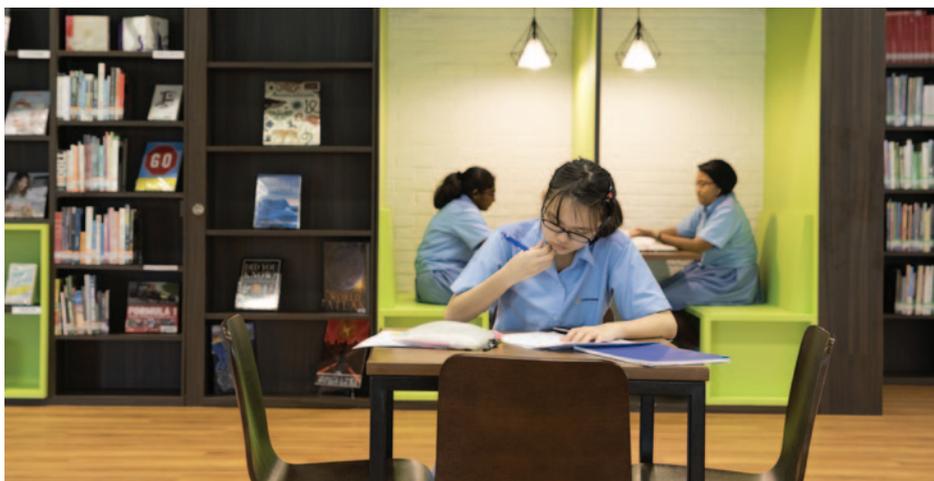

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Creating Reading and Learning Spaces in Our School Libraries

By *Loh Chin Ee*

Dr Loh Chin Ee's presentation tackles the main questions and areas that the ongoing study on library spaces should focus on. Among the salient points raised was the need to address the issue of library usage not from the "student as problem" perspective, but from the perspective of "space as problem" by re-looking library design and usage.

When the space rather than the student is perceived as the problem, the question to ask is: Why should students want to read, and why should students want to step into the school libraries?

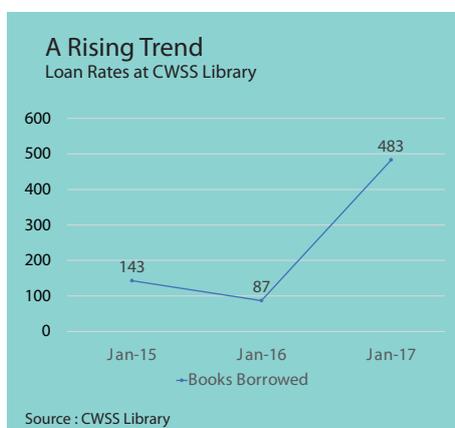
The presentation is based on a year-long study of reading and school libraries, and reports on the preliminary data from Commonwealth Secondary School (CWSS).

CWSS renovated its library in 2016 with the specific intent of encouraging reading, collaboration and study in the library space.

This presentation documents the research methods used and the preliminary findings on the effectiveness of the CWSS school library as a reading space.

Lessons from CWSS

Preliminary findings indicate that well-designed, well-laid-out library spaces can attract students from both the



For more information about the project, visit: www.readingculturesg.org

Express and Normal Academic (NA) stream to use the library to read in a sustained manner.

Researchers note that books in this library are organised according to genre for users to locate them easily. It might have played a role in increasing readership as book loans increased year on year for the month of January, from 143 in January 2015 and 87 in January 2016 to 483 in January 2017.

Time-lapse videos showed how certain spaces were used by students: Sofa seats near book displays encouraged both sustained reading and browsing of interesting titles. Students were also seen reading alone or in groups, showing that reading can be an individual as well as a social activity.

Multi-use spaces, such as the amphitheatre space, can be used for

lessons, performance and reading. The library's varied spaces see students using them for different types of reading, including sustained reading, browsing and book flipping. This suggests that we need to widen our understanding of what counts as reading. Interestingly, students colonise various spaces within the library for reading, showing that they are socialised into reading in school libraries.

Finally, researchers note that a reading programme need not only comprised sustained silent reading programmes; other activities and curriculum-integrated reading projects encourage the culture of reading as well.

The important learnings from preliminary data obtained thus far point to the need for clarity in terms of what spaces are designed for.

Schools need to decide whether they want their library to be study spaces, reading spaces, research spaces, leisure spaces or collaborative spaces. Understanding the preferred dominant use helps guide library design and policies for usage. This clarity of purpose as far as the priorities and usage of spaces are concerned should be communicated to both students and teachers.

Moreover, the intersection of policy, programme and practice in a space is underscored. Policies guide how a particular space should be used (e.g., use of space, Internet and handphone policies), programmes can support and encourage desired habits and practices on how students and teachers are actually utilising the library space.

Understanding how policy, programme and practice build a reading culture can help us encourage more reading, better reading and critical reading in schools.

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View the full presentation: <http://bit.ly/2nL2WnN>