This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30046300

Reproduced with the kind permissions of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2008, School Library Association of Victoria
The Living Library was certainly one of the most popular innovations of Brauer's Book Week 2007 celebrations. Every year we aim to celebrate the achievements of our library: its staff, services and the wonderful resources we share. We kicked off the week with a performance from 'The Library Crew – the Library Ladies' Book Rap' at General Assembly. It brought the house down!

The Living Library was a response to an article I read in *Incite*, the journal of the Australian Library and Information Association. I proposed the Living Library to our staff who strongly supported it. The concept has been very successful both here and overseas. The idea originated at a youth music festival in Denmark and was further developed by a Swedish library. In Australia, the public library in Lismore (NSW) and the tertiary library at Melbourne's RMIT have both run this program which is now ongoing.

The Living Library aims to present people as living repositories of knowledge and information and was initially conceived as a way to break down prejudice by encouraging community members to access 'books', whose lifestyle and experience they might not otherwise be aware of, building tolerance and understanding, aiding social cohesion.

In a school context I thought the idea would work well with a little refocusing and could be a way to broaden our ties with the local community. I also believed it fitted perfectly with the philosophy behind VELS, in that it provided an ideal vehicle for cross-curricular studies, subverting the old reliance on disciplinary limitations. It is also perfect for breaking down social and cultural barriers.

Consequently, I sought to include a number of community luminaries. Everyone I approached was willing and very enthusiastic, and they represented the broadest range of backgrounds I could find. Committed to the idea that 'less is more' I didn't overdo it, but kept our shelf of 'books' down to two a day.

A booking sheet was kept at the desk and staff members were able to reserve the 'living book' of their choice for all or part of a class. I provided a detailed biography on each person and suggested they be used in a variety of ways: a formal talk, informal discussion, working with individuals or small groups, in a mentoring role out of class (for students and teachers) or as an expert source on a particular subject. I also believed many students would benefit from talking...
to an adult with broad life experience who could offer advice perhaps and a different perspective.

Our living books were all high achievers drawn from the Warrnambool community and each spent a day with us, being 'borrowed' by staff as living, breathing stores of knowledge. Together they represented an awesome tally of knowledge, life experience and special skills.

Our Living Library 'Books' were Donald Swanson, Judy Irvine, David Atkinson, John Maroniti, Elizabeth O'Callaghan and Mark Chapman.

Some highlights were when US expatriate and Deakin University academic Don Swanson played blue grass banjo in Maths classes and talked about the relationship of mathematics and music. Mrs. O'Callaghan shared her knowledge of local history, including her childhood spent in the Otways in the 1930s, and she taught another class how to decipher cryptic crosswords.

Mark Chapman took examples of his latest artworks featuring computer-generated images to an English class who interviewed him. Later, Mayor David Atkinson spoke to a VCE Business Management class about 'marketing' and how the City of Warrnambool is promoted. Local globetrotter Judy Irvine explained the history and lifestyles of Cambodians and her work amongst people traumatised by conflict, to Middle School English classes. John Maroniti took his guitar with him and played and talked about his early days in Warrnambool (as the only Greek boy in town!); of his love of music and the '70s and '80s music scene.

Living Books were available to be 'read' at lunchtimes and recess for anyone who wanted to consult them, so we had a steady stream of teachers wanting a cup of tea and discussions with our Mayor. John was ready to 'jam' with any student who brought their instrument to the library, while Judy was keen to share her involvement (over many decades) in the performing arts with anyone keen to listen.

All of our books reported their day with us to be a satisfying one and all have indicated a willingness to be involved again. Teachers have remained committed to the concept. Next year, I would like to pursue new books, too. For example, we have a small but strong contingent of Sudanese refugees living in town and I see Living Books as an ideal opportunity for the involvement of this important minority group.

Sharyn Anderson, Manager, Brauer College, Learning and Teaching Resource Centre, Warrnambool, Victoria.

A literature-based conference
Re-imagine other worlds!
Friday 14 November 2008