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|  | **Western Australian School Library Association** |
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| **Response to the Draft Australian Curriculum**  **ACARA**  **23 May 2010** | |

**Western Australian School Library Association**

**1. This submission is made on behalf of Teacher Librarians in Western Australia.**

For this consultation, Teacher Librarians in Western Australia came together with questions regarding the direction, degree of prescription and content of the Australian Curriculum; how it might impact of the provision of resources and their leadership role for implementation; and the impact on training for Teacher Librarians both pre-service and in-service. They want to be pro-active and able to respond not only to those developing the Australian Curriculum, but to teachers and colleagues in schools enquiring about the curriculum.

As a result of a presentation of the Australian Curriculum, their own investigations and group discussions, Teacher Librarians see the curriculum as an excellent reference point to enable Teacher Librarians to be pro-active in developing resources and supporting student learning, in focusing pre-service course work for Teacher Librarians to prepare for the profession and in promoting the work of Teacher Librarians as information specialists in schools.

**2. A Need for Information Literacy**

Teacher Librarians’ particular knowledge and skills in relation to information literacy drives much of the feedback in this submission. Teacher Librarians note that Information Literacy is not sufficiently explicit in the curriculum. The capabilities of Literacy and ICT do not address this important area of learning. ICT competencies are only a small part of Information Literacy and can be learned at any stage. The ability to be information literate (i.e. critically define, locate, select, understand, synthesise, evaluate, use, create and present information from a variety of sources in a variety of formats that suit identified needs) needs to be embedded in all subject areas, at all stages of the curriculum to enable school leavers to be productive and functional. In examining the curriculum, Teacher Librarians note that students will need information literacy to effectively interrogate and understand written texts, websites, databases, online/electronic resources, visual texts (fiction and non-fiction), multimedia, podcasting, periodicals and digital technologies. If information literacy is not explicit in the curriculum, teachers may ignore it.

**2.1 Recommendation 1**

**Teacher Librarians recommend that the ICT capability be renamed Information Literacy and expanded to include critical and creative thinking skills across all levels of the curriculum.**

**3. Positive Aspects of the Australian Curriculum**

Teacher Librarians note the following positive aspects of the Australian Curriculum.

***3.1 Content***

There are currently gaps in student knowledge, particularly at the primary school level, due to the current construction of curriculum in WA. Having an explicit direction for content has the potential to support student learning across the curriculum and reduce repetition.

A prescribed curriculum may enable teacher librarians to source resources that support the content to be taught, making a more efficient use of the budget for resource provision. Teacher Librarians may be able to create information packages related to particular content areas, providing building blocks for students differing levels of ability. The curriculum may also provide an opportunity for collection mapping. Over time, teacher Librarians note that resources can be expanded, increasing the diversity of genres and formats. Resources that are created by Teacher Librarians in one school may be able to be shared by teachers in other, particularly rural and remote, schools.

A common Australian Curriculum has the potential to enable designers and information specialists who have skills in developing resources, units of work and lessons, as well as school policy documents in areas such as copyright, intellectual property and acceptable use, to be employed in developing resources, rather than depending on teachers who do not necessarily have these skills. The sequenced content may provide an opportunity for Teacher Librarians:

* + to improve their teaching since the clear sequences could support their understanding of the way in which the curriculum progresses from year to year, especially for people working in primary schools; and
  + afford more opportunities for Teacher Librarians to be involved in collaborative programming because they will know what is happening and can anticipate the needs of teachers.

With Information Literacy more clearly described and embedded in the curriculum (see Recommendation 1 above), Information Literacy could be developed over time and in all content areas.

***3.2 Capabilities and cross curriculum issues***

The inclusion of capabilities and cross curriculum issues is seen as a positive aspect of the curriculum which can be strengthened. These areas are skills for learning for life, needed by all school leavers regardless of their career paths. Cross curricular topics and skills enable teaching at the point of need, embedded in the real learning experiences of students.

**3.3 Recommendation 2**

**Teacher Librarians recommend developing scope and sequences for the capabilities, linking to the content areas.**

***3.4 Online format***

The online format of the curriculum, particularly the use of colour coding, supports teachers to focus on particular capabilities.

**3.5 Recommendation 3**

**Teacher Librarians recommend closely examining the curriculum with a view to making explicit the development of capabilities.**

Continual updates are more achievable through the online registration process. This provides an opportunity for Teacher Librarians to be a conduit for disseminating information to all school staff.

**4. Concerns about the Australian Curriculum**

Teacher Librarians find there are issues related to the Australian Curriculum content, capabilities, cross curricular areas, and achievement standards.

***4.1 Content***

Teacher librarians are concerned that the emphasis on content does not allow sufficient emphasis on processes. Content changes, but processes are skills to learn for life.

The curriculum assumes that all students and teachers come with the same information base. This is patently untrue. Students from backgrounds where English is an alternative language may not have the prior language, information and/or concepts to learn the content identified. In addition, these students may also have different religious or cultural experiences which may affect their learning of the curriculum content.

**4.2 Recommendation 4**

**Teacher Librarians see benefit in expanding content possibilities in a limited way and enabling schools and teachers to make their own judgements about the best content to be taught to their students.**

Some Teacher Librarians, from their perspective in supporting individual learning, are concerned that the curriculum content does not cater for differentiated learning, particularly non-achieving, low achieving, gifted and talented students, and students from English as an Alternative Language background. The range of learning styles, students with learning difficulties and the cognitive ability levels of students are also not considered. The reality of classroom life is that there are students who take more time to cover the content. Students with differing learning needs, such as those above, may be rushed, overlooked, ignored or will simply lose interest. With work refusal and disengagement a recognised problem in education, the productivity of the nation will not be increased by these students achieving lower grades and opting out of the school system.

**4.3 Recommendation 5**

**Teacher Librarians recommend that the content is reviewed by teachers from these specialities so that the Australian Curriculum supports the learning of all students.**

Many schools are using well researched curriculum models that integrate learning, have a competency framework (e.g. VET studies), develop curriculum from student interests (e.g. Big Picture, Reggio Emilia Inspired Schools) or focus on individual and group learning (e.g. Student-centred learning). The prescription and sequencing of content in year levels undermines these recognised and successful pedagogies.

**4.4 Recommendation 6**

**Teacher Librarians ask if there is a way to reduce the prescriptive nature of the year levelled-content to encompass a learning focus.**

The choice of content, its elaborations and the work samples indicate the pedagogy required. No curriculum can be free of pedagogy. This curriculum, however, lends itself to whole class, teacher initiated, teacher directed and teacher lead tuition in narrow learning areas. Some Teacher Librarians are concerned that the sheer quantity of curriculum described will encourage an expository style of teaching and crowd out student-initiated learning. For example, Teacher Librarians note the large number of specific literacy skills to be learned in Year 6 reading.

**4.5 Recommendation 6**

**Teacher Librarians recommend the development of lesson plans that use different teaching and learning approaches so that teachers can see many ways in which the content can be learned.**

***4.6 Capabilities and cross curricular issues***

Teaching in cross curricular ways is not sufficiently supported by identifying where cross curricular issues and capabilities are located in the learning area descriptions. The development of cross curricular resources will be vital in supporting teachers to implement the curriculum in a way that supports student learning.

The capabilities are insufficiently connected to the content at this point. For example, there is only one element in Year 8 Mathematics attributed to ‘literacy’. Literacy should be embedded in all subject areas and strands. Teacher Librarians also see the potential for confusion between the English strand ‘Literacy’ and the capability ‘Literacy’. Literacy should not be taught in isolation.

**4.7 Recommendation 7**

**Teacher Librarians recommend the enhancement of the capabilities in all subject areas and strands.**

***4.8 Provision of resources***

Implementing the curriculum will require print, electronic and subscription based resources. With the nation’s schools requiring similar resources, there is the potential for mass buying, reducing prices and facilitating ordering. Or, there is the potential for high demand to drive prices higher. While implementation inevitably is passed to systems and schools (with little in the way of additional funding), ***this issue requires strategic thinking at a national level***.

***There is also the potential for a central collection of lists of suppliers, resource lists and electronic information which can be updated regularly****.*

Schools will, however, need to expand their resources and this will demand an increase in budgets. Teacher Librarians wonder if libraries actually can provide everything, and what other resources may need to be accessible to cover the breadth of the curriculum.

There is a great paucity of Indigenous resources, and much of what is available is of poor quality. This will be a large area of future expense for many schools.

Having lesson plans, online resources and work samples may provide support for teachers, but only if they can afford to print out what they need – a cost that is rarely factored into any resourcing. There are also copyright concerns when printing resources only available online.

Supporting teachers in accessing resources, providing ideas for programming and/or providing online or phone support for developing unit and lesson plans is the work of Teacher Librarians. This work requires training. Qualified Teacher Librarians will enhance the implementation of this Curriculum.

**4.9 Recommendation 8**

**Teacher Librarians recommend the issue of resourcing the proposed curriculum be part of further strategic considerations by the national body.**

***4.10 Training and professional learning***

An emphasis on emerging technologies requires skilling of teachers. Teacher Librarians are in an ideal position to support this peer learning, given adequate time and recognition. While the deployment of teachers is a school level issue, training and professional learning must also be part of the national curriculum agenda

**4.11 Recommendation 9**

**Teacher Librarians recommend suggestions about the ways in which teachers and schools might gain the skills and knowledge they need, including involving Teacher Librarians and professional associations.**

***4.12 Achievement Standards***

Teacher Librarians are concerned about students who have not achieved the Achievement Standards and how they will be accommodated in a content driven curriculum. There was particular disquiet in regard to national testing such as the National Assessment Plan for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). ***Teachers see educational benefits to students being exempted from tests in which they can only gain a sense of failure.***

Failure to achieve and/or boredom produce behavioural problems and further disengagement. ***Standards need to be written in such a way that students can see their areas of achievement and pathways for future learning.***

The national push for productivity is also of great concern to Teacher Librarians. National testing, staffing levels and school rankings do not lead to genuine improvement. Engagement in learning is more important as a lifelong skill than achievement of a standard in a particular year.

**4.13 Recommendation 10**

**Teacher Librarians recommend that assessment and achievement standards be re-evaluated to include assessment regimes students who do not/cannot achieve (Recommendation 5) at the benchmarked level**

**Contact:**

Barbara Combes

President WA Operations, WASLA

b.combes@ecu.edu.au