

eLearning Case Study

Essendon North Primary School

Context

Essendon North Primary School is situated in the Western Region, is in Like School category 2 with 490 students from 15 nationalities. This school was selected as centre of ICT expertise and innovation and to support whole school as part of the Department's *Creating e-Learning Leaders* (CELL) program.

This case study is based on an interview with Mr Michael Giulieri, Principal (michaelg@mail.enps.vic.edu.au) in May 2007.

Leadership and developing an ICT Vision

At Essendon North Primary School, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is not seen as different or separate from the core program of the school. elearning is part of learning and contributes to achieving the school motto namely, *to deliver the highest quality Learning*

The school has identified the essence of learning at the school. To quote the *Information Booklet* for parents:

“Learning is a dynamic, integrative and interactive process. It is a process which naturally integrates subject disciplines, one which necessitates higher level thinking, and one which requires the use of information skills. Learning is authentic and has real life meaning.

It is initiated by a need and a desire to find out and inquire and hence is a problem solving process. It is completely connected to subject disciplines and skills become melded as one searches for meaning.

In the natural learning process technology is not something that lies outside this learning process. It is not something that dominates the process. It is an integral tool that supports and enhances it.”

The *Information Booklet* describes the core goals, the school's teaching and learning philosophy and beliefs about learning thus describing the values and beliefs that are inherent in the work of every teacher and in every classroom in the school.

The leadership and staff have worked hard to develop a common approach to teaching and learning and for staff to be model the approach for students (form and work in teams, use tools to obtain the best outcomes, collaborate with teachers outside the school, problem solve).

Leaders spend a lot of time releasing teachers to work in teams, visit classrooms, solve problems and to allow teachers to implement new teaching and learning approaches and coach other teachers. Teachers have responded very positively to this professional and caring approach.

Learning, teaching, assessment and reporting enabled by ICT

The school has created a rich ICT environment. Originally an *Classrooms of the Future Navigator* school, the school teaching approach has been transformed. Teachers work in teams and collaborate to develop shared visions. The *ICT Peer*

Coaching Program supported by CELL was instrumental in collaboration between teachers. Teachers stay in the same team (year level group) for three years before changing thereby developing closer relationships with the students and their team.

Teachers are focussed on using multi-media formats to engage and excite students. There is increasing use of video formats. The school arranged for a professional animator to work as an *Artist in Residence* to further develop multi media approaches.

All students have a digital portfolio to record and showcase their work and to inform their personal learning. The school has identified core applications and a standard operating environment for each sub school (years P-2, 3-4, 5-6).

A feature of the students at the school is they can articulate how each class operates, what learning is taking place and how they learn and how other students learn. On a weekly basis, students are involved in creating knowledge, thinking, problem solving and collaborating

Students are becoming more and more technologically aware and parents are demanding more personalised programs to allow students to reach their full potential. Teachers are developing deeper relationships with students and parents, facilitating different learning styles and assessing performance more accurately. The student learning environment is gradually expanding to include student time at home with online access to school resources and collaboration tools. The school is moving towards having individual learning plans for each student.

Students are now selecting authoring, publishing and collaborating tools in accord with the needs of each specific learning situation.

ICT Professional learning

Changes to teaching and learning at the school were prompted by the appointment of a new principal back in 1994 and the subsequent appointment of a *Teaching and Learning Coordinator* (not an ICT or eLearning Coordinator). The principal and coordinator started as change agents and built the culture. As the school progressed, the change agent role progressed to a coaching role. The coordinator works with individual teachers to model strategies, identify strategies that work, develop new approaches and to measure outcomes. This coaching role has been instrumental to developing a whole school philosophy and approach.

The change process started with supporting “early adaptors to trial new teaching and learning approaches, using short, small, and achievable goals. These teachers were then supported to reflect on their practice and to share their experience with colleagues and support colleagues as they tried new approaches. As more teachers became involved, the focus shifted to getting all teachers to reflect on their practice and for the school to develop shared beliefs and values about teaching and learning at the school.

The school developed a template for each teachers’ *Personal Professional Learning plan* (PPL). The PPL is linked to the school’s *Annual Plan* and is structured around the school’s annual goals. Teachers list personal goals, a description of current

practice and shortcomings and strategies to reach their goals. The principal interviews all teachers three times per year on their progress against their PPL goals

The school has a policy of planning professional learning from March to March to avoid the heady time of the start of the new school year.

The school has a priority to release teachers in school time to work in teams to:

- undertake action research
- collaborate in groups of 2-3 teachers
- experiment with new approaches and tools. This “sand pit time” has proved very important in encouraging teachers to problem solve and think about new approaches
- reflect on teaching and learning practice

Every Wednesday, a professional learning activity is offered for all staff at 4pm. Every session is linked to the school’s *Strategic Plan* and *Annual Plan* goals. There are no staff meetings, rather staff briefings on Monday morning and email distribution of notices and messages.

Learning spaces and places and developing Learning Communities

The school has overcome the difficulties of networking in a 100 year old building. Wireless networking has been installed along side four or five cabled desktop computers in each class. There are some computer “pod” spaces between some classrooms. There are only 4 designated printers in the school. The school is moving away from desktop computers to laptop computers as resources become available. Currently the school has a bank of 15 laptop computers that can be moved to any class for intensive skills development activities. All classrooms have a television, DVD player and access to digital still and video cameras and a data projector.

The school allocates approximately 6% of its total budget to ICT hardware, software, associated professional learning, technical support and consumables.

All classes have “class space” on the server for files. Students use “class” email accounts.

Staff access school policies and procedures, administrative forms, curriculum scope and sequence documents and best practice teaching and learning exemplars on a school intranet. Students or parents cannot access the school intranet. However, the school is moving to students being able to access their digital portfolios and to use a localised version of MSN from home.

At this stage, the school does not use electronic whiteboards in classrooms but prefers to buy more laptop computers. Through the CELL program to encourage reflective practice, teachers are also experimenting with the use of Ipods and Isight cameras.

Infrastructure and technical support

The school has employed a full time technical support person in conjunction with two other schools. Changes to the network or desktop are not permitted without permission of the *Teaching and Learning Coordinator*.

A standard operating environment has been established on all computers to reduce maintenance and complexity.

Advice for other schools

- ICT can be a catalyst for changes to teaching and learning in classrooms. Professional learning is the priority
- Retain an open mind and have a positive approach to problem solving which is the model schools should have for their students
- Keep asking the questions- “Will ICT assist to fulfil school goals”, “What works well?” and “What needs improving?”
- Encourage everyone in the school to be reflective. Teachers and students need to make mistakes to improve. Students and teachers need to think, tinker and take risks. Support teachers by providing time for teachers to reflect – visit other classrooms, other schools and distance themselves from their own classroom to think.
- Encourage everyone to work in teams, develop shared beliefs and values and to reflect on outcomes. Establish a coaching model – encourage teams to focus on developing their own skills and then sharing with and supporting the rest of the staff.
- Introduce new hardware, software and peripherals in the context of ways they can be used in the classrooms, show people how to use them, give them sandpit time to use them and then share how they used them in their classrooms.
- Support the risk takers, they are life long learners and they lead and influence others by proving a model and giving support to reluctant teachers
- Encourage teachers to start small. Set achievable fortnightly goals.
- Share successes and the not so successful aspects
- Document what you learn – tie the goals into the Annual Implementation Plan
- Support the person (s) providing technical support. It is a thankless task where people always come to you with problems.
- Share with parents the exciting things happening in your school and assure them you are still teaching basic skills and more.
- The potential is unlimited.