

Moving students' learning beyond the teacher

St James' School jumped at the chance to participate in a project using blogs and a wiki to involve parents more in their children's education, as Helena Dorn and Caroline Paynter explain.

When St James' Catholic School was one of six schools across New Zealand chosen for funding last year through the Microsoft Innovative Schools Project, staff here decided it would be a great opportunity to involve the parents/whanau in a true 'learning partnership'. The aim was to utilise Microsoft and Web 2.0 products to move students' learning beyond the classroom walls. Rooms 2, 3 and 6 are part of the pilot project to explore the creative use of student-generated digital content and share their learning.

Welcome to CreateIT

The project was named CreateIT because we wanted students to use their own digital content, as well as articulate their inquiry-based learning in creative ways. The 'CreateIT' Wikispace (<http://createit.wikispaces.com/>) was set up to make a place not only to store digital content but also where students, parents/whanau and teachers could engage in learning conversations based on students' work.

Our classes explored the use of blogging software for their learning. Each Year 3, 4 and 5 student created their own blog and personalised it to their learning. These then provided an authentic audience for students to share their creative learning and were easily accessible for teachers, parents/whanau from the wiki.

A parent workshop was held in the early stages to show them how to access the wiki and how to comment constructively on learning blogs. Data about computer use at home was collected to clarify who could access the Internet at home to allow for successful learning partnerships.

Through the use of a range of Microsoft and Web 2.0 based products, such as Photostory, Google Earth, Wordle, Voicethread, Bubbleshare and more, students were able to creatively communicate their inquiry-based learning. They could then give constructive feedback using self and peer assessment strategies to identify next steps in their learning.



Why did we do it?

Through the use of digital technologies, it was our intention to motivate and engage our students so that they could share their inquiry learning with their families and their teachers. We also wanted to increase the involvement of parents/whanau in their students' learning and bridge the gap between home and school by forming learning partnerships.

The benefits and outcomes

Student leadership and motivation for learning has greatly increased. They're using problem-solving and peer-tutoring skills on a daily basis, which has given them more ownership about the direction they want to take in their learning. The students' enthusiasm is obvious in the way they are working on their learning blogs at home and during any spare moment they have – the learning really is becoming 24/7 and is not limited by the classroom walls! The quality of their thinking and presentation has improved as they have an authentic global audience to share their learning with. Quieter students are thriving and showing initiative because they are able to share their learning in a non-threatening way.

The number of laptops per class means that not every student has a laptop. This means they have had the opportunity to continue developing co-operative learning strategies with a partner.

Home links are strengthening as parents/whanau and students log onto their blogs and the wiki at home. The students have worked with them, explaining the project and demonstrating the use of blogs, wikis and Microsoft software. Some have even made their own blogs. Our parents' meeting was attended by the majority from both our classes, where they were informed of the learning intentions of the project.

Where to next?

Students will continue to investigate and develop ways to present their inquiry learning using these products, which will result in raising their achievement in oral, written and visual language. They'll continue to create student-generated vidcasts and other digital content for parents/whanau to engage in their children's learning via the CreateIT wikispace. As a result of students contributing to blogs and wikis throughout the project – recording and communicating thoughts, ideas, and information – they will improve their ability to articulate clearly using a variety of genre.

For us, we will continue to work with our own project guides Sue West (www.globo.co.nz) and Pete Sommerville (www.heurisko.co.nz) to fulfil the learning intentions of this project through professional learning both onsite at school and via Skype video conference. We will also share our learning with other staff and other schools.

Thanks to the Microsoft Innovative Schools Project for this amazing opportunity! ▲

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EXPLORE THE CREATEIT WIKISPACE

Here you can check out class and student blogs, surveys, newsletters, reports, watch a video about the project logo, and even download a PDF of the project plan

<http://createit.wikispaces.com/>