

Chapter 32

Fishing for Quality Learning: KnowledgeNet a New Zealand Solution

Julie Lynch

University of Auckland, New Zealand

Kerry Lee

University of Auckland, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

In order to prepare children for a world of rapid change New Zealand has developed a new education curriculum. This curriculum emphasises both a new vision and new values for teaching and learning. In order to address these, some progressive schools are trialing new technologies such as learning management systems. One such system which is showing exciting results is KnowledgeNet (KNet), which provides opportunities for students, peers, teachers, parents, and the community to be actively involved in the child's education. Schools trialing this system are beginning to see extensive positive applications. This chapter will provide visual real-life classroom examples in order to describe how one New Zealand school has successfully introduced KNet.

INTRODUCTION

More than ever, education is taking place in a time of rapid social, cultural, economic, technological and global change. Some of these rapid changes involve advances in information and communication technology (ICT), which mean businesses now perform in a global economy which the media report on. Increasingly, today's

students are living their lives online; therefore fluency in ICT will be an important life skill, both economically and socially. Essentially, the expectation is that students emerging from schools will be “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 7). In order for students to make the transition into the workforce effectively, businesses need “people who can learn, adapt quickly to new situations, think for themselves, and make decisions. . . . They are ‘systems’ or ‘big picture’ thinkers” (Gilbert,

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2005, p. 31–32). For this reason teachers need to make key decisions about how to integrate different technology effectively into their classroom programmes in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes for students. Teachers need to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of available technology and digital resources and decide when and how to use them with students. Schools must encourage a culture of change and innovation, foster creativity and engage students in self-directed learning so they are prepared for the future.

This chapter will discuss how the New Zealand education system is striving to encourage a culture of change and innovation in schools. The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2006) defined a learning management system as “a software package to manage and deliver learning content and resources to students, usually comprising a variety of applications amalgamated as an ‘integrated’ package” (p. 2). This chapter will demonstrate how one particular learning management system, KnowledgeNet (KNet) has impacted on teaching practice and engagement of the key stakeholders. It is important to note the lead writer is an experienced classroom teacher in a New Zealand school where KNet has proven to be a real asset, and as such is keen for others to be shown a few of the possibilities.

A decade of the 21st century has already passed and schools need to consider strategies they can use to appeal to the learning preferences and communication needs of third-millennium learners while, at the same time honouring traditional practices related to teaching and learning. The literature identifies the most significant factor that contributes to student engagement and achievement is quality and effective teaching (Alton-Lee, 2003). This chapter will highlight some of the theoretical approaches around quality teaching and how the effects are maximised when supported by effective partnership and collaboration practices that focus on student learning (Ministry of Education, 2006; Roblyer & Edwards, 2003; Condie & Livingstone,

2007; JISC, 2000). The impact on pedagogical practice will also be investigated, as teachers need to consider how to integrate technology effectively into their classrooms. Lehtinen (2003) eloquently supported the importance of pedagogical practice in relation to technology, when he stated:

“The effects of ICT, however, depend not only on the equipment, but also, above all, on the pedagogical implementation of technology. Thus, the pedagogical approaches used are, in many cases, more important than the technical features of the applied technology. A successful application of ICT in education always means that many systemic changes in the whole activity environment of the classrooms takes place.” (Lehtinen, 2003, p. 35)

It is important that all strategies which are developed to support teachers throughout this process be constantly evaluated.

BACKGROUND

New Zealand Setting

Social change in New Zealand continues to move at an ever-increasing pace with the population becoming increasingly diverse, technology more sophisticated, and the demands of the workplace more complex (Ministry of Education, 2007). This has impacted on the education system over the last 30 years. Following a major public consultation on the curriculum in the mid-1980s, the Department of Education began work on an overall framework for a revised school curriculum. The reform of the administration of education in 1989 and a change of Government in 1990 meant that work did not proceed beyond a draft document. Curriculum development resumed in 1991, under an “Achievement Initiative” policy, and from 1993, under the umbrella of “The New Zealand Curriculum Framework”. With the publication of The New Zealand Curriculum Framework, cur-

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