How Monmia Primary School refurbished its library

In this issue of Connections, we look at how well-designed library spaces can strengthen school communities. Principal Lucia Vorpasso and architect Christopher Peck share insights from a library refurbishment that supports curiosity, comfort and a culture of reading.

What prompted the decision to refurbish the library, and what were the key issues or limitations you hoped the refurbishment would address?

My background is in literacy, so when I arrived at Monmia as Assistant Principal I could not walk past what we called 'the library' without cringing. It was a 25-year-old room that had never really had any care. There was a small cluster of children's books at one end, teacher resources at the other, and the whole space felt dark, gloomy and uninviting. It was essentially a dumping ground for books rather than a library.

When our local MP, Natalie Suleyman, visited the school we talked about our vision for Monmia, and the first priority we named was valuing books and reading. We wanted a library that showed we take education seriously. Sometime after her initial visit, Natalie returned with a cheque for $100,000, and our Family and Friends Committee donated a further $20,000. That funding allowed us to reimagine the space so that it was light and open, with as many front-facing books as possible, places for classes to gather for read-alouds, and cosy nooks where children would actually want to stay and read. There is a card in the library from a parent that sums it up beautifully: 'What a school's library looks like tells you how much it values education.'

Did you involve staff, students and the broader community in identifying what the refurbished library needed to better support learning?

Absolutely. Student voice was central to the process. Each class completed a survey asking what, in an ideal world, they would like in their library. Among the fanciful suggestions like rocket ships, there were strong themes: they wanted a bright space, places to curl up with a book and something for everyone. I summarised the student ideas and then posed similar questions to families. Those responses were also collated and taken into our planning.

We then worked with the architects, using these ideas alongside a very clear picture in my own mind of what the space could be. Because we are a Be You school (the mental health and wellbeing program for schools), every child

In this issue

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Monday 17 March | Free | 2 pm AEDT

Strengthen your library's impact with a catalogue that actively supports information literacy. This webinar shows how high-quality records and strong authority files make it easier for students to find, evaluate and use information with confidence. Gain practical strategies to improve your catalogue and equip learners with skills that support successful research and lifelong learning.

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The SCIS blog is a space for dialogue, guidance, insights, and extra resources.

Join the conversation: scis.edublogs.org
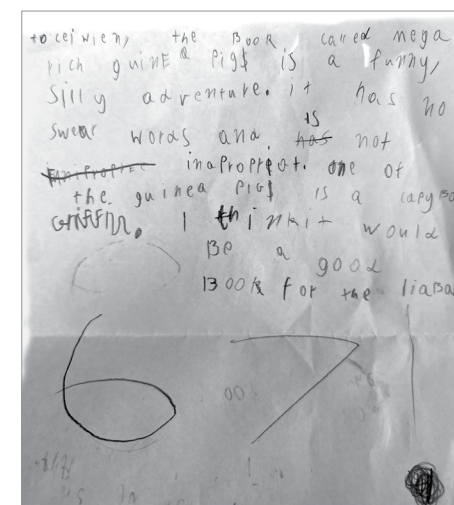
Library love letters

Welcome to our Letters to the Editor section, where readers can share their thoughts, opinions and feedback on topics that matter most to them. We'd love to hear your responses to our articles, opinions on current library issues or even a brag photo of your latest fantastic library display!

Send your letters to help@scisdata.com with the subject line **Library Love Letter** to join the discussion.

This term, which includes Library Lovers Day on February 14, we heard from students about why they love their school libraries!

I like looking at the comics and me and my friends like finding the weirdest, strangest, stupidest books possible and reading them and making up new words for them.

– **Frieda, 9**

At the library I enjoy looking through the graphic novels, searching for interesting mystery novels and finding the cutest picture storybooks.

–**Margot, 11**

I love the library because there are lots of books. And I love books.

– **Thomas, 9**

I love my school library as it's a comfortable and welcoming space where you can learn new things every day and discover new amazing books.

– **Robbie, 14**

I like going up to all the books I've read and telling people I've read them!

– **Ginger, 19**

I like the school library because of the way they use the space. There are places to sit and read and spaces to work or study, there's enough room for a teacher to teach a class and for the class to sit on the floor, and overall the place is large and feels spacious but still also feels cosy.

– **Juniper, 13**

made a butterfly from newspaper to symbolise transformation, which we displayed in the library. Staff with artistic flair drew the outline of the feature tree and created signage for our Harry Potter exhibition. The result is a space that feels like it genuinely belongs to the whole community.

Refurbishments often require balancing ambition with practicality. How did Monmia prioritise which elements to refresh, repurpose or completely rethink?

At first glance, $100,000 sounds like a lot, but it does not go as far as you think when you are refurbishing a whole library. We also had some structural constraints: we could not move some support poles or extend the footprint of the building. That meant we had to be very clear about our non-negotiables.

The top priority was open shelving with front-facing books so that covers could be seen easily. We knew that spine-out shelving was uninspiring for many children. Our furniture choices flowed from that goal. Working with a consultant from Raeco, we refined the shelving and seating several times until it matched our vision: open shelves, circular seating around the tree feature, and flexible areas for children to settle in with a book.

The poles that we could not move became design features. One was transformed into the trunk of a tree, with branches and leaves extending across the ceiling. Another was turned into a crayon, carrying phrases such as 'read to learn, read to play, read to laugh, read to connect', along with our school motto. We also curated special zones, such as a Harry Potter exhibition and a back wall covered with quotes about reading and its possibilities. Teacher resources were moved out to a dedicated resource room so that the entire library floor could be reserved for children. In the end, we feel we achieved everything we wanted within the constraints, and we have continued to layer in small additions over time.
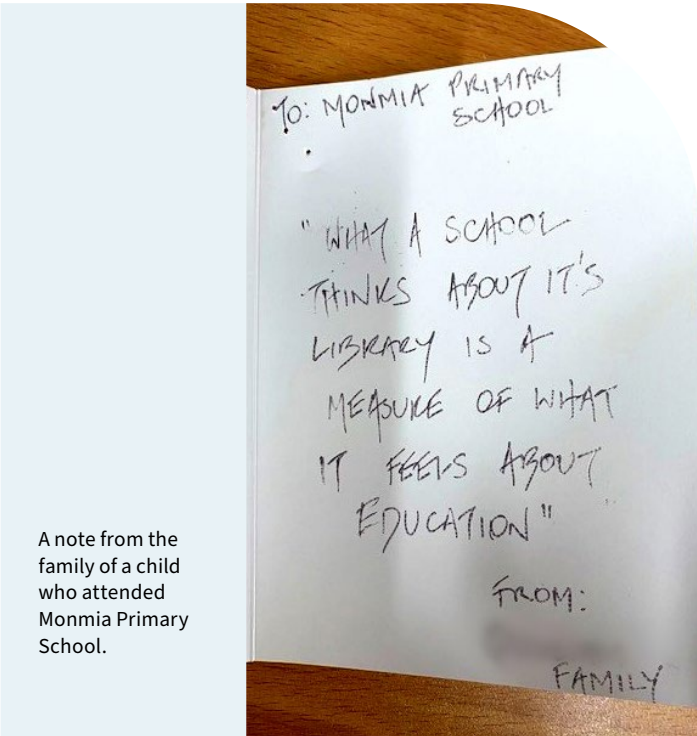
A note from the family of a child who attended Monmia Primary School.

Since the refurbishment, what tangible differences have you seen in students' engagement, learning behaviours or sense of belonging in the library?

The change has been remarkable. Before the refurbishment, classes would come in, collect books and go straight back to their rooms. Students didn't want to stay in the library because it wasn't an inviting space. Now every class is timetabled for an hour a week in the library, and most children borrow regularly. More importantly, they want to be there.

> "At first glance, $100,000 sounds like a lot, but it does not go as far as you think when you are refurbishing a whole library."

When we first revealed the refurbished library, we did it 'renovation show' style, with blinds down and only small sneak peeks in the lead-up. When students finally walked in, their faces said everything. We captured their reactions and have some of their quotes displayed on the wall. Seven years on, the sentiment behind those quotes hasn't changed. The space still looks almost as new because the students value it and look after it.

Our reading data has improved and we are continuing to build on that. The biggest shift has been in the narrative the school community has around books. Classrooms now have their own mini-libraries that echo the main library, and it is very clear to everyone that Monmia is a school that values reading. The library has also achieved external recognition in a refurbishment competition. While the State Library (with a budget of over one million dollars) took out the top spot, our library was highlighted as an example of what can be achieved on a much smaller budget.

> "When we first revealed the refurbished library, we did it 'renovation show' style, with blinds down and only small sneak peeks in the lead-up."

How has the redesigned library influenced teaching practice or the way staff integrate the space into everyday learning?

The refurbishment has given teachers a clear purpose and structure for their time in the library. We have an instructional model specifically for the library. A class often begins with a whole-class read-aloud in a special reading chair, with students gathered around. Teachers then use that text as a springboard for discussion and questioning, modelling the kinds of conversations we want children to have about books.

After that, teachers move into mini-conferences with students while other students are choosing books. They will sit with a few
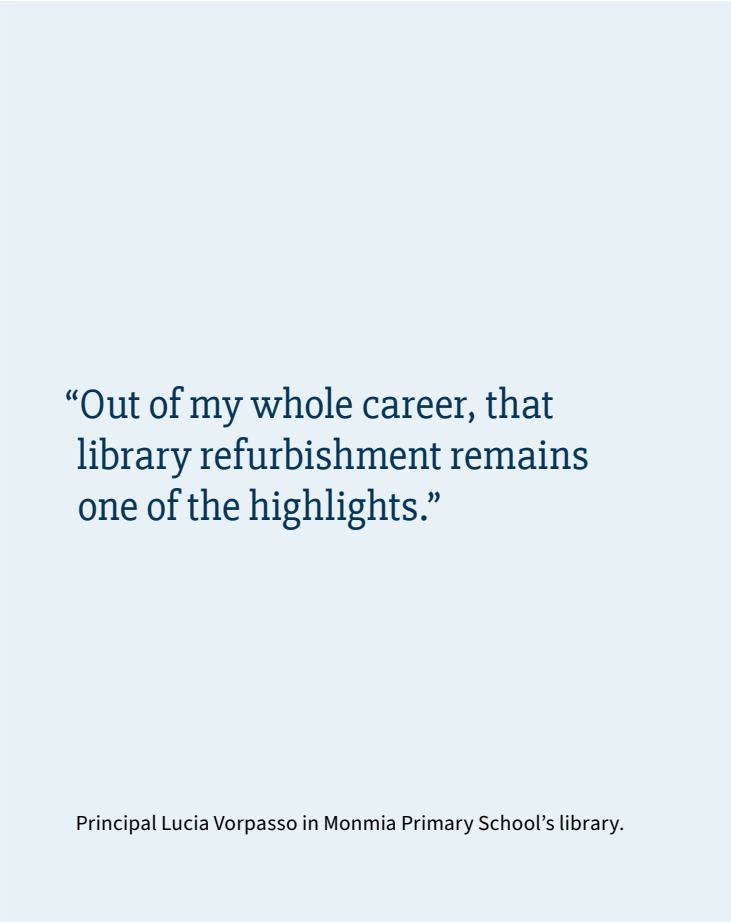
> "Out of my whole career, that library refurbishment remains one of the highlights."

Principal Lucia Vorpasso in Monmia Primary School's library.

children each week, ask about their reading preferences, talk about genres and make individual recommendations. Those small conversations have enriched the way we talk about reading and have helped students discover new interests.

What aspects of the new design have had the greatest long-term impact on staff and student wellbeing, inclusion or access to learning?

For me, the library has become our calm, inclusive heart. It's a beautiful, peaceful space where staff will sometimes retreat when they need a moment of quiet, and some of our therapy work with students takes place there because it feels so safe. One deliberate design decision was to remove rows of tables and replace them with nooks and flexible seating. I did not want the library to be dominated by desks and worksheets. I wanted children spread out, reading independently or with a friend, and that is exactly what now happens.

We have also embedded wellbeing and inclusion into the way we curate the collection and displays. We have a dedicated wellbeing display with feelings books and stories that explore everyday challenges like bullying or family separation in gentle, age-appropriate ways. We use picture books to open up conversations about life skills and relationships, not just reading skills. Our ANZAC wall links to a memorial garden outside and allows us to talk about empathy and gratitude in ways that make sense to younger children. Other focal areas highlight multicultural Australia so that students can see their own backgrounds reflected and celebrated.

The library has strengthened our connections beyond the school as well. Our local Ray White (Taylors Lakes) office sponsors student leadership and chose to hold a staff meeting in the library, which prompted a wonderful moment of adults reconnecting with books that were their childhood favourites. We also have an on-site kindergarten, and they visit weekly to borrow books. We're working towards a dedicated four-year-old reading group with them, to help them engage with reading in their early years.

> "The architects from AOA Christopher Peck gave us the canvas through their design and project management, and we have filled it with what we know best: reading, education and community."

Out of my whole career, that library refurbishment remains one of the highlights. The architects from AOA Christopher Peck gave us the canvas through their design and project management, and we have filled it with what we know best: reading, education and community. Together, that combination continues to support our students' learning, wellbeing and sense of belonging every day.

Behind the spotlight: designing new library spaces

Following on from the article on Monmia Primary School's library renewal, architect Christopher Peck shares how thoughtful design can turn any library into a space that strengthens learning, connection and community.

Before anyone even enters a library, before the books are even on the shelf, a process that shapes the way education happens in that space has already taken place. Specialist architects consider how students learn, collaborate, feel, access, use and respond to spaces in order to make design choices that will work for your school community now, and into the future.

Chris Peck is an architect from AOA Christopher Peck who has helped many schools design or reimagine their libraries. Here, Chris helps us better understand how thoughtful design turns a building into a bespoke, purpose-built space for learning. What are the main things an architect might consider when designing or renewing a school library space while also balancing competing priorities in an educational landscape?

According to Dianing (2025), physical layout and organisation, green spaces and nature, and lighting and acoustics were the leading influences on students' (self-assessed) engagement in the library. Stewart (2018) emphasises that diverse and flexible spaces are essential to cater for students' differing social and cognitive needs. Let's see if the academics and the architects agree!

Community consultation

> "The design work in the first phase is to step right back to a master plan and work out how the library sits within the overall campus"

When starting work with a school, Chris says library design is a holistic process that takes into account the overall physical and philosophical choices and features of that community. Architects will want to workshop where the library is placed in the school, how the space is special to the school, and how they want it to operate. Often school staff will have been to other libraries and seen features they'd like to incorporate into their own space. Key to the planning of a new library is early consultation with school staff, students and the greater community to optimise the layout and identify unique features to be included. Top features that are desirable right now in school library design include the following.

1. Flexible learning spaces that allow collaboration, small group and individual work; and furniture with wheels so it can be moved when the space is used for different purposes.
2. Small amphitheatres or gathering spaces for groups to read together, or for guest speaking events; and withdrawal spaces such as small cubbies for individual or paired student breakaway reading.
3. Indoor-outdoor flow ensuring connectivity between indoor and outdoor spaces; and even the possibility of including an outdoor space as part of the library.
4. Murals: especially ones that reflect the makeup of the school community – often co-created with students and other community members.
5. Pin boards to allow changing library displays of themes and student artwork

Site features and constraints

> "Sometimes it's not a new library, it's the refurbishment of existing buildings, such as Thornbury Primary School, which result in the most interesting spaces. We consider where the existing doors, windows and circulation spaces are. Where's the best access to natural light? What is the acoustic performance of the space? How do we merge existing and improved view lines with how they want the spaces to work."

When designing a new library build, Chris says that thinking about how the building connects with, wraps around, or speaks to, external elements such as trees and other landscape elements is really important – but existing buildings can have special features that are great to use as well. At Monmia Primary School library, an existing space needed refreshing within a tight budget. There were two rather annoying columns right in the middle of the room that stuck out, and appeared at first to be a hindrance. The architects' response to this was to design a story tree around one of them, with seating for around ten children, and to make the other one into a giant crayon! So, something that originally seemed like a hindrance turned into a playful and practical feature of the library.

Inclusivity and respect

When beginning a project, architects do a 'deep dive' into the makeup of the student body, to learn about additional needs, cultural backgrounds, language, so they can respond with their designs. Acoustics are incredibly important in libraries. It is crucial to make sure this is dealt with not just in the ceiling but throughout the library, to reduce reverberation as much as possible. Ensuring there are spaces for different types of learning needs – quiet or collaborative – is central to designs.

Chris says that his company includes local Indigenous consultants in meetings so that cultural respect and understanding is a consideration in the design from the very beginning, rather than a token add-on at the end. A great example of this is the Clifton Creek school library, which was rebuilt after the 2020 bushfires. The project used local sand to make rammed earth walls, a choice that reflects a commitment to local materials, energy efficiency, and deep connection to Country. The graphics from the shields of the five local Indigenous clans were then imprinted on the external walls – forever connecting the building to Country and its original custodians.

Another holistic approach to including the whole community in the project is evident in the Thornbury Primary school build and renovation, where the school invited an ex-student who is now an artist to return and conduct a smoking ceremony with the students. After this, they gathered the ashes from the smoking ceremony and mixed them into a paint. The children collected native plants and with these materials created artwork which was then used in graphic patterns on the carpet and pinboards throughout the school. Involving the students and locals in this way from start to finish, and integrating the school's story, values and connection to Country, allows ownership, links and investment from the whole community.

Sustainability and future-proofing

> "… you need to enable enough flexibility should the education philosophy change over time, permitting these spaces to be used differently."

Ensuring that the library is fit for purpose not only for its current custodians, but for future cohorts and approaches to education, is extremely important, especially for state schools with government investment – hence the emphasis on flexibility. But future proofing also means incorporating sustainable principles in every aspect of a project, from the design to the fit-out. The orientation of a new library space, to allow light, optimal sun exposure and natural ventilation is key. Insulation, building materials and glazing are chosen to minimise the energy required to run the space. Architects and designers also take into account the maintenance of spaces into the future. This includes small things like choosing carpet tiles, where you can replace just a section of carpet if needed, instead of ripping up the whole lot; or choosing durable, weather-resistant materials that are built to last, not just to look good for the first year.

Students' learning success is linked with the design of learning spaces (Zhang, 2024), and experienced architects and designers take into account all of these factors, and more, to enable innovative, inclusive and sustainable library designs.

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Christopher Peck
Director
Art of Architecture (AOA) Christopher Peck

SCIS: News for subscribers

With the memories of great summer reads, New Year's Eve fireworks, and the sounds of the beach and leather hitting willow drifting into our collective subconscious, summer holidays have passed, and Term 1 is upon us once again.

The theme of this issue of *Connections* is school library spaces, which got me reminiscing about the school libraries from my school days. If I go back a (very) long way to when I started school in suburban Sydney, my first memory is of a school library that only grade 5 and 6 students were allowed to use. I clearly remember my eldest sister's excitement when she had library lessons and was allowed to use the library, borrowing a new book every week. Sadly for me, boys left primary school to go to their high school at the end of grade 4, so the school library remained off-limits and generally only ever imagined by me and the other boys.

Moving school for grades 5 and 6 meant we had access to the primary school library for the first time. I have vivid memories of the book-filled space, which was strictly ruled by Brother Phillip. There was no talking, laughing or fun allowed – and woe betide any boy who dared smuggle food into the library. Books were to be revered and always read silently. Brother Phillip patrolled the space, somewhat like a combination of Yoda and Darth Sidious but with a jaunty trilby on his head and an ever-present *ssshhhhh* poised on his lips. Anyone who transgressed was quickly removed from the library and had to stand in the corridor for the rest of the 'lesson', hoping not to be caught by the very strict head of primary.

Upon completion of primary school, we were introduced to the secondary school library. Suddenly a whole new world was opened to me and my peers. Fiction and non-fiction shelves filled with books covering all sorts of subjects, the somewhat baffling Dewey decimal signs on the ends of shelves and then the large mysterious cabinet of catalogue cards. It took some time to master both Dewey and the catalogue, but upon doing so my world opened even further.

The well-stocked shelves and the cataloguing tools weren't the only new experiences for me. Having access to a school library before and after school as well as at lunchtime was a brand-new adventure. I was able to read when and what I wanted to (within reason, of course – this was a Catholic school after all!), as well as escape the cold or the heat, and sometimes take refuge from the hustle and bustle of the playground. The school library was definitely a safe space, and the library staff were as concerned about student wellbeing as they were with overdue loans or eating in the library.

By modern school library standards, the space wasn't comfortable or adaptable and the only tech available was a photocopier, but then tech wasn't really a thing. As much as I have fond memories of that senior school library, I'm also grateful that school library spaces have mostly evolved and changed with the times. Imagine if school library staff were still spending their time manually creating catalogue cards, rather supporting students and educators. Thank goodness SCIS is here to automate cataloguing for you.

Thanks for indulging my walk down memory lane (or perhaps the walk through Dewey 994 or 930) and let's look ahead to the wonderful year to come.

The SCIS cataloguing team will continue to work towards its commitment to 'Enhance SCIS Data to cultivate respectful, culturally appropriate subject headings, descriptive cataloguing and presentation of data' through the work for the inclusion of Ngā upoko tukutuku (Māori Subject Headings) in SCIS Data. We hope to be releasing this new thesaurus in Term 3 or 4 this year, to coincide with Te Wiki o te Reo Māori (Māori Language Week).

Further to this, throughout 2025 the SCIS Standards Committee approved revisions to subject headings for Dreamtime stories and Dreaming (Religion) Fiction. For more detail on this and further revised headings, see our 'New and revised SCIS subject headings' article.

To learn more about SCIS cataloguing standards, you can refer to SCIS Data website (help.scisdata.com/hc/en-us/articles/115009544108-What-are-the-SCIS-cataloguing-standards).

The SCIS team has another busy year of conferences planned. We'll be exhibiting and/or presenting at conferences in every mainland state throughout the year. Our first conference will be the WASLA Library Officers Day in Perth. Ceinwen Jones, our wonderful Editorial and Professional Learning Lead, will be attending.

We also have a full professional learning calendar throughout the year – please go to our website to find what we have planned and to register (www.scisdata.com/professional-learning). And remember, our professional learning is free, and every registered attendee receives the link to the recording, even if you're unable to make the live session.

From the entire SCIS team, we wish you a wonderful and wonder-filled 2026 and we welcome you to Issue 136 of *Connections*.

Anthony Shaw
Product Manager
SCIS

Setting yourself up for success in Term 1 as a teacher librarian

This article focuses on the teacher librarians who activate those spaces, and how Term 1 can be used to build visibility, collaboration and momentum for the year ahead.

How can we as teacher librarians set ourselves up for success? Every year it can feel like we claw our way through bureaucracy to fight for our roles and our place within the school. The library should be the centre of learning, the focal point of every school, and yet it is repeatedly forgotten, not because we are ineffective, but often because we succeed in silence. We support our communities with such steady determination that both we and our safe, welcoming spaces can be overlooked.

Term 1 brings a whirlwind of beginnings, chaos and new faces. Teacher librarians hold a pivotal role as supporters, collaborators and facilitators. Success throughout the year depends not only on pedagogical knowledge and meticulous planning, but on advocacy, partnerships, and the resilience required to meet the unique expectations of each school.

Clarifying and advocating for the teacher librarian role

The teacher librarian role can feel isolating. We take it on, ready to help whoever walks through the door, yet waiting can sometimes be our downfall. How often have new staff arrived halfway through the year, unaware of the resources that the library can provide?

I began requesting 'library time' during the Term 1 Staff Development Day – even half an hour has proven invaluable to show current staff what resources are available for curriculum, literacy and whole-of-school information needs (NSW Department of Education, 2021). These sessions can often spark 'aha' moments when planning units for the entire year.

In the first few weeks of Term 1, I try to meet with my Principal to ensure my priorities align with the school plan and leadership expectations. I attend stage meetings frequently, assisting where I can, helping with resources and collaborating on units of work (Hughes, 2019).

To advocate for your library, you need data! Borrowing statistics, staff and student feedback, surveys and examples of collaborative teaching create a snapshot of the library's impact and guide future planning (ALIA, 2022). This evidence helps ensure the library remains relevant to its current cohort of learners and teachers.

Building strong relationships with staff

I don't know a single teacher librarian who isn't able to collaborate with staff. We know our collections intimately – what is genuinely useful, what is just a good title, and what will spark excitement for readers. This expertise makes the teacher librarian one of the most valuable resources in the school.

Collaboration can still be difficult. Approaching a stage or inserting ourselves into planning can feel awkward, even when we know we can help. Yet research consistently shows that when teacher librarians co-plan and co-teach, student learning improves, particularly in literacy and information skills (Merga, n.d.; Todd, 2020). As Term 1 is the time teachers are still shaping their programs and lessons, it is the ideal time for teacher librarians to establish a collaborative presence.

The reality of shrinking library budgets

Term 1 can provide many new and exciting ventures, but it can also bring the familiar challenge of shrinking budgets. One year, I remember clearly, an email came through with the library budget and my heart sank. It was almost half the previous year's budget.

At first it felt personally diminishing. I invest deeply in creating a dynamic, well-resourced space for students and staff, and a reduced budget felt like a statement about the library's worth. Then came the practical reality: delayed updates to nonfiction, cancellation of a digital subscription, and severe limits on new releases.

The impact went far beyond books. Fewer resources meant fewer opportunities to support new inquiry units and limited chances to 'hook' reluctant readers. At a time when diverse representation in children's literature is expanding, the thought of students seeing themselves less often in our collection was heartbreaking (Cox & Korodaj, 2019). The library is often the only place where all children, regardless of background, can access quality literature (Merga, 2020).

Adaptation becomes essential. Strategic purchasing, waiting for sales, using book fairs and book clubs to stretch budgets, and ongoing advocacy with leadership can make a significant difference. Budgets fluctuate; it is unavoidable. But we must not allow our libraries to become invisible during the lean times, because invisibility has a way of lingering even when circumstances change.

Building rapport with local bookshops

Community connections, especially with local bookshops, have become an unexpected cornerstone of library success. Years ago, after receiving another modest budget, I visited a small independent bookshop and introduced myself as the school's teacher librarian. That simple introduction sparked a long partnership.

The owners began curating lists of high-interest, diverse books for primary students. They invited me to after-hours preview nights with discounted prices. They even approached local authors about visiting our school, events that became student highlights and strengthened the shop's community outreach.

This relationship grew into something far richer than transactions. Families recognised the shop staff at school events, the bookshop displayed our students' book reviews, and the school gained deeper roots in the local community. Partnerships like these highlight the library's role as a connector between school and community (Parliamentary Committee, 2011). When the bookshop later closed, it was a profound loss, proof of just how valuable that relationship had been.

Conducting a library scan and planning strategically

Research highlights the value of participatory design in creating learning spaces where students feel ownership and belonging (Hughes, 2019). Invite students to share their preferences: what books they enjoy, what they want more of, and what excites them. While every suggestion must be assessed through a professional lens, these conversations create engaged readers. A strong collection includes not just curriculum texts but also fantasy epics, adventures, humour and the diverse stories students love.

Promoting literacy and information skills from the start

Term 1 is the ideal time to launch literacy and information initiatives; from reading programs and library orientations, to early information skills lessons. Start small if needed; even a single lunchtime book club can spark engagement. Australian research continues to demonstrate that qualified teacher librarians are linked to improved literacy outcomes and higher student engagement (Students Need School Libraries, 2018).

Use Term 1 as the school's 'introduction' to the library. Younger students can explore picture books, Stage 2 can learn about genres, and Stage 3 can begin developing strategies for evaluating online information.

Engaging the wider school community

Knowing your staff, students, and community allows the library to be shaped by their needs. Yet often the broader school community doesn't know who the teacher librarian is; we are rarely at kindergarten orientation or parent–teacher interviews.

Introduce yourself early, through a newsletter article, a social media post, or a note home. Highlighting new resources, research statistics or book-related quotes builds relationships with the community, and these small gestures strengthen the library's visibility and help cultivate a school-wide culture of reading.

Conclusion

Setting yourself up for success in Term 1 as a teacher librarian can be challenging, but with communication, collaboration and advocacy, it becomes not only achievable but transformative. Strategic thinking and strong community connections help weather shrinking budgets. Intentional relationship-building positions the library at the centre of learning.

Ultimately, the work you put into Term 1 lays the groundwork for equitable access, enriched learning, and a vibrant reading culture that stays with students long after they leave your library, and their school.

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AI and the lone librarian: how artificial intelligence can be your collaborative partner

Library spaces rely heavily on the people who run them, and for many that means working solo. This article explores how AI tools can step in as a quiet collaborator, helping you manage your space, plan programs and reclaim valuable time.

If you've ever wished for a clone to help you run your library, one that doesn't need a lunch break, never complains about shelving and always has fresh ideas, artificial intelligence (AI) might just be the next best thing. For many teacher librarians, librarians and solo library staff, the daily juggle of running a library can feel like a one-person circus. But what if you had a digital colleague who could help lighten the load?

AI is no longer just the stuff of sci-fi. It's here, it's practical and it's surprisingly helpful in the library. Whether you're managing a bustling secondary school collection or flying solo in a small primary school library, AI tools can act as collaborators, planners and even creative partners.

Why AI is a game-changer for library staff

AI tools like CoPilot, ChatGPT, Claude and Perplexity are designed to assist with a wide range of library tasks such as these:

- Time saving: AI can summarise articles, draft emails, generate book lists, and even write blurbs for displays.
- Idea generation: Need some more ideas to support Book Week? Want a new angle for your reading challenge? AI can brainstorm with you.
- Professional development: AI can help you stay current with trends and research, and even assist in writing grant applications or reports.

UNESCO's 2025 (revised) report on AI in education highlights its potential to support teachers and learners by automating routine tasks, supporting inclusion and enhancing creativity. For library staff, this translates into more time for meaningful engagement with students and collections.

Creating your own AI agent

One of the most exciting developments is the ability to create a custom AI agent – essentially a digital assistant trained to understand your library's needs. There are a variety of platforms that allow users to build assistants that can:

- learn your preferences (genre recommendations, curriculum links, library programs)
- help plan library activities and events
- draft newsletters, book reviews, or even social media posts
- simulate student questions for reader advisory practice.

These agents can be programmed to suit your needs and the needs of your school community. As Dr. Kay Oddone notes on the *Engaging and Empowering School Libraries* podcast, AI can be a powerful tool for enhancing library services when used ethically and thoughtfully.

Practical AI use for library planning

Here are a few ways that you can use AI to support your day-to-day planning:

- Curriculum alignment: AI can match books to ACARA standards, helping you build reading lists that support classroom learning.
- Event planning: Whether you need ideas for the never-ending display opportunities, Book Week or general library activities, AI can help generate themes, activities, promotional copy and resources.
- Collection development: AI can assist in analysing data (with help from your LMS) and suggest gaps in genres or age groups.

Approach AI as a collaborator, not a replacement. It's there to support your expertise, not override it.

It is here to (hopefully) make it easier. Especially for those working solo, it's like having a partner to bounce ideas off. See what subscriptions your school has to AI resources (BCE has access to CoPilot). Focus on one to begin with and learn what it can offer you. The key is to use it so you can learn its limitations, but you'll also see how much help it can be.

References

Oddone, K. (2023, June 10). *AI: Friend or Foe? The School Librarians Perspective* [Video file]. YouTube. youtu.be/nF7q-naoEKg

UNESCO. (2021). *Artificial intelligence in education: Guidance for policy-makers.* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000376709

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Educational Lending Right

In each addition of *Connections*, we like to give an update about the Educational Lending Right (ELR) scheme. We know that you – as librarians and school library staff – understand the importance of supporting the Australian literature community. Each year, ELR surveys schools to understand how many copies of Australian book titles are available for loan in our school libraries.

The data is provided to the Australian Government's Office for the Arts – data which, in turn, ensures Australian authors, illustrators and publishers are compensated for the free use of their books held in any educational libraries. When authors are compensated fairly, it increases their ability to produce more content to enrich the minds of our children.

We'd like to give a big thankyou to everyone who participated in ELR 2025–26. We received data from more than 4,000 schools in Australia, through bulk extractions via schools' Library Management System (LMS) vendors.

All participating schools were eligible to win one of three gifts. The two schools that received book gift packs – proudly sponsored by our SCIS team – were:

Our Lady of the River School in Berri, South Australia

Mt Eliza Primary School in Mt Eliza, Victoria

The school that received a $150 gift card was:
Hillbrook Anglican School in Enoggera, Queensland

Delivering a survey like ELR does not occur without collaborative partnerships with LMS vendors, suppliers of digital content, and staff in all state and territory Departments of Education and Catholic Education Offices. We'd like to thank those who have helped make ELR the success it is:

New websites and apps

Download the entire collection of records for these digital resources, which you can then upload straight into your library management system. Select 'Connections Term 1 2026' and click on the Download button.

BBC Learning Hub

Year levels: Students and teachers
SCIS ID: 5552901
URL: gotlearning.com/blogs/gotfeedback

Gotfeedback is an AI-driven feedback resource for teachers. The premise is that while AI is a great tool for generating feedback, to give truly meaningful, individualised and consistent feedback, teachers need to be involved in moderation. So this tool is just that – a resource that can help teachers give feedback efficiently and individually. The makers emphasise the importance of teacher moderation and the fact that this tool is only part of the feedback process.

Elementari

Year levels: K–12
SCIS ID: 5552904
URL: elementari.com

Elementari is an online platform with self-guided lessons for students to learn coding while creating stories, games and apps. There are some pre-designed lessons but teachers can also design their own lessons within the platform. Coding takes place using a drag-and-drop interface and the platform is designed to foster creativity and critical thinking, and allow collaboration between students. Free training/professional development is available for teachers who would like to learn more.

Duolingo for Schools

Year levels: K–12
SCIS ID: 5552923
URL: schools.duolingo.com

This is a free layer of management for classrooms that sits on top of the regular Duolingo learning app. Students can create new profiles in Duolingo or preserve their existing progress when teachers set up their classroom. Teachers can keep track of students' progress with stats for accuracy and time spent on learning. This gamified tool could be a handy one to add to the school language teachers' arsenal of strategies for extra-curricular language practice.

Australian Education Research Organisation: Topics

Year levels: Teachers
SCIS ID: 5546811
URL: edresearch.edu.au/topics/classroom-management/guides-resources

This set of classroom management guides and practice resources for teachers provide excellent scaffolding and structure for experienced teachers and school leaders to conduct peer observation and feedback with their colleagues. This is not a new website, but we are highlighting it here because there are some new resources that have been published this year. The practice resources are tailored for use in primary, secondary and senior secondary schools.

Deaf Children Australia

Year levels: Teachers, K–12
SCIS ID: 5552941
URL: deafchildrenaustralia.org.au

Deaf Children Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that champions growth and social inclusion of deaf and hard-of-hearing children and young people in Australia. The website contains resources for parents, teachers and children, but of particular interest to schools will be the free online course 'Building Bridges', which is designed to help school staff and the school community feel confident and informed about deaf and hard-of-hearing students' needs and requirements.

Cool.org

Year levels: Teachers
SCIS ID: 1965389
URL: cool.org

Formerly known as Cool Australia, this charitable not-for-profit group has been publishing curriculum-aligned resources, lesson plans, games, activities and professional learning for over 16 years and has recently had an update. There are both free and paid account options. Resources are available for most curriculum areas across an incredibly wide-reaching range of topics – from the environment through to Bluey – in a variety of formats, including videos, activity sheets and handouts.

New and revised SCIS subject headings

The following changes to SCIS Subject Headings List were approved by the SCIS Standards Committee November 2024 – October 2025. Please see *Connections* online for further change details, including references and full revisions.

Key

BT – Broader term
NT – Narrower term
RT – Related term
UF – Used for
SN – Scope note
SEN – Special example note
In – Indexing note

New headings

Bilingual texts
SN Use for works of, or works about, fiction or nonfiction where the theme or subject matter is communicated with parallel text in two languages.
UF Bilingual books
UF Dual language books
BT Bilingualism
BT Education, Multilingual
RT Multilingual texts

COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020–2023
SN Use for works on the pandemic of 2020–2023. For works on the disease, use COVID-19 (Disease).
UF Coronavirus Pandemic, 2020–2023
UF COVID Pandemic, 2020–2023
BT Epidemics
RT COVID-19 (Disease)
RT Quarantine

Dreamtime stories
SN Use for resources about the ontology, spirituality and religion of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, e.g. Paul Callaghan & Uncle Paul Gordon's *The dreaming path* and Tyson Yunkaporta's *Sand talk*. For tales of the Dreaming told for the general public and for children use the heading Dreamtime stories. For fiction works using elements of The Dreaming (not a retelling), use Dreaming (Religion) – Fiction.
UF Aboriginal peoples – Dreaming – Fiction

UF Aboriginal peoples – Dreamtime legends
UF Aboriginal peoples – Folklore
UF Aboriginal peoples – Legends
UF Aboriginal peoples – Mythology
UF Dreaming stories
UF Dreamtime stories – Fiction
UF Folklore, Aboriginal
UF Legends, Aboriginal
UF Mythology, Aboriginal
UF Myths, Aboriginal
BT Dreaming (Religion)
RT Creation
RT Dreaming (Religion) Fiction

Dreaming (Religion) Fiction
SN Use for fiction works with elements of The Dreaming (not a retelling), e.g. Jared Thomas' *Uncle Xbox*. For tales of the Dreaming told for the general public and for children use Dreamtime stories.
RT Dreamtime stories

Fugitives
SN Use for people fleeing and hiding from police, criminals or other perceived threats.
BT Life change events
NT Refugees
NT Runaways
RT Escapes
RT Missing persons

Imaginary wars and battles
SN Use for works about wars and battles existing only in the imagination of the creator.
UF Imaginary battles
UF Imaginary wars
UF Wars and battles, Imaginary
BT War
RT Battles

Imaginary wars and battles – Fiction
SN Use for stories about fictional wars and battles fought by fictional people (or other fictional beings). For real and historical wars fought by fictional people use War stories. For real and historical battles fought by fictional people use Battles – Fiction.
RT Battles fiction
RT Fantasy
RT Science fiction
RT War stories

Multilingual texts
SN Use for works of, or works about, fiction or nonfiction where the majority of the content is communicated with parallel or equivalent text in three or more languages regardless of layout.
UF Multilingual books
BT Education, Multilingual
RT Bilingual texts

Solids (Matter)
BT Matter

Revised subject headings
Aboriginal peoples – Dreaming revised to Dreaming (Religion)
Aboriginal law
Agriculture
Agricultural workers
Battles
Battles – Fiction
Bilingualism
Cowhands revised to Cowboys
Cowhands – Fiction revised to Cowboys – Fiction
Creation
Dreams
Dwarfs revised to Dwarfs (Imaginary peoples)
Dwarfism revised to Short stature (Medical condition)
Education, Multilingual
Epidemics
Fantasy
Farmers
Farms
Folklore
Gases
Jackeroos revised to Jackaroos
Legends
Liquids
Matter
Mythology
Myths
Religion
Religions
Quarantine
Runaways
Science fiction
War
War stories

The Last Word

This regular column is your digital TBR list, bringing you school library news and research for your professional reading.

Read the whole lot. →

- ☑ Devour the latest Connections
- ☐ Coffee
- ☐ Further reading – The Last Word

More exciting contemporary library designs.

AOA Christopher Peck.

Thinking of new library furniture? Here are some things to bear in mind.

Davison, S. (2025, June 17).

The relationship between teaching, space design and learning outcomes.

Zhang, M. (2024).

Library and architectural wonderfulness for your library inspo Pinterest board.

ALIA. (2024). Design gallery.

Co-designing library spaces with children.

Jamali, Hamid R. (2025).

Spoiler alert: this study shows kids like calm, flexible and well-resourced libraries!

Stewart, P. (2021).

A surprising read on school wellbeing and engagement.

Marrone, R. (2024).

New and ongoing research about learning space design for diversity and inclusion from the University of Melbourne.

University of Melbourne. (2025).

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