

**Submission from the  
Australian School Library Association Inc.  
to the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety**



The Australian School Library Association Inc. (ASLA) is a national authority, a peak forum in the field of teacher librarianship and school library resource services.

Its aim is to maximise opportunities for students to obtain independent lifelong learning and decision making skills through ASLA's commitment to:

- High professional standards
- Awareness of advances and changes in technology and the competence and ability to teach and use it
- Effective, cooperative use of school resource services by the whole school community
- Qualified teacher librarians with an image of excellence
- Optimum use of the dual skills of teaching and librarianship

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## Introduction

The New Media Consortium's Horizon Project is an ongoing research effort that identifies and describes emerging technologies and the impact on teaching, learning, research or creative expression within education. In 2009, *The Horizon Report: 2009 K-12 Edition* identified the following critical challenge facing schools – 'There is a growing need for formal instruction in key new skills, including information literacy, visual literacy, and technological literacy. New skills are required of students in writing and communication, different from those of even a few years ago' (Johnson et al 2009, p. 6-7).

In 2010, *The Horizon Report: 2010 K-12 Edition* continued this theme with the following critical challenge – 'Digital media literacy continues its rise in importance as a key skill in every discipline and profession' (Johnson et al 2010, p. 5).

*Digital information literacy* emphasizes the interaction between technologies and information literacies. Students engage with technology to negotiate information in multiple modes to support the process of becoming 'active meaning-makers' (Hague & Payton 2010, p. 8). In addition, digital information literacy supports an inquiry based approach to teaching and learning. It is inclusive of social responsibility and ethical behavior in not only the appropriate acknowledgment of the work of others but in the personal creation of information and awareness of the impact of one's digital footprint. Digital information 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 school library programs integrated into the curriculum programs of schools. Teacher librarians are well placed to support and deliver digital information literacy across all curriculum areas and age groups, including parents, within a school community. Unfortunately, not every school library is staffed by a qualified teacher librarian.

Research undertaken by Combes (2007) on information-seeking behaviour of post-secondary students indicated a confidence in using the Internet for study and finding information, but a significant drop in skills when it came to their ability to evaluate, organise and use the information they had found. The students acquired their Internet skills by personal experimentation and rarely consulted with a teacher or a teacher librarian whilst at school. By the time the students entered tertiary studies they had already developed a culture of information seeking behaviour that was lacking in high level digital information literacy capabilities. Educators cannot assume that because students have a familiarity with the technology that they possess sophisticated digital information literacy skills. Being *tech-savvy* does not automatically mean one is *information literate*. Students who are digitally information literate by definition must also be aware of the personal safety issues and security of using the Internet. *Cyber-safety* is an integral part of digital information literacy. 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 these crucial 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.

## **Terms of reference addressed by the Australian School Library Association for this submission**

### **1. The online environment in which Australian children currently engage, including key physical points of access (schools, libraries, internet cafes, homes, mobiles) and stakeholders controlling or able to influence that engagement (governments, parents, teachers, traders, internet service providers, content service providers)**

Students of the *Google Generation* have not developed digital information literacy skills in alignment with their access to and use of information and communication technology (ICT). They are surface web browsers and do not have the skills for advanced web searching, evaluating the relevance of information nor the skills to use this information appropriately.

Digital information literacy is a key skill for every curriculum area and is increasingly becoming more critical in a 1:1 laptop school-based environment. Teachers are not teaching digital information literacy due to lack of training and professional development in either pre or in-service professional learning. “This challenge is exacerbated by the fact that digital literacy is less about tools and more about thinking, and thus skills and standards based on tools and platforms have proven to be somewhat ephemeral” (Johnson et al 2010, p.5). Teacher librarians plan, develop and deliver explicit teaching in digital information literacy, as it is not about tools but learning and thinking. The school library is a place of learning and discovery.

Teacher librarians contribute significantly to the development of knowledge and understanding of cyber-safety of young Australian students through the teaching and learning programs and digital access points delivered through the school library that focus specifically on digital information literacy skill development to include being literate across multiple media areas within the context of an ever-changing technological oriented world.

### **6. Ways to support schools to change their culture to reduce the incidence and harmful effects of cyber-bullying including by:**

- **Increasing awareness of cyber-safety good practices;**
- **Encouraging schools to work with the broader school community, especially parents, to develop consistent, whole school approaches; and**
- **Analysing best practice approaches to training and professional development program and resources that are available to enable school staff to effectively respond to cyber-bullying;**
- **Analysing information on achieving and continuing world’s best practice safeguards.**

Being a responsible digital citizen requires appropriate, responsive behaviour with regard to how one uses the technology. A digital information literacy program in a school setting would focus on the following:

- Etiquette
- Effective communication
- Information literacy taught in the content of teaching and learning programs
- Equity of access and participation
- Social responsibility and ethical behaviour
- Collaboration and creativity in a safe environment
- Safe practices (e-safety and health safety)

- Critical thinking and evaluation
- Cultural and social awareness of the information environment

School libraries and teacher librarians have the current and future potential to map the digital tools and skills required for learning to the Australian National Curriculum. The Australian National Curriculum in 2011 and beyond will need to use emerging digital tools to personalise learning environments so that teachers can meet the individualised learning needs of young Australians. Teacher librarians have the skill set to implement a digital information literacy continuum linked to the national curriculum. A national digital information literacy focus within the Australian National Curriculum will enable progressive development of individual skills to a higher level of thinking, creativity and innovation. In this context, explicit instruction by the teacher librarian in digital literacy and trans-literacy need to commence in the first years of schooling.

Teacher librarians have developed and delivered successful parent programs through the school library to help parents support their children through their schooling years. In 1993, the School Library Association of Queensland was recognised by the International Association of School Librarianship for *Project Parent: Control or Chaos*, a program that provided original and practical guidance for parents to collaborate in the education of their children through the school library. The award recognised the program as a model for replication by other schools worldwide. National funding assistance to the Australian School Library Association would allow for the development of a national parent program to help parents support their children in the specific area of digital information literacy and cyber-safety, especially in collaboration with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

As part of the 2003 survey of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), students (15 year olds) were asked about their familiarity with information and communication technology (ICT), principally their computer use. The findings identified issues about "whether students who are using computers more are necessarily using them to best effect" (OECD 2005, p. 69). There was also a concern about the presence of policies that ensured usage was effective. A warning was presented "not to assume that more means better. Above all, it is the quality of ICT usage, rather than necessarily the quantity, that will determine the contribution that these technologies make to student outcomes" (OECD 2005, p. 69).

The potential of teacher librarians to contribute to better outcomes for students within safe learning environments is untapped. Professional learning opportunities should include teacher librarians and school librarians. As these personnel support all year levels within a school setting they are well placed to integrate cyber-safety into digital information literacy programs and to provide professional learning for teachers across the school.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Ministers of Education develop an Australian-wide 21<sup>st</sup> Century student learning skills policy as a framework for national curriculum planning, implementation and delivery.

2. The Australian Government to fund the development of a digital literacy learning continuum as a support document for the Australian National Curriculum in partnership with the Australian School Library Association.
3. The Australian Government to fund the development and delivery of a parent program on digital literacy and cyber safety to help parents support their child's learning in partnership with the Australian School Library Association and the Australian Communications and Media Authority.
4. Governments acknowledge that professional development opportunities need to be inclusive of teacher librarians especially in relation to the implementation of Australian Government initiatives.

## References

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