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Changes to world-leading copyright system risky, say teachers

Opinion

Wendy Cody



A great teacher is irreplaceable. We've all had them and we remember how they made us feel – inspired, excited, delighted and wanting to know more.

We know that a great teacher can make a world of difference to a child – the difference between just scraping through school and really switching something on inside their brains that will stay with them forever.

But great teachers need resources, and they need to be able to access them. Our association for the teaching of English is one source of rich content for them and there are many others.

The modern teacher is a content curator for their kids (and many of them create content themselves).

One thing that lets a teacher get on with their job of creating great learners is not having to worry about where they get their content from and whether they have permission to use it.

They don't have to worry because Australia has a unique, world-leading, all-you-can-eat copyright licence for educators. It costs less than the price of a textbook for each student and the fees are paid by the education systems. It allows unfettered access to everything

published and teachers needn't fear breaching someone's copyright.

It means that content creators, such as my organisation, which is a member of the not-for-profit Copyright Agency, receives annual royalty payments

when teachers use the copyright material that we produce for them.

Educational publishers are also Copyright Agency members. They include 3P Learning from NSW, which developed the internationally successful Mathletics, Reading Eggs and Into Science; Queensland's Firefly Education with its award-winning Think Mentals and English Stars; and Western Australia's R.I.C. Publications who produce The Literacy Box, The Comprehension Box and The Maths Box.

Changes are in the wind to relax Australia's copyright laws. But very few of the proponents of those changes – including the Productivity Commission, libraries, academics and big tech players – have considered the impact they would have on teachers.

Will teachers have to ask what is in, and out, of copyright? And what about the fair payment to creators that is made now – will that disappear?

In Canada, a change to copyright laws meant schools and universities kept using the same amount of copyright material but stopped paying the licence fees. The effect on local

authors and publishers was immediate and disastrous.

As a creator of resources by teachers

for teachers, my organisation strongly opposes any change to the current system that affects the remuneration for the people who create high quality and highly valued Australian education resources.

We know that the system doesn't capture every single use. We, and others, sometimes wish it did.

But it's a fair system and it works because it lets teachers get on with the job of doing what they do best – creating an environment for learning that brings out the potential in every child, whether they are a future innovator, artist, engineer, doctor, plumber or teacher.

Wendy Cody is president of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English.

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