

# Putting the 'fun' back into 'fundamental immunology'

(or, Engaging professionals with special library services)

*"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of Captain Phillips and the crew I'd like to welcome you aboard the Discovery. I'm Petty Officer Edwards, and I'll be conducting your orientation and tour today."*

Using theatrical techniques to engage users in what a library has to offer is not new. Most public libraries offer story-times for children and run school holiday programs which use an element of the theatrical as a way of 'hooking' young users.

However, this method of engaging users is usually the domain of public libraries, and is generally directed solely at children and teenagers. Once the patrons are out of high school, there seems to be a general reluctance to use stories and theatrics to appeal to them or engage them.

If this is true of public libraries, it tends to be doubly true of special libraries. It seems that the more education our clients have, or the higher their pay packets, the more reserved and 'dignified' we become. Self-promotion is relegated to an occasional e-mailed notice or a subdued display in the library entrance.

*"For this tour, the captain has set the controls to the 610s, so we will be taking a short trip through the Medical Sciences. You are welcome to disembark and explore the islands we will visit at any time, but please remember you are travelling through the human body, and its various ailments and conditions, so we do ask you to wash your hands before and after any physical contact. Infection Control, by the way, is located at 614.4 and 614.5."*

The Townsville Health Library decided to break the mould for this year's national Library and Information Week (22–28 May). Doctors, nurses, allied health and other staff were invited to join the crew of the DDC Discovery for a 'Tour of the World (or part thereof) According to Dewey'.

We ran four tours on the Friday; in the week leading up to the tours invitations were sent out via the hospital's e-mail system, posters and flyers were put up around the hospital. Invitations were sent to the neighbouring university for the medical students and library staff who frequent the Health Library.



*The anatomy island*

Unsuspecting professionals, medical students and staff members were lured into the library with lollies and chocolates (and barley sugars to help with 'sea-sickness') before being swept around the library under the care of a crew member of the Class Six Transdimensional Time Ship.

Throughout the library, 'islands' had been set up with book displays and items begged, borrowed and otherwise filched from various departments around the hospital. Each island represented one of the ten major classes in the 610s division of the Dewey Decimal Code. 'Passengers' were escorted to these islands, where they were given a brief run-down of what could be found at that location.

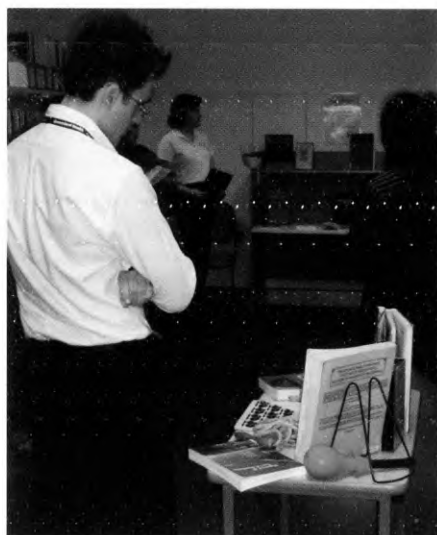
*"If you do decide to visit this island I must ask that you put everything back exactly where you found it. One of our previous passengers accidentally went home with the kidney and we had to replace it – then he returned it and now there are two of the darn things."*

The doctors and staff did not quite know what to make of it at first, but they quickly got into the spirit of the exercise. One nurse was heard saying to another, "It's like going to a show!" Most of the passengers who were unsure at the first island (610 – general subdivisions and nursing), were grinning by the time they got to 612 (physiology) and laughing by the time they reached 615 (pharmacology and therapies).

Each island was described briefly as if it were both a source of information and a potential holiday location. Passengers were given advice on avoiding catching the Black Plague or getting involved with the arguments between warring tribes. 613 (promotion of health) was recommended as a holiday location ("you'll come back looking and feeling better than when you left") while hypochondriacs were advised to avoid 616 (diseases).

The tours finished at 619, which used to be allocated to experimental medicine, but is now unassigned. This was a place used to discuss the fact that different versions of the DDC exist, and to encourage the patrons to consult their librarians if they can not seem to find the topic they are looking for.

Sharon Bryan



*We hope this patron is learning something useful...the islands were fun to set up and gave visual reminders of the subjects covered in each area*

*"In the mean-time, this area is empty, waiting for someone to discover something new – and I'm looking at a group of doctors, nurses and health professionals. Maybe one of you will have the chance to fill it."*

The rationale behind our activity was two-fold. The clientele of the Townsville Health Library often come to the desk and ask questions such as "Where will I find books on Occupational Therapy?" Clients often simply want to browse the relevant shelves, but the library system is designed to help them with specific searches.

The primary purpose of the tours was to provide the hospital staff with a general understanding of where subjects can be found. Proponents of Museum Theatre have long known that passive knowledge acquisition is encouraged by an entertaining presentation of information. By making the information amusing, it becomes more engaging. As a result, people are more likely to remember what they have heard and are more likely to want to learn more.

In designing and running the tour, signs and handouts were also created which will continue to be used in the library and will help point clients in the right direction. These handouts will both jog the memory of the passengers who attended the tours and provide simple, clear guidance for patrons.

*"Quite frankly, I think this is the most disgusting island in the whole archipelago. Every-*

*where you go there are open wounds and people running around with knives trying to cut you open so they can take something out or put something in. It's not for those with weak stomachs, I can tell you."*

The second reason for the tours was to have some fun with the clients. The Townsville Health Library has always maintained a friendly atmosphere and the librarians and staff prefer their clients to see them as open and approachable. By feeding them sugar and giving them a fun break from their usual Friday, the library could foster a more open relationship with the patrons – one which will encourage a pleasant and co-operative working environment.

Bringing a touch of the theatrical into the library is an enjoyable and effective way of connecting with your clientele, no matter how old, educated or specialised they may be. Special libraries should not be afraid to play with their professionals – it may be one of the best ways to get their attention.

*"It's probably best if we move on. If you'll just follow me..."* \*



*"Please step this way..."*



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Entertainment - Circus Oz at the Australian National University, 1982, NAA: A6135, K7/6/82/36