Implementing the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) in DocBook

Extending DocBook to support four interesting technical ideas from DITA*

1. A topic-oriented authoring paradigm

It's straightforward to add a `<topic>` element to DocBook. Although it comes from a traditional publishing background, there's nothing in DocBook that's intrinsically about “books”, linear sequences of printed pages.

2. Flexible cross-references

It's easy to support DITA's “#topic/subtopic” cross-reference design.

```
<link xlink:href="#topic/anote">this note</link>
```

3. Transclusion

DITA's conref is a transclusion operator. It's easy to add conref to DocBook. Combined with support for the more flexible cross-reference mechanism, supporting conref is straightforward.

```
<note conref="#topic/anote"/>
```

4. Specialization

DITA uses an ingenious, if elaborate, system of fixed attributes. DocBook can do better with schema annotations. Consider:

```
productlist =
  [ r:remap [ db:orderedlist [] ]
  element productlist { ... }
```

That simple annotation makes a “productlist” a specialization of “orderedlist”.

With those four small extensions, we have the power of DITA in the already well-understood and widely deployed DocBook vocabulary.

*Abridged from http://norman.walsh.name/2005/10/21/dita