

Learning Technologies In The Classroom

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The learning technologies area is a focus for many thousands of dollars across the state and with the need to achieve certain ratios by the Year 2002, teachers can be forgiven for thinking that learning technologies is about the quality and quantity of computer equipment in the school. However, it is much more than that; it's about using Learning Technology tools to improve the learning outcomes for our students. These tools enhance student learning by reducing isolation, improving efficiency, increasing motivation and providing opportunities for student interaction and decision-making. During this paper, we will examine a few of the ways South Kalgoorlie Primary School has integrated learning technologies into classroom programs to enhance the learning environment for our students.

Background

South Kalgoorlie Primary School is in the third year of a three-year school priority for learning technologies. Our Strategic Plan is based on three Overarching Learning Outcomes.

- OLO1 *Students use language to understand, develop and communicate ideas and interest with others.*
- OLO 3. *Students recognise when and what information is needed, locate it and obtain it from a variety of sources and evaluate, use and share it with others.*
- OLO 9. *Students interact with people and cultures other than their own and are equipped to contribute to the global community.*

We recognised the need to target both teacher and student skills and decided to provide a full time support position for learning technologies, this has been Denise's role since the beginning of 1997. She teaches collaboratively with each classroom teacher, holding a planning session in the first week of each term to determine the focus for her support and for independent classroom activities.

E-mail from Camp

For the first time in several years, the Year 7s at South Kalgoorlie were going on camp. Lorellyn was very aware of the need to ensure that all Year 7s were included. To achieve this we decided to E-mail back to school every night with digital pictures and text describing our day.

Several Year 7 students who were not attending the camp were trained as "E-mail experts" and given the task of downloading the E-mails daily and setting up a display for the school community to keep them informed as to our activities whilst we were away. Students on camp were rostered through the task of writing E-mails on school laptops and recording activities with a digital camera.

The entire school was included in our venture by keeping all interested parties involved. Students had a real purpose for the use of the technologies involved and responded with great enthusiasm.

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Book Raps <http://rite.ed.qut.edu.au/oz-teachernet/projects/book-rap/>

Book Raps involve the sharing of thoughts and activities on a selected book between a group of schools across Australia or even the world. They can include author and illustrator involvement, access to content area experts and live chat sessions. Raps are available for students from junior primary to high school and can be used with the whole class or small groups. South Kalgoorlie has been involved in several raps, one of the most memorable being the Wild and Wacky Wildlife Rap in which a small group of Year 5 students, including a special inclusion child, participated in the Junior Primary Rap under the guidance of Denise and their teacher-aide. All showed an improvement in communication, increased knowledge of mail and E-mail processes, awareness of Australian animals and their features and a huge interest in the books used.

Teddy Bear Rap

Jenny Swain, a Year 1 teacher, and Denise coordinated the Teddy Bear Book Rap in Term 2 this year. Rap points targeted a range of activities from detailed descriptions of the class bear through the researching of facts on real bears to creating their own "bears in trouble" class story and sharing it with the rap list. This very successful rap culminated in a Teddy Bear Picnic for each participating class. Class bears were then exchanged and a closer relationship between two schools developed as they moved into a travel buddy exchange.

Travel Buddies <http://www.ozprojects.net.au/projects/project-search.cgi>

Travel Buddies are a simple, effective way of bringing the rest of Australia or the world to our students. Travel Buddies, generally soft toys or puppets, are sent to another school as a class representative. The buddy takes a travel diary with them and the host school makes the buddy an integral part of their daily school and home activities for a few weeks, writing in the diary, collecting souvenirs and taking photographs. Home and host classes keep in touch via regular E-mails so that they can share their buddy's adventures. At the end of the exchange the buddies return home with their diaries.

Travel buddies are a great way for a teacher to start with E-mail projects since they can so easily be integrated into a wide range of classroom activities and require very little online time. They can have a general or specific focus and are easily linked with the Technology and Enterprise Learning Area if students become involved in either designing and making the buddies themselves or making items such as hats, houses, beds for the buddy they are hosting.

Students show an increased interest in reading and writing, a greater awareness of the wider world and improved general knowledge. Travel buddies projects set up an environment where students have a real purpose for writing, can participate in a range of rich language experiences and develop skills in the use of E-mail, digital cameras and attachments.

Other Collaborative Projects

<http://www.ozprojects.net.au>
<http://www.edna.edu.au/EdNa/>
<http://www.epals.com/index.html>

A wide range of projects is now available for students of all ages and to target most learning areas.

South Kaigoorlie has been involved in:

- A weather project involving recording temperature and plotting latitude and longitude.
- Poems a Fortnight – children from all over the world contribute to an anthology of poems with the format changing each fortnight.
- Each year our Pre-Primary to Year 2 students E-mail the Easter Bunny and Father Christmas Online <http://ozprojects.net.au/santa/>
- Some of our most successful projects have involved a simple exchange between two classes on a particular topic eg one Year 7 class discussed stereotypes with a class in the USA and a Year 4 class exchanged stories, dragon trap plans and thoughts about fairy tale characters by fax and E-mail with a class in Perth.

The Day I was Born – Internet Research

We wanted to develop the Internet skills of our students but reduce the time wasted in searching. This project, taken from the North Parmelia web site (<http://www.schools.ash.org.au/parmelia/>), required students to search the Internet for information regarding the day they were born. The project enabled students to search within websites that had already been viewed by a teacher but did not hand feed the information that they required.

Students were given a project sheet that gave them tasks (with web addresses) to complete based on the day that they were born. They then used the information collected to create a PowerPoint display for our Open Night. Students were given basic lessons in PowerPoint creation and then left to their own devices to 'jazz up' their work by learning more about the program and its uses. When students discovered new things they were asked to share them with the class enabling them to become teachers as well as learners. These presentations were the first ones that the students had done on PowerPoint, student motivation and interest was very high.

A year 6 class took the same student discovery approach to PowerPoint with students creating displays on their fairy tales topic. A small group created a mini class portfolio on this term's topics.

Hyperstudio

Hyperstudio is a package that allows students to easily create interactive multimedia, ranging from simple linear storybooks to complex stacks to display their research.

A Year 1 and Year 7 buddy group combined to create Hyperstudio stacks for the Year 1s to show their parents at Portfolio Night. The Year 1 students drew pictures that went with a story they had written about insects/spiders. Their Year 7 buddies helped them scan their pictures, create text on a Hyperstudio stack and then record their voices to tell the story.

We find that Hyperstudio gives students a real purpose for their research, involves them in the use of scanners and digital cameras and is highly motivational, especially for some of our older boys who can be somewhat disillusioned with school.

Spreadsheets

Spreadsheets are powerful tools that allow rapid manipulation of data and the construction of graphs. Over the last couple of terms we have used spreadsheets to graph fingerprint data in Year 4 Primary Investigation lessons, climate data in Year 7, to collate playground surveys in Year 7 and to play a stock market game.

After reading about a competition run by the Australian Stock Exchange (<http://www.asx.com.au/>) for high school students Lorellyn decided to run a similar program with her class. Students were given a fictitious \$50 000 to invest in the stock market. They were given opportunities each week to buy and sell shares and kept records of their transactions on a spreadsheet designed by Denise. Copies of the spreadsheet were printed off each week as part of the student's portfolio.

Most students were highly motivated to complete the activity each week with the spreadsheet reducing the workload and bringing a real life flavour to the game. Unfortunately the stock market suffered big losses during the program time and this discouraged some students as they felt they were not succeeding in their choice of investments. This however, was also an advantage as students discovered that money is not always easily made in real life situations.

The Future

The installation of our network will bring Internet access to all classrooms and make participation in collaborative projects easier. However with the rapid advancement of technology it is not easy to predict what we will be doing beyond the next year or two. All one can say is that learning technologies is a developing field and we have some exciting times ahead for both students and teachers.