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Information literacy: a life long path

The need to be able to use information effectively has in many cases become more important than the acquiring of factual knowledge itself. The sum total of information increases at such a rate each day that yesterday's best answer may be known to be incorrect today. Much of what many children learn during their school life will be quite obsolete by the time they enter the workforce.

Effective learners are not just those people who are knowledgeable, but rather they are people who are able to find and use information as required. It can be said that effective learners are those that are information literate. Information literacy is synonymous with knowing how to learn. This means that the ability to process and use information effectively is more than a basic tool for the empowerment of school students: it is in fact the basic survival skill for those who wish to be successful members of the 21st century.' (Australian School Library Association, Australian Library and Information Association (2001) *Learning for the future: developing information services in schools* Melbourne: Curriculum Corporation)

The ability for a learner to be information literate and ultimately knowledgeable is the underlying basis for the role of teachers in Australian schools. Teacher librarians are the catalyst, expertise and primary support for learners in enabling and empowering life long learning in this environment.

Information literacy is a larger-than-life concept that includes many other aspects of what it means to be an effective learner. Resource based learning, collaborative learning and knowledge management are just three of the tenets that teacher librarians operate under and that consequently the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) holds as principles for its members. ASLA and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) have collaborated to produce a second edition of *Learning for the future: developing information services in schools*. This collaboration is an indicator of both organisations' ability and path in becoming an information literate community.

Information literacy has been defined in a variety of ways and from a variety of perspectives, but to an educator in a school, the real challenge is: how does it work within the learning environment?

Teacher librarians work with students and teachers to create effective learning environments and consequently effective learners. This co-operation ranges from teaching students how to access, manipulate and present information through to acting as a support for curriculum initiatives and how information literacy could be developed across all areas.

Developing the basic skills for information literacy within learning areas is the easy part. Ensuring that the information and communication technology skills and thinking and learning skills are included and students are able to transfer their learning across subjects is a critical part of the whole process. Current discussion in schools is focused on this integration process. Teacher pre-education in the field of information literacy is lacking, and as a learning community must also be an information literate community, developing teachers' understandings and knowledge of information literacy is mandatory in ensuring that a professional dialogue can take place in the community. I applaud CAUL (Council of Australian University Librarians) for the release of *Information literacy standards* — why haven't we seen this type of document from education faculties within universities?

Teacher librarians bring their knowledge of learning and information literacy together with information and communication technology literacy to empower students. It is a life-long task and one where common understandings and collaboration between professionals — teachers and teacher librarians, is the lynch-pin of success. Ultimately, the education side of the teacher librarian role is one where we look towards making ourselves redundant — if I can paraphrase Martin Luther King, I dream of a world where students and teachers work collaboratively in an information rich environment ... where teacher librarians are free to work within the curriculum as co-learners and teachers! ■

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