



Submission by the Australian School Library Association to
The Coalition's Discussion Paper on Enhancing Online Safety for Children
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Introduction

The *New Media Consortium's Horizon Report: 2012 K-12 Edition* (Johnson et al 2012) examines emerging technologies for their potential impact on and use in teaching, learning, and creative inquiry within the environment of pre-college education. At the time of publication, the near-term horizon predictions (within the next 12 months) were:

- mobile devices & apps, and
- tablet computing.

As indicated in the report, our students have 'ever-increasing expectations of being able to work, play, and learn on these devices whenever they want and wherever they may be' (Johnson et al 2012, p. 4).

The interim results of the 2013 Horizon K-12 Project advances the 2012 near-term horizon predictions by identifying the following four emerging technologies to have an impact in one year or less:

- BYOD (Bring Your Own Device)
 - Cloud Computing
 - Mobile Learning
 - Online Learning
- (Becker 2013).

In the 2013 interim results, the team reports that 'faculty training still does not acknowledge the fact that digital media literacy continues its rise in importance as a key skill in every discipline and profession' (Becker 2013). This critical challenge has been consistently reported over the years.

Teacher librarians support teachers in building students' digital media literacy capabilities. With their knowledge and use of current and emerging digital technologies, as identified in the Horizon reports, they can assist their colleagues through collaborative partnerships to

improve teaching and learning practice in the school community. They also understand the importance of providing a range of resources and tools to facilitate students' interaction and engagement.

Digital media literacy

Digital media literacy can be defined as the ability to effectively locate, access, organise, understand, evaluate, analyse and create content using a range of digital media technologies (Wikipedia 2013; Australian Communications & Media Authority 2012). Digital literacy emphasises the interaction between technologies and information literacies. Students engage with information online personally, socially and in an academic context. In addition, digital literacy supports an inquiry based approach to teaching and learning. It is inclusive of social responsibility and ethical behaviour in the personal creation of information and awareness of the impact of one's digital footprint. It is important to make links to cyber-safety, which is an integral part of digital literacy.

Digital literacy is a critical skill set in the development of active, productive and socially responsible digital citizens and cannot be ignored in the development of curriculum programs in schools.

Mobile phones have become ubiquitous and integral to everyday society. As indicated in the Horizon report 2012 K-12 edition, 'mobile devices have become one of the primary ways that youth interact with and learn from each other' (Johnson et al 2012, p. 11). In addition, with the technological advances in tablets, these devices are multi-functional tools that bring together a range of computing features with a high level of portability. A number of schools are embracing the tablet as the preferred BYOD (Bring Your Own Device).

Recent research indicates that tablets, because they are designed to easily share their screens, foster key 21st Century skills in students, including creativity, innovation, communication, and collaboration (Johnson et al 2012, p. 16).

With always-on connectivity, it is imperative that the skills required to help young people to safely explore, communicate, create and collaborate using digital technologies is paramount.

Educators cannot assume that because students own mobile devices and have a familiarity with the technology that they possess sophisticated digital literacy skills. Being tech-savvy does not automatically mean one is digitally and information literate. Students need to be aware of the personal safety issues and security of using the Internet. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) *Cybersmart* (2013) web site hosts valuable information and activities for students, parents and teachers.

The potential of teacher librarians to contribute to better outcomes for students within safe learning environments is untapped. Teacher librarians can be accessed to explicitly teach digital media literacy skills in the context of the content of the curriculum through collaboratively developed classroom learning activities, authentic assessment and research tasks within a well-resourced school library environment. Teacher librarians are the ‘apomediaries’ in the digital context (Gasser et al 2012, p. 77). Instead of being intermediaries that stand between, they stand by as guides, advisers and coaches.

The teacher librarian and the school library are vital agencies in facilitating global connectivity. Teacher librarians are instrumental in

- the design and delivery of digital literacy programs,
- adopting digital citizenship approaches to exercising social responsibility and ethical practice, and
- creating awareness of cultural sensitivity in a digital environment.

They also identify, store and disseminate relevant and appropriate information to support the teaching and learning process; teacher librarians assess the quality of information and customise access to that information (Australian School Library Association 2013, p. 3).

Improved coordination

The discussion paper suggests the establishment of an independent agency or Commissioner-led body, such as a ‘Children’s e-Safety Commissioner’. This suggestion is worthy of consideration specific to young people and online safety as long as there is

- independence in the regulatory role and providing advice,
- transparency in decisions, activities and accountability, and
- collaboration with education professional associations, industry bodies, employers, parents and governments.

The agency or Commissioner-led body must be accessible to teachers, students and parents/carers.

It also makes sense to harness existing, established and recognised agencies. The findings from *The ACMA Cybersmart Outreach Program Evaluation* (Beavis 2011) indicate the success of the Internet Safety Awareness Presentations (IASPs) and Professional Development for Educators (PD). A key benefit of these programs for students, teachers and parents/carers was awareness raising of cyber-safety. Students from Years 4 through 12 were involved in the IASPs and strongly believed that children needed access to this information at a younger age. The younger students in this cohort reported they were more careful and attentive about their safety online as a result of attending the IASPs. The teachers who attended the PD program indicated a gain in new skills and knowledge that would enhance their teaching practice. Parents and carers who participated in the ISAPs felt more

knowledgeable and confident in their own and their children's capacity to take steps to be safe online.

Participants' recommendations to ACMA included the need for schools to have a greater knowledge awareness of the Cybersmart resources and to find ways for all schools to have access to the IASPs. Teachers especially indicated that schools would benefit from more active utilisation of the available resources and the incorporation of these into their educational programs.

As previously indicated, the knowledge, skills and expertise of teacher librarians is essentially underutilised in this area of teaching essential skills in digital media literacy and online safety in schools.

Support for schools

Modern learning involves active engagement, inquiry, independent effort and shared discovery, using a wide range of information media and digital tools. Education is the key to students becoming safe and responsible digital citizens.

Lee and Finger (2010) have argued that educators need an approach that goes beyond banning and filtering. They have proposed that educators embrace the concept of digital citizenship; an approach that is more about informing, critiquing, and building knowledge, skills and understandings in young people about digital spaces. With the near-term horizon predictions of BYOD, cloud computing, mobile and online learning, it is imperative that schools move towards empowering students in these environments.

Ongoing professional learning for teachers is an effective practice for working towards improving student safety. Training personnel within the school community to provide this quality professional learning to help teachers develop awareness, literacy capabilities and technical ability will help to make online safety a more prominent feature in the school community.

Teacher librarians as technology innovators:

- Provide equity of access to a range of digital resources and technologies.
- Demonstrate expertise in using technologies for information creation, storage, retrieval, dissemination, organisation and communication.
- Respect and adhere to guidelines and laws for intellectual property and fair use of information in a school setting.
- Model the attributes of a responsible digital citizen.
- Support teacher colleagues in exploring creative and innovative ways to use technologies to develop new ways of teaching and learning, and

- Use technologies to support problem solving and creative thinking by encouraging colleagues to set assignments that advance students' skills in using technologies to access information and to create and design products that demonstrate the students' understanding of the content (Australian School Library Association 2013, p. 13).

The role of a Children's e-Safety Commissioner is not only to assess and certify online safety programs for schools so there is consistency, but to recommend the framework for delivery so that personnel within the school community can be deployed to apply their specific knowledge, skills and expertise in a far more productive way.

Recommendation

A recommendation from the Australian School Library Association would be:

That funding be allocated to the training and employment of teacher librarians to deliver nationally certified online safety programs in conjunction with digital literacy integration in schools.

Australian-based research on online safety and children

The House of Representatives, Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety published a comprehensive interim report, *High-wire act: Cyber-safety and the young* (2011b) which includes data from the Committee's *Are you safe?* survey that captured the opinions and experiences of young people on the topics of cyber-safety, cyber-bullying and their strategies to mitigate online dangers. This report provides a good starting point in respect to establishing Australian-based research into the use of the Internet by children and the impact that it has on them.

In addition, the findings of research studies conducted in Australia and overseas demonstrate the contribution that teacher librarians and school libraries make to students' learning and literacies development, e.g. Combes 2008; Hay 2005, 2006; Lonsdale 2003; Lankes 2012; Smalley 2004; Todd and Kuhlthau 2005. The varied roles and contributions of teacher librarians to their school communities are illustrated in the almost 400 submissions to the Commonwealth Government's inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians (House of Representatives 2010). The Inquiry was significant and timely in the context of Australian government financial investment in the building and refurbishment of school libraries through the Building the Education Revolution program. Its recommendations and the Committee's concluding comments (House of Representatives 2011a) recognise that school libraries are important sites of student learning, which warrant resourcing and professional

staffing. Teacher librarians play a vital role in educating young people to be responsible cyber citizens and discerning users of information. In particular, Recommendation 5, endorses the need for Australian-based longitudinal study in this area.

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government initiate an Australian-based longitudinal study into the links between library programs, literacy (including digital literacy) and student achievement, including their impact on improving outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged students (House of Representatives 2011a, p. xx).

The Australian School Library Association would value the commissioning of a longitudinal study that addresses the above recommendation in the context of policy development for online safety for children.

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