
Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services in Australian Schools

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The publication of Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services in Australian Schools (1993) was the culmination of a broad consultative process. It resulted in a contemporary standards document that could be used to monitor the effectiveness of school library resource centers in a range of educational settings across Australia. Its five domains, Learners and Learning, Teachers and Teaching, Providing Access to Information, Resourcing the Curriculum, and Developing the Physical Environment provide a framework for use at a national, systemic, and local level to develop and monitor school library information services.

Introduction

The last decade has seen an increased emphasis on school effectiveness with a corresponding growth in the literature devoted to the area. Consequently, educators have learned a great deal about what makes an effective school, classroom, and library. This knowledge has undoubtedly assisted with informed decision-making. The sheer range and quantity of the information available, however, often make it difficult for educators to understand and implement what they know about school improvement. The release of *Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services in Australian Schools* (1993) was welcomed enthusiastically as it provided a much needed framework to facilitate continuous improvement in Australian school libraries. *Learning for the Future* reflects the changes that have occurred in Australian education including the national focus on learning outcomes, the movement to collaborative decision-making, and the emphasis on improved teaching and learning as the focus of school activities.

Australian school libraries have developed in different ways, largely because education is state-funded, with the federal government funding programs of national significance. Generally, all Australian secondary school libraries are staffed with qualified teacher-librarians as are many primary

schools. However, school administrators, classroom teachers, and volunteers also assume responsibility for the library in many instances. *Learning for the Future* was developed to satisfy the diversity of systems, both government and nongovernment, and to serve individual school needs.

The Development of Australian Standards Documents

Australian standards documents have reflected the overall educational environment in which they are produced. Prior to the 1970s the educational value of school libraries was recognized; however, most school libraries were badly equipped, the collections were poorly managed, and they often tended to be distributed throughout classroom collections. Some schools employed librarians, but generally school libraries were staffed by volunteers with limited funds being made available by parent groups for the purchase of resources.

The first national standards document for Australian school libraries, *Books and Beyond* (1979), was produced at a time when the federal government began to provide substantial funds for the establishment of school libraries and when the various state governments also became committed to providing well-equipped school libraries. This document established comprehensive quantitative standards for collections, staffing, library buildings, and furniture. It was essentially a recipe approach that provided all the best ingredients to achieve an effective library. The provision of funds for school libraries and the development of this document took place in an educational context characterized by a strong centralist approach by governments. The document provided an opportunity for physical facilities, collections, and staffing to be standardized across Australia.

By the 1990s it was clear that the recipe had provided for the physical requirements, but there was increased awareness by the educational community of the contribution of the school library to the achievement of enhanced learning outcomes. Further, the quantitative standards were no longer appropriate, and educational decision-making had devolved from the center to the school level. The school community was playing a significant role in decision-making at the local level. Schools were adopting a range of decision-making structures and priorities that best suited the needs of their own school community.

Into the Twenty First Century: Library and Information Services in Schools (Kirk, Poston-Anderson, & Yerbury, 1990) was published to address these changing needs. Although it provided an overview of the function of the school library resource center, it did not sufficiently focus on devolved decision-making and outcomes-based education.

The Australian School Library Association (ASLA) recognized the need to develop a national document that would provide guidelines and indicators for use by education authorities and that also could be used at the individual

school level. To create such a document required the involvement of the two peak professional bodies, ASLA and the Australian Library and Information Association, School Library Section (ALIA). A committee, which represented all stakeholders and included members from all Australian states, all education sectors and systems, was established to supervise the development of the document. Gwen Gawith devised its conceptual framework, and her work was further developed by the committee. The drafts of the document were considered in widespread consultation across Australia over a period of 18 months. In addition to the consultative process, the Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS) provided funds for a survey of 1,000 Australian schools to establish contemporary benchmarks for quantitative standards (*A Select Survey of School Library Resource Centers in Australia*, 1992).

The Structure of *Learning for the Future*

Learning for the Future is strongly focused on outcomes-based education. It takes as its starting point the need to ensure the effective delivery of learning outcomes at the school level through a collaborative process. Its purpose is to

- set a context for the development of library and information services in Australian schools;
- provide a springboard for discussion within schools and systems;
- present benchmarks against which schools can evaluate current provisions for developing information literacy;
- provide opportunity to develop more specific quantitative standards at the school level;
- provide opportunity to plan programs to develop information literacy and library and information services responsive to the school's needs and resources. (p. 5)

Learning for the Future provides benchmarks in five interrelated domains that can assist the examination and development of school library information services. The first two domains are clearly connected to the use of resources by students and teachers:

- The development of *resource-based library and classroom programs* to support student acquisition of the skills necessary for gaining access to information, acquiring knowledge, and understandings and using resources for personal growth and fulfillment;
- The availability of a *curriculum information service* to assist teachers with curriculum development and program planning by providing access to information internally and through external databases.

Those that follow reflect the need to develop efficient management practices to ensure that adequate resources are available, access to these resources is facilitated from both within and outside the library, and appropriate physical space is provided for users within the library.

- Access by students and staff to a *quality collection of information resources* that have been selected to support the curriculum priorities of the school and the interest and achievement level of students;
- The efficient management of *library resource center systems* according to recognized library procedures with the resources catalogued to a high and uniform standard;
- The maintenance of a *library resource center environment* that is functional, congenial, and supports use on a needs basis for individuals and groups using a variety of media and information technologies (*Learning for the Future*, 1993; Jeffery, 1994; Scott & Tierney, 1994).

The final section of the document relates to the area of staffing and includes details related to adequate professional and support staffing for school libraries.

The document is constructed so that the information in each domain can be used independently or jointly depending on the needs of the school

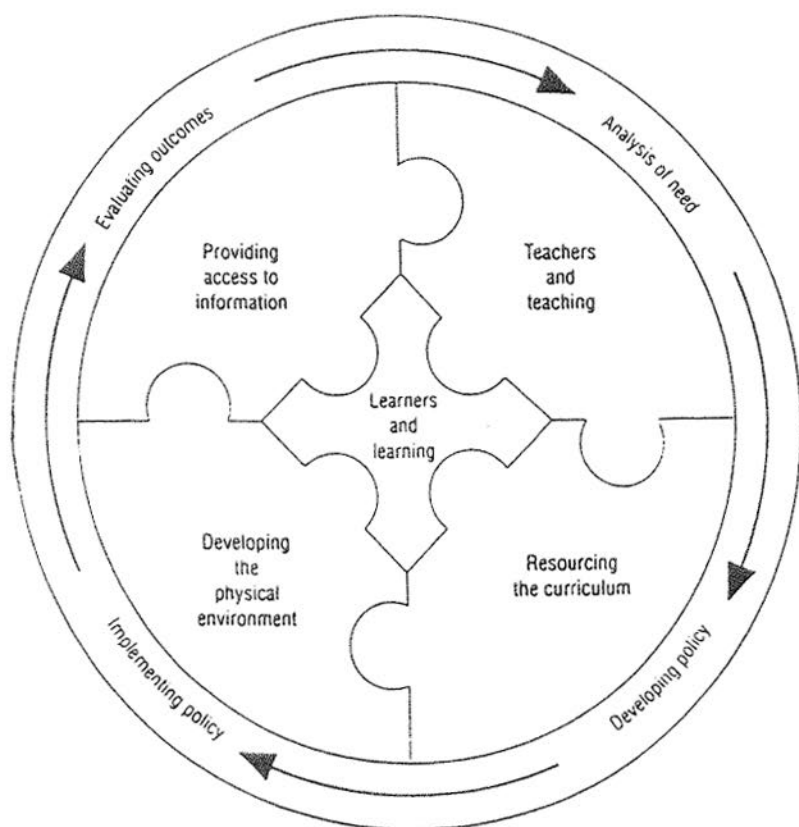


Figure 1. Relationship of five domains and process frameworks in which they are discussed (*Learning for the Future*, 1993, p. 6).

community. The centrality of the needs of learners to all domains is illustrated in Figure 1.

Each domain consists of a *process framework*, which is also illustrated in Figure 1. This framework is designed "to assist school decision-making groups to establish policies and priorities and to allocate resources" (*Learning for the Future*, 1993, p. 7).

- The introduction to each domain provides a definitive statement of outcomes;
 - Analyzing need refers to the ongoing analysis of need. Specific aspects to be considered are suggested for each domain;
 - The development of policy provides the framework for future action in each of the domains and these are developed as part of a whole school strategy for school improvement;
 - Implementing policy refers to the development of strategies to carry out the policy;
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- ✎ Students experience learning programs which integrate the acquisition of knowledge, understandings and information skills and which are developed cooperatively by teachers and teacher librarians.
 - ✎ Time for cooperative planning of resource-based programs is allocated on a regular basis in the timetable for teacher librarians and teachers.
 - ✎ Learning programs provide for:
 - varying learning styles
 - different levels of student achievement
 - learners with special needs
 - ✎ Learners have regular and systematic exposure to resource-based inquiry learning.
 - ✎ In learning programs, progress is monitored at specified stages in the process to facilitate self-assessment and student understanding of the process.
 - ✎ Student competency in the information process is an integral part of student assessment across all learning areas.
 - ✎ Students have opportunities to work with teacher librarians as individuals, in small and class groups at the point of learning need.
 - ✎ All students have equal opportunities for access to staff assistance and use of the facilities and services of the library resource centre.

Figure 2. Selected guidelines and indicators from *Learners and Learning* (*Learning for the Future*, 1993, p. 13).

- Evaluating outcomes refers to the extent to which the implementation has contributed to the achievement of student learning outcomes and the extent to which planned strategies have been effective;
- The Guidelines and Indicators provide specific details that can be used by schools to develop benchmarks for planning and against which performance can be measured. They can be regarded as indicators of quality.

The Guidelines and Indicators are qualitative and quantitative. For example, those related to the Learners and Learning Domain are qualitative (Figure 2) whereas those for Resourcing the Curriculum (Figure 3) include quantitative and qualitative guidelines. Where quantitative guidelines are provided they are supported by information regarding factors that may vary the interpretation of the data.

The school community can evaluate the current performance of the school library, establish appropriate performance indicators, and monitor the school library's achievement of these indicators using the process framework. The important element in the process framework is that it provides opportunities for continuous improvement.

Learning for the Future: Educational Applications

Learning for the Future is being used widely in a variety of Australian educational contexts. The document is sufficiently specific to provide the level of guidance required to deal with current issues, but flexible enough to accommodate the range of school library situations that exist in Australia. It provides a framework for discussion and hence contributes to the development of common understandings among all educators.

- ☞ The composition of the library resource centre collection is based on student needs and school priorities.
- ☞ A collection development policy which has been developed as part of the school plan guides the ongoing process of analysis, selection and evaluation and budget planning.
- ☞ Curriculum and students' needs are closely monitored to ensure that:
 - there are adequate resources at appropriate levels for all resource-based units and to meet personal and recreational needs;
 - new curriculum and interest areas are resourced;
 - new ways of teaching and learning are reflected in new information technologies and resources.

Figure 3. Selected guidelines and indicators from *Resourcing the Curriculum* (*Learning for the Future*, 1993, pp. 21-23).

Table 1. Size of foundation collection

| Enrolment (note 1) | Collection size | Items per student (note 2) |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 100 | 3,450 | 34 |
| 150 | 4,719 | 31 |
| 200 | 5,861 | 29 |
| 250 | 6,909 | 27 |
| 300 | 7,880 | 26 |
| 350 | 8,790 | 25 |
| 400 | 9,646 | 24 |
| 450 | 10,454 | 23 |
| 500 | 11,221 | 22 |
| 600 | 12,646 | 21 |
| 700 | 13,944 | 20 |
| 800 | 15,137 | 19 |
| 900 | 16,235 | 18 |
| 1000 | 17,250 | 17 |
| 1100 | 18,189 | 16 |
| 1200 | 19,061 | 16 |
| 1300 | 19,869 | 15 |
| 1400 | 20,620 | 15 |
| 1500 | 21,318 | 14 |
| 1600 | 21,964 | 14 |
| 1700 | 22,567 | 13 |
| 1800 | 23,115 | 13 |
| 1900 | 23,639 | 12 |
| 2000 | 24,114 | 12 |

Notes

- 1 Enrolment figures refer to actual numbers of students enrolled, except in schools with senior school enrolment where actual senior school enrolment is doubled and added to the number of students enrolled in the junior school.
- 2 Number of items per student indicates the number of items per student at the collection size.
- 3 For schools with enrolments of less than 100, the collection is calculated on 20 items per student, but no school should have a stock of less than a 1000.
- 4 The figures incorporate both book and non-book items.

Figure 3 (continued).

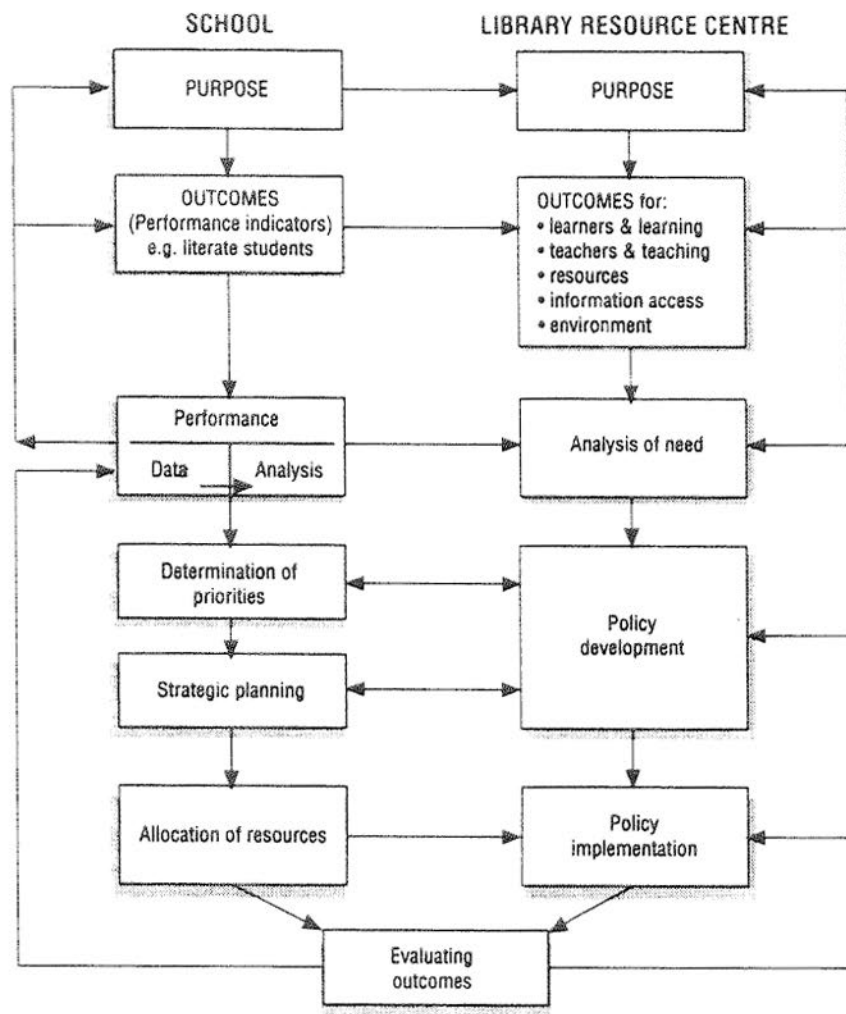


Figure 4. The library resource center and school development planning: An integrated planning structure (*Learning for the Future*, 1993, p. 9).

The flexibility of the document is reflected in its use across the various levels of education. At the national level, *Learning for the Future* has been used for the development of inservice programs for teacher librarians, school administrators, and teaching staff. Support material has been developed through the federally funded National Professional Development Programme (NPDP) to assist with inservicing programs. *Learning for the*

Future has also been used by consultants to develop survey instruments for use in reviewing school library performance and by the higher education sector as a text and as a guide for research. At a system level, the quantitative guidelines have been used as a basis for the construction of new school libraries, to guide staffing decisions, and to inform policy making. At the individual school level, *Learning for the Future*, with its focus on continuous improvement and learning outcomes, is being used extensively to assist with school development planning, reviewing, and monitoring school library performance, policy and report writing, and the development of management and operational guidelines. The planning and implementation of teaching and learning programs has been influenced by the document in all education sectors. A major strength of the document that has contributed to its wide use is the ability to focus on a specific domain or all domains depending on the situational needs. The relevance and the user friendly nature of *Learning for the Future* (1993) augurs well for its continued use in a range of Australian educational settings.

Conclusion

Education systems are increasingly under pressure to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. As a consequence of demands for greater accountability, the education system and its various sectors look to standards and guidelines as a basis for planning, reviewing, and demonstrating performance. School library resource centers, an accepted feature of all Australian schools, need to demonstrate that the services they provide contribute to improved teaching and learning outcomes. *Learning for the Future* has already shown that it will be of invaluable assistance to all educationalists involved in guiding Australian school libraries into the 21st century.

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