Schools Take Charge of Evolution

and Technology

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There are pleasing signs globally and across Australia that evermore schools are recognising they have to take charge of their own evolutionary development and the digital technology they employ to achieve that sustained development.

Evermore are recognising they have to be the prime unit of change, and as such they, and not the government of the day or their local education authority, are responsible for successfully addressing the plethora of variables that will allow them to evolve at pace and achieve the desired digital normalisation and provide an apposite 21st century education.

They are long past waiting for government or the system to provide the answers and funding for the way forward. Yes, they will most assuredly use any apposite support provided by external agencies but they understand they have to take control of their own destiny.

The stark reality is that while in some fortunate situations the 'system' is providing apposite support most central offices are currently demonstrating little appreciation of what is occurring with the pathfinders, of the evolutionary continuum or how the continuum can assist individual schools in their journey. Many are adding little value to the teaching in the schools and simply frustrating the school's evolution.

In many respects it matters not to the individual school what the Federal Government of the day is, whether it be the Greens, Labor or Liberal or indeed who wins the next election.

While governments of all persuasion globally, and not simply in Australia, like to project the profound impact they have upon the running and performance of the nation's schools, and imagine that by the end of their term in office all 'their' schools will naturally have embraced and benefitted from the government's policies the reality is that most government's have limited impact on the school's culture and operations.

The power lies primarily within the school.

In researching the work of the pathfinder schools in the UK, US, NZ and Australia that had or nearly had reached the Digital Normalisation Stage, and noting the remarkably common attributes all at that stage showed - regardless of situation or government - the universal commonality brought home how little impact national government's have had upon the evolution of those schools or indeed schooling in general.

It has been the shift from a paper to digital operational base that has fundamentally transformed the nature of schooling. Schools, education authorities, governments and eminent educators have been trying for decades to achieve the desired transformation but ultimately it has been the ever-

evolving digital operational base that has thrown off the ways of the past and which will go a long way to ensuring school evolution globally will remain largely common.

What is now increasingly evident, as mentioned in many of the previous ETS articles and the recent publications on *Bring Your Own Technology* (Lee and Levins, 2012) and *Collaboration in learning* (Lee and Ward, 2013) is the ever greater impact of the natural growth that occurs when organisations move to a digital operational base, the technology becomes ever more sophisticated and the users' expectations continually rise.

That natural growth is occurring globally in much the same manner with governments everywhere having no voice in the development.

The importance of schools recognising they have to take charge of their own evolution and shape that natural growth came home to me recently in Tasmania where I had the pleasure of presenting and facilitating a day with the state's independent schools. Vitally within the group were school principals, business managers, the ICT coordinators and key staff.

At the day's end I was able to conclude that for the first time I'd observed in conversation a total group of schools, which understood

- that all schools – aside from a few outliers – would in the not too distant future normalise the whole school use of the digital
- where each were positioned on an ever-evolving continuum
- what each had to do to ready the their school to move along the continuum
- that BYOT was a vital stage in the school's evolution but that upon normalisation the term would disappear
- inherent to the success of BYOT was trust – in the children, the parents and vitally the teachers
- underpinning the astute use of the digital must always be the desire to enhance the quality of the student learning

While that understanding had been evidenced in individual schools this was the first time I'd seen it with a total group.

It was appreciated these were independent schools which by their very nature recognised the imperative of shaping their own development but there were also state schools in attendance.

It was also appreciated that most of the schools there had an advantage enjoyed by few other Australian schools – they had access to the NBN and the opportunities it provided.

Vitally the understanding was evidenced in a group of schools at different stages along the continuum, with markedly different student intakes and resource bases.

All were displaying by the day's end an appreciation of the imperative of each adopting a holistic development strategy that merged the very considerable resources and expertise of the student's homes with those of the school.

What was interesting was how astutely the individual schools in their development drew upon the apposite resources provided externally be they via government at the state or national level, or by virtue of the schools working as an association.

The day also affirmed a development noted internationally in that the pathfinder schools act as the 'de facto' policy developers for the other schools. Schools increasingly are swayed in their evolution by the lead provided by the pathfinders – by their peers - far more than any national or central office policy.

Once again the key roles of the principal and the head of the school's technology was highlighted, both in the positive and negative sense.

Those working at the networked stage were all represented by principals, with a strong digital acumen, who were working as the school's chief conductor orchestrating all facets of the school's operations, in and outside the school walls. Most principals of schools at the lower ends of the continuum weren't in attendance but rather had delegated the 'ICT' to middle managers.

While as stressed on many occasions the on-going evolution of schooling and the creation of an apposite ecology is primarily a human challenge the underlying, ever evolving technology is fundamental to the school's every operation and as such requires a head of technology able to support on an on-going basis the head's educational vision. It matters not what the position is called, be it an assistant principal, head of information services or ICT coordinator, that person is key to the school's evolution and realisation of the desired education. Tellingly one of those coordinators in attendance made the oft forgotten the point that he could not do his job properly until the principal delineated the school's shaping educational vision.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that all schools whether they are small or large, in or outside an education system have to take charge of and responsibility for their on-going evolution.

For many the idea is alien but if schools are to evolve at a pace consistent with ever-rising societal and client expectation they have to adopt development strategies appropriate for their current position.

Bibliography

Lee, M and Levins, M (2012) *Bring Your Own Technology* Melbourne ACER Press

Lee, M and Ward, L, (2013) *Collaboration in learning: transcending the classroom walls*, Melbourne, ACER Press