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Future proofing the evolving library



Li•brar•y a building or room containing collections of books, periodicals, and sometimes films and recorded music for people to read, borrow or refer to. (Trad)

As online learning grows, the role of the conventional school library is evolving. Call it what you will... 'resource centre', 'learning centre', 'student lab', or stay with 'the library', it is becoming an inviting space for individual and group learning opportunities. And the role of the librarian is changing too – from keeper of books to learning facilitator whose role is to guide students on where to seek and qualify information and how to access it across multiple channels.

Damian Moore, director of library fit out specialists Kingfisher Library, a division of Abax Systems, welcomes the evolution. He says: "Reference book collections are shrinking so fewer shelves are needed and there's more floor space to provide an environment that students will want to use.

"We are thinking about how individual spaces and open areas are equipped and how to address the individual child's learning preferences with furniture that suits their physical and study needs.

"The goal is to create an environment that that will inspire children. We have documented evidence of dramatic increases in usage when the space is properly designed. On the other hand putting in trendy stuff can be throwing good money after bad; everything needs to be thought through carefully to make sure that the facility will retain long term relevance and durability."

He mentions as an example the library refurbishment project at Knox Grammar School in Wahroonga, Sydney, where Beth Treseder is Head of Information Services.

She says: "The refurbishment was driven by the changes in teaching/learning pedagogy and the obligation to accommodate student requirements with regard to appropriate learning spaces and access to technology. We wanted the library to be a vibrant, welcoming place and a productive learning environment for students and staff.

"Usage levels have increased dramatically. Previously, our busiest days might see 100 students visit at lunchtime, now we regularly see 200 or more. After school, the numbers have grown too and we often have 80 students working for 1-1.5 hours after the final bell."

The key issue, Moore says, is to 'future proof', to allow for new teaching techniques and disruptive technologies that might suddenly emerge. "Technology is changing so fast that it's easy to get confused and interior designers need to build flexibility into their layouts to provide for innovations that we haven't yet heard of.

"... Apple invented the smart phone and then the tablet only a few years ago; now Sony and a host of new technology start-ups have developed 3D wearable viewers and computer glasses. Will they be used in education? I think there's a good chance that they will."

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