

Chapter 15

Case Study of a New Zealand School's Use and Development of a Parent Portal

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ABSTRACT

Involving parents and the community in children's learning has always been a difficult challenge. The New Zealand Ministry of Education has identified the value of this involvement and has directed schools to develop links with parents and the community. Learning Management Systems are seen as a way where this can be effectively achieved. This chapter will provide a case study of one of the first schools in New Zealand to take up the challenge of linking with parents by utilising their school learning management system. Examples will be used to provide evidence of the ways the school utilised their parent portal to enable parent and community interaction to assist with children's learning.

INTRODUCTION

A significant feature of information and communication technology (ICT) has been the opportunities that it has provided for the formation of school-home partnerships. Parent involvement is integral to the successful operation of any school and building school-home partnerships in this new millennium is possible through a range

of technological innovations. On-line communication systems such as school websites, email, wikis and learning management systems are just some of the ways schools are now interacting with parents and the wider community. A recent innovation, discussed in an earlier chapter, is the learning management system KnowledgeNet (KNet). As part of a New Zealand Ministry of Education initiative a parent portal was developed to connect teachers, students and parents/caregiv-

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ers. This parent portal, has been described as “an online portal that gives key stakeholders up-to-date, ‘on-demand’ access to individual student’s education progress” (Dataview, 2010). Through this parent portal, the key stakeholders have been able to engage and access attendance information, assessment results, school reports and interact with samples of children’s work.

Although here is a wide body of literature discussing the adoption and diffusion of course and learning management systems, few publications provide specific examples of the adoption and implementation of these tools (West, Waddoups & Graham, 2007). This chapter refers solely to the experience of one New Zealand school. This school was the first in New Zealand to develop a parent portal via their learning management system. Specific examples of child, parent, peer and teacher interaction will be used and links made with international literature on this area.

Recent developments in the New Zealand educational system with a particular focus on ICT and initiatives of the Ministry of Education will provide background information in order to “set the scene” for the reader. This chapter will then provide an overview of the school, and the implementation strategies that were utilised. Some of the strategies to implement change, the importance of whole school alignment and effective leadership, as well as the structures that were required will also be identified. The benefits, challenges, and possible impact on the engagement of key stakeholders will then be discussed.

BACKGROUND

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in New Zealand

The New Zealand Ministry of Education, as a key stakeholder in New Zealand teaching practice and engagement of learners, is encouraging initiatives and innovations in technology. One initiative is to

develop learning management systems to enhance and improve student-learning capacity. By funding initiatives such as the parent portal, the Ministry of Education is encouraging innovative networks and online communities which offer more choice for educators, schools, and communities on how they engage in education. Steve Maharey, the Minister of Education in 2006, highlighted how new knowledge and technology needs to be secured to sustain the social and economic future of New Zealand.

For New Zealand, the development of a prosperous and confident knowledge society means the development of new skills and knowledge. It will require a culture of continuous enquiry, innovation and improvement, risk taking, and entrepreneurship. This can only come from the education system. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 3)

Educational researchers support the importance of preparing students for life in the world outside education especially now “the emphasis needs to shift to developing students’ capacity for *knowing* – in all kinds of situations with all kinds of people” (Gilbert, 2005, p. 76).

In 2006 the Ministry of Education produced an action plan “Enabling the 21st Century Leader” which argued that effective teaching for all students will depend on teachers becoming confident and capable users of technology (Ministry of Education, 2006). Pedagogical practices that are required to make an impact on students’ learning will depend on teachers making decisions about how to integrate ICT effectively into the classroom. Teachers need to evaluate ICT tools like learning management systems from an educational perspective to determine how the new technology can be embedded into the teaching and learning. The New Zealand E-Learning Advisory Group (2002) stated, “effective e-Learning also means ensuring that on-line resources and assessment are of equivalent or superior quality to those available in a traditional learning environment”

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