Submission

from the

Australian Library and Information Association

to the

ACARA consultation on the draft K-10 Australian Curriculum:

English, mathematics, science and history

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Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the ACARA consultation on the draft K-10 Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the peak body representing the library and information services sector. It represents 6000 members, the library and information profession, Australian library and information services, and the interests of over 12 million library users. http://www.alia.org.au

ALIA is committed to promoting the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy.

We support the development of a 21st century information infrastructure with libraries as the conduit for a sustainable knowledge economy.

The key principle for the Association in relation to school libraries is commitment to the principle that school library and information programs and services are integral

to the mission, objectives, and teaching and learning goals of the school, and provide the foundations for lifelong learning.

The school library and the teacher librarian will be integral to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. The integration of information literacy into the curriculum and the explicit teaching of information skills are essential to ensure that students become independent, discerning lifelong learners.

This submission presents comments from teacher librarians in the ALIA Schools Group – a group which comprises teacher librarians across Australia who are committed professionals and members of the Association.

The role of libraries

ALIA advocates the development of an informed society that can partake of and participate in skilled decision-making. Accurate, relevant and timely information is the key ingredient to effective decision-making. Australia's long-term economic development is dependent on its ability to use information to make decisions that enable growth, progress and productivity.

Libraries and the library profession contribute to an informed society by acquiring, organising, archiving, retrieving, using, synthesising and analysing information and thereby empowering users so that they can utilise this information in their decision-making processes.

School libraries sit within the broader structure of the Australian library infrastructure. This infrastructure includes: the National Library and state/territory libraries, 42 university libraries, more than 350 TAFE libraries, over 1500 public libraries, approximately 9000 school libraries, and hundreds of special libraries (eg government department, law, research, health, corporate etc.). The collections from these libraries are supported by professionally produced catalogues, indexes and abstracts, a national bibliographic database (Libraries Australia), a national schools database (SCIS), digital preservation, interlibrary loan, and database consortia arrangements all of which underpin world class research, creativity and innovation.

Support for the Australian Curriculum

The concept of an Australian Curriculum is attractive as it theoretically avoids the duplication of effort that is currently happening in each state. It is also an opportunity for school libraries and teacher librarians to work with teachers in developing units of work that are inquiry based. The opportunities that the Australian Curriculum provides for collaborative planning, teaching and reviewing for classroom teachers and teacher librarians is an exciting one. This collaborative process is also the fundamental principle that ensures students attain relevant learning outcomes and become lifelong learners.

Inquiry based units of work allow students to develop a range of information skills that, when explicitly taught, enables the learner to know how to learn. Content is important but at times has been the focal point to learning to the detriment of students being taught information skills. We live in the digital age where information is everywhere. The development of information literacy in a systematic and sequential way is critical. Today, for our students to be effective global citizens, they need to acquire the skills to define, locate, select, organise, present, critically appraise, and evaluate information. To become information literate is truly what allows a student to navigate effectively and efficiently and to become a successful learner.

Role of the school library and teacher librarians

The role of the school library is critical to the Australian Curriculum. The primary function of a school library is to underpin the school's mission statement by providing services, resources and programmes that foster opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy, reading and the love of literature. The school library also offers all members of its community the opportunity to develop as informed and responsible citizens and to contribute to the Australian democracy, culture, society and economy. The school library operates on three levels as a learning centre, a resource centre and as a service centre.

To support the role of the school library, the teacher librarian, who holds qualifications in both teaching and librarianship, is the expert in the school who can assist classroom teachers with explicitly teaching information skills and ensuring that these skills are incorporated into learning and teaching.

Concerns regarding the Australian Curriculum

In reviewing the Australian Curriculum, this submission focuses on the following two questions:

1. In what ways do the general capabilities relate to the work of teacher librarians, as the skills associated with information literacy are not explicitly mentioned?

2. What are the implications for resourcing the Australian Curriculum?

General capabilities and information literacy

The ability to process and use information effectively is a basic survival skill for those who wish to be successful learners in the 21st century. Learners, who are able to find, analyse, evaluate and ethically use information for a given purpose in a variety of formats are considered information literate.

Information skills must be embedded across the school curriculum and explicitly taught in the context of teaching and learning programs. Effective teacher librarians are expert in collaboratively developing and implementing such an approach.

With regard to our first question above concerning how the general capabilities relate to the work of teacher librarians, it is evident that the role of the school library and the teacher librarian is not mentioned at all within the Australia Curriculum. In particular, the development of information literacy is not clearly stated. We believe that there is a need and a commitment for the inclusion of information literacy across the whole curriculum.

Information literacy can be defined as a series of physical and intellectual steps required to complete an information task. Each step uses several information skills. This process is generally a part of learning and problem solving inside and outside the school. People tend to move backwards and forwards between the steps according to the unique requirements of each information task. Information skills are applicable to all themes and subjects. (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2007).

Information literacy is far deeper than communication skills and ICT skills and as a result should be made explicit within the context of inquiry based learning. Information literacy is part of an authentic, constructivist and resource-based learning and is most effective in a collaborative planning, teaching and reviewing model between the teacher librarian and the classroom teachers. Information literacy would certainly address several of the ten general capabilities especially those of thinking skills, ICT and literacy. Research has shown that the quality of a school library is directly correlated to the quality of its school's learning and teaching (Lonsdale, 2001).

Within the information literacy process, special attention must be given to skill development. Assisting students to move from a basic skill level to an advanced skill level over the span of their thirteen years of schooling will ensure that they become more independent and discerning users of information in all its formats and sources.

In the Australian Curriculum, these form some of the learning skills which are addressed in an integrated fashion in the *Literacy* section of the English curriculum, in the *Skills* section of the History curriculum, in the *Inquiry skills* section of the Science curriculum and in the *Problem solving and reasoning* section of the Mathematics curriculum.

Even though ICT is seen as a general capability, it is only one aspect of the information literacy process. It seems that emphasis has been placed on the learning of ICT skills to the detriment of how a student can learn information skills. Research has shown that the explicit teaching of information skills can lead to

higher educational outcomes (Lonsdale, 2001). When emphasis is placed on content over skill development then poor assignment task construction can result in confused meaning about the expectation of the task. It invites plagiarism which is a major problem as 'cutting and pasting' is so easy to do with digital technologies and it doesn't ensure that students understand what they have learnt nor how to use reliable, accurate and valid resources.

Teacher librarians have been well versed, for many years, about information literacy. In recent years teacher librarians have actively undertaken professional development to inform themselves about digital literacy and critical thinking skills. These two areas, together with reading and literature, also form the core business of the school library.

Teacher librarians are in the best position to lead their schools in the areas of information literacy, digital literacy and critical thinking skills. Documentation regarding the school library and teacher librarians explicitly highlights these areas.

The seminal documents include:
- *Learning for the future: developing information services for school libraries*
- *Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians*
- *Statement on school libraries and information and communication technologies.*

The excellence of a teacher librarian is directly correlated to the quality of their school's learning and teaching. This quality of schooling is also supported by a knowledgeable principal who understands the importance of the development of information literacy over the drive to know content. Imagine, at the national level, what student achievements could be attained with a systematic and sequential approach to the development of information literacy?

We are particularly interested in the timeline for further development of and consultation on the general capabilities as this will be the area which most informs the work of the teacher librarian. Currently the ten general capabilities are listed as broad titles. A definition of each capability and an outline as to what or how that capability will look like is essential. It would also be critical to know how these capabilities will be evident in our students. How will teachers know when students have achieved the required level of each capability?

The general capabilities are seen to underpin the curriculum design in each subject specific areas; how will each one be unpacked? Will there be a continuum for each of the general capabilities?

Resourcing the Australian Curriculum

One of the potential issues of the Australian Curriculum is how it is to be resourced. The school library as a learning centre aims to provide materials which enrich and enhance learning and teaching. It encourages individual discovery and inquiry and provides resources and facilities for individual, paired or group research. The school library provides a variety of learning and teaching spaces for information skills, for reading and literature and for digital literacy. The school library also encourages the use of a variety of resources in various formats.

The school library aims to provide resources that ensure a balanced collection. This balance includes a variety of resources that comprise both book and non-book formats. The collection also provides sufficient resources for both students and teachers. Furthermore, the collection is organised, catalogued and housed in a systematic way for equity of access and use. Research has shown that the quality of library resources and the number of resources available per student is related to reading achievement (Lonsdale, 2001).

The Australian Curriculum is designed to cater for all Australian students. This includes catering to each student's diversity in their learning needs and styles, in their cultures, in their personal experiences and in their intellectual development. The Australian Curriculum does not explicitly cover:
- the type and formats of resources required
- the amount of resources required by students and staff
- how resources are to be provided so that equity of access and use is ensured
- what type of financial considerations may be required to provide for the most appropriate resources.

What is the expectation on how the Australian Curriculum will be resourced? Is there to be a basic resource list for all schools? Will a school and its library be able to value add to the resources required? If so, how does that affect schools who do not have the funds to value add with resources?

As teacher librarians, we are concerned that publishers may have a field day with the introduction of new texts, particularly in the form of the textbook. This type of resource could ultimately cost schools and parents a great deal of money. It is also possible that publishers or publishing houses might prey on schools or parents and promote the textbook as a must have, 'can't live without' resource to the exclusion of other worthy resources and possibly to the exclusion of the essence of the Australian Curriculum.

What thought, if any, has been given to how the textbook as a resource will be controlled? What provision has been made for the timing of a textbook to be updated or revised? There are large contracts looming for potential publishers in the

cut-throat world of publishing. How will smaller publishing houses not be disadvantaged by the larger publishing houses? Currently there are state based texts being used. What relevancy will these state based texts have in the Australian Curriculum?

Conclusion

The school library and the teacher librarian will be integral to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. The integration of information literacy into the curriculum and the explicit teaching of information skills are essential to ensure that students will be independent, discerning lifelong learners. Adding more information to the general capabilities will enhance teachers' understanding and expectations of how students will attain them. Outlining the types of resources required and the process for their provision will give schools the ability to value add to the Australian Curriculum.

ALIA welcomes the opportunity to provide further input and assistance in the areas of information literacy, information skills and resources. We look forward to the opportunities that the Australian Curriculum will bring.

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