



**Submission to the Education and Science Select Committee on the:
Inquiry into 21st century learning environments and digital literacy**

1 Preamble

1.1 Who we are

The School Library Association of New Zealand Te Puna Whare Matauranga a Kura (SLANZA) aims to strengthen and promote the role of school libraries, to enable all school communities to become information literate.

SLANZA membership is made up of school and public library staff, National Library staff, teachers, principals, publishers, book-sellers, and library-related solution providers.

SLANZA's purpose is to:

- provide a national voice for school library teams - School Librarians and Library Assistants, Teacher Librarians, Teachers with Library Responsibility and school staff involved in managing school libraries;
- advocate for the critical role of school libraries in reading, teaching, and learning; and to provide support and networks for school library staff;
- improve the professional standing, working conditions and qualifications for all staff involved with school libraries;
- support professional development through conferences, network meetings, and regular newsletters;
- develop links with associated national and international professional organisations.

1.2 Why we are presenting this submission

School libraries, staffed with qualified librarians and/or teacher librarians will need to be an essential feature of 21st century learning environments. The complexity of the curriculum for the 21st century requires specialist support in the teaching of information, critical, and digital literacies. To meet the requirements of the NZ Curriculum students require access to high quality literature and information

resources, and high quality teaching to become discerning readers and thinkers. For a significant number of students in New Zealand, the school library will continue to be the main resource available to them. This includes the information and writing “born on the web” that will never be presented in hard copy.

“As librarians, we may know that our library can offer more in-depth and authoritative information than a simple Google search, but our users may not. A truly successful 2.0 library will combine everyday social media and Web 2.0 tools with library services that enhance critical thinking and evaluation skills. For one particular set of our users this guidance will be essential in shaping how they learn, create, evaluate, and use information.”

In addition the school library is most likely to be the central facility in a school to develop *coherence* (a principle of the NZ Curriculum) across learning areas. It requires schools to rethink how teachers make links across learning areas to support students in recognizing links and synthesizing information to extend their understandings.

The Education Review Office reports¹ that coherence was evident in only 39% of schools reviewed where the curriculum principles in general were most evident (this group made up 70% of all schools) and was ranked 5th in importance of the seven principles in those schools. A further 30% of all schools reviewed had minimal evidence of the principles in practice.

The school librarian or teacher librarian can act as the information resource who can best guide teachers in selecting the appropriate material for learning in the 21st century, both online and hard copy.

Many principals are starting to question the value of school libraries. Some educators believe school libraries are nothing more than ‘sinkholes’ of resourcing. Some schools are beginning to use their library spaces for other purposes. In New Zealand we would have to say that both the primary and secondary school library is

¹ Education Review Office, *Directions for Learning: The New Zealand Curriculum Principles, and Teaching as Inquiry* (May 2011),

under threat, and that unequal provision resourcing staffing is inadequate across all sectors. We believe that instead it should be the hub of curriculum development for all schools.

2 Recommendations

- That the select committee recognize that the effective teaching of digital literacy requires face-to-face teaching to provide a framework for using ICTs tools and the internet
- That the select committee recognise that while we need to be thinking about new purpose built schools and learning environments, for the early part of the 21st century we will be working in traditional school buildings. We need a shift in pedagogy to create effective and flexible learning environments within them, rather than renovations
- Having a school library should be a requirement of all primary and secondary schools
- That the government should commit to the target of having a teacher librarian and/or a qualified librarian in every primary and secondary school
- That teacher education courses include qualifications for teacher librarians
- That principals and other senior leaders undergo professional development in how to most effectively use the school library and the specialist positions of teacher librarian and librarian
- That the Ministry of Education establish a business unit to support school boards on ICTs issues

3 Definitions of key concepts

3.1 Digital literacy

The definition of 'digital literacy' has evolved over the past 10-15 years drawing from understandings around the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), and information literacy. For the purposes of this submission we have chosen to use the definition from the Glasgow University-led "DigEuLit" project, which was funded by the digital literacy strand of the European Commission's eLearning Programme:

Digital Literacy is the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyse and synthesise digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process².

3.2 **Learning/knowledge**

The traditional understanding of learning is that it is about the acquiring of knowledge. Knowledge is a noun and this definition implies a passive approach. The thinking about learning and knowledge is changing. As Gilbert³ suggests, the shift in thinking required for the 21st century is that knowledge should be seen “as action or ‘doing’”. Knowledge is a verb and the emphasis is shifted to knowing as a process and not a thing. It is about the skills involved in active learning that can equip students to move beyond the acquisition of a particular piece of knowledge.

3.3 **Independent learning.**

We are beginning to see developments in online learning, particularly in the tertiary sector, which involve fewer opportunities for face-to-face learning experiences. Across the education sector students are provided with more opportunities to explore the web independently to complete learning tasks. To be independent is to be able to function without the support of others. We know that students demonstrate high levels of competence in operating within web-based complex social networks. However, it is not clear the extent to which students are also careful and discerning users of the internet and whether even that necessarily equates to effective “independent and online learning”.

The focus for this submission is that we are not discussing the availability of technologies but the quality of education that will need to be provided for the 21st century.

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http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/docs/digital_literacy/digital_literacy_review.pdf

³ Gilbert, J. (2005) *Catching the Knowledge Wave: the Knowledge Society and the Future of Education*.

4 Options for the best facilities that support teaching and learning

While it is useful to think about the best facilities that support teaching and learning in the 21st century, for most schools it is the current school learning environments that will shape that learning, not an idealised model. There is clearly a significant cost to the state in shifting to purpose built schools with flexible learning spaces so there will not be any quick change. We need to ask how the existing school structures can be used effectively to promote the necessary changes in pedagogy, not just new schools, and what would that cost.

The state would need to ensure that all schools are appropriately resourced in high quality literature and information texts along with up-to-date ICTs for students to access the internet quickly and efficiently. This is already well-established in Ministry of Education (MoE) planning and property guidelines. However it is not the access to the technologies alone that will make the difference for 21st century learning.

A traditional school environment can meet the needs of 21st century learning if it has a library that is staffed by librarians and/or a teacher librarian who understands the needs of 21st century learners and educators. The requirement for high quality face-to-face teaching is needed more now than it ever was. Librarians are the experts in determining the right resource for students' needs, at the right time, to support their learning and achievement.

The cost to the state would include the establishment of professional training programmes to upskill teacher/leaders who are readers, and skilled practitioners in literacy teaching, to become teacher librarians. It is also necessary to improve the opportunities within staffing allocation to release this person to work in flexible teaching spaces with teachers and students. This person would also mentor teachers in the process of shifting pedagogy to enable students to develop the high level thinking skills, collaborative work, active participation and contribution required for the 21st century.

Thirty years ago it was known that we would require teacher/librarians to teach students for the information age. The 4th Labour government of the 1980s

committed to having a teacher/librarian in every school because they recognised the contribution that this position can make in developing skills and seeking out and assessing information among both students and teachers. However after a relatively short period of time the training programmes were disestablished as they were considered too expensive.

We cannot afford to allow this specialist training to be ignored again. Improved access to ICTs will simply lead to improved access to bad information without leadership and guidance from teachers and/or school librarians.

A recent report (2011) from the British think-tank Demos, found that “around one in four 12-15 year olds make no checks at all when visiting a new website, and less than one in ten ask who made the site and why.” They also found that decisions about information quality were “based on site design, rather than more accurate checks...” and that only “one third of 9-19 year olds have been taught how to judge the reliability of online information”⁴.

While the report is about students in the United Kingdom, similar conclusions could probably be drawn here. It is not just about providing flexible buildings and improved access to ICTs – it is more important to have skilled educationalists in the literature, information and ‘literacy across the curriculum’ hub that is the school library. It is also important that the principals and their senior leaders understand how to best utilise this resource in improving student outcomes. Professional development is required.

5 Equity and the Technological infrastructure

Schools currently fund their technological infrastructure from their operations grants and /or fundraising. There is an issue of equity in New Zealand schools as schools are funded on pupil numbers as well as decile rating. Small schools (less than 150 students) are disadvantaged in the amount of government funding they receive

⁴ Jamie Bartlett & Carl Miller *Truth, lies and the internet: a report into young people’s digital fluency* , September, 2011

[http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Truth - web.pdf?1317312220](http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Truth_-_web.pdf?1317312220)

and their capacity to fundraise large amounts of money. Small schools in low decile areas are particularly disadvantaged as the capacity to extract further funds from their community is limited. Often in these communities families are also unable to support their children's eLearning because of the lack of resources at home. It is even more important that the school and its library, containing up to date ICTS and specialist teaching, is the hub of that local community, providing equitable access for all.

The government will need to address these issues of equity. Of particular concern is the lack of advice on how to upgrade and maintain ICTS to be current. The MOE will need a section that provides advice and guidance to schools on their resourcing in this area, in the same way that school property and finances are currently monitored by local MoE offices. If a school's ICTs systems are no longer meeting the needs of its staff and students there is little support for the principal and board about the various options that are available (such as cloud technology, Bring Your Own Device, Google Apps and Docs) before spending significant amounts of money.

6 The impact of increased digital literacy on Learning

Despite the large amount of money schools spend on ICTs we are not aware of any evidence that the use of ICTs in school, access to the internet and web 2 tools, has a direct impact on improved learning outcomes for students particularly in literacy and maths. While there is anecdotal evidence that students are more motivated when using these tools, particularly when teachers are planning and teaching to diverse needs and providing students with greater opportunities for ownership of their learning, the government needs to consider how they will evaluate the impact of increased use of technology on learning. Currently guidance in this area relates to monitoring the use of the tools, not whether student achievement has been lifted.

We need to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of digital literacy on learning, and this is particularly important for those schools that have high numbers of students who may not be achieving in literacy and numeracy. ICTs are a tool for learning, not the end in itself.

7 Impact of ultrafast broadband (UBF) on teaching

UBF will be important in improving teaching and learning insofar as it will meet the increasing expectations of students of what should be available, and the ubiquity of access. UBF, just like ICTs as a whole, is just a tool that will not bring advantages in itself unless it is supported by effective teaching. We would reiterate that this is best led out of the school library. UBF will facilitate school libraries, public libraries and the National Library to link together to provide resources and services as part of Digital New Zealand and the Network for Learning. However this will not occur in schools that have substandard access to quality school libraries and library staff, or inadequate infrastructure.

SLANZA recognizes the collaborative potential of school library staff working with the National Library of New Zealand and public libraries to support 21st century learning environments and digital literacy, and wants every school in New Zealand to have access to the benefits this would bring. For this vision to become a reality, there needs to be a consistent, equitable programme across all sectors of education, involving all who contribute to student learning and achievement in all areas, especially those who are the experts in information, critical and digital literacies – school library staff.