

# Lead. Transform. Create

By Dr Ross J. Todd

I have just returned from a wonderful trip to Reykjavik, Iceland, where I gave the opening address at the Iceland Library and Information Association annual congress. The country has a population of just some 320,000, and 200 people from all library sectors attended the conference, including a significant number of school librarians. It was a wonderful opportunity to build a richer understanding of the library scene there, and particularly the school education arena. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the public education system, and has recently released the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Upper Secondary Schools (Available at: [brunnur.stjr.is/mrn/utgafuskra/.../adskr\\_frsk\\_ens\\_2012.pdf](http://brunnur.stjr.is/mrn/utgafuskra/.../adskr_frsk_ens_2012.pdf)). I was somewhat drawn to this, given the development of national curriculums in several parts of the world, including Australia and the USA.

The new curriculum is built on six 'Fundamental Pillars' and it is these that have captured my attention. The Pillars are Literacy, Sustainability, Democracy and Human Rights, Equality, Creativity, and Health and Welfare. The curriculum positions literacy as dealing first and foremost with the creation of meaning, and identifies that the main objective of literacy for students is for them to become active participants in 'transforming and rewriting the world by creating their own original meaning and responding in a personal and creative manner to what they read' (p. 17), with the aid of media and technology that is available. Core competencies identified in the curriculum include:

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- problem solving,
- the ability to think critically and reflectively as individuals and as a responsible collective,
- the ability to engage with diverse and multiple viewpoints, ideas, belief systems and social and cultural values that constitute a society,
- to give all students the opportunity to develop on their own terms, nurture their talents and to lead a responsible life in a free society,
- to develop as active citizens and change agents, conscious of their own attitudes, values and feelings for global impact and equality,
- to develop an understanding of their own intellectual footprint and capability for engaging with information to make decisions for the future of society.

Creativity is viewed as a process of welding together existing knowledge, curiosity, interest, challenge, excitement, imagination, inquiry and search, often disrupting traditional patterns, rules and systems to find solutions and to search for new possibilities. There is such a strong focus on students leading, transforming and creating – and being responsible and creative in seeking and developing new knowledge, in reflection and reasoning.

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In the USA, the movement to a national curriculum is strong, and the Common Core Standards has been adopted by 45 of the 50 US states, as well as three territories (available at: <http://www.corestandards.org/>).

One of the key elements of the Common Core Standards is the information-to-knowledge journey of students, a focus on developing deep knowledge and understanding of curriculum content through engagement with informational texts through deep critical reading to build meaning. Deep critical reading involves school educators not just engaging in the evaluation of text but also matching learners, texts, readability levels, and tasks. It also involves the explicit and systematic development of capacity to interact with text to construct deep knowledge. This includes such capabilities as analyzing texts for pertinent ideas and the interconnection of

main ideas and supporting ideas, connecting ideas across diverse texts, developing arguments, crafting informed and evidence-based conclusions through interaction with diverse and conflicting viewpoints, establishing and justifying positions through the critical interrogation of ideas, and writing, speaking, and listening as central to developing informed creative responses to information. As with Iceland, there is a very strong focus on intellectual engagement with information in all its forms, and the application of a deeply interconnected information base. The focus extends to the capabilities needed for students to intentionally integrate knowledge, skills and ways of knowing acquired from multiple sources in the development of new knowledge that has salience in shaping the future of society.

Similar to Iceland, the Australian National Curriculum includes seven general capabilities, the pillars on which intellectual engagement, social and cultural agency is built. These are: Literacy, Numeracy, Information and

communication technology (ICT) capability, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Ethical behaviour, and Intercultural understanding. I like the strong focus on intellectual engagement and intellectual

adaptability, with strong and clear emphasis on developing meaning and understanding through transformation and use of information in all its forms and the creation of new knowledge that enables purposeful participation in society and its growth and sustainability. This gives emphasis to developing students as critical, reflective, imaginative and creative thinkers who are able to interrogate meaningfully their information landscape and be innovative problem solvers. As with the Iceland and US national curriculums, there is attention given to the development of personal, social, cultural and collective capability that is at the heart of democracy, social wellbeing and sustainability.

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The commonalities found in these national curriculums bring together a set of core elements that in my view characterise a sustainable and visible school library for the future, and their role in the school of the future. These include: the school library as a common pedagogical zone across the school, where the central focus is on intellectual engagement with information:

(1) the critical, reflective, analytical and creative processes of engaging with found information in all its forms to create knowledge that is of value to the personal, professional, social, cultural and collective lives of young people. This is much bigger and beyond the development of information skills: it is about taking the lead role in the across-school development of reading-to-learn capabilities, resource-based capabilities, thinking-based capabilities, learning management capabilities, and personal and interpersonal capabilities;

(2) connected leadership through a team approach to instruction that focuses on the core intents of the curriculum. This involves the welding of multiple forms of expertise such as curriculum experts who know how disciplines build knowledge and technology. Also, Instruction experts, who support deep learning of students, and who together can mutually fuse declarative knowledge (knowledge of disciplinary content); and procedural knowledge. This is fused in a holistic and integrated way through a constructivist, inquiry-centered pedagogical framework; and

(3) making visible the focus on learning outcomes, and showcasing the school library as a transformative and creative place. It is a learning-outcomes vision, one that is so clearly aligned to the fundamental intents and pillars of the curriculum, and not an information vision.

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