

Ivanhoe Girls' genrefied together!

By *Fiona Mulvaney*

Snapshot

Fiona Mulvaney describes a student-centred approach to genrefying the school library collection, fostering student voice and inclusion and creating a sense of ownership of both the collections and their reading lives.

In September 2018, our beautiful Senior School library at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School received an exciting injection of funds to build an Innovation Station (Maker Space) within the existing library. This meant the existing book collections and spaces needed to be redesigned. Between September 2018 and January 2019, the library team worked together to completely change the existing layout of the library and reconsider the collections. This included the necessary weeding and removal of some shelving. We decided it was a great opportunity to genrefy both our non-fiction and our fiction collections.

This article follows on from a panel discussion and presentation I made at a ALIA Library Technicians Conference in September 2019 titled: *School Libraries: Genrefication, Virtualisation, Realisation and Diversification*. I have included some of the images used in that presentation here. The steps we undertook to create our fabulous new Genrefied Young Adult collection are summarised, but I will address the most exciting aspect of the process, which was the input by our students in our newly formed Year 7 library club called 'Junior Edition'. I will discuss why I think the Junior Edition students were so central to the success of this project and how they continue to drive our Reading and House literature programs.

Our process

We started with 3 students that were Reading Captains in the Junior School, who had graduated up to Year 7. We collected additional students as we grew, and the word got around that we were 'taking over' the Senior Library and genrefying the Senior Fiction collection.

We kicked off with Fantasy, as it was agreed by the students it would be the biggest and easiest collection to Genrefy. We bought Syba Signs senior posters and packets of Genre labels and we spent our lunchtimes initially looking at these genres, reading their



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genre definitions and trying to come to a general consensus about which genres to include and which to exclude and what 'in house' genres we would like to keep and grow.

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Diversity and inclusiveness: Our students love reading in the area of diversity and inclusion. The Year 7 Junior Edition students chose the genres to include from this area as part of this project. Many of them read widely and are very aware of being privileged young people. They are robust and want to hear stories or difference, diversity and stoicism. They want the good, the bad and the ugly.

They chose to keep and expand the Genres of Sad, Aboriginal and LGBTQI (which changed to PLUS+). These are some of most widely read genres in our collection for Wide Reading lessons and walk in choices. We also Genrefied the Quick Reads for EAL students.

Initial planning and debating took 2 weeks: This was vital time, for the students to really get to know each other. This was their first year of secondary school, their first time in a big school library, their first time with new friends, and their first time being allowed to run a project together that was student driven. A lot of firsts! Some of the students were very shy and didn't have a voice at the beginning. Some students dominated and were very opinionated and needed to learn to listen more. Some students came for the interactions, the debates, the inclusivity and the food rewards.



There was a general sense of a mission: we needed to get this done, as the whole collection was on the floor, on temporary shelves, trolleys, in boxes and basically not accessible for borrowing. This really spurred the students on. They hated not getting to the lit. We moved quite fast. From one very large Library fiction collection, we turned the new collections into 20 YA Young Adult Genrefied collections and a separate Senior Fiction collection. We had about 7500 books in the Senior Fiction collection. We weeded approximately 30% of the collection before and during Genrefication, and the Year 7's Genrefied 3325 books!

Debating Genres: Each book was assessed. As the titles were taken out of the collection, students had to either have read the book or found someone else who had read it, and if they were unsure or couldn't agree, the students had to come and debate the pros/cons of their genre choice

with a teacher librarian. It was time consuming and incredibly rewarding. The Junior Edition club grew to a steady 20-25 members at lunchtime on Wednesday, and then, as we ramped up, students came before school, during other lunchtimes and after school. This was voluntary and completely driven by individuals in the club.

Knowing students through their literature passion:

The most exciting part of this process for me, was getting to know the new year 7 students, watching their interactions, getting to know them through their genre passions, their reading habits and watching them work together, play together and really 'own' the new library collections. As the collections were Genrefied, they began to look less inwardly, and wanted to communicate their shared successes with the rest of the school.

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Learning and growing by doing: There is so much about this process that we didn't know. So much that we learnt and tried and tested as we went. This was incredibly rewarding for all of the students involved. Being able to be free to try an idea, see how it goes, reflect on what works and what doesn't and being able to speak up and make changes, has empowered these students.

Term 2 launch date - into assemblies and beyond: The students decided that in Term 2 when the House Reading Challenge started, we would be ready to share our new collections and passions with the school at assemblies. The students were excited to have an assembly spot on Monday to talk about their reading passions, 'sell' the library spaces and speak personally about a book and genre that was their favourite. Teachers were surprised and delighted with the sophistication and language used by the Junior Edition students. I have included samples here of some of the Genres highlighted at the assemblies:

Student voices: Indigenous Genre

"I'm part of the Junior Edition club. Our library's collection of Indigenous literature features stories about, by or in collaboration with Australia's First Peoples. These novels might feature young people coming to terms with their identity in contemporary Australia, consider realistic or historical perspectives, or take a more fantastical approach. Nanberry by Jackie French takes a look at the real life of a young Cadigal boy in the late 1700s. Which novels do you have a strong history with?"



Student voices: PLUS+ Genre

"I'm often inspired by the bravery in the library's PLUS+ novels. Named in support of IGGS own PLUS+ club, these stories centre on the realistic experiences of LGBT teen protagonists. These novels are often about young people, like all of us, facing challenges like bullying and family pressures, ultimately finding their truth. Becky Albertalli and Adam Silvera's *What if it's Us* looks at two young men, their chance meeting, and the awkwardness of making a connection. Which stories do you identify with?"



Student voices: Fantasy Genre

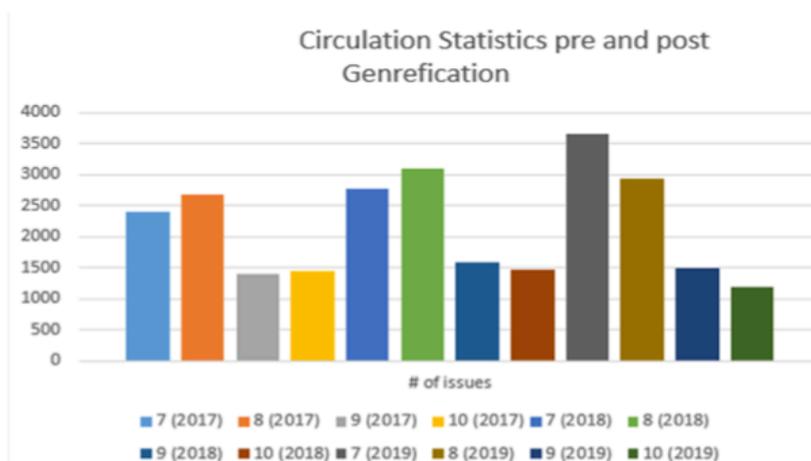
"I'm in Junior Edition Club. House Genre Reading Challenge is happening this term. One of my favourite genres is fantasy. Fantasy is the presence of magic and supernatural elements in a story. The powerful clash of magic and monsters is so exciting. In my opinion, the 'Throne of Glass' series by Sarah J. Maas are some of the best fantasy books ever. What are some of yours?"

Student voices: Sci-Fi Genre

"Hi, personally, I prefer Sci-Fi. Science Fiction books feature science elements and speculative scenarios that probably could exist. Sci-Fi writers have inspired technology we use today, from Bluetooth headphones to submarines and spaceships, but I love Orson Scott Card's 'Ender's Game', which explores alien conflict and virtual reality. What Sci-Fi inspires you?"

We all love statistics

Circulation Statistics have increased across the Year 7's and will probably exceed in Year 8, 9 & 10 after holiday borrowing. We lost a lot of time by lower access to the fiction collections in Term 1. We also lost student access as many classes were booked into the Innovation Station and not Wide Reading during Term 2 & 3. However, the definite up-side of Genrefication, is the access and ease of retrieval for our students and our library staff. Students wander in, self-browse easily and stand in groups and debate genres, interests and ideas a lot more. We don't have to rely as heavily on our Wide Reading classes to promote books alone, and book talks by students are a favourite past time.



Genrefication one year on and COVID 19

A small update to this project. We have moved on. The Junior Edition club have graduated to become the Limited Edition club. They come and visit the new Junior Edition club and share their amazing year and their special project. They have grown and matured as young adults into a world where they are captains of other clubs, speak loudly for the diverse voice across campus and continue to share their love of reading and sharing stories. Many of the same original group are currently involved with running the House Reading Challenge for 2020 from home and are writing incredible reviews for our e-library weekly titled *The Page Turner*. They all continue to be passionate and excited about sharing the love of a good story.

Fiona Mulvaney is passionate about Young Adult literature and the way students can be facilitated to direct their own learning. She has worked in international schools and universities for more than 18 years and is currently the Head of Library & Information Services at Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School.