

# RETURN TO READING: A UK BOOKMARK

## SLIDE 1

Before I get started, I'd just like to thank the Library Board of Victoria for awarding me the Margery C Ramsay scholarship in 2005 and giving me the opportunity to undertake my study. I have never felt so passionately about anything in my working life before and it has opened so many doors for me. I urge any of you who have a particular enthusiasm in your work to make a Ramsay Reid application – if you are successful it gives you a once in a lifetime opportunity. And I'd also like to congratulate the 2006 Ramsay Reid recipients, Michelle McLean from Casey Cardinia and Anna Boland from Hume Global Learning Village.

I'm going to give you a really brief overview of my study tour investigating Best Practice in Reader Services and training for library staff in Reader Development. The research I carried out – before, during and since – has been extensive. I have enough information to write my own book! But if any of you have a particular interest in anything that I only touch on here, I'd be happy to meet with you individually to give you more information.

## SLIDE 2

So, why did I choose my subject matter? I'm sure all of you are familiar with the Libraries Building Communities report, published in February 2005 by the State Library of Victoria. The report states that **88%** of Victorian library users go to the library to borrow books. Book loans are also rated as **the most important service** offered by libraries. And yet we have had a 10-15 year period dominated by the IT and information services in terms of service delivery, staff expertise and professional development. But now, more people are becoming independent in their information searching, especially if they have the Internet at home. And also, if we look beyond our shores, there has been an international reader development renaissance – particularly in the UK and the US. I believe if we're going to remain a relevant service in for our communities, we need focus back on our **core business of books and reading**.

There is still a strongly held perception in our communities that librarians know about books. But our main challenge here is that many of our library staff have lost confidence in giving people advice about books and offering our borrowers the chance to try something new to read. They can handle reference queries with great alacrity but if they are asked to recommend a good book, many will break out in a cold sweat!

### SLIDE 3

As part of the 2000 Ramsay scholarship, Genimaree Panozzo of Moreland Libraries undertook a study of reader development programs in the UK.

Much has happened since Genimaree's report, most importantly the **raised profile of reading on the political agenda and in the media.**

**Framework for the Future** is the government's vision for public libraries, published by the The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, MLA, in 2003. **F4F's mission is to bring reading to the heart of every community** and it advocates that reader development is the key to addressing change in the community. Reader Development is now central to the strategies of all library services in the UK.

**Reading is also high in the nation's consciousness, particularly since the National Year of Reading, 1998-99.** Reading has a high profile in the **media** – TV and radio – has meant that reading for pleasure is very popular in the UK. Advertisements for books can be seen everywhere in the UK – on billboards, on the London Underground, at train stations, on the side of buses. Books are everywhere.

One of the biggest successes has been the Richard and Judy Bookclub – part of their popular teatime chat show on Channel 4. Unlike the ABC's First Tuesday Book Club, the Richard and Judy Book Club is a segment on their chat show – more like the Oprah Book Club. Through their partnership with The Reading Agency, Public libraries played a key role in the huge success of the R&J Book Club. Libraries are mentioned on-screen as places to go to get hold of the featured books. The poster on this slide is an example of the material supplied, free of charge to libraries, to promote the books featured on the program. The R&J award is part of the British Book awards. Viewers vote for their favourite books featured on the show.

## SLIDE 4

There are 2 main agencies that are responsible for the focus on reader development in UK libraries:

- The Reading Agency
- Opening the Book

**The Reading Agency** is a charity, formed in 2002. It is founded on the principle that **reading has infinite potential for making life richer** and that **libraries are the most democratic medium** for bringing reading to people. TRA has a mission to **inspire a reading nation**, by working with libraries and their partners.

## SLIDE 5

**TRA projects include: Reading programs** – They are the people behind World Book Day and develop partnerships with libraries and the Orange Prize as well as the Richard and Judy Bookclub. TRA's partnership with the Orange Prize for Fiction began in **2000**, and library participation has grown steadily. It runs annually between March and June. TRA:

- organizes free Orange Prize information seminars each year, linked to the announcement of the long list in March – info on long listed books, authors, etc
- co-ordinates the distribution of special free Point of Lend materials (including posters and bookmarks) to participating authorities
- works with library suppliers to encourage prompt arrival of long and shortlisted books
- supports libraries in using a variety of reader development activities to involve readers.

**Participating libraries organise a variety of reader development activities around the Prize, including:**

- arranging for reading groups to shadow the Prize. Participating groups get a free set of the shortlisted books, vote for their own favourite and have a chance to attend the award ceremony in London. They can also be in the running for Penguin/Orange Reading Group of the Year and get a visit from one of the shortlisted authors.
- running Orange Prize for Fiction events - parties, readings and discussions
- encouraging readers to complete review cards and post comments and reviews on the Orange Prize for Fiction website.

Australian Literary prizes do not have a very high profile in the media here – only in the literary pages of newspapers. I think programs like this here would raise awareness about Australian prizes significantly.

## SLIDE 6

TRA also works to foster partnerships between libraries and affiliated agencies e.g. BBC, National Literacy Trust. One of the most exciting projects I focused on in my study paper was The *Reading Partners* publisher and libraries project, launched in 2004. The main aim was for publishers and libraries to work together to expand the market for books. Reading Partners aims to create a more vibrant reading experience in libraries for adults and to help publishers grow their market by developing the audience for reading. They have published this handbook, *More Readers Reading More* which reports on the main projects from the first 2 years of RP.

The main elements of the Reading Partners project are:

- Partnerships between libraries and publishers.
- Book promotions – support for libraries promoting certain titles/ authors or running events with authors, readers' days, etc
- Database management –
  - **The Rolling Calendar** allows libraries to see what authors, publicity material, proofs and other activities are available to tie in with.
  - **The Venues Database** gives details of hundreds of library venues to publishers to show them where they take authors and what the set up is at each library.
  - **The Author Database** lists authors willing to work with libraries, where they live and which areas they are willing to visit
  - **What's Happening in Libraries?** Publishers have asked for information about festivals, projects, anniversaries and other activities so they can consider how to support them.

## SLIDE 7

- The Reading Partners project has a strong focus on Reading Groups. The TRA manages a database of over 1000 RGs in the UK, searchable by postcode or type of group. Publishers have worked directly with RGs on the RP projects. This slide shows promotional material supplied to libraries Penguin consults RGs for their Book of the Month promotion. Reading groups are given a range of Penguin's up-coming titles and each one chooses a book of the month from their selection.
- Other projects include - Time Warner consulted RGs in market research on book covers, Faber worked with book groups to choose poetry for people who don't like poetry, Pan Macmillan worked with libraries in the NW of England on a project to encourage more men to use libraries called 'Reading the Male'.

## SLIDE 8

A highly successful RP project was the Vintage Future Classics. To celebrate Vintage's 15th birthday, they asked 48 reading groups affiliated to libraries around the UK to help select fifteen of its books, from a list of 100, that will still be read in 100 years time - fifteen 'Modern Classics'.

I visited a library in Cumbria, in the Lake District, that had been part of the program. They were so involved in it that they actually kept a reading diary, recording their thoughts about the books as they were going along – see bottom of screen.

RPs has worked with publishers and libraries on a Code of Practice to improve the speed of supply of new and promoted titles - prize shortlists, Richard and Judy - to libraries.

## SLIDE 9

One of the outcomes of the Reading Partners project was The **Love Libraries** campaign which has set about to change the public's perception of libraries as being old-fashioned and having nothing to offer them. It has created a positive branding for marketing libraries (see slide). To explore a new vision for a 21st Century reading service, 3 libraries in Kent, Cornwall and Richmond in London, were selected to experience a 12-week makeover as models for future libraries. As this has come out of the RP project, there is a strong emphasis on library and publisher partnerships.

The Love Libraries web site contains testimonies from high-profile library champions, saying what their local library means to them. They have also developed an online toolkit to let readers know what to expect from a good library service.

In April 2006, Love Libraries launched a campaign to find 10 young librarians of the future. The announcement of the winners in July 06 heralded the Top 10 young librarians as more 'Buffy than stuffy!' One of the winners was inspired to become a librarian in his late teens by Giles from Buffy the Vampire Slayer!

## SLIDE 10

### Opening the Book

Opening the Book is the other main driving-force responsible for the renewed focus on readers in libraries. Opening the Book works with libraries to change: the look and feel of library buildings and spaces, the skills and confidence of library staff, the management and presentation of collections and library presence on the web.

I think many of you here would have heard Opening the Book's director, the guru of RD, Rachel Van Riel, speak at the City Library last July. She was the first person to coin the phrase **Reader Development** and is a strong advocate for taking a **reader-centred** approach in libraries.

### OtB's mission statement is:

The best book in the world is quite simply the one you like best and that is something you can discover for yourself, but we are here to help you find it.

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### **Reader development means active intervention to:**

- increase people's confidence and enjoyment of reading
- open up reading choices
- offer opportunities for people to share their reading experience
- raise the status of reading as a creative activity

### **Reader development is audience development for literature**

Reader development sells the reading experience and what it can do for you, rather than selling individual books or writers – sells the sizzle not the sausage. It builds the audience for literature by moving readers beyond brand loyalty to individual writers, helping them develop the confidence to try something new.

Traditionally, libraries have focused on readers' advising e.g. if you like reading books by Janet Evanovich, you might also like... The distinction between RA and RD is that RA leads you to the next book you knew you wanted whereas RD leads you to the next book you didn't know you wanted.

## SLIDE 12

The image here is an example of an OtB promotion – sells the experience not individual book titles. Other great examples of promotions like these are available on the OtB web site.

### **Some examples of taking the reader-centred approach are:**

#### **Readers' Days**

UK libraries invented Readers' Days. A Readers' Day is different from a writers' festival in that it focuses on the reader and the reading experience rather than writers and the writing process. Readers' Days are hugely popular in the UK. There is usually one happening every weekend. I'll tell you more about Readers' Days when I discuss Yarra-Melbourne initiatives later.

#### **Reading Groups**

Reading Groups are massive in the UK. Most UK publishers have Reading Group sections on their web sites. Supporting RGs is possibly one of the most reader-centred things libraries can do. They give the opportunity for people to interact with others that love reading and they expand people's reading choices, introducing them to books they would not necessarily have picked for themselves. It is estimated that public libraries in the UK support around 4,500 RGs. Essex, one of the library authorities I visited, is one of the largest English counties.

It has **73** libraries and supports over **350** book groups. **Indication of who supports a book group.** Urge people to start one – even if very limited resources.

### **Readers-in-residence**

A reader-in-residence is like a project worker and works in a library to help broaden people's reading choices. They give training to library staff in how to give people advice about what to read and how to create reader centred displays and noticeboards. They also work closely with library book groups.

### **SLIDE 13**

One of OtB's main roles is in **training** for library staff in reader devt. They have a strong focus on desk staff. Their major initiative has been the Branching Out training.

The original Branching Out England **1998-2001** was a selective process in which **33** library authorities were chosen to participate. They took part in OtB training RD sessions. Part of their responsibility over the three years was to set up regional networks to help cascade what was learned more widely. Funding was **300k** from the Arts Council and support in kind from library authorities.

From **2001-2003** the project continued to run at a smaller scale with interim funding (**80k**) for the website, some training and projects. From **2003-2006** the project expanded to reach **all 149** authorities in England. This programme - **£610k over the 3 years** funded the development and testing of the online RD training program **Frontline**, 90 face-to-face Reader-friendly Library training sessions (one of which I was very lucky to attend in Manchester), the Branching Out website, regional sessions for heads of service and for librarians and this book ***The Reader-friendly Library service*** - which they have nearly finished and I'm hoping they will distribute to Aus!

OtB also established similar networks and training in Wales – Estyn Allan, which I will talk about later – and Scotland – Scottish Reader Devt Network.

## SLIDE 14

**I won't go into great detail here as Paula Kelly will be speaking about this later.**

Frontline is an online course in the basic theory and practice of reader-centred work for frontline staff in the adult lending library. Self-paced training course. Trainees work through 7 modules. It begins with the principles of reader development and culminates in the member of staff putting together a reader-centred promotion.

It's called Frontline because it targets Frontline staff – the people that do the most desk shifts – as they are the ones who have most direct contact with readers. All of the library authorities I spoke to in the UK said that their staff had benefited greatly from Frontline; some said it was the best training they have ever done. Paula will talk later about bringing Frontline to Australia. Rachel Van Riel has specifically said that she wants Victoria to be the pilot before it is rolled out to the rest of Australia.

## SLIDE 15

Libraries in the UK are really rethinking the way they organise their spaces to make it as easy as possible for their borrowers to find something good to read - this is largely due to OtB's influence.

**A library service that is reader-centred puts the needs of the reader first, above those of the staff or the traditional lay out of collections.** It makes independent use of the library as easy and effective as possible.

Libraries are often guilty of not putting the reader first in their layout. We know our way around our spaces but, for most people, the library is overwhelming. Many people will not ask for help and will often leave the library thinking that it has nothing for them. We need to offer people new, appealing things and make them easy to find.

## SLIDE 16

Opening the Book's research and observation in over 100 library authorities in the UK shows:

- 75% of readers are browsers looking for reading ideas; only 25% are searching for a specific title.
- the average length of visit is between 5 and 9 minutes
- most readers prefer to choose independently rather than to ask staff or use catalogues
- face-out book displays in good locations significantly increase performance.

So how do we catch the eye of the browser? How do we grab the attention of the 5-minute borrower?

## SLIDE 17

**Traditional library layout is collection-driven;** collection allocation determines what goes where.

Libraries are mostly designed to meet the needs of the 25% of people who know what they want and can find it - the A-Z shelves, the categories of fiction, the Dewey system, the catalogue.

**Reader-centred layout is user driven;** it starts from understanding the different ways people use the library space.

## SLIDE 18

Reader development has drawn attention to the neglected majority. What can you offer the 75% to help them browse more effectively? You don't need to change the whole library, just offer something to make browsing easy.

I actually think it's time for a joke: What makes a good librarian? Shelf-confidence!

This example from Bolton Library uses the book shop model of putting non-fiction into categories that can be easily recognised by browsers. The Dewey sequence is alien to many people. I know that Beaumaris library has taken a similar approach to their non-fiction layout.

## SLIDE 19

Reader-centred displays help browsers and the 5-minute borrower make quick choices by offering a smaller range of books face out. Publishers spend thousands of dollars making their book covers appeal to their target audiences. Book covers are our greatest allies in creating attractive library displays but most of the time, they are hidden on the shelves.

Readers find it much easier to choose from a smaller selection. And shelves used for face-out display issue many more books than those with spine out, even though they hold fewer books.

Some of you attending Rachel's seminars lamented the fact that the stylish OtB furniture that facilitates face out display isn't available in Aus. I think that these examples show that you can make the best of what you have to put together an eye-catching face out display.

Reader-centred displays should be positioned in prominent places in the library to catch the browser's attention. Just like the confectionery and magazine displays next to the supermarket check out encourage impulse buying, a reader-centred display should encourage impulse borrowing.

## SLIDE 20

OtB's research has also shown that if a display falls below 70% full, the use drops off dramatically. Displays should be topped up at all time to increase usage. These displays give the impression that they have been picked over and all the best stuff has been taken. In the reader-friendly library, more time is spent topping up the face out display than shelving books A-Z.

In retail, 50% of customers buy what they touch. An effective display should tempt people to pick books up, read the endorsements on the front and the blurb on the back. Avoid locking books up in glass cabinets.

## SLIDE 21

Another aspect of my study was library networks and how they have helped libraries work together on RD projects. In order for RD projects to be successful, libraries can not work in isolation. From my observations in the UK, library networks have allowed RD projects to move forward by:

- Collaborating on innovative ideas to promote reading
- Providing a support network with regular meetings to discuss RD issues in their library services
- Providing practical benefits in terms of shared costs
- Obtaining new funding outside the library sector
- Raising the profile of libraries and reading
- Spreading and sharing the passion for the pleasure of reading.

## SLIDE 22

Time to Read is a network of libraries in the NW of England. It includes authorities from Manchester, Liverpool, Lancashire and Cumbria – the Lake District. It has a dedicated coordinator based in Manchester Central Library, Jane Mathieson.

NW libraries were inspired to form a network after an OtB Branching Out training session in 1999. They originally obtained a grant from the Public Libraries Challenge Fund and collaborated on a regional partnership to work with 18-25 year olds. Each authority in NW England gave a small amount of money to fund the Time to Read coordinator position. They also obtained money from the Arts Council. In 2002, there was enough money for Jane's post. Coordinates work of librarians working in reader devt in NW England. Includes:

- Devt of web site
- Each year, she produces one promotional package to be used by libraries
- Min of 4 training courses per year

Originally set up for 2 years (to 2004). Then it was extended another 2 years. It will probably go to 2008.

TTR has developed Readers for Life – an overarching strategy for reader development work with adults in public libraries in NW England. It identifies priorities in line with Framework for the Future.

As you can see from their web site, TTR has a strong focus on promoting reading local authors and was one of the inspirations behind Reading Victoria.

## **SLIDE 23**

As I mentioned earlier, Estyn Allan is the Welsh version of Branching Out. It was a three year national project, 2002-2005, involving all 22 library authorities in Wales. It aimed to increase access to the richness and diversity of contemporary writing in Welsh and English by using the popular base and extensive networks of the public library service. As you can see here, their web site is in both Welsh and English. I'll show you their tempting site for readers later!

Some of their projects include:

Involvement in the Reading Partners pilot project (with TRA).

### **Reading between the Wines**

Think of wine that will go with the book you are reading. Can also be done with chocolate and books.

### **Right poetry at the right time**

Poetry for every occasion – perfect poems for wedding, funerals, special occasions

### **Just imagine - a Partnership with North Wales Cancer Treatment Centre**

New books – selected by reader development librarians are placed in the waiting rooms. Patients can take them home or return them to the centre

### **Books on prescription – Cardiff**

Health benefits of reading. List of self help books drawn up by librarian and doctor. Lists given to Cardiff GPs. When they write prescription for drugs, also write one for books. Prescription is taken to local library. Lists are now being drawn up of fiction and poetry.

## SLIDE 24

And finally, I also looked at Reader-centred web sites in my study. Books and technology do go together. In libraries, the Internet can bring readers and books together in interesting new ways.

I'm sure many of you have had a look at the grandmother of all reader-centred sites in the UK is [whichbook.net](http://whichbook.net) developed by OtB. It starts with what the reader is in the mood for.

## SLIDE 25

Just like a reader-centred library space, a reader-centred web site starts with the reader at the centre rather than the site's restrictions or organisational goals.

- This diagram illustrates the elements that should be present in a reader-centred web site. 'Interactive and with a purpose' and 'Interesting, entertaining, experience are self-explanatory. Combines virtual presence with physical is interesting as your web site should be offering the 5 minute (possibly less online!) browser something appealing.
- Rachel always talks about promoting the 'sizzle' (the experience) rather than the 'sausage' (the product) – there is no right or wrong read just something you enjoy. The web site should promote the reading experience.
- One of the other key aspects is that the website isn't a solution in itself and that the path of discovery also leads you to your local library – the site I'm going to show you next does this in a beautiful way!
- Opening the Book have created a number of websites designed to enhance the experience of reading. Some are targeted to specific audiences but they all have the ethos of providing an intuitive aid for choosing books
- An example of one of their sites is [givemeabreak.org](http://givemeabreak.org), one of the products of the Estyn Allan Welsh library network.

## SLIDE 26

Give me a Break focuses on the using reading to help you escape from your everyday life. As well as giving you a break from the ironing, kids, stress, life, etc it also offers a Surprise Break.

## SLIDE 27

You can nominate the kind of book you think you'd give a try and then select your nearest library. You are emailed when your surprise is ready for collection.

## SLIDE 28

The reader2reader site, designed and managed by OtB for the People's Network (a network that placed up-to-date IT equipment in all English public libraries). reader2reader.net was created as a site where readers could exchange recommendations about books they have enjoyed. They have just added a Tags search system and you can now post comments about what other readers have said about particular books.

I particularly like the section where you can 'Bin a Book'.

## SLIDE 29

You can suggest a book for this section – usually one that lots of people have been raving about but you hated. There's also the option here of rescuing a book from the bin. Those of you who heard Rachel speak will have heard about her idea of having recommended and not recommended on either side of the returns trolley – this is similar but in virtual space.

## SLIDE 30

I also really love this 'Take your seat' section on the site where there are books to suit different situations in your life. As well as these sections, there is also a 'Familiar reads' heading with a comfy armchair and suggested books that you like going back to, like old friends.

## SLIDE 31

And finally, I'd just like to say...

I strongly believe that by implementing these reader development principles the level of service our libraries offer will improve markedly. Our libraries will perform much better, engagement with the community will be stronger and staff will gain a great deal more satisfaction out of their work. In libraries, the reader-centred approach is the ultimate customer service that we can deliver.

And I urge you all, if you haven't signed up for our RD list serve for Vic Public library staff, make sure you do so as soon as you can. Address on screen.