

DIVERSE YET FAMILIAR: TOURING MELBOURNE LIBRARIES

On a late September morning in 2018, library staff of St Monica's College, who service approximately 2,300 students and staff across two sites, spent the day visiting various libraries within the City of Melbourne, these being Docklands; RMIT Swanston Street library; State Library of Victoria; City of Melbourne Flinders Lane; and Athenaeum Library Collins Street.

The intention of these visits was to provide samples of 'other' types of libraries, and their services, while getting a general vibe of how patrons spend their time within these spaces and to shake up our normal, everyday, experience as library staff.

This was the first opportunity for our library staff to spend the day away from the school and the excitement was evident, tinged with some apprehension. Although the library staff believe that the school library service operates on many levels quite well, it was important to see other possibilities and to visually benchmark our practices. We hoped to see what was similar and different to our approaches and learn why.

The common attribute of these various libraries was of space as places, print redeployment, database availability and boundless internet access, exposing library staff to differences but also sameness and familiarity, based on generations of library practice and social connections in various environments.

Broadly, the staff enjoyed the variety of libraries and definitely felt influenced by the environments. They had a sense of belonging to a broader library world and were exposed to the support and openness of these libraries, all based on local community habits. They also appreciated areas such as: placing of displays, spine label variations, service provision support and assistance and generally being there for the user – the technical background work underpinning what the user sees and experiences.

Staff reflected on this short exposure and found that what they were currently doing, they were doing well. That overall we seemed to be on track but needed to be more creative, to be continually engaged in our work with users and to be welcoming and personally responsible and responsive to users.

We learnt that being facilitators who were willing to share and engage would not isolate us, but instead lead us to being part of the user environment. Overall, it was an important action day in sharing and mixing with different and yet familiar library staff and appreciating the diversity of libraries within our Melbourne community. 🌟

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