



The UQL Cyberschool: Bringing Online Resources to High Schools in Queensland

Deborah Turnbull, Liz Blumson, Noeleen Fleming
The UQL Cyberschool Team

Overview

The UQL Cyberschool, launched in 1998 as an initiative of the University Librarian, is a community outreach program of the University of Queensland Library www.library.uq.edu.au in Brisbane, Australia.

Finding appropriate and reliable information for effective teaching and learning can be challenging, and in the past most Queensland high school libraries have had limited resources to purchase research resources for students. Real books and real journals and e-books and e-journals are expensive. Teachers and students need access to quality information resources at an affordable rate. The state of Queensland covers an area of about 1,722,000 square kilometers, or 662,000 square miles, so for geographically isolated students and schools, access issues are compounded.

In order to address these needs for access to quality information, the University of Queensland Cybrary's UQL Cyberschool program and its qualified and experienced teacher librarians was established to provide for Queensland secondary schools:

- negotiated discounted purchase prices for school access to quality online information resources, e-journals and online databases
- a free website at www.cybrary.uq.edu.au/schools to provide links to:
 - a searchable database of authoritative e-resources for each of the key learning areas of the Queensland high school curriculum;
 - access to the University of Queensland Cybrary's online catalogue and its Virtual Reference Collection;
 - e-resource evaluative tools
- advice, support and solutions to technical problems encountered in using online electronic resources
- training for teachers, teacher librarians and students in the use of relevant online information resources
- tours of the UQ Cybrary for secondary school students, and an introduction to the University of Queensland and its school programs.

Aims and Objectives

The UQL Cyberschool is a web portal where Queensland high school students can go to do online research using state-of-the-art electronic databases. The University of Queensland Library developed the UQL Cyberschool program and website to provide schools with a cost-effective gateway to electronic information resources. It also provides access to the University of Queensland Library's online catalogue and other

information finding tools, and to initiatives of the University that are directly useful to schools and school students.

The UQL Cyberschool also aims to negotiate cost effective access to commercial electronic databases, and provide a web 'place' where Queensland high school students can go to do online research. Improved access to high quality information will enhance student learning, and assist students to develop information literacy and lifelong learning skills. The UQL Cyberschool works to bridge the gap between high school and university, and it provides students, particularly those disadvantaged by distance, with the opportunity to develop university research skills.

Implementation Process

The University of Queensland Library began work on the UQL Cyberschool early in 1998 as an initiative conceived in partnership with an international database publisher, the Information Access Company (now known as Thomson Gale). The first step was a trial by three Brisbane schools of IAC's Expanded Academic ASAP Int'l Ed database of 1900 indexed and full text journals. The trial was an overwhelming success, and led to UQL and IAC offering discounted access to Expanded Academic ASAP Int'l Ed to subscribing Queensland high schools from February 1999. In tandem with the database trial, The University of Queensland Library developed the UQL Cyberschool web site to provide schools with a gateway to databases and access to the UQ Library's online catalogue and other information finding tools. Since then the UQL Cyberschool has negotiated trials of other electronic databases that provide indices to journals, newspapers, as well as full text articles and online encyclopaedias. The UQL Cyberschool also runs information literacy training for students and teachers in searching the University of Queensland Library catalogue and the Internet.

Achievements

The UQL Cyberschool has expanded the range of subscriptions to quality information resources available to all secondary/high schools in Queensland, with the online databases providing access to electronic versions of newspapers, scholarly journals and magazines in all subject areas. The UQL Cyberschool negotiates discounted purchase prices for all schools, making subscription prices more cost effective to schools. The UQL Cyberschool provides trial access to, and impartial advice about, more than 40 online databases. The free trials allow schools to make informed decisions about resources before purchase. To date more than **170** schools have purchased over **390** subscriptions to approximately **34** different databases through the UQL Cyberschool consortia. The UQL Cyberschool receives no financial remuneration for this service to schools.

As well as access to purchased database subscriptions, the UQL Cyberschool website provides links to many freely available online information resources. School students can access online gateways developed for University of Queensland students in various subject areas. One of these gateways is the *Virtual Reference Collection*, which provides links to government legislation, statistics, dictionaries and encyclopedias, atlases, information about educational institutions, and business and employment directories. Other available subject related gateways include AVEL (Australian Virtual Engineering

Library), AGRIGATE (Agriculture Information Gateway) and WebLaw (Online Australian legal information).

The UQL Cyberschool team, who are familiar with curriculum contexts, has also developed a searchable database of Internet sites relating to each of the *key learning areas* in the Queensland secondary school curriculum, and additional sites are identified and selected using Queensland syllabus documents. The selections are evaluated based on authority and quality for appropriate age levels. The following positive feedback from one of the Cyberschool members indicates the usefulness of the Internet sites web page:

‘I have just completed a series of lessons with students on how to establish the “authenticity” of websites and I have found the information on the Cyberschool homepage invaluable for this task. I have also been bringing to the students’ attention all of the other good information available to them on that page - the list of reference materials, the list of authentic sites organised by KLAs (Key Learning Areas), the differences between subject directories and search engines etc...’ *Head of Department - Resources, Large Brisbane State High School*

There have been many highlights since the UQL Cyberschool was created, with the following being some of its achievements over the years:

- over 720,000 hits recorded on the web site from 2000 to 2004
- over 170 schools subscribing to online databases by the end of 2004
- the establishment of an online Discussion List for subscribing schools
- the creation of a Newsletter for subscribing schools
- annual updates on services for teachers and teacher librarians
- annual Seminars for professional development for Principals, teacher librarians and teachers held each year
- the creation of online Information guides on searching databases
- ongoing liaison and collaboration with secondary school teachers and teacher-librarians
- providing easy access to the University of Queensland Library catalogue and online information via the UQL Cyberschool web page
- the creation of a program of school tours incorporating training in using the UQ Library catalogue, finding information in the UQ Library and getting the most out of electronic databases and the Internet
- regular Cyberschool staff presentations at workshops and professional conferences
- regular contact and liaison with:
 - The UQ Dean of Students
 - Other University of Queensland Departments
- the creation of web site links to other University of Queensland secondary schools programs and services.
- the creation and maintenance of continuing trials for over 43 online databases.

Commitment to school librarianship and impact on student learning

The state of Queensland covers an area of-about 1,722,000 square kilometres, or 662,000 square miles. All Secondary School libraries throughout the state of Queensland, not just in high-density areas, are supported through the UQL Cyberschool.

Team members have visited areas as far north as Cairns and west to Mount Isa and many areas in between, to bring online resources to distant schools. Local Brisbane and environs schools are similarly supported.

The UQL Cyberschool staff regularly liaise with teachers and teacher librarians throughout Queensland to provide advice, assess needs, identify new educational directions, and obtain feedback on services and support associated with the use of online electronic resources. Every endeavor is made to implement the online requirements of school libraries. Additional database trials are organized at the suggestion of teacher librarians and assistance in the development of teacher librarian skills in evaluation of online databases is provided. UQL Cyberschool staff respond promptly to questions, issues and problems encountered in the use of online electronic resources in school communities.

Currently one UQL Cyberschool team member serves on the Brisbane Sub Committee of the School Library Association of Queensland, and another is the Convener of the Children's Youth Services Australian Library and Information Association group. These positions serve to foster partnerships between the school library community, the academic and the public library community.

Conference papers and workshop presentations are regularly made secondary school related events; including the School Library Association of Queensland Biannual Conferences, The Australian School Library Association Conferences and various subject association Queensland and National conferences. Cyberschool staff also regularly contribute articles on information literacy to education and school journals.,

In 2001, in recognition of its services to Secondary schools, the UQL Cyberschool was awarded the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Award for Innovation. In 2004 the UQL Cyberschool also won the inaugural peer nominated IASL (International Association of School Librarianship) Softlink Award which recognises significant contributions to school librarianship by school library specialists, educators, and/or researchers.

Impact on student learning

Schools from all over Queensland bring their students to visit the University of Queensland and to use the Cybrary to conduct research for assignments. This research is usually directly linked to specific curriculum and assessment needs. UQL Cyberschool staff run information literacy training sessions that assist students to identify and locate relevant information using online resources and University of Queensland Library resources; improve their research methods by utilizing increased access to appropriate, relevant and wide ranging resources both print and electronic; and gain skills in the information literacy process, as part of the student developmental continuum of skills. These training sessions are particularly important in fostering students' transition from senior secondary school to university, while also preparing them for study at university and their lifelong learning journeys.

Each year hundreds of secondary school students attend training sessions in the University of Queensland Cybrary, organized and conducted by the UQL Cyberschool team. In 2004 alone 1500 students were introduced to the services of the Cyberschool

and to advanced information research methods. The usefulness of the tours and training is summarized by the following comments:

‘I commend the UQ Library staff for consistent high levels of professional and personal service to and support of Teacher Librarians and Teachers. Accessibility of resources...is a key issue which has been met. School personnel are being assisted in the skilling of staff and students which will undoubtedly have a beneficial effect on the quality of learning and confidence of the overall population of schools using the service.’ *Teacher Librarian, Queensland Independent School*

Contribution to professional development of others

Professional development and training sessions are regularly provided by the UQL Cyberschool for specific groups of teachers, teacher-librarians and students. Training is offered in database evaluation and use for teachers in faculty areas and for teacher librarians, through their regional networks. In 2003, more than 140 teacher librarians attended practical hands on training workshops on the use of online materials in the curriculum.

Free update sessions for teachers and teacher-librarians are also provided on a regular basis and address challenges associated with information technology and learning.

Previous sessions have covered issues such as:

- integration of electronic online electronic resources into teaching and learning;
- information Skills at the University of Queensland;
- information Literacy Planning Overview;
- advanced Information Retrieval using online electronic resources;
- full text electronic databases;
- plagiarism.

A one day professional development Seminar is held annually to address trends in information service delivery. The inaugural seminar in 2003 entitled *Schools, Scholars and Cybraries – Seize the Future*, attracted 150 attendees. At the seminar, leading presenters from the educational world addressed a number of issues, including developing pedagogical practices to cope with the Internet and other challenges of technological innovation. They also explored the challenges implicit in the changes required to meet the demands of 21st century learners.

In 2004, a second Seminar, *Schools, Scholars and Cybraries – Winning Ways*, focussing on advocacy, promotion and marketing of the School Library was held. As in 2003, leading presenters were selected and invited to address and challenge attendees from the Secondary school community. Over 120 delegates attended the seminar and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Planning has already begun for the 2005 seminar!

Other areas in which the Cyberschool contributes to the In December 2003, a Brisbane based Network of teacher librarians sought training for its members in Advanced Information Retrieval using online electronic resources. This training was planned, developed and implemented by the UQL Cyberschool team fulfilling the requested professional development needs of the Network members.

The UQL Cyberschool also runs a discussion list for teacher librarians and provides a monthly newsletter with updated information about databases, using Information Communication Technologies in the classroom, new resources and items of interest for their attention.

The professional development opportunities and assistance provided by the UQL Cyberschool are greatly appreciated by secondary school staff throughout Queensland. The following comment is typical of those received on a regular basis from teachers and teacher-librarians who use the UQL Cyberschool's services:

'What has struck me with UQL Cyberschool is the way the staff has marketed themselves and the service they provide. Priding themselves on quick service is very true to their name. Providing in-services via various teachers' associations has also made the Cyberschool a well-known and well-respected group. Only recently we had an in-service by two Gale Group representatives from Melbourne. This only came about through communication with Cyberschool. Our staff and students found it quite remarkable that they should fly from Melbourne to in-service us in Brisbane. This is the type of service that we have now come to expect from Cyberschool, and know we will not be disappointed.' *Director of Resources, Large Brisbane Independent School*

UQL Cyberschool Technical Setup

The UQL Cyberschool's web page is the major interface for schools logging on to their subscribed databases. The web page was originally set up as simply as possible to enable maintenance by librarians with minimal web and HTML writing skills. The page has grown, and with technical help from the library's IT section passwords and IP addressing for school databases have also been implemented. An existing library web portal database was also modified to address a growing need for maintained internet site links related to the school curricula < <http://cyberschool.library.uq.edu.au/index.phtml>>. The collaboration between the library's IT section and the Cyberschool staff has grown over the years, and a number of projects including an administration database and a course pathfinder database have also been implemented or are in the process of implementation. Technical assistance on access issues for schools has also been provided in the past by various database vendors.

Advantages

The Queensland school community trusts the University of Queensland Library as a non-biased, impartial institution that provides a quality service which saves them time and money in negotiating database subscriptions. The UQL Cyberschool also allows online database vendors to deal with a single institution which understands the school community in the supply of subscriptions to many and varied clients.

The University of Queensland Cybrary provides professional development and training in the use of online databases and internet use to all school staff and students regardless of government or denominational affiliations so that undergraduate students enter tertiary study with a clearer understanding of the requirements of university research in the technological age. Undergraduate students begin university study familiar with university life, how to make the best use of online information and with a clearer idea of what is involved in research at a tertiary level.

Turnbull, D., Fleming, N., & Blumson, L. (2005). Cyberschool reaches all the parts down under. *Multimedia Information and Technology*, 31(1), 17-18.

Selected Publications

Blumson, L., Fleming, N., & Turnbull, D. (2002). UQL Cyberschool - Reaching out for you! *Access [Australian School Library Association]*, 16(2), 24-27.

Blumson, L., & Fleming, N. (2002). Libraries for Lifelong Learning. *EdViews*, 11(21), 10-11.

Fleming, N. (2004). Beyond Google: The UQL Cyberschool enhances the search for information in the online electronic world. *Curriculum Leadership*, 2(26).

Turnbull, D., Fleming, N., & Blumson, L. (2005). Cyberschool reaches all the parts down under. *Multimedia Information and Technology*, 31(1), 17-18.

UQL Cyberschool Statistics

UQL Cyberschool Statistics 2000-2004						
YEAR	Tours	Attendees	Classes	Attendees	Presentations	Attendees
2004	69	1598	64	1411	5	226
2003	72	1,319	76	1,521	5	71
2002	41	1,123	42	1,029	26	773
2001	51	1,123	18	683	-	-
2000	33	607	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	266	5770	200	4664	36	1070

Cyberschool Growth 1999-2004		
Year	Member Schools	Total Database Subscriptions
Nov-04	172	397
Dec-03	141	305
Nov-02	113	210
Nov-01	110	193
Oct-00	76	109
Dec-99	35	N/A