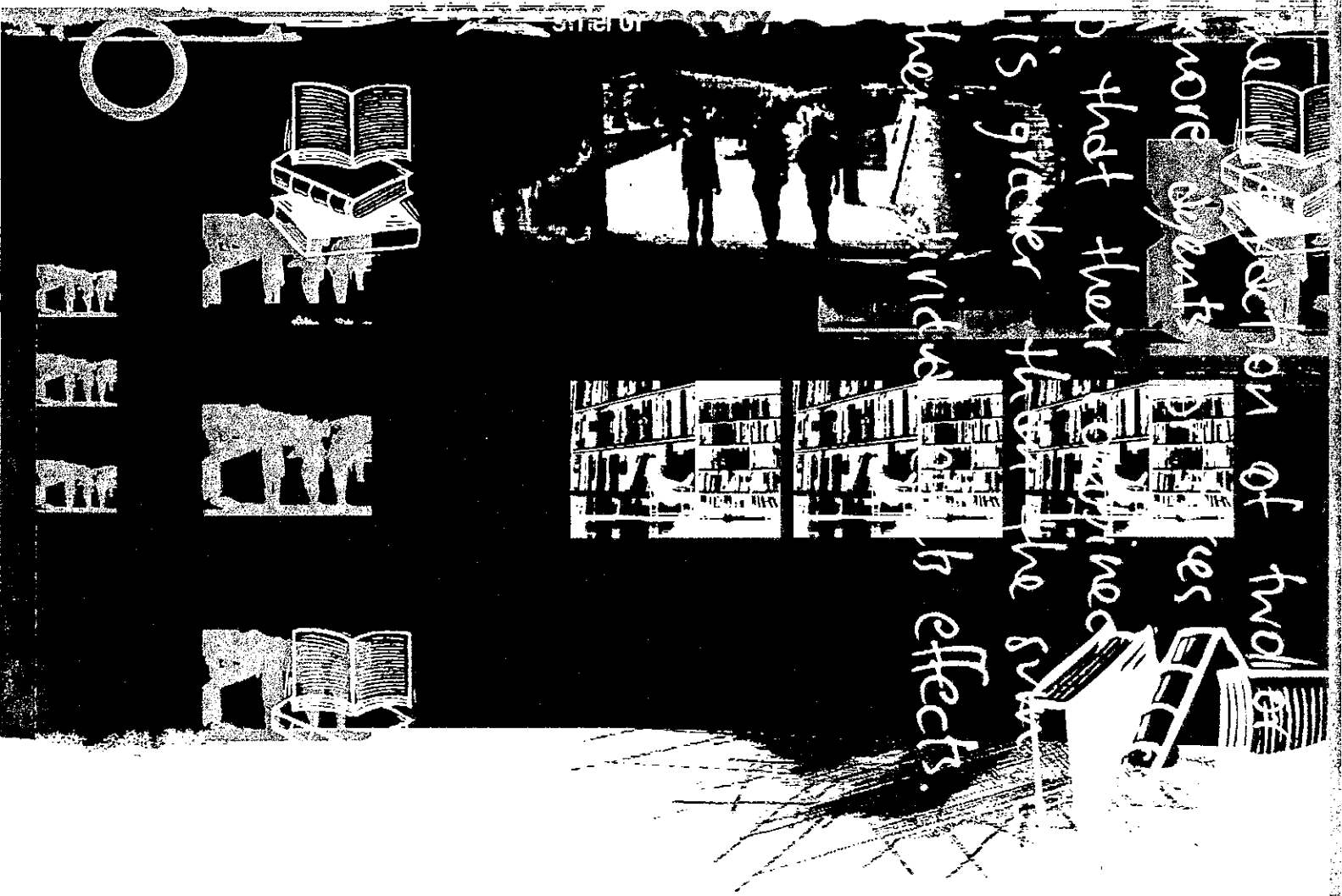
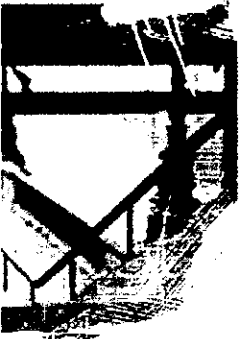


# °SYNERGY

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the perception of two  
more objects  
is greater than the sum  
of their parts  
synergistic effects.

# SYNERGY

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# The Agony and the Ecstasy of Change

Dr Carol Gordon

**Our regular section contributor, Dr Carol Gordon, explores the nature of change in relation to learning and teaching and the profession of teacher-librarianship.**

*"There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."* (Machiavelli, 1515)

This summer I travelled through the state of Victoria, with my colleague Dr. Ross Todd, to launch the first phase of a research project, funded by SLAV and conducted by CISSL, which is taking place in five schools. The study is looking at how students build knowledge when they engage in guided inquiry in the school library, in collaboration with classroom teachers. This premise constitutes a powerful paradigm shift as we move from the conception of school library as an information place to a knowledge space (Todd, 2001). This shift is beginning to influence the way libraries look as they become more learner-, rather than resource-centred.

The City Campus Library, Northumbria University in Newcastle on Tyne, has embraced the e-learning concept, taking on the look of a high tech, flexible learning space where students come to collaborate, study and learn. (<<http://www.elearning.ac.uk/innoprac/institution/northumbria.html>>). A similar phenomenon is happening in classrooms. One Victorian school we visited is installing a flexible learning space comprised of four connected classrooms of various sizes that support group, as well as individual work. Furnishings consist of tables and chairs but it was easy to imagine the learning space filled with computers, books and comfortable seating.

The decentralisation and ubiquity of information in the digital age has big implications for learning places and spaces. Teacher-librarians are reminded every day that they are surrounded by a new order of things as the digital revolution seeps down to the roots of librarianship. Why do we need a library when we have the Internet? One high school in Australia has eliminated its library. Do we really need the Dewey Decimal System? A public library in Arizona, in the United States, has abandoned Dewey for a more

colloquial, user-friendly, topical arrangement and plans to use it in all their branch libraries. Why do we need the controlled vocabulary of subject headings when we have metadata tags and clouds? Will automated library catalogues go the way of the card catalogue?

What do these changes mean for teacher-librarians, who are an anomaly in the library profession: they are educators as well as information specialists. If we ask them to identify the most powerful innovation school libraries have to offer, what would they say? The Internet? Web 2.0? Emerging technologies? Digital libraries? While these innovations have transformed our profession as information specialists, they are simply tools. But what is the job? It is to deliver a revolutionary methodology that is a shift from classroom and textbook-centred teaching and learning. It is the implementation of instruction that is resource-based, fueled by collaboration and the integration of information skills, knowledge construction, critical thinking and technology competencies is our innovation.

"Oh, that," I hear you thinking, "We have been doing that for years." Although it has been around for years, inquiry learning in libraries is still an educational innovation because it has not been integrated and institutionalised in any education system for all children. It is yet to be recognised as a powerful tool for 21st century learning. The job itself is the innovation, and every day teacher-librarians act as change agents when they implement this innovation.

How do we cope with these dynamics? Some librarians, in a state of frustration and denial, put their heads in the sand and let change wash over them. Some try to reconcile traditional and progressive ideas by projecting an old paradigm on the new. On a listserv recently a librarian, concerned and outraged by lack of authority of wikipedia, proposed that librarians create their own wikipedia, implying that only information professionals would write and revise it (and consequently, use it).

In order to understand how teacher-librarians can be effective change agents we need to focus on our innovation and understand why change is difficult, perilous, and uncertain. Change is the subject of a large body of research that can inform our attitudes and decisions about it. Typically, change upsets the status quo. School libraries as instructional innovations are on a collision course with a deeply entrenched culture of the teaching and learning called schooling. The preparation of teachers and administrators is bogged down in 20th century pedagogy that does not prepare educators to teach outside the classroom or to think outside the box. Administrators see the school library as a time-bomb of book challenges and censorship issues. Teachers are trained to teach in isolation, rather than collaboratively (Lortie, 1977).

Lasting change does not happen easily in a social system such as a school. When teachers engage their students in library-based inquiry they seldom go beyond cooperation or coordination to deeper levels of collaboration (Todd, 2005) that involve planning, designing, implementing and evaluating units of inquiry. Some teachers are reticent to use technology. Some reject the research paper assignment because of the cut and paste syndrome that reduces what should be a rigorous academic experience to busy work. Change stirs powerful feelings: it threatens what people know, and threat stimulates resistance. Change may make a particular skill or knowledge set obsolete, causing power and influence, and even jobs, to be lost. It will cause marginal groups to emerge, seizing power and influence formerly held by others (Hartzell, 2003). Change stresses the organisation as an entity and, like people, the organisation resists (Hartzell, 2003). It poses a threat to resource control; it threatens those who benefit from the status quo. Since resources are integral to power, those who stand to lose control of resources will resist change strongly (Hartzell, 2003). For example there is resistance from school librarians in the U.S. to classroom libraries, even though they will improve students' access to books. We know from the research that access to books relates to how much students read, and how much they read relates to how well they read (Krashen, 2004). Why not circulate library books to classrooms through the library circulation system? Librarians would retain control of the resources, improve access, and increase circulation statistics, which in turn would provide a strong rationale for bigger book budgets. Perhaps this innovation harbors a vision of classrooms as satellite libraries, or is it a vision of satellite libraries as flexible learning spaces?

Change is difficult because it threatens the structure of an organisation (Robbins, 1990). Libraries, like other organisations, have internal stabilising mechanisms such as rules and policies

to instill order and avoid disruption. Since organisations are systems comprised of subsystems working together; when one subsystem is changed, the others are affected. For example, changing the school schedule may inhibit student access to the library.

Change also threatens the accepted norms or standards of an organisation, as illustrated by the expectations that libraries should be quiet places. Changes in structure, system, norms or standards, expertise and resource allocation combine to threaten established power relations (Hartzell, 2003). The teacher-librarian, like everyone else in an organisation, needs resources, someone else's expertise, the support of the group, the interlocking activities of the system, and the support of the structure to provide a calm environment in which to work (Hartzell, 2003). If power and influence are defined by the resources people hold and by the nature of their dependent relationships, to change the elements is to change the power distribution (Hartzell, 2003).

The objective in a changing environment is to protect your resource base, increase it if you can, and reduce the level of your dependency while raising the level to which others are dependent on you (Hartzell, 2003). If we apply these criteria to flexible learning spaces, who wins? Who gets the resources? Who gets the power? Who becomes more dependent? This shift from dependency to power is important, not for power for the sake of power, but for empowerment to do the job.

Although there is a lack of research that examines school libraries as change agents, the Rand Change Agent Study (McLaughlin, 1989) offers insights into effecting educational change in instruction. The study examined four U.S. federal change agent programs that gave seed money to school districts to create and spread innovative educational practices. The study was designed to determine the factors for successful implementation and continuation of selected federal programs. Two important findings are:

1. The more supportive the principal was perceived to be, the higher the percentage of project goals achieved, the greater the improvement in student performance, and the more extensive the continuation of project methods and materials,
  2. Lasting change depends on implementation rather than the content of the change. Schools change as new practices gain support and are adapted to a local situation prior to integration with regular school operations. A key factor in successful implementation was constant planning to adapt a change to the local setting.
- Does research on change offer models that can help teacher-librarians with implementation? A well-known research-based model for change is the concerns-based approach (Hall & Hord, 1984). The model emphasises the personal side of change. The researchers hypothesised that

**. . . to understand how teacher-librarians can be effective change agents we need to focus on our innovation and understand why change is difficult, perilous, and uncertain.**

change is a process with predictable stages that teachers experience as they become skilled in using new programs and procedures. They collected data and learned that change is, in fact, a staged process. It is useful for teacher-librarians, who are effecting change every time they engage in collaborative instructional work with teachers, to not only recognise these stages and their attendant behaviors, but to know how to intervene to move teachers forward.

### **1. Awareness**

Teachers have little involvement with the innovation. This is the time to build relationships and begin to demonstrate how you can make teaching more effective and more fun. What percentage of your teachers lack awareness?

### **2. Informational**

Teachers have a general awareness of the innovation and interest in learning more about it. This is the time for promotion and public relations: Post material about inquiry units on the website, send out newsletters, put up posters, raise the profile of the library. Teachers are interested in substantive aspects of the innovation. How does it relate to their curriculum? What does it look like when students are engaged? How will we assess? The majority of your teachers are probably in this stage.

### **3. Personal**

Teachers are uncertain about the demands of the innovation, and their role and commitment. This is the cold feet stage when they feel overwhelmed and under pressure. The best antidote is support. Dig into your arsenal of intervention materials for students – graphic organisers, proposal sheets, peer editing forms, bibliography charts, how to do an interview/survey. Teachers feel relieved when they know these materials are at their fingertips, either clearly displayed in the library's research center or on the website. They are grateful when the materials appear in their mailboxes on the morning of the day they are scheduled to come to the library. Your dependability is your secret weapon.

### **4. Management**

Attention is focused on the processes and tasks of using the innovation and issues of efficiency, organisation, managing, scheduling, and time demands. Your help with logistics, scheduling and networking is critical here.

### **5 Consequence**

Teachers focus on the impact of the innovation, particularly for their students. They are interested in evaluation of student outcomes, including performance and competencies, and changes needed to increase student outcomes. Their fears will be allayed when they know that they can

count on you to be by their side, especially if their classes are using computers. Formative assessments and instructional interventions that give feedback of student progress are important so teachers can see student progress. Gather feedback from students, conferring with the teacher about how to adjust instruction, present an evaluation tool (i.e., student survey) to collect input about the unit raise the teacher's confidence. Offer to grade student work relative to the information literacy demonstrated. It can be as simple as a checklist or reviewing bibliography charts or proposals.

### **6. Collaboration**

Teachers engage in coordination and cooperation with others regarding use of the innovation. Although you may be working with one teacher, the unit of inquiry is probably going to need support from the computer teacher, the technology director, a community resource, the custodian, parents, and/or any number of people. Asking other teachers or students to participate as observers, evaluators, or audiences will bump up student performance several notches. As you work with teachers in successive years they will become more independent and you can juggle simultaneous projects. This will happen more easily if you stabilise projects so that you can build more and better resources for fewer curriculum topics.

### **7. Refocussing**

The focus shifts to exploring. Teachers see more universal benefits from the innovation, including the possibility of major changes or replacement with a more powerful alternative. They have definite ideas about alternatives in the proposed or existing form of the innovation. The refocusing will happen in a structured way when you meet with teachers to determine how you can do the project better next time. This is an exciting part of implementing the innovation because teachers are buying into it in a creative way, adapting the innovation and building ownership.

Reading research changes the way we see our practice. When we examine a familiar phenomenon as if it were new, we are changing our perceptions. When we implement change with new knowledge we are in control because we have reduced the peril and uncertainty of its success and increased what is possible. We are no longer victims swept away by a digital tsunami. "One change leaves the way open for the introduction of others" (Machiavelli).

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