

Reader Development: A reader-centred approach  
Opportunities for Public Libraries  
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Feb 22, 2006.

Slide 1:

Thankyou Debra.

We have heard about some amazing programs, initiatives and opportunities so far today. In the following 20 minutes or so I want to give you a snap shot of the Opportunities that are being developed by the State Library in the area of Reader Development.

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Reader Development – we have already heard today that reader development starts from the idea that the reader knows best, but also that we as librarians can have an active role in taking readers into new areas of reading. Opening the Book based in the UK – the leading international Reader Development organisation, have summed this up well by explaining that Reader development is about

- increasing people's enjoyment of reading
- opening up reading choices
- offering opportunities for people to share their reading experience
- raising the status of reading as a creative activity

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There are three ways in which the State Library is responding to this definition... through the development of

- Programs,
- Professional Development and
- Peer-to- peer recommendation online tools.

In this way we are working on a stable tripod strategy in supporting and providing opportunities for public libraries and librarians in Victoria to engage with their readers in a supported and strategic way.

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The State Library's first ever Pilot reader development program has been our summer reading program Reading Victoria: 20 Novels set close to home.

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Most of your library services have participated in this campaign so you will no doubt be familiar with the format and the promotional materials and the signature magpie on the letterbox. A copy of the brochure was on your seats after lunch. The State Library provided brochures to all public libraries, posters and display materials and professional development and activity development support for those libraries holding Reading Victoria events with the authors from the list of 20 Novels set close to home.

Slide 6: (books)

In this reader centred campaign 20 Novels set in Victoria were showcased. These are the novels on the list and later today we will be announcing the readers favourite TOP 5 as voted during the campaign via sms, via post and of course in public libraries across Victoria. I am sure you will enjoy the celebrations as we announce the books and authors who were voted as the favourites.

Reader centred events were held in 8 public libraries. These activities supported the program and some 95% of Victorian Public libraries participated – promoting these books to readers and the opportunity for readers to converse with each other about the books on the list via these events as well as online on the Reading Victoria blog on the slv website. Readers have voted for their favourite books, recommended books to others and commented and conversed on the favourites of others including our celebrity readers who featured on the website.

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We are hoping this will be an annual, if not twice a year program that will focus on developing other reader centred promotions that support public libraries in promoting a broad variety of recreational reading in your collections. It is also hoped that these programs will more and more support the notion of the reader at the centre of any promotional strategies. We were fortunate to have the support of not only the State Library but also program partners who were very generous in their response to the program and we will be expanding on the partnership approach in future campaigns including courting public transport providers and other mutually beneficial relationships. We will be enlisting your ideas and input in shaping up the next proposal and look towards being able to fund future adult reader centred programs with a winter and summer timeline.

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The second leg of the tripod of opportunities for public libraries lies in the areas of professional development for our Front line staff who spend a good proportion of their working hours on the circulation desk and on the library floor...the people who are most likely to be in the position of engaging and promoting collections to readers and who often get the least opportunity to actually develop their librarianship skills in the area of recreational reading support. This model is based on an independently evaluated e-skills online learning program that is built on a cascading mentoring model, whereby early trained library staff mentor and supervise the skill development of other trainees and they in turn do the same. The beauty of this model is that it is all online, can be done in your own time and in a supported collegial networking environment with skill development and dialogue across library services.

## Slide 9: The Frontline model

### **Frontline**

It is an online course in the basic theory and practice of reader-centred work for frontline staff – it is focussed on skilling those who spend most of their time with our patrons on the library floor. It takes about 28 hours all up and can be completed according to how much time the staff member has – for example in 10 minute or two hour sessions and anything in between at their desk top PC at work or at home.

The modules cover 7 areas:

#### **Module 1 Readers**

- Introduces the fundamental principles of reader-centred work
- Discusses how and why libraries can widen choice for readers
- Main task is to talk to 5 different borrowers about how they choose what to read
- Gives support on who to approach, what to ask, how to use what they say
- Discussion of barriers to reading choices
- Explores a reader-centred website and considers how to use it in the library

#### **Module 2 Library staff**

- Main task is to explore the difference between personal reading and the job-related skills of reader-centred work with books
- Looks at the impact of staff views about books, including the views of those who think of themselves as non-readers
- Explains the difference between recommending and promoting books
- Shows how to promote books you haven't read and don't want to read

### **Module 3 Reader-to-reader**

- Introduces ways to use readers' recommendations
- Main task is to undertake two small, instant promotions which use the power of reader recommendation
- Resources needed for the promotions are downloaded from the site
- Gives support on locating, monitoring and extending the promotions

### **Module 4 Books and audiences**

- Introduces ways to improve stock knowledge by learning to analyse book covers
- Main task is to practise understanding book cover signals and how books are targeted to readers
- Shows how to use this knowledge to choose which books to promote
- Gives support on testing this with practical tasks in the library

### **Module 5 Displaying books**

- Explores the importance of browsing to 75% of library customers
- Demonstrates how to use book covers to make effective displays
- Shows how displays help borrowers choose
- Main task is to make a small face-on display and monitor how it issues
- Gives support on locating a display and using spinners, tables, dumpbins and stands

## **Module 6 Targeting a promotion**

- Introduces how to plan a small-scale promotion
- Discusses how to differentiate reading audiences and meet different needs
- Main task is to identify one target audience and plan an appropriate location in the library for a promotion
- Gives support on how to analyse the library space from a reader's point of view, deciding how much space you will need, planning where to keep top-up stock and how to use shelves, bookstands, tables and dumpbins

## **Module 7 Running a promotion**

- Introduces how to identify stock for your promotion – what kinds of books will appeal to your target audience, how many, what not to include
- Main task is to set up, run and monitor the promotion
- Gives support on how to get other staff to help and how to evaluate and learn from your experience

We are currently looking at a variety of funding models to be able to adapt this model to Australian content and pilot this training across Victorian public libraries in Year 1 of a proposed 3 year national project. This would put Victoria's public library staff at the forefront of skill development and confidence in reader recommendations and developing a reader centred approach to library materials promotions.

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Reader Development – reader-to-reader online tools

As part of the development of our Reader Development strategy at the State library we have set up an RD listserv to communicate with public libraries about Reader development issues, training opportunities and so on.

A significant component of the Reading Victoria campaign is the facilities for readers available online at the SLV corporate website. This site captures the essence of reader centred online tools where readers are encouraged to interact and share their reading experiences.

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An example of this is shown here on the RV blog... where website visitors Lila and Genevieve have a brief interaction about a book that Lila is recommending ...

The Question is posed on the site for a recommendation for the readers favourite Australian book read this year...

### [Best Australian book of 2006](#)

**Lila**      [January 15th, 2007 at 1:33 pm](#)

THE SEA PEOPLE by Maurilia Meehan is set in Sorrento, Victoria, and is historical fiction about the first (abandoned) settlement there in 1803. It travels between the present and the past of Sorrento and is a great local read.

**Genevieve**      [February 4th, 2007 at 11:59 am](#)

Thanks for that, Lila - I'm fascinated by that settlement and will look for this book.

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Also on this site an example of a celebrity readers profile is rich in content and material of interest and recommendation

**Hannie Rayson, playwright – who also stands on the State Library's Readers and Writers Committee**

**What's your favourite work of fiction set in Victoria?**

*My Brother Jack* by George Johnson. This is my all-time favourite Australian novel.

**Which Victorian writer do you admire the most? (This is fabulous – listen to this...)**

Helen Garner. Helen's prose is like a perfect Pinot Gris: rich and full-bodied with a silken finish. She is devoted to language and even more dedicated to emotional truth-telling. Whenever I read Helen, whether it is fiction or non-fiction or journalism, I always experience an inadvertent little gasp - this comes from a revelation of such insight or a felicity with words which takes my breath away. I remember once she showed me a page in her diary. She had scrawled, "The tram shattered through the intersection of Flinders and Swanston streets". Every time I take that tram, I think of Helen's sentence.

**Where do you like to do your reading in Victoria? (I love this response of course...)**

... for work, I like to read at The State Library in the Dome Reading Room. I like to lean back on my chair and stare up at the dome. I think in a room like that, you can have the audacity to understand the universe. You can come at knowledge from any angle. When I'm reading novels, my favourite spot is curled up on the couch in my mother-in-law's house at Airey's Inlet. The sea air blows in and the day stretches out forever.

**What do you believe is the best film adaptation of a Victorian book?**

*Death In Brunswick* from the novel by Boyd Oxlade. To be honest, I don't remember this film very well, but I do recall laughing uncontrollably at John Clarke sloshing through the cemetery in the dead of night. As I recall it's fuelled by the glorious chaos of ethnic, inner-urban life - this is home turf for me.

**What is your most treasured memory of a public library?** (and I love this even more than the earlier one – those of you who are familiar with one of my previous professional roles as Coordinator of Carlton Library and of Children's & Youth Services for Yarra Melbourne Libraries will not be surprised...)

Curling up on a bean bag with my little boy in the Children's section of the Carlton Library on winter afternoons. Then when he could read by himself we took two beanbags. One year when I read Manning Clarke's *History of Australia*, he read 124 Enid Blyton titles.

**What is your best holiday read?**

*Shadowboxing* by Tony Birch. These are stories of such local colour: gut wrenching and full of profound insight about the ties that bind and the effects of poverty, alcohol and violence on family life. Tony's characters are exquisitely drawn - we engage with this world through the eyes of a robust and thoughtful boy and we are expected to roll with the punches as he does...

These are just two ways in which we have put readers at the centre of our online tools – providing a space for reflection and sharing about books and the experience of reading.

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Shirley has mentioned other Reader centred recommendation tools and an example you may have seen is Whichbook.net. This site works as a mix your own read site that allows you to determine in the moment what you feel like – for example (demo live) ...

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We are in the early stages of developing a project brief to develop an Australian Readers Choice online tool that would

- allow for reader centred selection
- facilitate readers recommendations from our patron base,
- potentially allow for downloadable materials to be accessed like e-books and audio books
- enable the direct placement of a hold on the item at your local library once you have determined the book you want and that it is available at your chosen library.

There are a number of key highlights to this proposed tool... the Top 5 include...

1. Alignment with Web 2.0 and Library 2.0 and the notions of the Library of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as captured in Charles Leadbeater address at the State Library of the same title in early 2006. The principles of actively engaging and empowering our patrons to participate in the creation and sharing of knowledge through the recommendation facility are at the heart of this tool.
2. reader centred approach which starts from the reader and his /her desires about what they want to read rather than starting from the book.

3. It encourages readers to explore library collections more broadly and deeply and takes them into places they may not usually go through straight author and 'who writes like' type lists and supports librarians in developing their knowledge and skill in making reading.
4. Recommendations and supports audience development strategies.
5. It could provide for increased satisfaction from public library users incorporating the option of an immediate access (through downloadable options).
6. It is a lot of fun playing with it...its compelling and engaging to use!

At this stage we are having preliminary talks with a range of people who have an interest and expertise in this type of application development and will be getting clearer about the parameters and possibilities of such a site as well as grappling with the 64,000 dollar question of “**who will show us the money**” to be able to do it! We think this type of project has the potential to be very attractive to a commercial sponsor or partner as well as potentially looking at other government support at a national level.

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In summary – I look forward to working with you further on Opportunities for public libraries to engage with reader development initiatives and having input into the ongoing development and implementation of these initiatives. I will be keeping you informed via the reader development list serve we have set up which you can subscribe to at ..... please stay tuned!