Creating eLearning Leaders

An opportunity to celebrate the work of schools using ICT to enable powerful learning

An eLearning Case Study 2007

State Government Victoria

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

eLearning Case Study
Anderson Creek Primary School College

Context

Anderson Creek Primary School is situated in the Eastern Region, is in Like School category 1 with 400 students. 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 Desmond McKenzie, Principal (McKenzie.Desmond.DJ@edumail.vic.gov.au) in June 2007.

Leadership and developing an ICT Vision

The current principal (with 15 years at this school) has a strong personal interest in using ICT to improve learning having experimented with the use of ICT at two previous schools. His view, and the approach of the school is that ICT is part of the core of *what we do*, not an add-on. He has trumpeted the view that teachers and students need to *control* technologies rather than *respond* or *use* technologies. Using off the shelf digital resources is using somebody else's framework for learning. The approach at Anderson Creek Primary School is to use all aspects of computers (information manipulation and storage, communication, databases, decomposing/composing text) as they are used in society.

A "big bang" strategy was used by the school to encourage all staff to use ICT; it was the introduction of electronic reporting for all year levels in one year. This strategy resulted in strengthened collegiality, more buy-in by staff to using ICT and creation of momentum for change. However, the strategy was only successful because of the professional learning opportunities provided to staff and associated support strategies. This strategy was followed by strategic use of ICT in the school operation (eg posting the agenda for staff meetings on the Intranet, placing a computer in the office foyer displaying student work to visitors …).

The school has moved from having an ICT Coordinator (who has most of the knowledge) to a team approach to spread ownership and knowledge. The school has ensured that this team involves teachers from all sections of the school to maximise knowledge transfer. The team has expanded its role to include team teaching with every teacher to move from an opt-in culture to an expected culture for the whole school. Allocation of teachers with the greatest experience with using ICT to new classrooms in sections of the school with lower rates of engagement with ICT has also been used to spread knowledge throughout the school.

Learning, teaching, assessment and reporting enabled by ICT

The school has worked hard to develop curriculum that integrates the use of ICT in every unit of work. All classes and all students use the technology on a daily basis. Teachers are changing the nature of learning to empower students to engage in their own learning and to decide when to use which approach (independent research, teamwork, problem solving …) and which technology or tool for each approach. Commonly, students author and publish online, access online resources, interpret and manipulate data and collaborate with students in and outside the school. The school was a member of the *iearn* project with students collaborating with students in

Broadford Victoria. Now, students are collaborating with, among others, koorie students in the Northern Territory

Curriculum planning is completed by teams of teachers from each section of the school (P-2, 3&4, 5&6). KLA coordinators decide what domains and strands are to be addressed at each level and suggest particular technologies that are appropriate and teams of teachers plan the units of work. Professional learning opportunities at the time focus on the suggested technologies. All professional learning opportunities allow teachers to deconstruct technologies and experiment with different uses of the technology to build confidence and knowledge and to promote creativity. Teachers review digital resources and benchmark them against the VELS student achievement levels.

ICT Professional learning

The leadership team identified teachers who would be "champions" for changing pedagogy and coaching colleagues.

Most professional learning opportunities are conducted at the school by staff. All staff have completed an eight week, 1 night per week course on demystifying how computers work and building up skills in using ICT tools and applications. Most professional learning is undertaken on a "just in time" basis as teachers and students need to use new approaches/resources.

The school offers ICT professional development sessions for parents annually. This strategy has built up support for the school's approach to pedagogy in the school as well as assisting parents to engage with their children on learning tasks.

Staff are encouraged to visit other schools and to collaborate widely. Four staff have completed exchange programs with schools in the United Kingdom to investigate new approaches to teaching and learning.

Staff recognise that an advanced ICT skill fast becomes a commonly required skill and new requirements for advanced skills quickly follow. Professional learning is an ongoing process.

Learning spaces and places and developing Learning Communities

The school has built four computer laboratories next to learning spaces and has a small number of computers in some classrooms. This approach has been deliberate to balance the need for access to equipment and the need to train students and teachers in groups. It has necessitated the removal of some walls to allow easy access to computers and to ensure teachers can supervise students in multiple places. The large computer laboratories service multiple classrooms and double as a training space for students and teachers. The school also has a set of laptop computers that can be moved around the school. The school has a 1:2.5 computer to student ratio which the staff believe is ideal.

Teachers at the school access all policies, procedures and curriculum resources via an intranet. Curriculum resources are catalogued by year level, VELS achievement level, class and topic.

A detailed calendar for parents is posted on the school website each semester. 75% of parents receive the school newsletter by email. The integration of ICT in the curriculum is a requirement of all new staff appointees.

Collaboration has proved to be a great way to build the learning culture in the school and to enthuse students. Over time, students have come to understand that the school's learning culture includes creating, reflecting and collaborating using ICT.

All students publish digitally. In semester 1, Grade 6 students teach new Prep students how to create a webpage and publish materials. Students then add work to their digital portfolio and learning diary web space" each year they are at the school. When students graduate from the school, the school burns their digital portfolio and diary to a DVD for the student to keep. This approach has proved remarkably successful in engaging new Prep students in the learning culture of the school, standardising approaches to digital authoring and publishing across the school and enthusing students and parents to the learning tasks.

Each class has a learning space and all students and teachers have access rights to publish to the class space. All students also have file server space and an email account. At present, students cannot access the school's network from home.

Teachers use email and MS Communicator to collaborate online.

Classes do not use electronic whiteboards preferring to have more computers in the school. Some students and teachers are beginning to use Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs.

The school is pursuing the goal of linking with a local secondary college to further cross-age tutoring opportunities.

All teachers and students are encouraged to trial new approaches to learning, to celebrate successes and to publish and collaborate about what works

Infrastructure and technical support

The school does not have a technical support person on staff. The school ensures that a teacher on staff has the skills to maintain the network and computers and to apply upgrades. All technical support beyond that which can be provided by teachers is outsourced.

Advice for other schools

- Ensure that staff in the school control the technologies (maintain the network and hardware, apply upgrades)
- Buy quality hardware to make the network "bullet proof" and replace equipment on a three to four year cycle
- Always focus on learning and improving learning. Using computers to transform learning is more important than computer to student ratios
- Arrange for groups of students to use a computer (rather than a 1:1 ratio), this approach facilitates collaboration and builds skills
- Create teams of teachers, pods of computers and knock down walls to encourage team teaching

- The key challenge is to move from the opt-in stage by keen staff to integrating ICT in everyday learning to building pressure for all teachers to integrate ICT in the curriculum so that ICT becomes an integral part of the school's everyday learning culture