Early implications: the National Curriculum & teacher librarians

Teacher librarians (TLs) should take a few moments to read the key paper, *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* which has now been released by Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). This is available on the ACARA website (**http://www.acara.edu.au**). This paper is best interpreted in conjunction with the Curriculum Design Paper. There is a real place for TLs in the new curriculum, but it will be up to us and our professional associations to lead the way forward as implementation of the new curriculum draws closer.

At the recent ASLA National Council in meeting in Sydney, Robert Randall, Acting General Manager of ACARA, addressed council and executive members. The content of this report is based on his address and the two papers available on the ACARA website.

Design considerations for the curriculum by the writers are:

1. **The nature of the learner and learning**, including consideration of how the national curriculum will take into account the developmental changes in young people attending school.
2. The **whole curriculum** and how national curriculum learning areas relate to it.
3. **Structural matters**, including commencement and completion of school, and transition points.
4. **Inclusivity** and how the national curriculum will provide for the educational needs of every child.
5. **General capabilities**, describing how the national curriculum will attend to general capabilities learning.
6. **Cross-curriculum dimensions**, describing perspectives that should be included in each learning area.

Further details can be found from page 6 in the Curriculum Design Paper.

The three key elements of the national curriculum will be curriculum content, achievement standards, and a reporting framework.

1. Curriculum content

The national curriculum will detail what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn for each year of schooling. The curriculum will describe the knowledge, understandings, skills, and dispositions that students will be expected to develop, in sequence, for each learning area across the years of schooling (*The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*, p.9). The national curriculum will emphasise the fundamental knowledge, skills, and understandings that are the core of a learning area.

The national curriculum writers will be required to develop a continuum of learning in literacy and numeracy skills from the early years to the later years of schooling. The development of these continuums means that these foundation skills are not regarded only as initial or minimal competences. Literacy and numeracy need to keep developing across the school years as the curriculum areas put them to work in increasingly distinct and complex ways (*The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*, p.10).

Not all learning is contained in the learning areas into which traditional school curriculums have been divided. Lifelong learning, critical in the 21st century, is an area in which TLs now provide students with structured assistance and will continue to be essential. The national curriculum identifies the important general capabilities required by students as:

- **Literacy** knowledge, skills, and understanding need to be used and developed in all learning areas. Initial and major continuing development will be in English but the national curriculum will ensure that this competency is used and developed in all learning areas.

- **Numeracy** knowledge, skills and understanding need to be used and developed in all learning areas. Initial and major continuing development of numeracy will be in mathematics but the national curriculum will ensure that this competency is used and developed in all learning areas.

- **Information and communications technology (ICT)** skills and understanding are required for all learning areas. Some aspects of ICT competence are as much about information management as about the use of technology, so an important aspect of the competence is the ability to evaluate the source, reliability, accuracy, and validity of information that abounds in cyberspace. New digital technologies are used in creative and artistic pursuits, and in civic and political activities. These opportunities for private and public expression, unimagined half a generation ago, will make up important elements of the national curriculum.

- **Thinking skills** refers to a range of applied intellectual activities that use information to achieve outcomes. They include problem-solving, decision-making, thinking critically, developing an argument, and using evidence to support that argument. Thinking skills constitute the core of most intellectual activity.

- **Creativity** enables the development of new ideas and their application in specific contexts. It includes generating an idea which is new to the individual, seeing existing situations in a new way, identifying alternative explanations, seeing links, and finding new ways to apply ideas to generate a positive outcome. Creativity is closely linked to innovation and enterprise, and requires characteristics such as intellectual flexibility, open-mindedness, adaptability, and a readiness to try new ways of doing things.

- **Self-management** enables a student to take responsibility for their own work and learning. It includes managing one's learning; monitoring, reflecting on, and evaluating one's learning; identifying personal characteristics which contribute to or limit effectiveness; planning and undertaking work independently; taking responsibility for one's behaviour and performance; and learning from successes and failures.

- **Teamwork** enables a student to work effectively and productively with others, including working in harmony with others, contributing to common purposes, defining and accepting individual and group roles and responsibilities, respecting individual and group differences, identifying the strengths of team members, and building social relationships.

- **Intercultural understanding** enables students to respect and appreciate their own and others' cultures, and to work and communicate with those from different cultures and backgrounds. It includes appreciation of the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; respect for Australia's multicultural composition; communicating and working in harmony with others within and across cultures, especially in relation to cultures and countries of the Asia-Pacific; and appreciation of difference and diversity.

- **Ethical behaviour** involves students understanding and acting in accordance with moral and ethical principles. Ethical behaviour includes the willingness, determination, and capacity to think, make judgments, and behave independently. It includes identifying right and wrong and having the willingness, determination, and capacity to argue the case for change; understanding the place of ethics and values in human life; acting with moral and ethical integrity; acting with regard for others; and having a desire and capacity to work for the common good.

- **Social competence** will enable students to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous, human situations. It includes initiating and managing personal relationships; being self-aware and able to interpret one's own and others' emotional states, needs, and

perspectives; the ability to manage or resolve conflicts and to foster inclusive and respectful interactions; and participating successfully in a range of social and communal activities (*The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*, p12–13).

2. Achievement standards

The standards will provide an expectation of the quality of learning that students should typically demonstrate by a particular point in their schooling, such as their depth of understanding, the extent of their knowledge, and the sophistication of their skills.

3. The reporting framework

The reporting framework will provide a consistent nomenclature to describe the quality of achievement associated with each A–E grade for use across K–10. These grades are designed to help parents and guardians interpret their child's performance in a simple and direct way.

The National Curriculum Board is expected to develop a national K–12 curriculum in English, mathematics, science, and history by the end of 2010. Implementation will follow, starting in 2011.

To implement the new curriculum, schools that have a scaffold for curriculum delivery that includes the teacher librarian in meaningful learning initiatives and assessment of students will be well placed. Students will need to plan and organise what they need to find out and reflect on final outcomes. That is, where it is evident that the students have moved from information literacy instruction to information analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Where students can plan and organise what they need to find out and to reflect on their final outcomes.

Those schools where the teacher librarian works as a timetabled class relief teacher, does not have the opportunity to provide meaningful class interactions in collaboration with class teachers ,or is overloaded with IT infrastructure and management will be very disadvantaged when the new curriculum is implemented.

Early implications for TLs in the curriculum papers

The Curriculum Design Paper (p.13) and *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* paper (p.11) outline ten general capabilities which will be explicitly handled in each learning area. The first five will occur in every learning area and the last five will be in most learning engagements. The Sections on Literacy, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), thinking skills and creativity are areas where teacher librarians can have the greatest impact on student learning. The section on ethical behaviour is a further area of interest for the teacher librarian. Achievement standards in the statement "the depth of their understanding, the extent of their knowledge and the sophistication of their skills" is an area where the teacher librarian can be involved in structuring meaningful assessment strategies where evidence of synthesis and understanding in the learner is evident.

The way ahead for teacher librarians

- Teacher librarians see this as an opportunity to make meaningful contributions to student learning.
- Teacher librarians can advocate an inquiry learning approach over that of 'library skills' which is not a curriculum standard.
- Teacher librarians can ensure that in collaborative teaching and learning activities that the input of the teacher librarian is measurable and observable in the assessment strategies.

In the print version of the curriculum, the content will be organised by strands and described by year level. In the digital version of the curriculum, however, there will be access to content elaborations and hyperlinks to other learning areas, resources, and support materials, and further exemplification. In this regard, the 'digital literacy' lens of the teacher librarian combining curriculum knowledge and pedagogy with information

management knowledge and skills can provide leadership in addressing the cross curricular dimensions.

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References

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Issues facing school libraries & teacher librarians: a snapshot

Staffing

Staffing in school libraries is determined at the local level, except in Western Australia where a per capita formula is applied. This means that there is no consistency across Australia in the staffing of school libraries: where one school of 500 could have a full time TL, another the same size could only have a part-time, or unqualified staff member running the library. The services and programs offered to the school communities in these two situations would be vastly different. This is an immense problem in terms of equitable access to resources, both human and physical.

Funding: facilities and resources

Equally, school library recurrent and capital budgets are determined locally. While some schools make adequate provision through program budgets for library resource provision, others do not. In addition, some schools have benefited from the recent capital grants from the Federal government, while others have not. Inconsistency in funding compounds the inequity highlighted by the staffing situation.

Programs to suit 21st century learners and the use of web 2.0 technologies

It is important that the programs offered by TLs, in consultation with subject teachers, suit the needs of 21st century learners. There are rapid changes in the information and technology landscape, especially with web 2.0 developments. Discerning which developments have useful contributions for our core purpose, and applying these technologies in ways that advance it, are immense tasks. We must keep our eye on developing students' competencies so that they are able to transform information into knowledge and understanding. What are the educational outcomes expected from using web 2.0 technologies and how do we scaffold their use to ensure that these outcomes are achieved? Through ongoing discussion and debate, our priorities for program development will become clearer and more refined.

Accountability

Demonstrating that the programs offered in school libraries make a positive difference to student learning in individual schools is a critical issue facing TLs, as is being accountable for staffing and funding crucial to school libraries. Being able to demonstrate that programs are effective involves research, surveys, and other evaluation tools. Given the problem with staffing identified above, it is only where libraries are better staffed that priority can be given to accountability through evidence-based practice.