



# School libraries share innovative ideas

By Softlink Marketing Specialist Kristen Lee

## *'What innovative practices have you introduced to your school's library?'*

That was one of the questions Softlink asked participants in the 2016 Australian and New Zealand School Library Survey. A new addition to the survey, the question was designed to provide content for the creation of an inspiring shared resource to help all school libraries fuel their own innovation strategies.

The concept of innovation can be daunting — it is a term that is regularly used to describe large-scale, groundbreaking projects with big budgets. And while we knew the survey question would uncover some of these examples, we also hoped to hear about the

'small innovations' with positive outcomes that could be adapted and used by any school library, regardless of size or budget.

Success! It has been inspiring to read the fantastic ideas that flowed through in the responses. The results confirmed that school librarians and teacher librarians are actively researching current trends and constantly looking for creative ways to improve learning outcomes, encourage reading and stretch their budgets further.

The **School Libraries Share Innovative Ideas** report identified eight core areas

where innovation is regularly occurring in school libraries: the library space; learning support; encouraging student engagement; technology; classification methods; reading programs; financial management; and student wellbeing.

This article includes an outline of these and we encourage you to access the report — available from the [Softlink website](#) — and read the stories and examples yourself.

## The library space

The library space is being reimagined and librarians are finding creative ways to open up their library, promote their services and resources, and provide an inviting and exciting student-centric space.

There is a broad spectrum of innovation occurring in the physical space, with high and low budget options being shared by the 2016 participants.

It became evident that school librarians are incredibly creative, as many of the responses

involved ‘upcycling’ real-world items, such as used car parts to create book displays and discarded books to make bench seats.

Other librarians spoke about the tangible benefits they saw after updating their library space.

*‘We have recently completely decorated/refurbished our library. Fiction loans have increased and recreational visits have increased by at least 300%.’*

## Learning support

With 92% of respondents stating that they feel it is important or very important to align curriculum with existing resources and practices, it is unsurprising that learning support is a core area of innovation.

Collaboration was a recurring theme, as librarians shared their ideas about how they have helped create lesson plans, worked with teachers to teach literacy, research and digital literacy skills, and supported subject areas school-wide.



*'I also take classes for SOLE and, having now provided a TPL session for staff in SOLE, more class teachers are using this in their classroom and students' questioning ability has improved 100%, as has their listening.'*

## Encouraging student engagement

Engaging students and encouraging reluctant readers has always been a priority for librarians, and 97% of respondents in 2016 said that providing recreational/leisure reading was important or very important to their role. To overcome the challenge, school librarians are finding innovative ways to encourage students to visit the library and do more reading for leisure.

A common initiative being adopted is to increase resources that will engage student groups that are identified as being reluctant readers; for instance, expanding the Graphic Novel collection.

School librarians are also taking a leaf out of the café culture's book. Although some have been able to introduce actual cafés, others have adapted the café concept with 'Loyalty Card' programs.

*'We have "The Little Library Loyalty Card". This is working extremely well. Girls get a stamp for each book they read. After 10 books they get a little reward.'*

## Technology

School librarians are not shying away from technology and are looking for ways to use it to enhance library services and improve learning outcomes.

Some respondents focussed on the benefits of improving the integration of digital resources with the library system, introducing features such as Federated Search, embedded videos and eBook lending; while the delivery of Makerspaces, Code Clubs and STEM programs also featured heavily in the responses.

*'Introduction of a mini 3D printer has been interesting for our creative students and quite well used. Has had the benefit of gaining library support from technology KLA who are pleased to see us developing a collaborative approach with them.'*

## Classification methods

Resource and collection management remains an important service provided by school libraries, and librarians are exploring new methods that make it easier for students to locate books.

There is a definite trend towards genrefication in school libraries, with survey participants discussing the positive responses they have seen in their school communities.

*'We have genrefied our fiction and non-fiction collections and the increase in borrowing and browsing books has been incredible, especially for non-fiction.'*

While some school librarians have timed the switch to genrefication to coincide with building refurbishments, others are planning their transition in stages, with the majority focussing on Fiction collections first.

## Reading programs

Programs that harken back to the 'traditional basics' of school librarianship can be innovative too. Tying in to the earlier



theme of student engagement, librarians are looking at formalising and extending 'read aloud' activities by adopting models such as the 'Drop-Everything-And-Read' (DEAR) program, letting children and other teachers have input into reading programs and also involving families.

*'We run a great family reading program called our READ TO ME! Club and run this after school each Wednesday night. We share a story and run a hands-on activity open for families from ELC to Year 2. We encourage families to borrow books and share these at home.'*

### Financial management

Innovation is often driven by a need to overcome a specific challenge. In the case of school libraries, where 48% of survey respondents feel that their school library is not adequately funded, finances have been a source of inspiration.

In many instances it is not only the school library's budget that is being addressed through innovation, but the financial pressures being felt within their local community.

*'We are a decile 1 (low income area) government school. I have 2 ePlatforms providing eBooks and I am sharing the eResources with 8 more decile 1 Primary and Intermediate schools around us. These schools can't afford to have [their own] eBooks.'*

### Student wellbeing

School librarians recognise the importance of mental and physical wellbeing, as it can have long-term benefits in terms of student performance and social development. In response, they are diversifying the range of activities on offer through the school library to improve the wellbeing of all students, but especially those who need additional support.



*'We have a communal puzzle that is very popular. It helps keep some children out of the playground who would otherwise get in trouble, or who are stressed or alone. It is done with the librarian so students have someone to chat to.'*

The level of innovation occurring within Australian and New Zealand schools is testament to the passion that school librarians have for ensuring all students have access to quality library resources and supporting services.

To read more about the innovative ideas and practices being delivered in school libraries throughout Australia and New Zealand, download the complete **School Libraries Share Innovative Ideas** report from the Resources section of the Softlink website. The complete 2016 Australia and New Zealand School Library Survey is due for release in mid-2017.