

Using the Internet in the Primary Classroom

Interface Term 2 2004

The Problem – a brief background

Having moved to a school which has a large number of thin clients with limited software, the internet was one of the most reliable tools available on many of these 'old' machines. The school has a very high computer to student ratio, but the majority of these are thin client machines. With very limited open ended software including the Office products and Inspiration we managed to use the internet very effectively to supplement our learning program.

I have been working as a classroom teacher since returning to Melbourne in 2003 and was previously an ICT Coordinator at West Beach Primary School in South Australia. Having worked for the SA Education Department in 2001 as a Discovery Network teacher I began to explore ways to help other teachers and students access the internet in more meaningful and relevant ways. I had visited many classrooms where students were spending fruitless hours 'surfing' the net and finding very little to enhance their learning.

As a user of technology I wanted to ensure that what they were doing with the technology could NOT be equally well done or replicated without the technology. I wanted the experiences that the technology could provide to be unique, interesting, engaging and purposeful. I had experienced a significant emphasis on computers being used to publish neat work but knew that there was so much more!

Gotta love the Net! – sometimes – gotta hate the LAG

'It's been a long and winding journey, but I'm finally here...' There's a song in my head and it won't get out! I know – google the lyrics – ah Yes – Guy Sebastian – Angels brought me here!

Gotta love the Net – I have all the lyrics now – well at least someone's version of them. Isn't it fun when they get them wrong? 'Tenderness you fear' or 'tenderness you feel' makes a big difference. Credibility of the source questionable? – Smacks of critical literacy!

Gotta love the Net - This phrase is often used in our home as we are lucky enough to have broadband connection – school is not so lucky and LAG is a huge issue in the daily workplace routine. If the principal has difficulty accessing his / her email because you have got so many students online 'hogging' the bandwidth it can facilitate change. Things usually improve but it is true to say that no matter the situation I will always manage to find a positive way through. Students have tended to be more multi-tasked in their approach to the technology. They are usually working on other tasks while waiting for pages to load and switch easily between screens from a very young age.

The internet provides an endless plethora of information, the majority of which is not particularly useful. How and why do we make this messy place accessible to the students? Partly, just because it is there, but also because supporting them to learn to navigate successfully, will avoid future tidal waves or the fear of becoming adrift and eventually sinking.

Where to go, where to go?

This is where the idea of pre-searching comes in. Pre-searching is what teachers do in their own time (usually late at night when the kids are in bed) scouring the net for interesting or useful sites to use in their programs. Streamlining this searching for teachers is done really well at EdNA <http://www.edna.edu.au> as one example, where events of significance are usually well catered for in listings of useful resources online, many of which have been evaluated before being included and marked as such. Their school curriculum resources are wonderful. The Departments of Education in most states have very informative sites for teachers with a wealth of information and it is a great idea to look beyond your own state as menus from another state may provide the 'idea' or glimmer of hope you were looking for.

Now for the students

You find a fantastic site and it fits in really well to your program and you want to use it in the morning. Suggestions; copy the url from your navigation window onto a word document, copy five times, enlarge and print out two copies which you then cut at school when you get there and blutack to the monitors for the session! Done – ten kids online FAST. Next go to the site before the session as all machines will be likely then to load faster if you are running a proxy server or thin client as we are. Finally – have a back up plan for when it all falls apart. Possibilities of falling apart might include the kids login won't allow them to access the site, the site moved or crashed in the last four hours (while you were sleeping) or power failure or the machine blows up. All possible I hear you cry.

Some site suggestions

Although I have collections of hyperlinks, in a largely picture based format, which can be accessed via <http://www.judyb.id.au> I would like to share some of the sites that might work for you on Monday morning when you hit the classroom. Most of these are likely to be able to be integrated easily when you are less prepared because you were spending this time at a conference considering your own learning needs rather than the learning needs of your students for a moment.

Fake Out – dictionary word game

<http://www.eduplace.com/fakeout/>

Capital Cities Quiz - Australia from the air

<http://www.ga.gov.au/education/facts/capital/capgame.htm>

Dog bone number grid find – cool maths fun

<http://www.primarygames.co.uk/pg2/dogbone/gamebone.html>

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