

MAKING READING FUN!

When making design decisions in libraries, there is a lot of emphasis on natural light, and bright open spaces, but what of the furniture?

While tables and chairs seem to be making way for moveable desks, pods, and bench seats, there are other options for creating bright, open spaces and comfortable, personalised places.

Students at The Phoenix P-12 Community College in Sebastopol are trialling a range of bean bags in their Redan Campus library. After consultation with students, teachers selected a range of popular colours and different shapes, using twenty-six bean bags in total.

The idea behind the exercise was to make an environment where kids enjoy sitting down to read.

It may be argued that the more comfortable students can be while reading, the more inclined they will be to pick up a book! With the trend towards tablets and kindle readers, kids are definitely engaging in reading

in a different way, and this change is emphasised if they are sitting on a different kind of furniture.

Consider your clients when working with different kinds of furniture. For example, bean bags work well with kids, but are probably not ideal for an adult space. When choosing furniture, consider all aspects – comfort, style, design. Younger children seem to prefer brighter colours, with a preference to pink, red, and yellow. Children between five and eight seem to dislike black, white, grey, and dark brown, instead, preferring lime, orange, yellow, and purple. The use of colour to warm and brighten these spaces can encourage students to read – and can also be an inexpensive way of freshening up a space. Consider picking up the bright colours of non-traditional furniture with bright wall graphics or coloured shelves. You may consider the use of abstract art or bright privacy screens and room dividers. Perhaps exhibiting art from local artists or school

children will make your interior more appealing. Rugs and different types of floor coverings for different areas is another idea. Many kids like to sit on the floor, so it may be worthwhile considering some crash-mats or soft flooring in a big open space, replacing traditional tables and chairs.

One would conclude there may be substantial benefits from the use of furnishings that children enjoy using. The trend in business these days is to do business the way your customers want you to. In a library, the children are your customers. When was the last time you asked them what they would like to see inside your library?

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LISTENING TO WHAT OUR LIBRARY USERS WANT

In the Alexandra Hills campus library at MSIT, we had a spare room that was waiting to be used for something special. I had an old-fashioned view that TAFE libraries should only provide services to students that assist with study in a quiet atmosphere. At MSIT we surveyed our students to see what they wanted. They predominately wanted fun things to do in the library, along with places to relax and talk to friends. Of course, we gave our students what they wanted.

Our spare room has been changed into a rec room. We purchased board games and a Wii and the room has graphic novels and bean bags for quiet reading. Students can now eat and drink in the library, and we have vending machines which are popular with students and staff. Instead of just having chairs and tables, we now have lounges and coffee tables where students can sit, talk, and relax. We have regular displays and promotions with giveaways such as book marks, lollies, and badges.

Making small changes to the library and introducing fun has made the library the place to be on campus. It should also mean that students will get better results with their studies. How? Having regular breaks from study can assist with retaining simple facts. Having a fun outlet while you're a student can help prevent stress and depression.

I definitely recommend surveying your library users and implementing what you can.

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