

# Collaborating to create

*By Annabel Astbury*

*The advent of a national curriculum will, in my opinion, open up many more opportunities for collaboration – not just on national level but at school level.*

When I visit Diploma of Education students I tell them, in all seriousness, that there are two people in the school with whom you need to become best friends because of their expertise – those two being the school librarian and the secretary. During a morning at Sovereign Hill a couple of weeks ago, I had the privilege of attending a primary schools teachers' network to do a presentation on the impending Australian Curriculum. I also had the pleasure of meeting one of your colleagues who presented the fabulous resource on inquiry thinking skills. It was there that I was reminded of the importance of fostering this relationship between the classroom teacher and teacher-librarian.

Collaboration in education, on a simplistic level, is often seen as “sharing resources”. Certainly, emergence of communities of practice over the last 5 years can be seen in those areas that involve information and communication technologies – and this is one area where I have seen school librarians really make their mark within the educational community. Two people come immediately to mind: Judy O’Connell from NSW and Jenny Luca from Victoria who have been so instrumental in forging strong communities of practice.

Similarly, there are many examples of collaboration in terms of international partnerships – schools working across borders learning from each other, forging new relationships and consolidating learning. As well as this there is still room to look at collaborating at a school level in order to create very exciting, innovative learning programs.

Going beyond the simplistic idea of “collaboration to share”, school librarians are going to play an important role in fostering and expanding the idea of “collaboration to create”. I am not suggesting that the classroom teacher is incapable of this - **Project based learning** (PBL) proponents may argue that this sort of collaboration occurs in their method of designing learning programs frequently. To me, though, it is the teacher- librarian, with their expertise and ability to have cross-curricula perspective, who is going to be key in creating some great opportunities, even at school level, to help realise this idea of collaborating to create.

Maybe it's because the 'innovators' in some schools are isolated, sometimes the case of the position of the school librarian, working within a system that is slow to change that we see the collaboration occurring across state, sea and country borders, but I still feel that the single school structure could benefit from learning to collaborate within its own institution.

If I was in a position of leadership within a school I would certainly be considering how I was going to make the **Australian Curriculum** work in a sustainable and meaningful way. Schools should use their human capital more wisely – use subject expertise, use technological expertise – marry the two where possible. I realise there are so many extenuating factors, not least the sector shortage of teachers, which prevent schools from realising such structures, but the days of the English faculty working exclusively outside of the 'History' faculty or 'Science' faculty, for example, is probably limited.

In regards to the proposed History curriculum, teacher-librarians will find themselves in a position where teachers may be approaching them for assistance, although hopefully collaboration, of how to tackle the 'world history' thread of the K – 10 curriculum. At the primary level, the collaboration will be more pronounced where it is possible that teachers may feel the need for stronger collaboration to enable the implementation of the history components. Some schools are already considering this, at the conference at Sovereign Hill I met a classroom teacher and school librarian who had decided to attend together in order to create together.

In the next couple of years schools will need to be more 'inventive' regarding whole school planning and the teacher librarian is going to play an important role in this. Traditionally behind other public sectors –

education needs to look at the collaboration that is occurring all around them in the community, relinquish some of the control that they so desperately grasp onto, and allow amazing things to happen.

*At the time of publication, the Australian Curriculum (K- 10) in the areas of English, Maths, Science and History is due to be released by ACARA in mid-October after it has been accepted by the Ministerial Council of Education. The VCAA has said that if the curriculum is accepted then Victorian Schools can expect implementation to occur for the 2012 school year.*

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