DIGITAL EVOLUTION
OF SCHOOLS AND
SCHOOL LIBRARIES

At a time when the Australian Government is espousing the importance of highly agile innovative organisations, digital technology is transforming all manner of organisations. Schools are moving fast to a digital operational mode, so it's critical that school libraries and teacher librarians take advantage of the opportunities made available. They need to move quickly and proactively to ensure their contribution is central to the workings of rapidly evolving, increasingly integrated schools. MAL LEE tells us more.

There is now a clear understanding in all organisations, including schools, that they must go digital to remain viable. The efficiencies, economies, benefits and enhanced capability of the digital organisation far surpass those of the traditional paper-based operation.

Moreover, there is a growing recognition that all digitally based organisations, as complex adaptive systems, will continually evolve and will do so more rapidly, taking advantage of the digital convergence to become ever more integrated. They will abandon their old silo-like structures and discrete operations and adopt an increasingly integrated and networked form.

The word 'critical' in the introduction was chosen carefully.

Silo-like school libraries that sit alone, operate largely autonomously, and that are perceived to be paper-focused and removed from the core workings of the school can be readily dispensed with in the creation of more tightly integrated and productive school ecosystems.

To thrive and to continue making a significant contribution in any rapidly evolving digital organisation – be it a company, university or school – the library and librarian need to play an integral and lead role in the organisation's workings and its ongoing evolution.

Most schools have been slow to move to a digital operational mode, but teacher librarians have only to talk with their colleagues within the pathfinder schools, business and the public sector to recognise the pattern of change.

School libraries and teacher librarians need to position themselves where their service is perceived by the principal and staff to be central to the school's vision, operations and growth, and where the role played grows

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and evolves naturally – and largely unwittingly – as the school's total ecosystem matures.

That is easy to say but it is difficult to achieve, particularly when the principal lacks vision, digital acumen and the willingness to lead.

It is appreciated that most teacher librarians now have as their focus the teaching, with little interest in the macro workings of the school.

But the stark reality in most schools and education authorities is that unless the teacher librarian looks after their own situation, has a sound appreciation of the macro workings of the school – its vision and its digital evolution – and is proactive and positions the information services at the centre of all operations, no one else will do so.

Accept the folly of trying to defend the bastions against digital evolution.

Recognise that by being proactive you can assist in shaping the desired future and lessen the risk of becoming a digital casualty.

The experience of the pathfinder schools suggests the following could assist that quest:

- It is not personal, but it's understandable that it might feel personal. The digital revolution is simply impacting you.
- Understand the macro workings of the school. In tightly integrated school ecosystems it is vital that all staff, teaching and professional support – and not just those at the apex – understand the macro workings of the school and are able to contribute as professionals to its growth.
- Appreciate the evolution of complex adaptive systems. Those with a science background will already understand the importance, but all staff need to recognise the implications of working with seeming chaos and constant change, and the new order that the disturbance creates.
- Thrive on chaos. Embrace and promote a culture of change, and support all colleagues in their work, continued growth and evolution.
- Adopt a digital and networked mindset. Grasp the marked contrast between analogue and digital thinkers provided by Bhaduri and Fischer (2015).

Then you'll appreciate why a pathfinder school in a networked society has chosen to 'outsource' its ebook services to the local library.
- Integrate the school library and ICT services. Move to the centre of school operations. Look to the kind of iCentre model advocated by Hay (2010, 2015) and have it play a lead role in the digital workings and evolution of the school.
- Support the principal's leadership. Provide the principal, the staff and the wider school community with the ongoing support and information services they will need – as well as supporting the students.
- Make your services indispensable.

The Digital Revolution is bringing about much ongoing organisational transformation that could, if unharnessed, hurt many.

School libraries and teacher librarians could be hurt badly, unless each teacher librarian genuinely collaborates with their colleagues and the school leadership to position their programs and services at the centre of the school's digital evolution.

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