

## A READING ADVENTURE FOR BOYS

Frances Berndt, Katya Henry, and Anna Lagos are current students in the Masters of IT (Library and Information Science) course at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). In this National Year of Reading, they have been investigating what it takes to engage with a renowned group of disenfranchised readers – boys.

In 2012 boys still make up the majority of students struggling with literacy skills. National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results show that boys are lagging behind in literacy, and we know that literacy achievement is one of the most reliable indicators of educational, social, and economic success. Alarmingly, it is the level of achievement by the age of 14 that is the determinant. Poorer achievement in literacy is linked to early school leaving and lower rates of entry into higher education. Boys' literacy is an issue that affects all of us.

As part of our studies we were assigned the task of developing a hypothetical program designed to meet the specific needs of a target user group. This assignment was undertaken as part of the Information Programs unit of our course, created and taught by Kate Davis. We researched what libraries around Australia and the rest of the world are doing to get boys excited about reading. We conducted a review of the literature, had discussions with public and school librarians, and importantly, asked boys and their male carers what would work for them. We considered the challenges and barriers to boys' literacy and created *BookQuest: A Reading Adventure for Boys*, a program designed to respond to user needs and to make boys want to come to the library each week and engage in reading. This is what we found as a result of our research and subsequently built into the *BookQuest* program.

### Male mentors

A key component of any reading program for boys is the involvement of male role models. If a boy sees another male reading, he is more likely to read himself. *BookQuest* invites boys and their male mentor (dad, grandad, teacher, etc) to monthly pizza nights where everyone comes together to participate in themed reading-related activities.

### Books for boys

Author James Moloney wrote, "A good book for a boy is one he wants to read". And a book enjoyed by, and shared with another boy is even better. *BookQuest* provides a Readers Advisory Service, where the boys themselves nominate the books.

### Book trailers and boys (information literacy and technology)

Boys love technology and to build on this interest the *BookQuest* program includes a Book Trailer competition where boys are given access to video cameras and computers in order to make a trailer for a book they consider a 'must read'. While appealing to boys' love of technology and competition, this also engages boys in reading and re-telling stories in their own way.

### Gaming and libraries

In recognising that literacy skills can be developed through a variety of methods, the *BookQuest* program suggests building on boys' interest in technology through a weekly gaming afternoon. Making space and games consoles available one afternoon a week for the boys' use will assist with the development of digital literacy skills.

### Collector cards

Every parent knows that children are motivated through reward. Each time a *BookQuest* member borrows from the library, they are given a collectable card, with certain cards being rarer and more difficult to obtain than others.

### Boy-friendly libraries

For boys to fully engage and participate in an activity, they first need to feel comfortable in the space. The *BookQuest* program makes the library more inviting for boys by allowing food and drink through monthly pizza nights, getting boys' family members involved, and hosting the program after hours so the boys had exclusive ownership of the space.

The full details of our program proposal, *BookQuest: A Reading Adventure for Boys*, including our own 'book trailer', can be found at [bookquest2012.wordpress.com](http://bookquest2012.wordpress.com). Please use any element of the program you think would work in your own libraries. We want to get boys reading!

Australia's libraries can, and must, play a key role in addressing boys' literacy. The National Year of Reading 2012 reminds us of the importance of this life skill and presents us with the opportunity to address it. For libraries to remain relevant we need to find new ways of engaging the next generation of library users. We would love to hear what your library is doing to get boys engaged in reading.

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A STILL FROM THE  
BOOKQUEST 'BOOK TRAILER'