

# Invited guest or wedding crasher?: School librarians' involvement in national initiatives

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## Abstract

Nationwide education initiatives are underway in various parts of the world, including a push for national curricula in the U.S. and Australia. In Australia, school librarians have been invited guests to provide input into the integration of digital/information literacy across curriculum areas. Conversely, U.S., school librarians crashed the wedding by actively responding to the Common Core Standards initiative by highlighting areas where information literacy skills, dispositions, responsibilities and assessments are integrated – even though they weren't asked. Other examples of successful and not so successful national school librarian involvement to infuse 21st century skills and implications for professional practice are discussed.

## Introduction

I'm very happy to be joining everyone here at the IASL conference on this my first trip to Australia. I have been an IASL member for over a decade, have published two articles in *School Libraries Worldwide*, and have just recently been appointed co-editor of that prestigious journal with my colleague at Florida State University, Marcia Mardis. I consider IASL to be the most interesting conference in the school library profession. It's such an honor that you would have me present one of the plenary sessions. In this context I would have to say I'm an invited guest, and not a wedding crasher.

Many of you in the audience may have seen the movie, *The Wedding Crashers*. It was released in 2005, starring Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn and was extremely popular. The concept of wedding crashing might not translate to all cultures so let me explain. It's quite simple – wedding crashers come uninvited usually for free food, drink, and, as in this movie, to pick up dates. These characters do it as a hobby and they even have 115 rules of wedding crashing. Here are some I think are pretty funny:

Rule #11: Sensitive is good.

Rule #14: You're a distant relative of a dead cousin.

Rule #18: You love animals and children.

Rule #19: Toast in the native language if you know the native language and have practiced the toast. Do not wing it.

Rule #36: Your favorite movie is "The English Patient."

Rule #40: Dance with old folks and the kids. The girls will think you're "sweet."

Rule #43: At the service, sit in the fifth row. It's close enough to wedding party to seem like you're an invited guest. Never sit in the back. The back row just smells like crashing.

Rule #48: Make sure all the single women at the wedding know you're there because you've just suffered either a terrible breakup or the death of your fiancée.

Rule #49: Always work into the conversation: "Yeah, I have tons of money. But how does one buy happiness?"

Rule #55: If pressed, tell people you're related to Uncle John. Everyone has an Uncle John.

Rule #88: You're from out of town. ALWAYS.

Rule #89: Know something about the place you say you are from, whether it's another US state or another country. Texas is too played-out. For some reason, England, Germany, or even New Hampshire seem to work. Master the accents convincingly, and you've nailed them!

Now this is a lot of fun, and if you haven't seen the movie, I heartily recommend it, but how does all this

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relate to school librarians, and how does it relate to the conference strand – “Delivering excellence through standards?” Wedding crashing is all about not being included and not being included is what often happens to our profession. Governments and national educational councils often develop curricula, standards, and programs and set spending priorities, without inviting school librarian collaborators to the table. Today I’d like to discuss a number of projects around the world, focusing on information literacy, where the school librarians were either invited guests, or wedding crashers, or something in between. At the end I’d like some of you to share what is going on in your country in this regard.

### **National Initiatives**

Farmer and Henri (2008) provide us with examples of information literacy as part of national initiatives:

- Australia Department of Education – Requires postsecondary students attain information literacy through integrated curriculum and practices. This is complimented with the national policy statement on information literacy for all Australians developed by the Australian Library and Information Association.
- Hong Kong government’s strategic plan, “Empowering Learning and Teaching with Information Technology” which provides for information technology (IT) infrastructure and focuses on integrating IT into teaching and learning.
- Botswana government’s, “Long Term Vision 2016” which includes “the desire to produce citizens who are informed and are able to use information effectively.”
- France’s national educational system requires that information literacy be embedded in secondary and higher education curricula.
- Norway’s national curriculum includes as a basic skill “the ability to use information and communication technology” and there is a national plan, “Make Room for Reading” which focuses on reading ability and appreciation.

In today’s talk, I am going to focus on four of these – Australia, Norway, Hong Kong, and the United States, because they are central to our theme. School librarians have various levels of involvement in the national initiatives in each of these countries.

#### *Hong Kong*

When the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum was being developed in Hong Kong in 2007, Stephen Y. W. Yip (2007), Chief Curriculum Development Officer in charge of Life-wide Learning and Library released a statement, “The Role of a Teacher-librarian in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum” that aligned the roles of teacher-librarians to the focus of the Curriculum Reform, “Learning to learn.” What could be more natural? Yip noted there are two elements essential to the acquisition of the skill of “learning to learn” by students: one is “the development of reading habit” and the other is “the use of information skills.” These two elements are related to the major duties of a teacher-librarian.

*Promoting Extensive Reading to Support Teaching and Learning of Various Subjects* - With years of professional training, a teacher-librarian has become more than a library manager in the sense that he/she also plays the important role of a coordinator to promote “extensive reading” in school, a ‘knowledge’ manager, an information specialist and a curriculum facilitator. In fact, in addition to providing quality reading culture and learning resources, a teacher-librarian also shoulders the important task of equipping students to acquire and use information skills. Building on such existing strengths, the role of a teacher-librarian will become more important in the NSS Curriculum Reform.

*Developing Information Skills to Create a “Learning to Learn” Culture* - strengthen students’ ability of “learning to learn”, which allows them to become more involved in self-directed learning. It also helps students to develop independent thinking as well as critical thinking skills and information literacy (Yip, 2007).

The teacher-librarian who plays a significant role to support learning and teaching in the NSS will be

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counted as a regular post in the normal establishment. It is worth reiterating that teacher-librarians, as ‘information specialists’ should work closely with subject teachers to coordinate curriculum-related resources and to help develop information literacy among students. Schools should make appropriate arrangements for the teacher-librarian to continue to focus on these tasks of library services to promote quality student learning in accordance with the Code of Aids as well as the actual situation and needs of the schools. The roles of teacher-librarians in the NSS were elaborated in the “Realising the Vision of 334” article of 9 December 2007, and the message was delivered through seminars for principals and teacher-librarians (Secretary for Education, 2009). They also used the opportunity to state that Deploying Resources Effectively to Focus on Library Service means that teacher-librarians remain librarians and not be placed in classrooms.

NSS was only implemented in this recent 2009-2010 school year, and it will be interesting to note the progress made by school librarians in Hong Kong.

### *United States*

Since President Obama took office in 2009, one of his reforms has been to push forward with a national curriculum. The Obama administration hopes that states will quickly adopt the new standards, called the Common Core Standards, in place of the hodgepodge of current state benchmarks, which vary so significantly that it is impossible to compare test scores from different states. The United States is one of the few developed countries that lack national standards for its public schools (Dillon, 2010). Although the standards are voluntary, it is expected that most states will adopt them by August 2, 2010 because they will stand a higher chance at a piece of \$4 billion in federal grant money.

Historically, educators have vigorously resisted any type of nationalisation of education but Obama’s plan, “Race to the Top,” has even garnered the support of the most powerful teachers’ union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (Weingarten, 2009). AFT now concedes that countries that outperform the United States on international assessments all have national standards and a core curriculum. Currently in the U.S., students whose families move from New York to Georgia or California, for example, often have difficulty adjusting to new schools because classroom work is organised around different standards. The problem has become worse, since many states have weakened standards in recent years to make it easier for schools to avoid sanctions under the federal No Child Left Behind law. AFT President, Randi Weingarten (2009), asserts, “Should fate, as determined by a student’s ZIP code, dictate how much algebra he or she is taught? Such a system isn’t practical in today’s highly mobile society; and it’s just not right” (p. 93).

Presently, the new Common Core Standards cover only language arts and math with science to come next. The standards, developed by a committees and further reviewed by a validation committee. Over 10,000 individuals or groups subsequently provided feedback (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). There was no one from the school library community invited to be on the panel who developed the standards. The steps taken by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2010) to remain involved and relevant in the transition to the Common Core Standards include:

- Issuing formal feedback and encouraging individual AASL members to provide public comment during that open period.
- Issuing a position statement.
- Appointing a task force that has been charged with preparing a crosswalk from the *AASL National Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* to the Common Core Standards.

AASL has taken a similar tactic with the National Educational Technology Plan, and the Federal Four-Point Plan for Reform (Dow, 2010). In each of these instances, the plan of attack has been similar:

- Involving the AASL Legislation Committee, ALA Washington Office, and Executive Director, Julie Walker, to provide input to legislators that includes local stories as well as research-based

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statements.

- During public comment stage recommending that language be added to include school librarians and/or school library media programs.
- Highlighting key areas where school library programs are already supporting the initiative or are poised to ensure positive outcomes.

### *Australia*

It's quite appropriate that our Australian hosts have an interest in this topic. As I compose this paper, hearings are going on throughout the country on "School libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools." How wonderful is that? We would all hope that our government officials would have this interest to sit and listen about the issues concerning school libraries and teacher-librarians. Australian teacher-librarians have certainly been invited to the table. The Standing Committee on Education and Training (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010a) has been given the charge to focus on:

- the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;
- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;
- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;
- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and
- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

While at the table at the first hearing in Sydney, Karen Bonanno, representing the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) raised the concept that governments commit to fund the development of a digital literacy learning continuum as a support document for the Australian National Curriculum and the development and delivery of a parent program on digital literacy and cyber safety to help parents to support their child's learning (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010b). This is currently lacking. For example, mention of school libraries, and teacher-librarians is absent from Australia's 342-page document, *National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy*, where there are natural connections.

In Australia, almost 400 public comments responded to the government's inquiry on school libraries and school librarians and ASLA's (2010) concerns were further explicated in a written submission. Similar themes, phrases, and vocabulary, are evidenced in attempts to integrate school libraries in national initiatives in both Australia and the United States. These include:

- school librarians have the current and future potential; library programs/school librarians currently already doing this
- building-level leadership for facilitation
- equitable opportunities for all students
- social responsibility and ethical behavior
- reduces barriers
- aligns with, mapped to, consistent with
- expands upon
- higher-order skills, creativity
- models best practices
- school librarians hold a unique position
- all levels and all content areas, across the curriculum
- collaboration
- effective use of resources by the entire school community
- inquiry-based approach

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- gateway guide
- resources are required to support the initiative
- differentiated instruction
- whole-school approach

### *Norway*

In the 2006/2007 school year a new national curriculum was implemented in Norway called Knowledge Promotion (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 2006). Reforms have meant that information and communications technologies (ICT) is increasingly becoming a part of teaching and learning and professional development is provided through a national program consisting of modules (both technical and educational), locally adapted training programs, and collaborative efforts with schools (Erstad & Quale, 2009). The new curriculum defines “the ability to use digital tools” as a basic skill – as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Since 1996, several national initiatives have been concerned with implementing technology in Norwegian Schools. The phase from 2004-2008 called The Program for Digital Literacy had an emphasis on ICT as a natural part of learning activities in schools. The plan mentions four main areas that need to be addressed in order to accomplish “digital literacy for all” which are infrastructure, development of competencies for teachers, digital resources, curricula and learning practices, and research and development.

This national curriculum and the national program, Make Room for Reading! have been tools for empowering school libraries at the national level (Rafste et al., 2006). Similar to other national initiatives, school libraries are not specifically mentioned but they can be crucial to the areas of students’ development of learning strategies, critical thinking, addressing learning styles and students’ ability to express themselves, read, and use information and communication technology (Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education, and Research, 2005).

### **National Policy as Empowerment**

Rafste et al. (2006) raises the concept of national policy as a method to empower school librarians. They define empowerment as “a symmetric dialogue between bureaucratic and professional organizations on the one hand, and the school library on the other; a dialogue where the school library also has a say in decision-making and is proactive. The concept of a power base, which consists of the legal and legitimacy base, is introduced as a helpful concept. The former is the formal framework of the school library. The latter is the personal and professional confidence in, and support for, school libraries as an educational instrument” (p. 57).

There are several qualifiers that might pertain to the legal base of school libraries or school librarians. The existence of a school library within a school may be mandated by statute. So may the provision of a school librarian and whether or not a degree and/or certification is required for that school librarian. As we have been talking about today, the curriculum, particularly if it is a national curriculum, may be mandated.

First, the definition of legitimate in this context means, “being exactly as purposed: neither spurious nor false ; conforming to recognized principles or accepted rules and standards” (Merriam Webster, 2010). It is personal and professional confidence in, and support for, school libraries as an educational instrument (Rafste, et. al, 2006). What contributes to the legitimacy of school library media programs? In the most simple of terms, I posit that in order to be legitimate school libraries need to contribute to student learning and also to student joy. School librarians have to be highly skilled. There is a solid base of research studies demonstrating that school libraries contribute to student achievement (School Libraries Work, 2008). Todd and Kuhlthau’s Ohio study (2004) found that an overwhelming 99.44% of the sample (13,050 students) indicated that the school library and its services, including roles of school librarians, have helped them in some way, regardless of how much, with their learning. That was very good news.

Now fast-forward about eight years to when some of those students are in college. A very recent study, "Lessons Learned: How College Students Seek Information in the Digital Age" (Head & Eisenberg, 2009) has some troubling findings.

- College students think of information seeking as a rote process and tend to use the same small set of information resources no matter what question they have:
- The primary sources they use for course work are course readings and Google.
- They rely on professors to be "research coaches" for identifying additional sources.
- They use Google and Wikipedia for research about everyday life topics.
- They tend not to use library services that require interacting with librarians.
- And although they begin the research process engaged and curious, they become frustrated and overwhelmed as it progresses.

What about student joy? Is the school library somewhere where students *want* to go? Do their faces light up when you mention visiting the school library? Do they go there on their free time? Do they go home and tell their parents about the resources they use, what they learned, and the fun they have?

What is the vision people have of a school library? What is their impression? I really think this is important. I think it's so important that I made vision the theme of my presidency of AASL. My goal is to provide positive images of school libraries to the public – school libraries where students are actively engaged in learning, reading, using technology and working together. There are smiles on their faces and a bounce in their steps.

Cassandra Barnett, the past-president of AASL, maintains that in order to be legitimate we have to do what we say we can do. She proclaimed to AASL members before she left office this summer,

A school library that gives students access to a wide variety of resources 24/7 and a school librarian that works closely with teachers to design and deliver meaningful, relevant learning experiences is absolutely essential to preparing students for college and the workforce. However, just saying it isn't enough. Now you have to PROVE it. How do we prove it? Well, first of all, you REALLY need to give students access to a wide variety of resources 24/7. That means a collection that meets the school's curriculum and recreational needs, a vital web presence that gives your students access to resources 24/7, and an ability to provide materials not housed in your physical library. Second, you REALLY need to collaborate with teachers. Don't wait for them to come to you; go to them. Work from their curriculum needs but integrate our standards. Design effective learning experiences, co-teach with the classroom teacher, ASSESS student learning and share your successes (Barnett, 2010).

Can you have a legal base without a legitimacy base? Can you have a legitimacy base without a legal base? There are several examples that come to mind – mostly dealing with moral issues. Some people think the Iraq war is legal but not legitimate. There are others that believe that marijuana use is legitimate but not legal. Most young people think that downloading music is legitimate but know it's not legal. Many believe gay marriage is legitimate but not legal. Charging very high interest rates and adding on questionable fees on credit card bills is legal but not legitimate. A very personal example in the school library world happened to me when I worked in Pennsylvania that had a statute to employ a certified school librarian at each secondary school in the district and one at the elementary level. Because there were three elementary schools, I had to travel between all three. I know of other instances where the elementary school librarian traveled to fifteen schools! In some states there are statutes for school library media *programs* and administrators skirt that issue by having a room of books, but not a school librarian. It's legal but not legitimate. In Florida where I am now, there is not a legal statute for school libraries or school librarians, but they are strong. This strength comes from the legitimate services they offer, particularly their leadership in

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technology. It also comes from the professional association in Florida, FAME – the Florida Association for Media in Education.

On a national scale, professional associations, and their related standards and guidelines, convey legitimacy of the field. And real strength, empowerment, comes when school library programs are both legal and legitimate. One model (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995) identifies four task assessments as a basis for worker empowerment and is relevant to this discussion. These four dimensions of empowerment are competence, meaning, self-determination (choice), and impact. *Competence* is the degree to which a person can perform task activities skillfully when he or she tries. This dimension reflects a mastery of behavior. *Meaning* is the value of the task goal or purpose, judged in relation to the individual's own ideals or standards. It is the fit between the needs of one's work role and one's beliefs, values, and behaviors. *Self-determination* (choice): To be self-determining means to experience a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one's own actions. This dimension reflects a choice of behavior. *Impact* represents the extent to which one can causally influence a desired environmental outcome. This dimension reflects a control over ends and outcomes.

We might think about how as a profession we feel empowered and how we might use this empowerment to involve our profession in national initiatives. There have been some tried and true methods that have worked. Gerry Spence is a famous U.S. attorney who has never lost a case. He maintains that storytelling makes ideas stick and one should establish clean story lines and leave out needless details, places, dates, and history. Action is critical to a good story and you should focus on the people, not on the problem (Spence, 2005). Use phrases like “for instance,” “for example,” and “illustrated by,” to personalise what you are saying. In the U.S. we provide heart-rending stories of how school libraries are making a difference in the lives of a child in their congressional district to members of Congress.

People have different learning styles – some are visual or auditory learners. Songs and videos have become popular in getting the message across on iTunes, and YouTube. I have a theme song, “Check it Out” to advocate for school libraries. Does your school library have a Facebook page? Are you connecting? Are we doing all we can?

### **Recent International Endeavors**

In closing, I'd like to mention a few other things that are happening around the world, a few other weddings we might crash if you will.

In Brazil this past May, a law was passed that requires all public and private school systems in the country will have libraries and to make progressive efforts towards the universalisation of school libraries, in accordance with this Law, to take effect no later than ten years, to respect the profession of librarian.

Information and Communication Technologies for Education (2010), produced PriceWaterhouseCoopers India, has found that while it's important for school children to have access to computer labs, it's just as vital to integrate ICTs into the broader curriculum. surveys and compares eight countries in South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The soon to be published *Survey of ICTs for Education in India and South Asia*, supported by the Finnish Trust Fund, says: “Laboratories per se might succeed or fail – the distinguishing factor is not the physical space of the laboratory, but what is taught in these labs and how it is being taught.” The report will show that to be effective, school computer labs need to be used for more than an hour or so a week teaching word-processing and basic computer skills. The most successful schools use ICTs to teach other subjects, making the lab a space for learning across the curriculum. This means paying much more attention to curriculum and content development, capacity building with teachers and others, and creative approaches to better

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maintain hardware and software.

Are school librarians invited guests or wedding crashers in your country? I thank you for your time today and welcome you to share stories or ask questions.

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