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***Library-based adult reading for pleasure in the USA and the Netherlands: transferable lessons for English public libraries***

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**Library-based adult reading for pleasure  
in the USA and the Netherlands:**

Transferable lessons for English public libraries

**Claire Styles**  
**Clore Fellow**  
August 2007

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Claire Styles  
August 2007

## **About the author**

Claire Styles is a chartered librarian with extensive experience within the public library sector in England. She is a freelance libraries consultant, working with organisations including The Reading Agency, as a Senior Project Manager. Claire was selected as the second librarian to participate in the prestigious Clore Leadership Programme in 2005. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

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## **Executive Summary**

This report considers the potential for English public libraries to further develop their role in supporting adult reading for pleasure. It explores the lessons transferable to England, from reading programmes which have been developed in the USA (in Seattle and Los Angeles) and in the Netherlands.

The report starts by reviewing the political and professional policy environment in which public libraries in England operate. It explores definitions of reading for pleasure and identifies themes which libraries need to consider if their efforts to attract and retain adult readers are to be successful. It then moves on to outline how the Center for the Book and libraries in Seattle and California; and organisations and libraries in the Netherlands have responded to the interests of adult readers and argues that the key to success is the centrality of the 'experience' of reading together. The report argues that, despite being located in very different societies, many of the characteristics which underpin American and Dutch reading programmes are the same and are transferable to an English context.

The report literature review and case studies identify a number of key themes which are carried through to the thematic overview, findings and recommendations. It identifies the need for national bodies to not only provide strategic vision for adult reading development, but also suggests that they could lead on additional innovative projects such as a national One Book programme. Linked to this is the importance of extending productive partnerships with booksellers, publishers, the literary community and the media to maximise the impact of these initiatives. At a local level, this report suggests that all library services should be supported to use national campaigns not as off the peg one-offs but to build local capacity and sustainability. It is proposed that frontline staff should be trained in book knowledge, promoting the act of reading for pleasure and in using social networking technology as a reading development tool. The creation of more ambient lounge-style adult reading spaces in libraries and online is proposed. This report also suggests an increased personalisation of services, including web pages with an individual staff presence, for instance through recommendations and blogs. Finally, this report proposes that adult readers should be supported to become more involved in designing and delivering reading services, to build capacity for the library, increase reader confidence and self-esteem and contribute to community cohesion.

The themes, findings and recommendations in this report are primarily aimed at library staff involved in developing reading services in England. They may also be of value to policy organisations and to potential funders.

# 1 Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been a huge expansion in the number and range of reading initiatives in England to support adult reading for pleasure. It has come to be seen as a group pursuit, an experience which can connect readers and encourage them, through discussions about books, to view the world differently.

This phenomenon has been led to a large degree by bookshops and publishers and emulated in libraries. A plethora of reading groups in homes, workplaces, schools and in libraries have sprung up in recent years. At a time when more books are being published in England than ever before, many public libraries have seen a fall in book lending and in library visits. The relatively recent strategic focus on reading development, articulated in the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's *Framework for the Future* has encouraged public libraries to develop new proactive measures to connecting adult readers.

## 1.1 Context

In 2007, I visited the USA and the Netherlands to research public library adult leisure reading programmes. My intention was to identify policy and practice which might provide transferable lessons for an English library context.

The Washington and California Centers for the Book are state affiliates of the national Center for the Book. I chose to visit Washington and California in particular because of their work with adult readers and because they each interpret the national Center for the Book objectives very differently. Washington Center for the Book is run by Seattle Public Library service, housed in the spectacular Central Library. Its primary focus is creating adult literary programming. California Center for the Book is run by the California State Library and is based in the Library and Information Department of the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). It has a more arms-length relationship with libraries; providing resources and small grants, and coordinating a few state-wide initiatives. As in the USA, Dutch libraries deliver their own in-house activities, supported by a strong network of national organisations. In the Netherlands, national support comes from including the Netherlands Public Library Association (VOB), CPNB and regional Provincial Library Services. I was particularly interested in national programmes and use of new technologies to connect readers.

I have excluded from my research the phenomenon of the Oprah Winfrey Book Clubs, which have had a massive impact on reading groups in the USA, and been replicated in the UK by the Richard and Judy Book Clubs. This is because anyone reading this report is already likely to be aware of their impact. It is also important to acknowledge the Beyond the Book academic research into the One Book project, which is due to be published at the same time as my report and therefore could not be included.

## 1.2 Research questions

My research visits were structured to find out:

- The extent to which innovation in reading development is being led by strategic organisations and how those innovations are mainstreamed and sustained locally
- The short and longer-term impact of programmes on adult users and library services
- The contribution of reader initiatives to the image and identity of the library
- The opportunities for using new technologies to support reading development

I wanted to use my findings to identify best practice which could have relevance for English public libraries and think about how that could be achieved. I also wanted to stimulate

debate about the potential of adult reading initiatives to create new audiences and experiences in libraries.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Research is centred on visits to libraries in the USA and the Netherlands in 2007. The majority of interviews were fairly formal with open questions to explore the following themes:

- Importance of reading for pleasure and the group experience
- Contribution of reading for pleasure to organisation mission and priorities
- Programme content and rationale
- Impact and outcomes of programmes, including impact on social inclusion
- Partnership and collaboration
- Involvement of readers, including use of volunteers
- Relevance and use of new technologies
- Future planning and aspirations

There were a total of 22 structured interviews with senior managers and librarians from several organisations, lasting between 30 minutes and 3 hours. It was not possible to share transcriptions or notes with interviewees within the timescale. A further 12 informal interviews were carried out with staff, users and an author, lasting from 5 minutes to 1 hour.

I visited Seattle and Los Angeles in the USA in May 2007. I observed the 2007 Seattle Reads programme, including conducting informal interviews with the featured author, library staff and adult readers. I interviewed the Washington Center for the Book Program Manager, the City Librarian, a reviewer and bookseller. During my visit I attended the week-long IFLA MetLib international conference in Seattle, which brought me into contact with representatives from around the world. Some of their comments feed into this research. In California I visited libraries including Los Angeles Public Library, Santa Monica and the award winning "Experience Library" at Cerritos. I also talked to the current and ex Directors of the California Center for the Book. In June 2007 I visited the Netherlands. Again I interviewed staff at a number of libraries, the Netherlands Public Library Association and the regional agency Pro Biblio. Following my visit, I conducted further telephone interviews. In addition, several organisations provided me with reports and evaluation data on the take-up of particular programmes, which I have included in my research.

I conducted a literature review over a 3 month period to establish the English context for my case studies. My reading was not intended to be comprehensive but to provide an overview which identified key themes on which transferable lessons for English public libraries would be based. Given that the report was to serve as a practical document, my reading covered:

- English government policy and strategy
- Professional public library policy, strategy and best practice
- Selected academic journals and studies

This report has deliberately been written in an informal style in the first person to appeal to library practitioners as a practical document. It is underpinned by a serious approach to research supported by academic supervision.

## 2. Context for English public libraries

This chapter explores some definitions of reading development, the link between reading for pleasure and literacy, the importance of connecting readers and finally how library spaces (both physical and virtual) can support the act of reading. The themes identified in this chapter will be explored further through evidence from the USA and the Netherlands, to identify transferable ideas for English public libraries.

### 2.1 Introduction

'More people than ever before are reading for pleasure'. According to one survey, 65% of people in the UK read for enjoyment compared to 55% in 1979, with a rise in book sales of 19% in five years<sup>1</sup>. Many people prefer to buy rather than borrow their books, although people are using libraries in more ways than ever before. Reading development work can encourage repeat visits, more book borrowing and a regular connection between readers and library staff in a way that doesn't always happen in bookshops. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) leads English public library policy on 'books, reading and learning' as a strand of *Framework for the Future*. The recent consultation paper *A Blueprint for excellence*, describes 'The skills and joy of reading'<sup>2</sup> as one of four main purposes of public libraries, demonstrating a continued policy commitment to supporting readers and reading as both a pleasure and a life skill.

### 2.2 Reading development and reading for pleasure

#### 2.2.1 Background

Public libraries have always aimed to encourage the act of reading for its intrinsic value as a life skill. Where this promotion was once about the passive provision of quality reading, it was recognised in the 1990s that if libraries were to combat a decline in borrowing and also engage more proactively with readers, a new approach was needed. Pioneering work by Opening the Book and Well Worth Reading (now part of The Reading Agency), and large-scale funding initiatives like the DCMS/Wolfson Challenge Fund, helped to create a new culture of direct reader engagement. The growth in reading development activity has led to public libraries across the country engaging in a broad range of mainstreamed programmes, bought-in initiatives and time-limited externally funded projects.

#### 2.2.2 Definitions and approaches

There is no single definition of reading development, although most agree that it is reader-centred and focuses on creating an 'experience', a connection between reader and book or reader to other readers. Branching Out, an Opening the Book initiative, asserts that what it calls reader development:

*'Starts with the reader and the individual reading experience, not the author, or the subject, or the theme of a book. In reader development work the aim is to concentrate on the act of reading itself'*<sup>3</sup>.

It involves a proactive intervention to encourage people to read for pleasure, to move beyond their comfort zone of loyalty to particular writers or genres, and take reading risks. It seeks to engage the people who don't think reading is for them, those who lack the skills to find reading enjoyable, as well as more confident readers who have become 'stuck' through lack of confidence or uncertainty about what to read next. People choose to read for a variety of reasons; for escapism, for information, for inspiration, for relaxation, for challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> Morrison, Richard, *Times*, 14 September 2004

<sup>2</sup> Dolan, J., *A blueprint for excellence: Public libraries 2008-2011*, MLA, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Branching Out website, August 2007



Enjoyment for one person may involve a romance, for another a bloodthirsty thriller, although reading development aims to move readers beyond the narrow definition of ‘right book’ that they may have set themselves. A book will elicit different responses at different times depending on the circumstances and frame of mind of the reader.

The Reading Agency works to a definition of reading development which focuses on proactive engagement, inclusiveness and the group experience. It:

*‘describes the active way libraries and others work to create the best possible reading experience for everyone’<sup>4</sup>*

This definition provides the basis for my assessment of the case studies explored in this report. What must also be noted is the move towards describing these activities and approaches as ‘reading development’ rather than ‘reader development’ which focusing on the act of reading rather than the slightly patronising development of the reader. This is the term adopted throughout this report.

Quality is defined by the reader, rather than by the worthiness or otherwise of the book:

*‘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’<sup>5</sup>*

It is this quality which means that makes reading development accessible and socially inclusive, cutting across social background, culture, status and ability.

### 2.2.3 Defining readers

There are four main groups of readers commonly identified in library reading development literature:

- *Emergent readers*, who have quite basic reading skills. Considered a hard to reach group, they need support and encouragement to improve their literacy and confidence. Tailored programmes like Vital Link and BBC RaW help to foster reading enjoyment.
- *Reluctant Readers* may use libraries for multimedia services but feel that books are not for them. They are most effectively encouraged to develop reading habits through a hook that isn’t reading itself. Personal contact with library staff is important; to inspire them to try the first book that puts them on the road to experienced reader.
- *Experienced readers* read regularly for pleasure. However, they may get stuck on a genre or narrow list of authors that they know they like. A reader-centred approach, probably including connection with other readers and devices such as reading lists and promotions, can encourage them to take reading risks. They can become enthusiastic advocates for books and reading for the library.

I would argue that there is also a fourth group of *adventurous readers*, or thrill-seekers, who enthusiastically exploit reading development tools (reviews, promotions, book groups, events, blogs) with confidence and curiosity, readily pushing their reading boundaries. This is a smaller group of people, a few of whom I have met in bookshops and libraries.

My research is focused primarily on projects and mainstreamed service provision which seeks to engage Reluctant and Experienced readers, the types of initiatives which Adventurous readers probably will already know about and use with confidence. These include incentive schemes which reward engagement with any book, themed promotions, booklists and reviews, reading groups (physical and virtual), and events programmes. I will go on to describe the scope and impact of some of these, and transferability to the English context, from my observations in the USA and Netherlands.

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<sup>4</sup> Their Reading Futures website, The Reading Agency, August 2007

<sup>5</sup> Branching Out website, August 2007

### 2.3 Linking literacy and reading for pleasure

The ability to read and read well underpins English society. Reading is an essential life skill needed in all parts of our lives, to read a menu in a restaurant, to pass a driving test, to pay utility bills, to vote. The 2003 DfES *Skills for Life Survey* in England reported one in six respondents (16 per cent) as having serious problems in literacy or numeracy (Entry level 3 or below)<sup>6</sup>. The vast majority of current legislation and policy relating to adult reading is focused on basic adult and family literacy, set out in the government's *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (2004), which proposed that funding should be focused on adults with few or no skills, with free basic skills tuition. This was followed up by *Leitch Review of Skills* (2006) which set out targets for improving adult skills in the UK by 2020. There is significant legislation around literacy and reading for children and young people, which is not the subject of this report.

As already suggested, developing confidence in and enjoyment of reading at all levels is a key to personal educational achievement and is linked to employment and a strong national economy. Projects like the Vital Link, which help emergent readers discover reading for pleasure, are having a demonstrable impact:

*'Improved literacy, thinking and learning skills are found to result from reading, discussing and writing about books...Emergent readers describe their immersion in books as providing enjoyment, stress-release and escape from daily life'*<sup>7</sup>.

Reading for pleasure has been proven to result in better academic achievement in school children, demonstrated in the OECD *Reading for Change* report which described how young people performed better in tests if they were enthusiastic about and engaged with reading. It asserts that 'finding ways to engage students in reading may be one of the most effective ways to leverage social change'.<sup>8</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume, then, that the same benefits of reading for pleasure exist for adults. The National Literacy Trust's 2006 research overview identifies a number of studies which cumulatively emphasise the importance of reading for pleasure for educational achievement and personal development. Their research points to the notion that actively promoting reading can have a major impact on the life chances of children and adults<sup>9</sup>. The 2008 National Year of Reading is an opportunity to raise awareness of the benefits and pleasures of reading for all ages and abilities. Libraries, as socially inclusive accessible services in the heart of every community, are well placed to take a lead in this.

### 2.4 Designing reading spaces

The MLA has a vision for libraries to provide 'a modern, active and attractive experience both in the community and online'<sup>10</sup>. The design of physical space is an important part of this vision. Recent years have seen an increase in new builds and refurbishments, many of which incorporate the best of bookshop-style display of stock, particularly in quick choice areas. Recent campaigns like Love Libraries and The Reading Agency's BookBars teenage project have concentrated on creating appropriate spaces for particular groups of readers. I would argue that there is a market for more comfortable lounge-type spaces in the adult

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<sup>6</sup> DFES, *The Skills for Life Survey: A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills*, DfES Research Brief RB 490, 2003

<sup>7</sup> Hargreaves McIntyre, *Confidence All Round – Vital Link Executive Summary*, November 2005

<sup>8</sup> OECD, *Programme for International Student Assessment, Reading for Change* 2001

<sup>9</sup> National Literacy Trust, *Reading for Pleasure: A research overview*, November 2006

<sup>10</sup> Dolan, J., *A blueprint for excellence: Public libraries 2008-2011*, MLA, 2007.

library too, spaces which are conducive to relaxed reading and informal discussion about books.

## 2.5 Connecting readers

Robert Putnam's provocative article about American society, *Bowling Alone*<sup>11</sup>, describes a decline in social capital and active civil engagement, with a decreased voter turnout, public meeting attendance and community engagement, and more people spending their leisure on solitary pursuits (e.g. going bowling on their own). Reading development activities in libraries are one of the ways in which public libraries seek to engage and bind communities.

Reading development creates the opportunity to turn reading, an essentially solitary pursuit (unless being read to) into a social experience. Talking to others about reading elicits responses to books which challenge people's perceptions, create a community of experience and ignite debate. Government policy such as *Safer Stronger Communities* points to the importance of developing positive activities which build community and combat social exclusion. Reading development activities play their part in bringing together people who would not otherwise meet; connecting readers to explore social issues and the human condition in enjoyable, non-threatening ways.

The MLA *National Public Library Development Programme for Reading Groups* states that 'people in reading groups read more, read more widely and have a more enjoyable and satisfying reading experience'. Through membership of a library reading group, '50% of adults read more, 45% borrow more and 17% of group members buy more books'<sup>12</sup>. This report resulted in the creation of Reader2reader, a national reading groups and reading development website for the public, currently in its infancy. One of the objectives of this site is to bring readers together to chat about books online, creating a virtual community. It is one of many sites which are starting to do this, using social networking.

## 2.6 Virtual reader connections

Virtual reader resources have the potential to connect readers from much wider geographical areas and attracting those who might not regularly use a library. Some argue that it is not possible to recreate the community of experience online, although advances in technology mean that it is possible to talk to other people in real time, to see and hear them using web cam technology or to inhabit the same (albeit virtual ) space together. This report will explore a few examples from the USA and Netherlands which whilst in many cases in early stages of development, demonstrate concepts which could be transferred to English public libraries.

## 2.7 Conclusion

Reading development contributes to personal development and self-esteem, to educational achievement and employment prospects, to social cohesion and the binding of communities. Whilst most of the initiatives and mainstream activities described in this report focus on the pleasure of reading, they are underpinned by a fundamental belief in the importance, as well as the enjoyment of reading.

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<sup>11</sup> Putnam, R., *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, Journal of Democracy, January 1995, Volume 6, Number 1

<sup>12</sup> MLA, *A National Public Library Development Programme for Reading Groups*, 2004

## 3 Reading for pleasure

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores some possible definitions and outcomes of reader activities which provide a useful context for the later USA and Netherlands case studies. Through a series of interviews with experienced librarian and reviewer Nancy Pearl, it explores the value of reading for pleasure, particularly in developing individual readers and the group reading experience. It describes the potential impact of librarians in the media. It looks at the power of personality and proposes that English public libraries should incorporate an element of personalisation in marketing reader services, particularly online.

During my visit to the USA, I interviewed writer and celebrity reviewer Nancy Pearl. I was keen to interview her for several reasons; firstly because of her positive impact on the image of libraries; and secondly because she (with the assistance of Chris Higashi) developed the 'one city, one book' concept for Seattle, which is fast becoming a global phenomenon.

### 3.2 Background

Since the release of her best-selling *Book Lust* in 2003 and a Librarian Action Figure modelled in her likeness, Nancy Pearl has become a celebrity in America. She is famous amongst librarians and (slightly less so) in the media for her extraordinary ability to bring her experience of leisure reading to life. She is a regular commentator about books on National Public Radio's 'Morning Edition' and several local radio stations, with frequent television appearances. She has her own website and wiki and has published several books, including *Book Lust*, *Book Crush* and the *Book Lust Journal*.

### 3.3 Why reading for pleasure matters

Nancy Pearl talked about the value of reading for pleasure as:

*'...a way of people entering into the world and experience of another person...*

*Through books and reading we have numerous lives. A movie feeds it to you, but in a book, you're collaborating with the author in creating this world.'*

She talked about the importance of shared reading activities being:

*'...not threatening, not personal, because you're talking about it in the context of a particular book, and it builds a community because you get a shared vocabulary. And so no matter how different somebody might appear, a different age, gender, ethnicity; you can discover either that you both saw the same things in the book or something totally different, but that it's the same book. I think that it's one of the few ways that we have of connecting with another human being in a very meaningful way.'*

Nancy pointed to library-based book groups as having a unique community cohesion role. They draw on diverse communities (age, gender, ethnicity, etc), whereas school and work place book groups are more 'homogeneous'. She also described two distinct ways of working with readers, through 'reader's advisory' and 'book talks':

*'Readers' advisory is beginning with the reader. It doesn't matter whether you read that book, or whether you liked that book, or whether you even know anything about that book. What matters is what that person standing before you, what his or her experience was. You need to learn the entry point into the world of that book for that person. And the great thing is this that you don't need to know what it is about. All you need to know is what it was about the book that that reader loved...Book talking is different, because when you're doing book talks, you're picking books. Always pick books that you love.'*

Nancy reads widely and would definitely be classed as an Adventurous reader. Her unique selling point is that she promotes books which are 'under the radar'; often out of print and perhaps only available from a library. The prize winners and best-sellers are of no special importance unless they stimulate debate and encourage reader risk-taking. She is fascinated by what it takes for a book to create a connection and talked about mapping behaviour;

*'I would start with one book that everybody read. And then I would have everybody track their reading, to see where they went as a result of that book, and how far down the line there are going to be interceptions. The whole notion of how one book leads to another is very exciting to me'.*

### **3.4 Staff development**

Nancy Pearl teaches modules in Readers' Advisory and Genre Fiction at the Library and Information School in Seattle but felt that every library school should fund a dedicated reading development faculty post. She also stressed the 'vital importance' of a greater emphasis on book knowledge in frontline library staff training. Many of the English library schools have also withdrawn public library courses. In English libraries, the development of national procurement models and greater supplier selection mean that fewer staff are involved in stock selection.

### **3.5 Impact on libraries and book selling**

Nancy talked about the impact of her *Book Crush* series and media presence on libraries. Libraries have reported a marked increase in requests for 'books that haven't circulated for a while, perhaps stopping them from being withdrawn'. The Morning Edition radio show airs to c.11 million people across America. She talked about how one book she had promoted on air had topped the bestseller list the following week and two other authors had reported a 'massive' rise in their Amazon rating.

### **3.6 Personality and personalisation**

Nancy Pearl has created a celebrity status for herself based on her genuine talent for articulating reading experiences. She encapsulates the qualities of our best library staff in *proactively* promoting reading for pleasure. 'I have a lot to offer, about books, and about thinking about books, because I've spent a lifetime reading, and thinking about reading'. Her Book Lust website (which includes interviews, podcasts, reviews and a wiki) trades strongly on her public image as a friendly, engaging, knowledgeable librarian. She admits that there has been some envy from within the library profession in the US but feels that she has raised the profile and expert-reader status of librarians across America. The American interest in celebrity is reflected in several of the library websites I looked at. They often feature the recommendations ('staff picks') of named library staff or a single librarian (usually with a smiling photograph), personal comments and perhaps a blog of reading experiences. This helps to validate the skill of librarian as expert and creates a human connection with users. This is an area where library staff can be distinct from the bookshop. This concept could be transferred successfully to English public libraries.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Several of the issues raised by Nancy Pearl have a strong resonance with the English public library approach to reading development. A clear message which emerged from our interviews was about the importance of developing staff knowledge, firstly of particular titles, but also of the 'readers advisory' skills to promote reading and develop active listening skills. Nancy believes strongly in the power of shared reading. Personalisation of services to generate a stronger brand for reading development work is also an important lesson for English libraries.

## 4. Reading for pleasure in the USA

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter does not attempt a comprehensive exploration of reading development in the USA; instead it focuses on a few organisations and initiatives which offer transferable lessons for English public libraries. It is underpinned by an acknowledgement that reading development work sits within a wider remit of American public libraries' contribution to addressing literacy, educational achievement and social inclusion.

This chapter begins by exploring the national context of reading development support, including subscription-based reader websites. It then goes on to describe a regional model in Washington state and local provision in Seattle Public Library service. It describes a regional approach in California and finally identifies local examples of reader services in California libraries. These examples explore the effectiveness of mainstreamed reader-centred activities and time-limited projects. Emerging themes include the importance of sustainability, involving readers, the value of shelf-ready initiatives and the profound effect of particular programmes on their participants.

### 4.2 Background

American public libraries view reading development (which they call 'reader's advisory') as an important part of community engagement. Many participate in reading programmes provided by a network of national, regional and local agencies. These include at national level the American Library Association (ALA), Center for the Book and grant-making organisations like the National Endowment for the Arts. At a state level, libraries work with organisations including the state library associations (which are not included in my research) and state Centers for the Book. My research focuses on state Centers because of their specific remit to promote reading for pleasure, books and libraries. California and Washington were interesting, individually and in contrast to each other. I also include observations from library visits.

#### 4.2.1 American Library Association programmes

The American Library Association (ALA) is the national membership organisation for library staff. It supports reader's advisory work through expert advice and practical resources. In addition to free programme guides, ALA, through its Public Programs Office, awards reader's advisory grants to library services to deliver 'diverse and excellent humanities programming'. Grants cover:

- *Let's Talk About It*, a five-part reading and discussion series exploring 'Jewish Literature, Identity and Imagination'
- *Travelling exhibitions* on a range of largely historical themes;
- *LIVE!@your library* which explores current affairs through book discussions and performances by literary, visual and performing artists.

These programmes are designed to save libraries having to reinvent the wheel. They are part of a wider recognition that the greatest impact on readers is usually through a series of activities, rather than 'one-hit' which will only attract the already enthusiastic. They also build on the principle of needing a variety of approaches and media to engage the broadest spectrum of participants.

#### 4.2.2 Other US organisations and projects

The government funded National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) coordinates several cultural grants including The Big Read, designed to 'restore reading to the centre of American

culture'. It was developed in response to a major 2004 report *Reading at Risk*<sup>13</sup>, which found that not only is reading for pleasure in America declining rapidly among all groups, but that the rate of decline has accelerated, especially among the young. Like the wide-spread 'one book' imitative, The Big Read enables groups to explore one of 12 pre-chosen books. Libraries receive publicity materials, a toolkit and online resources. Like the ALA Let's Talk About It initiative, NEA provides libraries with everything they need to deliver a lively programme. Intended outcomes include increased profile within local government.

#### 4.2.3 Reader-centred websites

There are many subscription-based online resources which public libraries use in-house or with readers. Some of the ones most interesting from an English libraries perspective are:

- *Bookletters* contains book content for libraries to use as the basis for e-newsletters
- *NextBooks* has read-alike booklists (genre-specific and who-writes-like)
- *BooklistOnline* includes reviews, interviews, blogs and personal book list facility.
- *FictionConnection* offers recommended books related to genre, plot, character and feeling, enabling readers to find a book similar to one which they have already read.
- *Dear Reader* is extremely popular. Every day for 5 days, subscribers receive a 5-minute sample from a book. At the end of the week, they are encouraged to either borrow the book from a library or buy it online.
- Reader's Circle is a searchable directory of reading groups. It also coordinates a free Author Phone Chat service, for groups to have a free half-hour telephone discussion with an author. This service also has huge potential for UK libraries.

This list excludes a myriad other excellent reader-centred sites not specifically designed for libraries but popular in the US (such as Book Crossing, PaperBackSwap and Good Reads). Many of these offer social networking services not yet available to readers in English libraries. It is sensible to suppose, therefore, that there are transferable lessons for the developers of existing English websites like Reader2Reader.

### **4.3 The national Center for the Book**

#### 4.3.1 Introduction

The national Center for the Book (CFB) is relevant to this report because of its unique role to promote libraries, books and reading for pleasure. My research is based on reports<sup>14</sup> and discussions with the Directors of the Washington and California state Centers. In this section I will describe the CFB's remit and relationship to state Centers.

#### 4.3.2 Background

The national Center for the Book (CFB) was established in 1977, capitalising on the prestige of the Library of Congress to 'stimulate public interest in books, reading, libraries and literacy and to encourage the study of books and the printed word'<sup>15</sup>. The CFB coordinates a 'Books and Beyond' humanities programme for the Library of Congress as well as leading on several national ongoing projects and one-off campaigns. It is funded by the public and private sectors, existing primarily on tax-deductible contributions from corporations and individuals. It works with affiliated state Centers for the Book across the country, although it is unable to fund them. CFB's programmes and campaigns include:

For adults:

- *Read all about it* booklists.

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<sup>13</sup> National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading at Risk: a survey of literary reading in America*, Research Division report 46, June 2004

<sup>14</sup> Center for the Book website, August 2007

<sup>15</sup> Center for the Book website, August 2007

- *Telling America's Stories*, an ongoing national reading promotion (chaired by the First Lady) which emphasises how stories connect people to books and reading.
- *One Book* which connects people to literature and discussion through a single book. 16 state Centers participated in One Book projects in 2006.
- *National Book Festival*, organised annually by the Library of Congress

For children and young people:

- *Letters about Literature*, a national reading and writing competition which aims to develop critical thinking, reading and writing skills. Participants write a personal letter to an author, living or dead explaining how a piece of writing changed their views. In 2006, more than 48,000 young people from 46 states participated
- *River of Words* is an international environmental poetry and art contest for young people, currently involving 5 state Centers.

#### 4.3.3 Conclusions

The national CFB plays an important role in promoting books, reading for pleasure and libraries to national stakeholders. It facilitates programmes which involve readers across America, although its ability to provide direct support is limited. Organisations like The Reading Agency (TRA) fulfil a similar role in the UK, so the CFB is a natural international partner for TRA.

### **4.4 State Centers for the Book**

#### 4.4.1 Introduction

This section is a brief overview of the scope of state Centers for the Book. It provides a framework for later analysis of the work of the Washington and California Centers and gives an indication of best practice which the reader of this report may wish to follow up.

#### 4.4.2 Overview of the state Centers

The first state Center was created in Florida in 1984. There are now affiliated Centers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Each state Center works with the Library of Congress to promote books, reading, and libraries as well as its state's own literary heritage. In order to maintain affiliated status, Centers are required to provide state-wide programming, although the capacity for this varies, as the Washington and California case studies will demonstrate. With no core funding from the national CFB, there are huge regional variations in funding, management, scale of programming and interpretation of the CFB mission.

*'The states are all culturally very different e.g. Vermont & New Hampshire which are aggressively independent, supporting independent bookstores. Different states have long-standing traditions. These differences are reflected in their Centers.'*

Mary Menzel, Director, California Center for the Book.

#### 4.4.3 Programmes run by state Centers

As already mentioned, the state Centers vary in scope and scale. Programmes include:

- Authors – author tours of libraries (e.g. in California), databases and related information about local authors, identifying those willing to participate in library events;
- Poets – tours, readings, competitions, databases, workshops
- Book arts – book and paper making workshops and lectures
- Book Awards (e.g. Washington State Book Award)
- Book Festivals - run in 15 states in 2006 (e.g. New York)
- Online resources – including websites, blogs, e-newsletters and wikis
- Community engagement – e.g. New York's award winning Immigrant Writing, and Virginia's reader's programme for prison inmates and prison staff



- Grant distribution – (e.g. Montana Open Book grant project, which pays for reader events combining an author, scholar and book)
- Literacy projects – including family literacy (e.g. excellent pre-school Mother Goose programme in Vermont)
- Get Caught Reading – a national (see ALA) and state-wide (e.g. Alabama) media campaign showing celebrities reading. This has been replicated in the Netherlands.
- Literary maps (e.g. Pennsylvania)
- Reading development training programmes for librarians and teachers

#### 4.4.4 Conclusions

State Centers have developed fairly independently of each other. There are some excellent examples of innovative reading development work (e.g. Mother Goose) which would warrant further study by English public libraries. The scale which they operate on (and still achieve impact) is also interesting and may have some transferable lessons for regional and national organisations in England.

### **4.5 Washington Center for the Book (WCFB)**

#### 4.5.1 Introduction

In this section I will describe my observations about the work of the Washington Center for the Book (WCFB), particularly in relation to the hugely successful Seattle Reads programme which has clear transferable lessons for English public libraries. This section explores the importance of the right book for the right community, using reading activities to address social exclusion and the impact of a sustained programme of events. My observations are based on reports, selected evaluation data and interviews.

#### 4.5.2 Background

WCFB serves Washington state, and is located in Seattle Public Library service (SPL) Central Library. An affiliate of the national Center for the Book since 1989, its focus is adult readers. The Center is managed by its Director, Chris Higashi, with support from library staff. Its mission is to ‘celebrate the written word and to encouraging the exchange of ideas evoked by literature and the humanities’<sup>16</sup>. Through book discussions and other literary programs, it ‘strives to broaden and deepen appreciation for literature that expands the world of the reader. The Center develops programs that appeal to a wide audience - from confirmed book lovers to those who may not yet consider books and reading basic to their lives’<sup>17</sup>

The WCFB is funded in combination by SPL, Seattle Public Library Foundation and a series of grants from organisations including The Wallace Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. It receives no significant funding from the national Center for the Book. WCFB’s primary state-wide contribution is the Washington State Book Awards. Given resource limitations, and the fact that the majority of funding comes from Seattle Public Library, it is not surprising that the majority of its work is focused on Seattle. The Center programme is ‘an intrinsic part of the library service, promoting libraries and learning’ and:

*‘The challenge especially for Centers funded by public libraries is to meet the mission state-wide when funding is provided through a single library service, so we have to find the way to do that’.*

Chris Higashi, Program Manager, WCFB

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<sup>16</sup> Washington Center for the Book website, August 2007

<sup>17</sup> Washington Center for the Book website, August 2007

#### 4.5.3 Addressing social inclusion through reading

A main focus of WCFB is the identification of the 'right book', ensuring that reading for pleasure is a vehicle for (and product of) carefully planned reading development work with specific targeted groups throughout the city. Chris Higashi works closely with the Ethnic Services Program Manager to ensure that activities are relevant to the city's Asian American, African American and Latino communities. She explained:

*'We started to really focus on authors speaking from an immigrant experience, with the idea that it wasn't just about bringing in new communities, but also about everybody talking and reading together'.*

It is clear that the success of this relies on the right book for the right library. A recent event with author Rebecca Walker (daughter of Alice Walker) at refurbished Douglass Truth Library attracted a large African- American audience. Chris described:

*'The book was not getting particularly good reviews...but she had a very interesting background ... Well, they had a huge crowd...thrilled to have someone of her stature there... it was an enormous success. The Branch Manager cried that night, she was so excited and so happy that she was able to do this thing for her community'.*

Chris Higashi also talked about the importance of selecting venues carefully to engage with specific communities. This extends to partner events with the Elliott Bay Book Company:

*'...people don't necessarily always come downtown either to a bookstore or the library. Matching the venue and the art form to the community – is a very creative process, especially if you want to connect with an excluded group. We test it, I mean we're doing a reading next week in a club... a place where some of us don't go much...we've done stores, churches, top of high rise buildings, community colleges'*

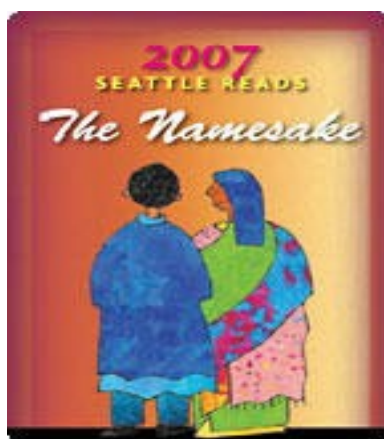
Rick Simonson, Elliott Bay Book Company

#### 4.5.4 Programmes

The Washington Center for the Book presents a year round-programme of events intermingled with the Seattle Public Library's own broader activities (often on similar themes). In 2005, 11,880 people attended a total of 107 programmes presented by WCFB<sup>18</sup>.

In addition, WCFB presents four branded programmes; Seattle Reads, Washington State Book Awards, Endowment Lecture series in American History; and the Living History Series.

##### 4.5.4.1 Seattle Reads



**Illustrations 1 and 2**

<sup>18</sup> Jacobs, D., Seattle Public Library, 2005 *Annual Report - Our Community of Readers* (2006)

Seattle Reads (formerly known as If All of Seattle Read the Same Book) is designed to 'broaden and deepen an appreciation of literature through reading and discussion'<sup>19</sup>. Based on an idea dreamt up by former Program Manager Nancy Pearl and Chris Higashi, the city reads concept has been taken up around the globe. Each year the WCFB invites the whole city to share a featured book, through a series of book group discussions and related events, culminating in a city-wide tour by the author.

My visit in May coincided with the 2007 Seattle Reads, featuring Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, which inspired discussions about the immigrant experience, culture and identity. Seattle Reads has a history of working with authors of diverse cultures and ethnicities as a way of fostering debate and developing new understanding. Previous books have included Marjane Satrapi's Iranian story *Persepolis*, and Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*.

Seattle Reads is much wider than the week-long author visit, spanning a 6 month period which explores the themes of the book through a whole range of related activities for all age groups. In February 2007 a 'Reading Group Toolbox', flyers and posters were widely distributed. In the two months running up to Seattle Reads Week, more than 15 library reading groups and numerous others read the book. There was a debate led by local Asian community groups, a discussion of the film *The Namesake* (coincidentally released during the Seattle Reads week), several Indian film nights, a bhangra demonstration and related adult storytelling. Several events involved collaboration between the library and other partners including Elliott Bay Bookstore and KUOW radio station.

By the time I arrived in Seattle, there was a definite air of expectation. My airport taxi driver had read the book and during my stay I saw two people on separate buses reading it, creating an impression was that the whole of Seattle was indeed reading this book! During the Seattle Reads week, I attended two of Lahiri's author events, at the Museum of History and Industry (a suburban location) and Seattle Town Hall (in downtown Seattle), with a capacity of 1000. The attendees I spoke to were very positive:

*'This is unbelievable. I've never seen so many Asian faces at an event like this before. Incredible.'*

And;

[The book] *'...has so much in it for everyone. My family comes from Brazil and they had the same problems settling, like Gogol. It really brings it out into the open and us all being here, from wherever we come from. Only the library can do that...'*

I talked to Jhumpa Lahiri briefly about her impressions;

*'It is a real honour for my book to be chosen...It means a great deal to me for it to be read and discussed in so many different communities and for the conversations which the book might inspire.'*

Chris Higashi talked about the potential of a book to engage communities in completely unforeseen ways, describing in moving detail the 2005 Seattle Reads programme, using Julie Otsuka's *When the emperor was divine*, about World War II Japanese internment:

*'It's a story that's so relevant to Seattle because Seattle was one of the communities from which the Japanese-Americans were evacuated... We found [14] former internees [who met] with book groups to reflect on the novel, but also to answer questions from firsthand experience...It was so moving. And we...screened films...organised a theatrical performance combined with archival footage, a*

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<sup>19</sup> Washington Center for the Book website, August 2007

*historical exhibit in the Wing Luke Asian Museum in the international district; and a children's musical...set in the camps. So we had all these ways that people could come to the story and tie it to the book. We partnered with two community colleges...They taught the book across disciplines'.*

My observations of the Seattle Reads events were of audiences diverse in ethnicity, age and gender. There were many ways in which Seattle readers could access the book and the issues it raised. The programme had a brand and distinctiveness not possible with individually marketed events. Also key to the success of the project for Seattle was the close partnership with bookshops, publishers, the libraries and the media.

The One Book initiative has proven very successful in engaging readers in communities across America. There is every reason to assume that this initiative would work well for library services in England.

#### 4.5.4.2 Washington State Book Awards

The Washington State Book Awards is the only state-wide programme delivered by WCFB. Without it, I suspect, the Center's affiliation with the national CFB would be questionable. The awards, started in 1967 as the Governor's Writers Awards, recognise books by local authors. For Chris Higashi, the awards play an important role in ongoing promotion. 'The Awards Ceremony occurs almost a year after some of those books have come out...a lot of them have fallen off of everyone's radar. So I think it's wonderful to bring some attention to the books that deserve to be recognised, and maybe didn't get that notice when they were first published'. The Awards ceremony is a free event which appears on the SPL website as a podcast, and there is a Washington writer's collection in the library.

Many of the American states have a book award which highlights local writers and their work. The awards encourage regional identity and pride and create opportunities for public libraries to develop relationships with publishers, writers and booksellers. The concept could be applied in English regions, perhaps coordinated by regional MLAs.

#### 4.5.4.3 Other programmes

The final two branded WCFB programmes, the A. Scott Bullitt Lecture in American History and the Living History Series, have a strong literary feel. The first is a lecture delivered annually by a prominent historian. The Living Series invites more audience participation, involving an academic who answers questions in the costume and persona of a well-known historical or literary figure. Chris Higashi describes it as entertaining, plausible and challenging; 'It's a wonderful way to learn.' Developing the Living series as a regular feature of the WCFB library programme has built a popular following.

#### 4.5.5 Physical space for reading activities

Most of the WCFB activities take place in the hi-tech Microsoft Auditorium at the new Central Library. Chris Higashi describes the pull of the building as 'an embarrassment of riches'. As a result of 'this rather spectacular building, everyone wants to do an event here. Very well-known famous authors and their publicists know about the building and we have built a reputation for doing excellent programming and turning out crowds'. Few of the Seattle's branch libraries are equipped for the large audiences that big-name authors will command, although high-quality, varied branch programming is built in, usually in libraries where particular staff are enthusiastic.

#### 4.5.6 Involving readers

We talked about the extent to which readers are actively involved in planning the WCFB programme. The results of survey forms from events feed into future programming. Chris Higashi chooses the annual Seattle Reads book, in collaboration with the City Librarian. Selection methods vary across USA based One Book programmes. Santa Monica Library Service, for instance, sees community selection of the book as crucial to community buy-in.

#### 4.5.7 Artistic direction

Chris Higashi was very clear about her role as artistic director, seeing the commissioning of events as a highly skilled and creative process. Establishing relationships of trust with individual publishers and writers is central to her work and means that she is often offered top authors for free as part of their national tour. The same values and approach were shared by the ALOUD Director at Los Angeles Public Library as described later in this chapter. Chris Higashi has established excellent relationships with booksellers, publishers and writers, and attends major book fairs to find out about new authors, books and trends. She attributes some of her success in building a readership to her partnership with bookshops like University and Elliott Bay:

*'We don't see ourselves in competition, but as complementing one another, bringing my bookstore audience to library events, bringing library customers to the store.'*

Rick Simonson, Elliott Bay Book Company

So often in English public libraries, in my experience, library programming comprises one-off events with little follow-up work to connect a community through the 'right book'. There are of course, many excellent exceptions. This leads me to think about whether English library services could seek to fund, or develop from within, dedicated Artistic Directors (as festivals and theatres do). Alternatively, a few services could collaborate to employ an Associate Director, contracted to build long-term relationships with publishers and literature organisations; delivering a creative vision and varied programme that builds an audience, a readership, over years. Existing bodies such as The Reading Agency already negotiate with publishers and other organisations on libraries' behalf, but library services also need to foster their own local relationships.

#### 4.5.8 Conclusions

It is clear that WCFB's programming adds a valuable dimension to what the library service itself offers. It could be argued that the achievements of the WCFB are due to their generous funding and the existence of a dedicated post. However, that said, the amount achieved seemed disproportionate to the staff resources allocated, owing much to the artistic vision of the Program Manager and the commitment of all involved. Chris Higashi was clear on the impact of her events on communities:

*'Programming for adults is a really important way to bring people into the Library. When I do my evaluation, I am still really amazed at how many people are coming to the Central Library for the first time. Considering how many events I do in a year it's amazing to me that what we present is still bringing new people into the library, which is fabulous. People talk about how these events have changed their perspective. We are making a difference to people's lives, in a way.'*

Chris Higashi, Program Manager, WCFB

Several themes have emerged from my observations of WCFB, particularly in relation to Seattle Reads. Critical success factors include an overarching clarity about achieving outcomes for readers and for the Center; partnership working and relationship building across the book trade; the confidence to choose the 'right book' to engage diverse communities; and employing a variety of approaches to bring people to the book. Strong

project management and attention to detail, coupled with advance planning are also important, allowing the programme to capitalise on marketing and promotional opportunities.

I will now move on to examine the way in which the Seattle Public Library service works alongside the Washington Center for the Book to encourage reading for pleasure.

## **4.6 Seattle Public Library approach**

### **4.6.1 Introduction**

In this section I will describe some of the adult reading development work that Seattle Public Library service offers as part of its mainstream delivery. An emerging theme is the importance of targeting work to meet the needs and interests of specific readers, through reading groups, personalised reader services and the adult summer reading scheme which all have potential for transferability to English public libraries.

*'I believe that reader advisory is a huge part of our job. At the same time, we need to be creating information literacy in lots of ways... Inspiring the love of reading and of critical thinking and of civic discourse through reading and cultural opportunities is what it's about'.*

Deborah Jacobs, City Librarian



**Illustration 3**

### **4.6.2 Background**

Seattle Public Library (SPL) comprises a Central Library, 24 neighbourhood branches, Washington Talking Books and Braille Library and Mobile Services. In 1998, Seattle voters overwhelmingly approved the \$196.4 million “Libraries for All” bond measure to upgrade SPL with new facilities, technology, and books. The bond money funded the spectacular Rem Koolhaas designed Central Library and, to date, 17 other and new and improved branches.

As previously described, the Washington Center for the Book (WCFB) provides a mainstay of quality adult literary programming. SPL delivers additional programming and resources. In 2005, SPL provided 1,918 adult and young adult events (not all reading related) for 36,706 people.<sup>20</sup> The Seattle Public Library Foundation contributes significantly to adult reading programmes and services. In 2005 they provided \$1.6million for books and materials and supporting more than 300 library programmes, which included adult reading events.

SPL delivers excellent children’s, teenage and adult literacy services which could easily be a focus for research. Adult reading is quite properly a very small part of the overall community

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<sup>20</sup> Jacobs, D., Seattle Public Library, 2005 *Annual Report - Our Community of Readers* (2006)

offer. However, this acknowledged, it is important to the library's identity, reflected in the Annual report, subtitled 'A Community of Readers' and the library service mission:

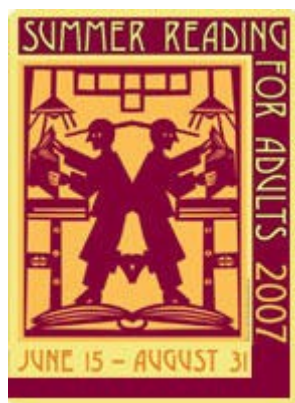
*'to become the best public library in the world by being so tuned in to the people we serve and so supportive of each other's efforts that we are able to provide highly responsive service...We strive to inform, enrich and empower every person in our community by creating and promoting easy access to a vast array of ideas...and love of reading'.*<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.6.3 Engaging communities through reading

SPL serves a diverse multi-cultural community, with 'access' and 'equitable services' core to their mission. All events are free. SPL often features authors speaking in languages other than English accompanied by a translator, and there are several non English language reading groups and online booklists in other languages. Volunteers often support these reading groups. The use of volunteers in reading development will be discussed later.

#### 4.6.4 Programmes

##### 4.6.4.1 Adult Summer Reading Program



##### **Illustration 4**

Like many other US library services, SPL runs an Adult Summer Reading Program (launched in 2002), which rewards adults who read and review 3 books with a 'Literary Latte' (a \$5 Starbucks voucher). A winning entrant is selected by every library and presented with a Booklover's Bag of goodies. Adult readers can vote for their favourite book; compiled into a People's Choice online booklist. The scheme generates publicity for the library and excitement about reading and books. It also enables families across age ranges to participate together in a Children's, Teenage or Adult summer scheme. The success of this programme suggests that it could also be adopted successfully for English public libraries, either organised in-house or coordinated at a national level in the way that The Reading Agency coordinates the Summer Reading Challenge for children. This would be even more successful if it could be promoted as a partnership between libraries, publishers and booksellers, with incentives to provide a hook for reluctant readers.

##### 4.6.4.2 Recommended reading

I was particularly interested in the English potential of the web-based Personalised Book List Service offered by SLP. On request, librarians will create a special list of recommended books for individual readers. This affirms librarians as reading experts, creates a relationship between readers and staff, and is a unique selling point for libraries. SPL also subscribes to several web-based services including NextList and FictionConnection.

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<sup>21</sup> *Seattle Public Library Mission Statement*, SPL website, August 2007

#### 4.6.4.3 Adult reading groups

SPL runs more than 30 adult reading groups, from the more general Afternoon or Evening groups in most branches; to those themed around cultural interests (Poetry appreciation, Arts Gumbo), language or special needs (Spanish, Visually Impaired, Seniors). Most discuss a designated book each time (advertised on the website several months ahead). In addition, there are several multi-session groups. These include the annual banned books 'Danger Books!' series; the highly participative 'Dramatic Reading' group which brings library members and professional actors together to read from (e.g. *To kill a mockingbird*) and then discuss the social or political issues it raises. Similar to this is the 'From Page to Stage' reading group which interlinks books and performance by a Seattle theatre. SPL also runs an intense Conversation Series. During my visit, staff were planning the September 'Democracy conversations' facilitated by author Cecile Andrews for six weekly discussions of chapters of Al Gore's *The Assault on Reason*. SPL also supports the plethora of non-library reading groups that exist in people's homes and workplaces, providing advice on setting up and running a group. The WCFB coordinates the Adult Reading Group Collection in partnership with SPL and a team of volunteers.

Chris Higashi asserted that library book groups have a unique offer for readers, with a regular flow of new members; 'a library group can be so much more open and inviting than a group made up of neighbours, friends, co-workers. They bring together people from different backgrounds, ages, and economic situations'. However, she felt that non-library groups (e.g. home or work-based), resulted in greater connection; 'Within that kind of group, you also can go deeper into the book, partly as a result of having these shared life experiences'. There are lessons to be learnt from Seattle's experience for librarians considering diversifying the types of reading group offered.

#### 4.6.5 Physical space for reading

The Central Library is a spectacular architectural feat, rightly admired as one of the great public libraries of the world. Like most of the libraries I saw, it worked hard to display stock attractively, using face-on displays. I did feel, however, that it lacked truly comfortable lounge-type reading areas (comfortable sofas, cosy spaces, etc) where readers could curl up with a book. Douglass Truth branch has been more successful (see below).



**Illustration 5**

#### 4.6.6 Impact of SPL reading development

Anecdotal comments from fiction librarians asserts that the readers advisory services are well used, appreciated and play a pivotal role in encouraging readers to connect to each other and to books in ways that they would not have done otherwise:



*“We don’t doubt, I mean we know for sure, that the program here creates conversations with readers, and between readers, that wouldn’t otherwise have happened. Customers are always telling me..., especially the book groups...they read stuff they would never have done otherwise. They take risks, and it broadens their views...It makes the library a beacon for this kind of thing...”*

Fiction Librarian, Seattle Central Library

#### 4.6.7 Conclusions

The combination of a large, current and well displayed stock, a varied programme of activities and engaged adult fiction librarians mean that SPL readers at all levels of engagement and ability are well supported. SPL could make more active use of its website to connect readers through social networking, as they are doing for teenagers. The tendency towards personalisation of services (e.g. Pearl’s Picks and the reading list service) and the development of tailored reading groups are ideas which could appropriately be applied in English public libraries.

### **4.7 California Center for the Book**

#### 4.7.1 Introduction

In this section I will describe the mission and scope of the California Center for the Book (CCFB), its relationship to California public libraries and describe several programmes which have transferability to and English context.

#### 4.7.2 Background

The CCFB, an affiliate of the national CFB, was established in 1987. Located at UCLA, it is grant-funded by the California State Library. It has a mission to ‘develop programmes and resources that libraries and schools can use to promote books and reading to the public and to students.’<sup>22</sup> It interprets the national CFB mission as bringing reading for pleasure to the whole state. This is no small task given the size of the state. It commissions, part-funds and organises mid to large-scale programmes involving several counties at a time, with programmes and ‘*big ideas that will be engaging to a wide spectrum of people*’ (Center Director). CCFB acts as a broker between state-wide and national organisations and public libraries. It is staffed by a full-time Director, Mary Menzel, a Programs Director, Programs Associate and other UCLA staff who contribute skills and time.

#### 4.7.3 Adult programmes

CCFB-led adult programmes include *Bookclubs in a Box* book group discussion packs, author and poetry tours, and support for festivals and book awards. It also provides practical advice for libraries wanting set up a reading group, ‘one book’ project or to host an author event. Unlike the Washington Center for the Book, CCFB also has a strong children and young people’s remit, including participation in the national *Letters about Literature* (with more than 4,600 submissions from across California in 2007) and *Bookclubs in a Box* collections for schools (*Caught in the crossfire*, about children’s experience of war and *Comix*, promoting graphic novels).

##### 4.7.3.1 Author and poetry tours

The Center administers a small-grants programme for ‘partner libraries’; in return for which the partner libraries agree to co-develop and pilot CCFB programmes. Many of the partner libraries use their grants for book-based festivals and one-off events. Sacramento Library, for example, used its 2006 grant to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*, with readings, discussions and an exhibition.

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<sup>22</sup> California Center for the Book website, August 2007

CCFB uses its own resources to initiate a small number of cross-county initiatives. In spring 2007, six mostly rural counties used Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* as a stimulus for discussion. The highlight was a video conference between book group members and Amy Tan, during National Library Week. The center Director, Mary Menzel talked about the value of this experience for bringing together disparate readers who rarely experienced this kind of event, asserting 'In more rural communities, people are more excited by it; when else are they going to experience something like this with each other or meet someone so inspiring'? The Director talked about the difficulties associated with coordinating projects over huge distances. Many author-based projects, predictably, focus on the same few counties, working with existing contacts, although the Director has worked to extend this, for example through a state-wide poetry tour which enabled her to extend her contacts and also built capacity within library services. 'The tour was full-on around California for the poet. There were two events a day and turnout at every single event was huge. It helped solidify local relationships between small arts organisations and librarians'.

#### 4.7.3.2 Bookclubs in a Box

These are collections of books and resources for libraries and schools to use for group reading. *Women of Mystery*, for example, is a four-part screening-reading-and-discussion programme using three crime novels in combination with a film and suggested activities for libraries. This in-depth multi-session approach allows for deeper library-to-reader, and reader-to-reader connection. It also helps libraries which lack resources or expertise in-house to deliver stimulating programmes. During my stay, the CCFB Director was working on an adult programme entitled *The War*, which links books and oral history activities with a television documentary to be aired in the Autumn. Mary Menzel was very enthusiastic, feeling that it would stimulate debate around the US conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan.

#### 4.7.4 Involving readers

CCFB's contact with readers is almost exclusively through local delivery agents on the ground. The Center website is aimed exclusively at librarians and teachers. Given the great physical distances between county libraries in California, I felt that the CCFB was missing an opportunity to create a virtual reading community amongst participating librarians and teachers, using social networking technology. This would facilitate knowledge sharing and create a community that CCFB could draw on when planning new projects.

#### 4.7.5 Impact of reading initiatives

*'I think CCFB have a lot of good programme ideas, which help us. The city-wide discussions they fund are so interesting, people are like "I've never been to a discussion before" and intimidated. You can tell they aren't the most highly educated, then they're just thrilled. By the end of it they have a whole new demeanour, their confidence is high and you know they're going to continue with it'.*

Julia MacDonald, Fiction Librarian at Santa Monica Library.

The CCFB aims to reach and inspire 7,000 readers across 500 schools and libraries in a minimum of 50 counties throughout California. It has recently submitted an application to the National Endowment for the Arts for a Big Read grant which would bring a 'one book' project to 12 rural counties. By offering small match funding grants for reader-centric projects, CCFB enables libraries in locations across the state to make an impact at a micro level. It is not clear whether these small grants can have a lasting effect on reading for enjoyment in California. In the future, the CCFB plans to develop its web resources, including a literary map of California to celebrate the state's literary heritage.

Mary Menzel talked about the need to focus library reading development work on new technologies and approaches which recognise the interests and needs of its intended audience:

*'The focus for CCFB and libraries isn't really about authors but reading, connections, the experience. We have to be about personality and personalisation. There's a lot to play for, with virtual groups like Reader'sCircle.com which acts like a salon where people talk about books. Publishers are setting up author conference calls with book groups, rather than sending authors on the road. So groups can be in their home with a glass of wine. Libraries need to be in on that'.*

#### 4.7.6 Conclusions

The CCFB has a seemingly impossible task of supporting the whole state. It is unable to work intensively with more than a small proportion of library services, although projects like Bookclubs in a Box extend its reach. CCFB is able to broker relationships at a state-wide level which are not possible for individual library services to do, performing a similar role to regional MLAs in England (although CCFB's focus is reading for pleasure only). Mary Menzel was very aware of the threats if her organisation and the libraries it serves did not significantly up the pace and intensity of their work with adult readers:

### **4.8 Los Angeles libraries' approaches**

#### 4.8.1 Introduction

This section identifies a number of initiatives and approaches observed in libraries across Los Angeles, several of which work as partner libraries to the CCFB. Interesting themes which emerge include the importance of involving readers in the development of programmes such as the Santa Monica one book project, the use of volunteers and creation of 'experience' through physical space at Cerritos Library.

#### 4.8.2 Background

Los Angeles is one of the USA's largest cities, resident to more than 17 million people and spanning 470 miles<sup>23</sup>. It is divided into 'cities', similar to London's boroughs, which have their own local government and services including public libraries. I visited a number of public libraries in Los Angeles. They included the Central Library of Los Angeles Public Library service (LAPL) and resident ALOUD events programme. I also talked to staff at Santa Monica, Westwood, Culver City and Cerritos libraries and studied the websites of several others (including Newport Beach, San Francisco and Inglewood). The information included below is not an exhaustive digest of everything that I saw but a selection of observations.

#### 4.8.3 Addressing social inclusion through reading

All of the programmes I saw in California were free for users and were actively promoted to a diverse community. Several had impressive adult and family literacy programmes and vibrant teenage service (e.g. LAPL) which would warrant further research. The prevalence of Spanish speaking communities in the city meant that there were reading groups and information services in Spanish as well as several other languages. Also noticeable in Los Angeles was the number of homeless people wandering the streets. Louise Steinman at LAPL described in detail an ALOUD debate which she had run at the Central Library on this issue which had attracted many homeless people and had sparked a city-wide debate which was discussed on local radio and in local government. The event and others like it (mostly with some link to reading) have a 'catalytic' nature in stimulating debate through books, to address inequalities.

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<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia website, August 2007

#### 4.8.4 Adult programmes

##### 4.8.4.1 Virtual developments

Most of the LA library websites I looked promoted adult reading for pleasure, although the extent and effectiveness varied. Santa Monica Library Service hosts a Readers Corner, which includes subscription-based Dear Reader (which they called A Chapter a Day). It also promotes commercial sites including BookBuffet.com, which links books to food and wine recommendations. The fiction librarian felt that these sites were effective to a point, although face to face recommendations were still superior 'For that, the public will always need library staff'. The library service posts personalised 'Staff picks' and booklists. I asked the Fiction Librarian about personalisation and she said; 'We are trusted in our community, we're in a unique position to share our book knowledge'.

##### 4.8.4.2 'One book' projects

Santa Monica library service runs a One Book programme, part funded by the CCFB. Unlike Seattle Reads, Santa Monica readers are actively involved in selecting the book:

*'We solicit community suggestions online, in libraries, everywhere; send out press releases, flyers. Then we generate a list based on that. We have a shortlist and that's when the advisors meet and get it down to two or three and then choose the book'.*

Julia MacDonald, Santa Monica Library

Santa Monica's 2007 book was Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*, which involved a radio phone-in, screening two time travel films, an art books discussion and several book group events prior to the author visit. The events targeted adults and teenagers (who could use attendance at the events to gain school 'credits'). It has become a 'signature project' for the library and 'now people expect it'.

##### 4.8.4.3 Reading groups

Julia MacDonald felt that general library-based groups are in decline; 'I think they're still popular but not like the phenomenon it was at first; that was just amazing'. In response, Santa Monica has redefined its groups around interests or communities (e.g. eastern philosophy, book-to-movie discussion and screening, biographies, feminism and Latino fiction). Some are run by trained volunteers. They also run a very successful multi-session group which Julia described as 'the future':

*'We are having extreme success with our hot topics programmes where it's based on a book but it's more issue orientated. My Jewish lit one has been very popular. They all read a particular book. We have a scholar who comes and talks maybe for ...20 minutes about the author, the context...and then we discuss. And it's led by the scholar so they know she's extremely well versed in the topic...Not only do they talk about the book but they may talk about anti-Semitism or immigration or it might lead to other things. People feel like they're learning'*

Julia MacDonald, Santa Monica Library

Julia described how readers are more likely to commit to a time-limited series than to an ongoing group and that the single book discussions often lack intensity. She felt that with so many other leisure pursuits, the 'learning' element, as part of a unique experience that readers cannot get anywhere else, is absolutely central to success. Public libraries in England may wish to consider the extent to which this applies to their libraries, and the ideas of developing tailored groups and reading series could be successfully transferred.

##### 4.8.4.4 LAPL and the ALOUD programme

The Central Library of Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL), rebuilt after a fire just over a decade ago, is located in the heart of downtown LA. It serves a diverse community of commuters, shoppers, tourists and residents. The library runs a series of reading initiatives such as reading groups (including popular reading/ knitting groups; and Thursdays@LAPL

which encourages commuters to bring their sandwiches and share reading ideas in their lunch-hour). LAPL has a popular Zócalo (meaning public square) Lecture Series which airs on local radio. According to the website, it brings 'together an extraordinarily diverse group of Angelenos [and] seeks to create a non partisan and multi-ethnic forum where participants can enjoy a rare opportunity for intellectual fellowship'. This includes author events and discussions (e.g. with James Ellroy), some of which are downloadable as podcasts. The library works closely with the CCFB (which has no relationship with ALOUD).

Quite separate from library reader initiatives is the ALOUD Programme, funded by the Library Foundation of Los Angeles. The Foundation employs a dedicated creative programme director, Louise Steinman. ALOUD presents around 80 events per year in the form of lectures readings and performances. All take place in the library auditorium.

*'I think of the auditorium as the hearth of this city, a place where people practice learning how to talk together and how to disagree in public. We have people who come regularly, tell me it's like their version of church to come and share ideas'*

Louise Steinman, Director, ALOUD Program

ALOUD has an incredibly strong brand and identity. Every month since my visit I have received a very slick e-newsletter telling me about upcoming events, guest-featuring a library service, inviting me to e-reserve a place or e-order an advance copy of the book at the Friends bookshop. Chris Higashi (WCFB) and Louise Steinman (LAPL ALOUD) both talked about the importance of their reading programmes in engaging and rewarding library donors and sponsors; inviting them to previews, exclusive signings and top events:

*'If we don't keep engaging those people with the events, they're not going to be here to support and throw money at the things that we want to do for other communities'*

Chris Higashi, Director of WCFB

#### 4.8.4.5 Other programmes in Californian libraries

The California Library Association develops an annual Adult Reading Scheme (this year on the theme of mysteries and sleuthing), which library services can adapt to their needs. Newport Beach Library has adapted the summer reading scheme to its own community of readers with featured books and theatre tickets as an incentive for completion. Throughout the summer, it also offers a 'Library-a-Go-Go' service, giving out free packs of paperback books, lip balm, beach balls and sun cream to people on beaches, in parks and coffee shops to encourage reading and library usage.

#### 4.8.5 Physical spaces

Cerritos Library, in Los Angeles, shined in terms of creating relaxing, comfortable reading spaces for adults. It has won numerous architectural awards in the US for its design and vision as 'the world's first Experience Library', incorporating themed spaces to stimulate imagination. The children's library includes a huge saltwater aquarium, dinosaur skeleton and full-size rainforest tree complete with birdsong for storytelling. As well as a theatre and art studio, the library incorporates many dedicated independent and group reading spaces. The ground floor Great Room is an inviting lounge area furnished with Arts and Crafts style rocking chairs, armchairs and soft lighting. One reader I spoke to said that it was his favourite place to read, 'including home'. The Art Deco teenage area also abounded with comfortable reading spaces.



**Illustrations 6 and 7**

#### 4.8.6 Involving readers

In most of the LA libraries I visited, there was a strong sense of community involvement. Many libraries have their own teen and adult councils. Volunteers are engaged with determining content and running reading groups and events at several libraries.

#### 4.8.7 Impact of reading initiatives

Louise Steinman was clear about the impact of her events programme on readers:

*'It has the potential to really air ideas in a very profound way. It's made this library more of a cultural destination in people's minds. And it positions the library as part of the cultural life of this city, that it's supporting the literary arts democracy the free access to ideas'.*

#### 4.8.8 Staff development

Several people talked about the importance of developing staff skills to enable them to support adult reading for pleasure more creatively. Skills identified were book knowledge (through library staff reading widely and having an awareness of publishing); and reader advisory (the ability to talk about the act and experience of reading and draw out reader views). Thirdly was the need to develop staff knowledge and skills in using social networking to promote reading development. Many talked about a new free online training programme for library staff called *Five weeks to a social library*. It teaches library staff about a range of tools and requires them to use them to create content. Modules cover:

- Blogs
- RSS
- Wikis
- Social Networking Software and SecondLife
- Flickr
- Social Bookmarking Software
- Selling Social Software @ Your Library

Library staff need to be able to use these technologies to engage readers. There is potential for a programme of this kind to be developed for public library staff in England, focused on reading development.

#### 4.8.8 Conclusions

It is impossible to draw any sweeping conclusions about reader initiatives in Los Angeles libraries from the few I visited. Service levels varied immensely, from the affluent libraries of Santa Monica and Newport Beach to the slightly run-down but well used Culver City. There are transferable lessons from the work being done in Santa Monica library to reshape

reading groups, and Cerritos library was truly inspiring for its ability to create an experience conducive to reading for pleasure.

Two observations which I would like to make here are the impact of Friends groups and library Foundations or trusts. I met the President of the Culver City Friends Group, a strong but often critical advocate of his libraries. His independent organisation both challenges and supports the library; raising funds, promoting reading (through a very amusing Get Caught Reading online campaign with local celebrities) and funding projects (e.g. the Culver City Reads programme). Non-profit Library Foundations, similar to museums trusts in the UK, offer huge potential for English public libraries, although the government would have to increase tax incentives. They raise thousands or even millions of dollars to support library programmes and services. In addition to tax breaks, individual and corporate donors receive public recognition and fulfil a sense of community responsibility (another feature of US culture - everyone I met seemed to volunteer in their community). What was also surprising is that most donations came from middle or lower income donors. WCFB and the ALOUD programmes are major beneficiaries of this giving culture.

## 5. Netherlands

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter will describe my observations about how the Netherlands encourages adults to read for pleasure. It is based on interviews with people I met in Holland, evaluation reports and correspondence. The chapter starts with an overview of national and regional library organisations and partners. I will then move on to my observations from particular Dutch libraries. Emerging themes include outcomes of thinking big and working in partnership (e.g. Netherlands Reads); the importance of sustained engagement with readers, and opportunities for developing readers as community leaders and library advocates. All of the initiatives described below have an element of transferability to English public libraries.

### 5.2 Overview

There are 1125 public libraries in the Netherlands, serving a population of around 16 million people from diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Adult literacy programmes are a priority for libraries, with an estimated 1.5 million people in the Netherlands having low literacy. Public libraries are funded primarily by local authorities (80%); with additional revenue generated through membership fees (17%) and other income generation (3%). Public libraries are united by a national strategy for improvement; the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's *Guideline for basis libraries* which names 'reading and literature' as one of five strategic functions of Dutch public libraries<sup>24</sup>. The most obvious reader-related outcomes of the strategy so far have been the creation of the Leesplein national libraries portal and the Literatuurplein reading promotion website.

The Netherlands has a strong network of national and regional organisations which work closely to deliver innovative reader initiatives. They include the Netherlands Public Library Association, CPNB, Stichting Lezen (primarily for children and young people) and Provincial Library Services (e.g. Pro Biblio). A further organisation, the Netherlands Library Service, which is a central non-profit library supplier and publisher, is not included in my research.

Several of the people I interviewed talked about a resurgence of interest in promoting reading for pleasure, in response to the high levels of poor literacy in the country. Fons Bouthoorn of Pro Biblio talked about how leisure reading had for many years been viewed by schools as a 'distraction from learning'. 'In recent years, central government has put it back on the agenda, reinventing programmes and cultural behaviours that have been missing from Netherlands society'. Fons talked about reinventing the 'cultural canon', a list of books which all Dutch people should be encouraged to read. He felt that this 'canon' should be 'different for everyone – you create it yourself. Libraries can help citizens to do this'. The 'canon' is 'just a way of promoting books, which creates the dialogue, the conversation'. Fons talked about the reading experience; 'For me, the book is a complex thing, a way to teach, to express the self, to tell a story'. He described some of the library-based initiatives happening across the country (which I will talk about in this chapter) and praised their innovation. But, he warned 'It is a crowded marketplace. We have a lot of catching up to do'.

### 5.3 Netherlands Library Association

#### 5.3.1 Introduction

This section describes the mission, remit and role of the Vereniging Openbare Bibliotheken (VOB) in representing public libraries, brokering important partnerships and stimulating developments in reading for pleasure.

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<sup>24</sup> Koren, M., *Public libraries on new wings*, conference paper, Helsinki, October 2006



### 5.3.2 Background

VOB, or the Netherlands Public Library Association, is subsidised by central government, leading on public library policy and innovation, including promoting reading and literacy<sup>25</sup>. It collaborates with agencies like CPNB (which runs large-scale campaigns on behalf of publishers, booksellers and more recently, libraries); support for national initiatives (e.g. Netherlands Reads, national Book Week, Children's Book Week and the Children's Jury); and initiation of virtual portals including one for books and reading (Literatuurplein). Five years ago the VOB established a partnership with CPNB on behalf of Dutch public libraries, making a financial contribution to ensure the prominence of libraries in CPNB's very effective national campaigns. VOB's Stephan van Vilder asserted that libraries need capitalise on this new partnership if they are to be seen as key players by the book trade and by readers 'We have been very lucky that CPNB does such big campaigns. Libraries must run very fast to keep up now'.

### 5.3.3 Supporting adult reading for enjoyment

VOB has developed a new virtual reading and book promotion website called Literatuurplein (or Reading Square). Set up in cooperation with publishers and booksellers to provide information about books, literature, authors and where to borrow or buy items, it has c.14,000 hits a day. Jef van Gool, the Literatuurplein webmaster described his vision of a self-supporting, highly participative and vocal 'community of literature lovers' online using Web 2.0 technology in creative ways.

Stephan van Vilder talked about VOB's plans to use geographical information systems (GIS) which overlay demographic, financial and other information to identify groups of residents in library catchment areas which libraries could market specific programmes to. In the longer-term, this might extend to individuals, with sophisticated micro-marketing of highly personalised services, including adult reading activities.

### 5.3.4 Conclusions

VOB plays a critical role in brokering relationships with booksellers, publishers and other organisations on behalf of public libraries. This role comes with a responsibility to be at the leading edge of innovation so that it can identify and drive forward the reading agenda. It is too early to tell how effective Literatuurplein will be in engaging readers although it has the potential to be a very powerful single resource for readers and for the site's partners. This makes it an interesting comparator for English library organisations wanting to develop a similar resource which brings together all involved with loaning, selling or promoting reading.

## **5.4 CPNB**

### 5.4.1 Introduction

CPNB plays a pivotal role in bringing together all those who write produce, sell or loan books. A partnership with libraries has allowed it to extend already ambitious national programmes to more than 1100 libraries across the country. Emerging themes include the ability of simple concepts (e.g. a whole country reads one book) to capture the imagination of a nation.

### 5.4.2 Background

The *Collectieve Propaganda van het Nederlandse Boek* (CPNB) was set up in 1983 as a partnership between Dutch publishers, booksellers and libraries. It aims to encourage the habits of reading for pleasure and book buying. Each CPNB campaign combines two

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<sup>25</sup> Netherlands Library Association website, August 2007

strands, one promoting reading, the other, more commercially, encouraging the public to visit their local bookshop.

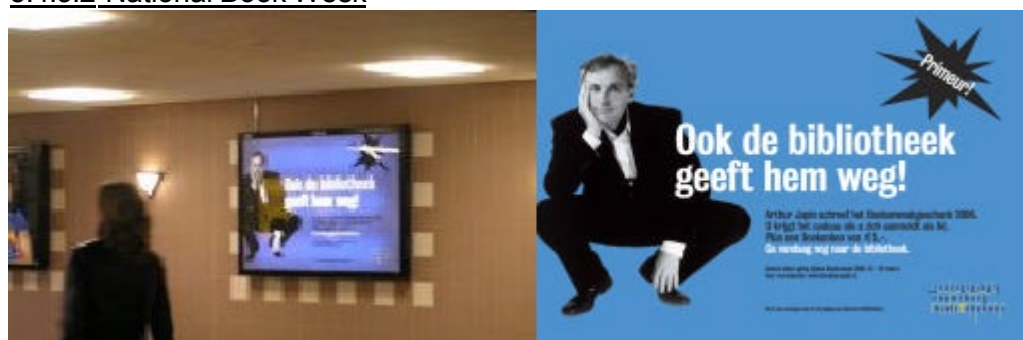
### 5.4.3 Adult programmes

#### 5.4.3.1 Nederland Leest

Nederland Leest, or Netherlands Reads, is a national 'one book' initiative, was launched in 2006 as a partnership between the CPNB and other organisations including VOB. 575,000 copies of the book (Frank Martinus Arion's Dutch Caribbean novel *Double Play*) were given free to library members and sold at a reduced rate in bookshops. CPNB set up an interactive online reading forum and coordinated a nationwide author tour. More than 400 libraries organised book discussions and wider cultural activities such as domino tournaments, Caribbean evenings, and salsa dancing, which feature in the book. The campaign received massive media attention and was 'by far the biggest national effort to promote reading and libraries that has been embarked on in the Netherlands' (Stephan de Vilder, VOB). It was used by public libraries as the basis for innovative and intensive reading development work in libraries and through community outreach, Joke Visser, librarian at Rotterdam Library said: 'Of course everyone gets the same book and in the library they talked to each other. There were taxi reading groups, with drivers reading it in the taxi office. It was successful for us'.

The campaign was a victim of its own success. *Double Play* quickly reached 11 in the top 60 bestsellers list and many libraries reported huge queues and book shortages. Special television and radio advertisements had to be taken off air once all the books had gone. Much larger print runs are planned for 2007. Stephan van Vilder of VOB felt that Nederland Leest was successful because; 'it inspires you to read if you read together, if everyone is talking about it. Libraries aren't just a place for reading but also a place where people come together. Put the two together and it's perfect! It starts with a big event and by the end of the month people have read the book'. Stephan talked about the importance of rewarding reader loyalty, 'giving something back'; in this case a free book and events. During the 10 days of Netherlands Reads, 30% of the total Dutch membership visited libraries. Outcomes of the project, therefore, included increased publicity and footfall for libraries, increased membership, and large numbers of people reading and debating the issues raised by a single book. What is less certain is how libraries used the initiative to establish a longer-term relationship with and between readers.

#### 5.4.3.2 National Book Week



**Illustrations 8 and 9**

The national Book Week, coordinated by the CPNB in partnership with other organisations, runs for ten days in March, to 'tempt the general public into a bookshop'<sup>26</sup>. A main feature of the programme, which has been running for over 70 years, is the commissioning of a novel

<sup>26</sup> CPNB website, August 2007

by a renowned writer, which is given free in bookshops to people who spend over €10. Stephan van Vilder (VOB) pointed out; 'it is very prestigious for an author to be asked to write a book for Book Week, because they get so many copies of the book, and their name, out there'. Over 750,000 copies are distributed and the Book Week is followed closely by Dutch media, supported by radio and television commercials and a glitzy celebrity Book Ball.

Libraries' proactive involvement is still fairly new. They give out €5 book tokens to members, redeemed in book shops and organise promotional displays and events (as part of a CPNB author programme). Stephan van Vilder said: '*We think results could be better. It needs time before libraries will be on top of the mind for Book Week. It is a hassle to go to the library, take your ID, then get your book token and go to the bookstore*'. Some libraries have had greater success with the Book Week by using direct marketing (telemarketing and on-the-street promoters). In 2006, these methods accounted for 14% of new library membership during the campaign period. VOB evaluation showed that Book Week activities in libraries tended to attract keen readers rather than enticing other less confident readers to take a risk. Stephan felt that what is needed is sustained year-round contact with new members identified through Book Week and other campaigns to turn them into 'active reading citizens'

#### 5.4.3.3 Themed book campaigns



**Illustration 10**

Every library I visited in Holland was participating in the CPNB *Crimes Passionnel* June book promotion, on the theme 'the tense book', or crimes of passion, with lurid red hearts and photos from classic movies. Dordrecht Library had created a mystery book initiative, where readers borrowed a 'lucky dip' bag containing a crime book, recommended reading, review slip and information about related library events. Utrecht Library organised a 'book exchange' so that members could donate mystery books to each other using the library as a conduit (similar to the US Book Crossing and Paperback Swap ideas).

CPNB has developed a *Zomerlezen/ Summer Reading* poster campaign (based on US Get Caught Reading) to encourage people from across socio-economic groups to read for enjoyment. They have slanted the promotion towards outdoor reading as a result of research which revealed that '67% of Dutch people will gladly read a book during the holiday'<sup>27</sup>.

#### 5.4.4 Impact of reading initiatives

Stephan van Vilder was very complementary about CPNB campaigns, although he felt that they could only succeed if libraries used them to the full, 'stretching the ideas and debate' to 'get people to talk to each other':

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<sup>27</sup> CPNB website, August 2007

‘For me personally, I don’t get so inspired by campaigns. I get inspired by my friends saying “you should read this”. All the book prizes, the publisher websites, they are a jungle. I want someone, a real person, to tell me what I should read next, especially with novels’.

Stephan van Vilder, VOB

#### 5.4.6 Conclusions

Dutch libraries’ partnership with CPNB has clearly built their capacity and enabled them to attract readers who might not otherwise have stepped through the door. The ability of the Netherlands Reads project to reach such a large proportion of the population is remarkable. The success and reach of this campaign clearly swings on the partnership between libraries, bookshops and publishers maximising opportunities for people to come to the book. CPNB’s themed promotions (e.g. Crimes Passionnel) demonstrate the capacity for national promotions to act as catalysts for local innovation.

### **5.5 Stichting Lezen**

In this section I will describe briefly the work of Stichting Lezen, based on a conversation with its Deputy Director, Christiaan van Willenswaard. I have included this organisation in my research because it raises interesting issues around what makes reader initiatives successful.

Stichting Lezen (a Dutch reading foundation) was founded in 1988 by the Dutch Booksellers Federation, Dutch Publishers Association and VOB. Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, its mission is to promote reading, primarily for children and young people. Stichting Lezen believe that for there to be an impact on the enjoyment of reading, ‘*structured measures over a longer period of time*’ are crucial. They recognise:

*‘Reading as a leisure activity has to compete with watching television or practicing sports. In many families the parents do not see reading as a useful activity. The reading environment at home or at schools is also threatened. Reading out loud, free reading and reading comprehension are not given enough attention’<sup>28</sup>.*

Stichting Lezen’s Deputy Director, Christiaan van Willenswaard talked about the strength of Holland’s network of national organisations like VOB and CPNB ‘spinning the web’ through their collaborative approach. He saw Stichting Lezen’s role as ‘stimulating real reading’ (and literacy), which was different from some of the ‘one hit’ projects. Stichting Lezen runs numerous projects for children aimed at fostering a ‘reading climate’ in schools, libraries and homes. They include a national reading-out-loud competition which reaches more than 80,000 children a year, building children’s confidence and parents’ awareness of the importance of book sharing and leisure reading. Their new website for young people ‘Read Me’ includes reviews, high quality author podcasts and other information.

Christiaan felt that for reading initiatives to have lasting impact, they should include:

- Sustained contact with and personalised promotion to readers
- A broad range of interests and abilities, presented in ‘exciting ways’
- Opportunities for social networking using new technology
- Combined with other cultural disciplines such as theatre, film or music.

### **5.6 Regional organisations (Pro Biblio)**

#### 5.6.1 Introduction

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<sup>28</sup> Stichting Lezen website, August 2007

In this section I will explore the contribution of the regional libraries organisation Pro Biblio to reading development, particularly in relation to innovative Beach Libraries and activity buses.

### 5.6.2 Background

Pro-Biblio is one of 12 Provincial Library Centres, serving two provinces in north and south Holland. The area covered by Pro Biblio includes 6 million residents (36% of the total population of the Netherlands), several large cities (including Rotterdam, The Hague, Haarlem and Amsterdam, which act as library hubs), rural villages and seaside resorts. Pro Biblio employs approximately 250 FTE staff and is funded equally by provincial government grant, and by revenue income from products and services to libraries<sup>29</sup>. The national modernisation strategy is changing Pro Biblio's role from a supplier of traditional back-office services to a knowledge centre and innovator. As part of a broad remit which includes ICT, stock and management support, Pro Biblio is active in leading reading development. This includes reader-centred marketing for local libraries, support for national campaigns, such as Netherlands Reads, and coordination of The Beach Library project. It also produces themed (e.g. multicultural, Dutch poetry) book collections for 'leeskrings' or book clubs.

### 5.6.3 Engaging communities through reading

Pro Biblio is actively engaged in developing services which libraries can use to engage a range of socially excluded groups, particularly through multi-cultural stock and children's and adult literacy (in particular the acclaimed Easy Reading Plazas).

### 5.6.4 Beach Libraries



**Illustration 11**

The Beach Library is a regional initiative designed by Pro Biblio and funded by a combination of provincial governments, library services and commercial sponsors. Beach libraries are located in temporary accommodation near the beach. They offer reading-based activities and lend paperback novels, children's books, and audio books loaded on to iPods and ILEAD e-book readers. Some offer material in German for tourists.

Rotterdam Library Service's 2006 evaluation of their 7 Beach Libraries<sup>30</sup> states that they attracted c.800 participants to activities and loaned c.13,000 books and magazines,

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, R., *Overview of ProBiblio*, September 2006

<sup>30</sup> Visser, J, *Conclusions of investigations amongst users of the Beach Library*, Rotterdam Public Library Service report, 2006

exceeding their target by 23%. Just 0.3% of items borrowed were not returned. Interviews with participants at the beach revealed that 'for almost half of the people questioned the library made the beach extra attractive'. Overall benefits cited included a remodelling of the image of libraries and potential for new readers and wider reading. As a specific initiative, beach libraries could be adapted for English campsites and seaside resorts and would complement the Summer Reading Scheme.

#### 5.6.5 Physical spaces

Pro Biblio has several Reading Buses or mobile activity spaces which it uses to support its reader programmes. These are not the same as mobile libraries, focusing instead on activities and community engagement rather than on book stock. Fons Bouthoorn invited me on to the 'Beach bus', attractively kitted out with wicker listening chairs, interactive museum-quality interactives, a PC, multi-media screen for showing films and book stock, to support Beach Libraries. Reading buses are also used to support the Netherlands Reads programme, hosting author events, films and book groups. The buses are shared across the region and an excellent, flexible resource for targeted community projects. They provide an interesting model for library services wanting to remodel mobile libraries or establish new methods of outreach.



*Illustration 12*

#### 5.6.6 Conclusions

Pro Biblio is an excellent example of regional collaboration. Its reader programmes are innovative and responsive to the needs of partner library services. As it develops its role as innovator and knowledge centre, it will be interesting to see how its reader activities evolve.

### **5.7 Individual libraries**

#### 5.7.1 Introduction

In this final section on the Netherlands, I will explore some of the mainstream practices and initiatives of a selection of libraries which I visited in Holland. Through the examples described, I will explore the importance of offering a broad range of programming to suit all reading tastes and abilities, the importance of sustained contact with readers and the value of partnership working.

#### 5.7.2 Background

I visited several Dutch libraries, mostly in north and south-west (Hoofddorp-Floriane, Utrecht, Zoetermeer, Dordrecht, Rotterdam and Amstelveen) and corresponded with library staff from other libraries including Amsterdam Central Library. All of them participate in national and

regional reading development initiatives described above, usually in addition to their own programmes.

### 5.7.3 Addressing social inclusion through reading

As was discussed at almost every library I visited, 1.5 million residents with low literacy account for almost 10% of the Dutch population. In Rotterdam, the proportion is closer to 20% of the resident population. This poses challenges for library services to engage readers across the full spectrum from basic skills learner through to enthusiastic reader.

### 5.7.4 Adult programmes

Zoetermeer Library hosts 23 adult reading groups, with contact details for the people who attend them. As in other Dutch libraries I visited, Zoetermeer does not see its role as running reading groups, but rather as a community enabler, encouraging groups to take the lead, even when they use the library as a venue. Some borrow book sets from the library (supplied by Pro Biblio). Now and again the library organises a 'blind date' night for people who want to set up or join a reading group. Throughout the evening, people meet and coalesce into new groups with a leader that they themselves designate. The library then offers training to group leaders (in choosing books, discussion topics and general literature awareness). The group leaders are nurtured as volunteers, becoming the main contact with the library, invited to events and staff training sessions. Ria Roelands talked about the 15,000 adult members she has in the library. She knows their names but little else about them. The 300 reading group members, whom they have come to know individually, are a 'precious resource – we can tailor services for them, involve them and maybe they will bring their friends... We would like to tailor events to the whole the community but this is the group we know about, so we programme for them'.

Dordrecht Library Service has a very active, quite literary reading programme for adults due to a large extent to a City Council which prides itself on being a 'city of culture' with a rich literary history. It is the site of one of the first printing presses, where Holland was founded and is also the birthplace of a famous Dutch poet. I interviewed the Director, Liesbeth van Eck-Jansen, an inspiring advocate for reading; 'Literature is the most important thing we have'. She leads on reading activities on behalf of the city, with a ring-fenced budget for programming and leadership role in the city's Future Perspective Foundation, which is made up of a range of city partners. Its activities include a literary prize, major street fair, literary lectures, poetry day, digital stories project and Ecultera young people's website which combines reading and heavy metal music.

Dordrecht Library's programme is varied and clearly a labour of love for Liesbeth van Eck-Jansen; 'it is my big pride'. It has established Dordrecht as a 'reading city', although Liesbeth admits, 'there are still the same problems of poor literacy here as everywhere else'. When asked if some of the events might be appealing to a worthy few, she agreed, asserting however, '...that is no reason not to do it though, many people get pleasure from our efforts'. She felt strongly that there should be a variety of reading offers and that the library provided something for all tastes 'across the spectrum from serious to light literature'. The other striking feature is the importance of continuity, a sustained focus on reading which owes much firstly to additional City Council funding, but also to a clear vision and strong partnership across the city.

### 5.7.5 Physical spaces

The importance of creating the right mood and ambience for relaxed reading was one of the elements that struck me most strongly in the libraries I visited. Rotterdam used lounge-style lampshades, traditional armchairs and fireplaces very effectively to create the right feel.



**Illustration 13**

Amstelveen, a stunning modern library near Amsterdam, has three reading spaces which, whilst being in the centre of a large open plan space, still manage to achieve a relaxing atmosphere and encourage reading for pleasure and conversations between readers.



**Illustrations 14 and 15**

The teenage reading space was designed to look like a 1950's American diner, replicated online in the interactive virtual diner. Both use design to encourage group and individual reading in the library.



**Illustrations 16 and 17**



#### 5.7.6 Involving readers

Rotterdam Central Library combines several cultural and information services and residents can buy a cultural card entitling them to library membership and reduced entry to city attractions. The Lezersfeest or 'Reader's Party' is organised annually to 'promote and celebrate literary reading', with a dedicated website<sup>31</sup>. During the day, readers take part in workshops and lectures followed by a celebration incorporating the announcement of the city's favourite book of the year and late-night dancing. She described the event as a 'reward and a treat' for library members. Librarian Joke Visser described how the party used to attract 'the upper classes, the elite' but since remarketing, it now reaches younger audiences and 'normal readers', many of whom are registered 'discount card' holders on low incomes. Evaluation revealed that in 2006, the Party attracted c.2500 (65% of whom were female). The concept of rewarding existing members could form the inspiration for loyalty schemes, like those used by supermarkets.

#### 5.7.7 Virtual reading development

The Amsterdam Public Library (OBA) has bought an island in Second Life virtual reality environment and is currently building a virtual 'experience library', based on the new central library. It will be the first Dutch virtual public library offering e-books, reservations, broadcasting live radio, with a virtual beach library and literary boat trips for adult readers. This technology has potential to attract new audiences in English libraries.

#### 5.7.8 Impact of reading initiatives

Rotterdam and Zoetermeer libraries both take part in the VOB led Children's Jury, which encourages children and young people to vote for the best book published in the previous year. In Rotterdam, young people had debating skills training with a professional lobbyist'. Librarian Joke Visser felt that there were transferable lessons for work with adult readers, who could be trained to debate about books and reading on their new web forum:

#### 5.7.9 Conclusions

The Netherlands is a small country but still has lessons to teach English libraries. I was inspired by the vision for virtual services, using social networking to connect readers. Many of the people I interviewed see Dutch libraries as being way behind English reading development, although I felt they underestimated their achievements, particularly on groundbreaking national and regional initiatives. I was impressed by how effectively a small network of organisations can galvanise a whole country through Netherlands Reads. What was obvious, however, was that these national initiatives can only have long-term impact when promoted intensively and part of a wider focus of developing readers.

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<sup>31</sup> Rotterdam Library Service Readers Party website, August 2007

## **6. Thematic overview**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The USA and Netherlands are hugely different countries. However, what emerged from my visits and discussions with library staff was a series of underlying themes and principles for developing adult reading. This section explores some of those themes and begins to identify lessons which may be transferable to libraries in England.

### **6.2 Strategic vision and drive for innovation**

Every strategic body and public library service I studied recognised the contribution of reading for pleasure to adult literacy, learning, self esteem and citizenship. Most mentioned it explicitly in their mission statement and priorities. The drive for innovation in reading development came from all levels, from the national and regional bodies, senior managers and frontline library staff. All felt that there was a need to engage adult readers more proactively, with a focus on creating a group 'experiences'. It seemed that often it is the big vision projects based on a simple notion which are most successful. The 'one book' projects are an obvious example of this; often attracting large number of participants and resulting in high issues and sale of the featured titles. What is less clear is how these projects translate into long-term benefits for libraries in terms of repeat visits, increased engagement in library activities and for the development of readers themselves.

### **6.3 Importance of cooperation and partnership working**

The most successful reading development initiatives relied on proactive outcomes-based partnerships with community organisations and with the book trade. The Washington Center for the Book attributed much of its success to its relationship with local bookshops, publishers and writers, to create a readership across the city. Through a partnership with the Elliot Bay Book Company and a local radio station, the Seattle Reads project was able to attract readers who would not normally step into a library. The Netherlands Public Library Association brokered a relationship with the CPNB which enabled them to work more closely with publishers, book shops and other literary organisations like Stichting Lezen on a variety of innovative projects. This partnership enabled the book trade to reach library audiences but also helped to update the image of Dutch libraries. It also gave them a practical focus for a new strategic focus on reading promotion. These partnerships can be very powerful at a local level, as demonstrated by the Future Perspective Foundation in Dordrecht, which has through its local partnerships been able to create a vibrant city-wide cultural programme.

### **6.4 Creating the experience of shared reading**

Reading development work in libraries connects readers with books which they might not otherwise come across. I would argue that many public libraries are fairly confident about promoting books to the individual reader, particularly when it doesn't involve a direct dialogue between library staff and the reader. There are a plethora of reading promotion tools such as posters, booklists and web pages which do this well. What is often harder but ultimately more rewarding is the creation of group experience, a conversation and debate about reading and books facilitated by library staff. Many of the libraries I visited, such as Rotterdam, focus their work primarily on group reading initiatives, seeing them as ultimately more rewarding for the library and for readers.

Reading groups have a part to play in reading development but are just one of many devices used. There were some fascinating variations in opinion about best practice. In Seattle, libraries ran general groups in many of the branches, at different times of day to suit reader preferences. In addition there were also groups tailored to language or other specific needs, addressing a social inclusion agenda. Others focused on particular genres; whilst a fourth

group linked books to other cultural media like drama or film. The majority ran as mutually exclusive, with a different book and therefore a different issue was discussed each time. One or two more in-depth groups over a number of sessions existed, although these were not the norm. The librarian at Santa Monica felt strongly that general reading groups had had their day. Instead, her focus was on creating more in-depth reading experiences; through 6 to 8 topic-specific sessions led by an expert, where several books on a particular subject provided the background for learning and discussion. She felt that people were more likely to continue to commit to a time-limited group rather than to a weekly event. Nancy Pearl and Chris Higashi both talked about the unique nature of library reading groups, which attract members from across the socio-economic spectrum with a steady flow of joiners and leavers. The targeted Santa Monica reading group, one assumes, would have a different dynamic, attracting members with similar interests, developing their knowledge, and retaining them until the end of the course.

Discussion with Dutch librarians revealed a subtly different culture and approach to reading groups. Many of the libraries fulfilled a coaching and facilitation role, helping people to join or set up a group which although linked to the library, would be community run. The library trained and supported group leaders who in turn became library advocates, consultants and activists. The emphasis was on capacity building and ownership, with library staff in an expert advisory role to the community. It meant that instead of a library like Zoetermeer having one or two reading groups, it has the capacity to work with 23. This idea has huge potential for English public libraries with limited capacity and resources to run reading groups, as well as providing a flow of ideas and library members who can be used to pilot new projects. It could also be a source of library volunteers.

## **6.5 Creating space for readers to connect**

The library has an important role to play in creating spaces for readers to connect both physically and virtually. All of the libraries I visited offered ways in which readers could share ideas; through reader reviews on notice boards, in books (as staff or reader's 'picks'), and online. I was interested in how some Dutch libraries created inviting, comfortable spaces which actively encouraged adults to sit and read or chat in small groups about books. Typically these dedicated spaces were located in the adult fiction area, with soft lighting, high quality lounge-style furniture (often with luxurious looking armchairs and sofas, thick rugs, lampshades and coffee tables) and a small collection of fiction within easy reach. My experience was that reading spaces for adults were more developed in the Netherlands than in either the US or English public libraries. Several librarians in the US and the Netherlands talked about the potential for using library cafes as venues for adults, who often read there anyway, to promote books to each other. One librarian in Seattle Central Library, which does not have a café, talked about the possibilities of printing book reviews on serviettes and setting up paperback swaps where readers 'rendezvous' in the café to talk about a book.

Both case studies revealed recognition of the need to invest in virtual space for adult readers. There were mixed views about virtual reading groups. All agreed that they draw a community of readers from a younger age group and wider geographical area. Nancy Pearl, however, felt that virtual reading groups lacked the expressiveness of physical interaction.

With the development of increasingly interactive social networking technology which includes audio, video and instant messaging, it is possible to create a connection between readers. Virtual environments like Second Life which emulate physical contact take this even further. It was clear that libraries need to be investing in this technology, particularly social networking which is to a degree self-managing as a way of interacting with users about books. Library blogs and MySpace pages were very common, particularly in the US, as was the use of e-newsletters as alternative methods of keeping in regular contact with members.

## **6.6 Developing reader confidence and skills**

Deborah Jacobs, City Librarian at Seattle Public Library asserted that ‘Inspiring the love of reading...critical thinking and...civic discourse through reading and cultural opportunities is what it’s all about’. Reading development plays an important role in educating, challenging people’s perceptions and stimulating discussion about social issues, fostering community cohesion. Nancy Pearl talked about group experiences as having the power to break down barriers between communities. Rotterdam Library talked about the need to offer debating skills training to adult readers to help them form complex arguments to use on online book discussion groups.

The issue of developing reader skills and confidence to help them choose their books and widen their reading horizons was a theme running through my research. It was considered important to offer a wide range of activities which promoted reading for pleasure. Most of the practice I observed held relevance for readers across the spectrum of interests and abilities, based on the notion that readers would support and inspire each other and that all activities should promote equal access.

Evidence shows that talking about books increases people’s confidence in their reading and their self-esteem. Creating opportunities for readers to lead discussions about books, perhaps in rotation in a group, will help to build confidence. It is clear that readers like not only to share their own experiences but also to hear about what other people think of the books they have read. Initiatives which increase opportunities for this, such as encouraging people to post reviews (either in tradition always or using new technology), for example by UTube video clips of themselves talking about a book, will increase reader engagement.

## **6.7 Involving readers in developing reading activities**

In the majority of the libraries I visited, adult readers tended not to be actively involved in designing programmes, except as consumers commenting on the events they attended. The Washington Center for the Book involved volunteer Friends at events, welcoming attendees and handing out evaluation forms. Volunteers also collated survey data for the Program Manager and ran the Friends book shop. Santa Monica Library encouraged volunteers to facilitate library reading groups, offering them training and inviting them to events in return. The long-list of suggested books for the annual Santa Monica One Book project was selected by the community, although the final decision was made in-house for practical reasons (so that the library can negotiate author involvement).

Trends in England towards greater devolution, democracy and involvement point to the inherent value of actively involving adults in developing leisure reading programmes and services. Having a culture within the library which encourages adults of all abilities to volunteer in the library is more likely to ensure local ownership, attract other less confident readers and act as a link between the library and the community.

## **6.8 Finding and exploiting the right book**

One of the themes which ran through discussions about programming in the US and the Netherlands was the importance of finding the ‘right book’, the spark which turned reluctant readers on to the joys of reading. The right book should also inspire debate and controversy, challenging people’s views. One of the most striking examples of this was the Seattle Reads book *When the Emperor was Divine*, which brought to the consciousness of a whole city the history of Japanese internment, and Seattle’s involvement in it. It enabled local survivors to tell their story to children and adults, to different communities, resulting in some fairly public apologies. Undoubtedly, this resulted in a series of dialogues in schools, college libraries, workplaces and communities, which would not otherwise have happened.

The One Book schemes themselves have emerged from my research as a remarkable concept with immense potential for English public libraries. Whilst they have been tried fairly successfully in a few English cities and at least one region, it is clear that to have maximum impact, they must be planned well in advance, form the basis of a varied programme that spans several months, and most importantly involve a wide range of partners. The Netherlands Reads programme reached a large audience and attracted huge media attention in its pilot year. It would be very interesting to see if a one book project on a similar scale could be piloted successfully in England.

### **6.9 Building library capacity**

As part of my research I looked at library initiatives organised by umbrella organisations such as the Center for the Book and CPNB. They included ready-made reading programmes like Bookclubs in a Box, Crimes Passionnel and The Big Read; which were tried and tested and relatively easy to implement. All the staff I spoke to were strongly in favour of these products and wanted more of them.

One or two commented on the value of national campaigns in particular, as they meant so that readers would find the same promotional materials and in some cases the same highlighted books in any library. Critical success factors for national campaigns included partnership with bookshops and other partners, marketing plan and a sustainability strategy. The Netherlands Reads media campaign included television and radio commercials and posters on public transport, thereby reaching a significant proportion of the population.

A related theme is the importance of sustainability. Whilst large-scale campaigns and one-off library events have the potential to attract large numbers of people, they do not assure the long-term engagement of readers with books or the library. CPNB talked about the need for libraries to use their promotions to 'get people to talk to each other' and to keep them talking. It is clear that libraries should view bought-in campaigns as catalysts for developing a genuine and fertile relationship with readers. This approach is also more likely to engage reluctant readers who will take longer to coax into the library and to turn on to books.

### **6.11 Personalisation of reading services**

Personalisation of reading services was a recurring theme in many of the libraries I visited. This was interpreted in two ways, firstly by making library staff and their reading preferences more visible; and secondly by tailoring reader services to the particular interests of individual readers. Rotterdam developed a Reader's Party as a reward or a thank you to library members who enjoyed reading. This event helped to personalise the library's relationship with its readers and provided a vehicle for further promotion.

### **6.12 Staff development**

Nancy Pearl talked about the decline in reading development training in American library schools and the need to train all frontline library staff in 'reader's advisory'. The skills of being able to lead book talks promoting particular titles, and being able to tap into the more general experience that reading evokes when talking to library users was seen as imperative to the identity of libraries as centres of reading for pleasure.

## 7 Key findings, recommendations and summary

### 7.1 Key findings

The two case studies may provide some useful lessons for English public libraries aiming to further develop adult reading for pleasure.

- Reading development was just one of many priorities for public libraries in the USA and the Netherlands. The main investment in leisure reading was the provision of quality fiction and non-fiction stock. Bookshop-style display, particularly in the newer libraries, helped to promote borrowing in much the same way as in England.
- A broad approach was taken to promoting reading to make it interesting and accessible. Methods included themed book promotions, reading groups, booklists and reviews, online discussions, and literature events.
- In the USA I observed a growing trend towards a more personalised staff presence on library websites; sharing expertise and personal reading preferences, sometimes using blogs and wikis. I would argue that this builds a more direct relationship with readers and creating an image distinct from booksellers.
- Libraries have always offered personalised services to some readers. New technology allows libraries to build individual user profiles and use them to design and market services accordingly. I observed a trend towards this in both the USA and Netherlands.
- The development of an active and equal partnership between libraries, bookshops, publishers and writers was a critical success factor in several of the large-scale initiatives I observed.
- There was widespread recognition of the need for staff to develop their book knowledge and reading development techniques. Increasingly, social networking is being seen as an important skill to engage users. The USA has developed a training programme called *Five weeks to a social library* which could be the inspiration for new adult reading development training in England.
- Reading groups were common to every library I visited, as part of a wider programme of activities. There were emerging trends in the USA towards more tailored groups and short leisure reading courses of 6 to 8 intensive sessions, with an underlying learning agenda. In the Netherlands, reading groups were generally run by volunteers, coached and supported by the library. These trends offer some alternative models for implementation in English libraries.
- One Book initiatives were successful in engaging large numbers across a diverse socio-economic group. Common success factors included: being part of a wider range of reader-centric activities in the library; the selection of the 'right book' to stimulate debate amongst a diverse readership; heavy promotion in the media; and collaboration with partner organisations such as bookshops and publishers.
- Reading programming, in Seattle and Los Angeles at least, was acknowledged as a highly creative process; with dedicated staff appointed to act as artistic directors. This approach could also be developed in English library services.
- The active involvement of adult readers in designing and delivering reading activities is becoming more prevalent, particularly in relation to reading groups, which were often led by volunteers trained and supported by the library.

### 7.2 Recommendations for public libraries in England

The case studies from the USA and the Netherlands provide some lessons which may be useful in an English context. The following list is offered as a starting point for those planning new programmes:

- Ensure a strong strategic commitment to developing reading services for adults, with a clear understanding of how a reader-centred approach contributes to wider local authority and national government policy objectives.
- Actively involve adult readers in developing new programmes, including offering ways in which they can contribute as volunteers and reading peer motivators. This could be tied in with developing the role of library Friends Groups to support reading activities.
- When developing adult reading groups, consider the intended audience. This could involve developing a series of groups focused on particular genres, languages or cultural activities. Consider setting up a time-limited series of linked discussions, which some readers may find easier to commit to than an on-going group. Keep group content fresh and interactive by having a rotating Chair to allow everyone the opportunity to lead discussion. Set up an online discussion so that readers can continue their dialogue (and therefore the momentum) between sessions.
- Develop and nurture a strong relationship with publishers and booksellers, based on long-term common goals rather than a particular initiative. Talk to publishers about whether they could arrange occasional conference calls between authors and library reading groups.
- Develop a more personalised approach to web based reading promotion, including developing a virtual web presence using social networking technology and sharing the reading preferences of individual named staff.
- Develop ambient reading spaces which encourage adult users to read for enjoyment in the library and talk to each other about books. Furniture design companies could be commissioned to produce new designs which help to create the desired atmosphere.
- Tie one-hit events with authors in with a wider programme of discussions in the library and online to build up a sense of anticipation and to maximise the ongoing library and reader benefits of author visits.
- Consider developing a 'one book' initiative across the library service.
- Develop initiatives which encourage a peer-to-peer reader experience or conversation, for example by training volunteers to promote and share reading experiences with customers in the library café.

### **7.3 Recommendations for English policy organisations**

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's vision for reading development, which has resulted in several major reading developments, has meant that there are real possibilities to expand the work of libraries in supporting adult reading for pleasure. The following are a series of suggestions for regional and national policy organisations to consider when exploring new ways of delivering the reading vision:

- Book related initiatives should aim to engage readers of all abilities and interests as the basis for fostering an ongoing, sustainable relationship with library users. A pilot One Book project across the country could have significant impact on the engagement of readers with libraries, bookshops, academic institutions, broadcasting and other media and literary organisations. It would need to be developed as a truly collaborative project with significant external sponsorship and clearly defined national and local outcomes.
- Consider the development of a national Adult Reading Scheme which libraries and bookshops across the country could buy into. It could be linked to reader incentives such as book tokens and invitations to local events. It would include centrally produced materials and links to online reader resources and discussion forums, including promoting existing activities and services.
- Create of an online national library training programme for all frontline staff which teaches the use of social networking and virtual reality websites to support reading development.

- Create more off-the-peg national promotions which libraries can use to support their local adult reading offer.
- Development of a single portal which brings together libraries, booksellers, publishers, writer organisations and readers, a one-stop site which recommends books and reader activities with an option for users to buy or borrow.
- Develop national guidance for libraries on creating ambient adult reading-centred spaces in libraries.
- Consider the development of regional book prizes, in partnership with Arts Councils and MLAs to celebrate local writing, encourage regional identity and pride and build relationships between libraries and the book trade.

#### **7.4 Summary**

The visits to Seattle, Los Angeles and the Netherlands was extremely useful in learning more about how adult readers can interact with the library and with each other in innovative ways. Whilst neither model would claim to have got everything right, the high take-up and positive feedback from many of these initiatives demonstrates that there is much that we can learn from our international colleagues. With collaboration and partnership, investment and a commitment to experimentation and sustainability, there is a real potential to develop similarly vibrant library services for adult readers in English libraries.



## List of illustrations

- 1 Seattle Reads event at the Town Hall, showing the author Jhumpa Lahiri and celebrity librarian Nancy Pearl in conversation on-stage
- 2 Publicity for the Seattle Reads promotion
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- 4 Publicity for the Seattle Public Library service Adult Summer Reading Program
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- 8 Publicity for the national Book Week in a Dutch train station
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- 12 Pro Biblio Reading Bus kitted out to host and support summer reading activities
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- 15 Amstelveen Library seats in the main fiction area
- 16 Teenage library American diner style reading space in Amstelveen Library
- 17 Amstelveen Library's interactive web page for teenagers, again using the American diner theme

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### **USA**

The Big Read (National Endowment for the Arts initiative) [www.neabigread.org](http://www.neabigread.org)

Bookletters [www.bookletters.com](http://www.bookletters.com)

NextBooks [www.epnet.com](http://www.epnet.com)

BooklistOnline [www.booklistonline.com](http://www.booklistonline.com)

FictionConnection [www.fictionconnection.com](http://www.fictionconnection.com)

Dear Reader (e-list of downloadable book chapters every day) [www.dearreader.com](http://www.dearreader.com)

Reader's Circle (reading group search and more) [www.readerscircle.org](http://www.readerscircle.org)

Book Crossing [www.bookcrossing.com](http://www.bookcrossing.com)

PaperBackSwap [www.paperbackswap.com](http://www.paperbackswap.com)

Good Reads (social networking site for readers) [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)

BookBuffet (combining recommendations for food, wine and books) [www.bookbuffet.com](http://www.bookbuffet.com)

### **Netherlands**

Leesplein (libraries portal) [www.leesplein.nl](http://www.leesplein.nl)

Literatuurplein (book portal) [www.literatuurplein.nl](http://www.literatuurplein.nl)

### **UK**

Reader2Reader [www.reader2reader.net](http://www.reader2reader.net)

## **Appendix A**

### **Summary of major adult reading initiatives included this report**

#### **USA**

##### *American Library Association*

Let's Talk About It reading and discussion series  
Travelling exhibitions  
LIVE!@your book discussions and cultural performances  
Get Caught Reading

##### *National Endowment for the Arts*

Big Read

##### *Center for the Book*

Telling America's Stories

##### *Washington Center for the Book*

Seattle Reads  
Washington State Book Awards  
Scott Bullitt Lecture in American History  
Living History and Living Literature

##### *Seattle Public Library*

Adult Summer Reading Program

##### *California Center for the Book*

Bookclubs in a Box  
Author and poetry tours

##### *Library-based initiatives*

Santa Monica One Book programme  
LAPL Zócalo lecture series and ALOUD events programme  
Newport Beach Library adult summer reading scheme and Library-a-go-go beach

#### **Netherlands**

##### *Netherlands Library Association*

Literatuurplein and Leesplein library portals

##### *CPNB*

Netherlands Reads  
Themed book campaigns including Crimes Passionnel  
Summer Reading celebrity poster campaign  
National Book Week

##### *Pro Biblio*

Beach Libraries

##### *Library-based initiatives*

Dordrecht Library Service literary programme  
Rotterdam Reader's Party  
Amsterdam Library on Second Life

**Appendix B**  
**Additional photos of libraries visited in the USA and Netherlands**



Advertising on the side of a library lorry, King County Library Service



Library Connection, King County Library Service



Cerritos Library (children's area), Los Angeles



TeenZone at the Central Library, Los Angeles Public Library Service



Top 10 book promotion at Rotterdam Central Library



Beach Library (photograph courtesy of Pro Biblio)

## Appendix C

### Research interviews

Formal one-to-one interviews were carried out with the following people for this research, using open questions based on the themes described in Chapter 1. It was not possible to share transcriptions or interview summaries with interviewees within the timescale.

- Chris Higashi - WCFB (2 hour interview\*, informal conversations, e-mail correspondence)
- Deborah Jacobs - SPL (1 hour interview\*)
- Nancy Pearl - Book Lust (3 hour interview in several locations and with interruptions\*)
- Rick Simonson – Elliott Bay Book Company (2 hour interview, with Chris Higashi present\*)
- Kathleen Imhoff - Lexington Library service (30 minute interview\*)
- Mary Menzel – CCFB (two 1 hour interviews\*, e-mail correspondence)
- Natalie Cole – formerly CCFB (two 30 minute conversations\*\*, e-mail correspondence)
- Anne Conner – LAPL (30 minute interview\*\*)
- Louise Steinman LAPL ALOUD (30 interview\*)
- Alan Corlin – Culver City Friends Group (2 hour interview\*)
- Julie MacDonald – Santa Monica Public Library Service (1 hour interview\*)
- Susan Annett - Santa Monica Public Library Service (30 minute interview\*)
- Marian Koran – VOB (30 minute interview\*\*, e-mail correspondence)
- Fons Bouthoorn – Pro Biblio (1 hour interview\*\*)
- Barbara Walraven –Floriande Library (1 hour interview, with Fons Bouthoorn present\*\*)
- Ria Roelands – Zoetermeer Library (2 hour interview\*)
- Liesbeth van Eck – Dordrecht Library Service (3 hour interview\*\*)
- Stephan van Vilder – VOB (1 hour interview\*\*)
- Jef van Gool – VOB (30 minute interview\*\*)
- Gerard Reussink – Rotterdam Library Service (2 hour interview\*\*)
- Joke Visser - Rotterdam Library Service (1 hour interview\*\*)
- Christiaan van Willenswaard – Stichting Lezen (1 hour telephone interview\*\*)

Open-ended discussions, recorded in note form and later written up, were undertaken in some cases. It was not possible to share interview notes with interviewees within the timescale.

- Jennifer Baker, SPL\*\* (30 minute informal conversation\*\*)
- 5 attendees of Seattle Reads events (5 minute informal conversation with each\*\*)
- Jhumpa Lahiri – Seattle Reads author\*\* (5 minute informal conversation\*\*)
- Librarian, Cerritos Library (10 minute informal conversation\*\*)
- Library user, Cerritos Library (5 minute informal conversation\*\*)
- Ruth Gooley - LAPL (1 hour interview\*\*)
- Georgina Todd – LAPL (1 hour interview\*\*)
- Maureen Wade – LAPL (1 hour interview\*\*)

\* *Recorded and transcribed interview*

\*\* *Notes taken at interview and later written up.*