

Walking, talking books The school library as a Living Library



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The Living Library – what is it?

- An innovative, interactive take on “Don’t judge a book by its cover”
- An event where the ‘books’ are human beings who are ‘borrowed’ by readers for personal dialogue
- An event at which the ‘books’ may represent groups frequently confronted with stereotypes and prejudices
- A opportunity for constructive two way conversations between individuals who may not normally meet each other

The Living Library – how did it begin?

- Began in 2000 in Denmark as part of a youth music festival, aimed at reducing youth violence
- Initially a ‘small event within a large event’ and incorporated into the Council of Europe’s youth program on human rights education – held as part of major youth festivals etc
- Adapted in Europe by other institutions, in particular public libraries
- Now held in other countries eg UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand

The Living library – how does the research support its practice?

- Allport (1979) – studies showing personal contact can counteract judgement based on stereotype
- Appiah (2006), Ang (2008) – the role of conversations with ‘others’ in cosmopolitan environments
- Bickford (1996) – ‘listening theory’

The Living Library – why have one in your school library?

- To reinforce the values and ethos of your school
- To reinforce the pedagogical philosophy of your school
- To help students meet the state/national curriculum outcomes
- To facilitate cross curricular and interdisciplinary learning

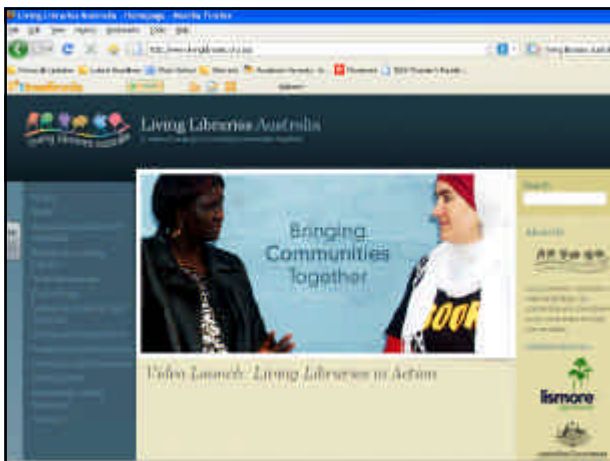
The Living Library – what can it do for your library?

- A low cost opportunity to refresh and revitalise the types of events you hold in your school library
- An opportunity to lead and innovate in school library practice
- An opportunity to make a vital contribution to the life of your school by reinforcing *values* and *learning*
- An opportunity to showcase your library and your school in the wider community



The Living Library - how to plan one?

- The following resources are invaluable:
 - ✓ [The Living Library website](#)
 - ✓ [Living Libraries Australia website](#)
- ✓ Abbergel, R. 2005 *Don't judge a book by its cover: the Living Library organiser's guide*
- Regard anyone interesting as a potential 'book'!
- Mine your extended school community
- Use community organisations – many already have their representatives involved with schools



Who makes a good 'living book'?

- Someone who supports the ethos of the Living Library
- Someone who is comfortable talking to young people
- Someone who can listen as well as speak
- Someone who wants others to learn about different lifestyles
- Someone who answers questions honestly
- Someone who doesn't 'preach'

The Living Library – how does it benefit ‘readers’?

- Meets syllabus outcomes across a range of subject areas
- A different style of learning - personalised versus generalised, conversation versus presentation
- *Listening* to learn about “the Other”
- Extends learning beyond the classroom, the library, the school – towards global citizenship

The Living Library – what’s in it for the ‘books’?

- The opportunity to speak for oneself, unmediated
- A chance to be listened to
- The opportunity to represent an organisation in a different context
- Personal affirmation

What are the challenges in running a Living Library?

- Deciding when and for how long
- Sourcing the books and familiarising them with the Living Library ethos
- Supporting people who may not have talked about themselves in conversation with strangers before
- Promoting the event – to students and the wider community
- Ensuring smooth running on the day

A few tips...

- Do consider a ‘pilot’ to test the waters
- Do start preparations early
- Do make sure you have the cooperation and support of school staff
- Do have a ‘manageable’ number of books
- Do try to fit the books with the prospective readership
- Do be prepared for ‘no shows’
- Do document the process and the event
- Do evaluate by seeking reader and book feedback