

Chapter 4.23

Connected Learning in an Australian Technology Program: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Connected learning using video conferencing, the interactive whiteboard and Web 2.0 tools is possible in the new “interactive classroom” more than 2,240 New South Wales public schools will receive over the next four years. In Australia the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSWDET) is delivering \$AUS 158 million of infrastructure and services to schools and technical and further education campuses for new technologies and applications to support teaching in the 21st century. The intention of the *Connected Classrooms Program* is to create a “large connected and collaborative learning community” of teachers, students and parents that can go online for information, resources and communication “anywhere, anytime” across a state that covers over

800,000 square kilometres. This paper describes the three projects in the program, the underpinning prior work and seven teacher professional learning platforms that reference anticipated learning outcomes and future directions. In its third year, this case study is a descriptive insiders snapshot. It provides an overview for project administrators and participants in other national and international education milieu who may be responsible for planning and implementing enhanced technology environments.

INTRODUCTION

The *Connected Classrooms Program* has a four-year timeframe (2007-11) to provide education sites with enhanced technologies and applications for teaching and learning. This approach sits in a broader Australian education policy context that

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seeks to improve infrastructure for information and communication technologies (ICT) in schools, as well as recognise that today's students like to learn digitally. Led by NSWDET this initiative is built on prior evidence from education research in schools, regional ICT strategies and local trials in technology (Schuck & Kearney, 2006; DET-Engaging Pedagogy, 2007; Groundwater-Smith, 2007).

THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

In Australia significant reports published by the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs Information and Communication Technologies in Schools Taskforce (2005, 2006, 2008) document technology integration in teaching and learning. Other key education guidelines (Kearns, 2002), in particular the *Education Goals for Young Australians*, cite reasons for schools to give priority to student learning with technology:

Successful learners have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation of success in all leaning areas when students leave school they should be confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, and understand the impact of those technologies on society (p.4).

Initiatives of the *Schools Taskforce* and the *National Goals* seek Australian or bi-lateral collaboration on digital content, systems and services, policy, standards and operational agreements. This action supports the development of a framework by which jurisdictions can evaluate and report their progress on the implementation of ICT priorities detailed in *Learning in an Online World* (2005).

Prior to the election of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2007, the promise of a “digital educa-

tion revolution” further positioned technology as a key political platform for effective learning for students in Australian schools. Commitment by the Federal government involves \$AUS 1.2 billion over five years (2008-12) to “turn every secondary school in Australia into a digital school” (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 5).

In July 2008, the Federal Minister for Education, Training and Industrial Relations, Julia Gillard, wrote to all teacher employers in Australia indicating that funds of up to \$AUS 11.25 million will be directed to ICT-related school based professional development for teachers under the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program (AGQTP). Further funds for such programs are not available beyond 2009, and are being replaced by new funding arrangements for teacher professional learning using ICT.

NSW initially withdrew from the Council of Australian Governments (2008) agreement in September 2008 arguing that the initial \$AUS 1.2 billion was insufficient to cover the delivery, installation and ongoing maintenance of wireless learning devices for each student. By December, the Commonwealth had agreed to provide an additional 807 million to meet further costs incurred by the States in implementing the *National Secondary School Computer Fund*:

Each State will report on their progress toward reaching 1:1 student to computer ratio for Year 9 to 12; and to pass on the non-government sector their share of these funds (Council of Australian Governments, 2008).

In 2010 the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs and the Australian ICT in Education Committee are developing a *Digital Education Revolution Road Map* that includes a *Teaching in the Digital Age Work Plan*. It focuses on the teacher professional development required to integrate ICT into pedagogical practice to connect learning, to meet

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