



DIGITAL BRIDGES 2005



Digital Bridges participant students with their technology

A milestone report into the use of technology to help students with English as a second language.

Hamilton East School and Peachgrove Intermediate School – Hamilton.

By Pippa Wright

www.digiops.org.nz



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

Project details:

Building Bridges between communities project (Digital Bridges)

The pilot project for Digital Bridges involved eight students and their families from two Hamilton schools, one primary and one intermediate. Both were lower to middle decile inner city schools with student populations covering many ethnicities. The students selected were new immigrants living in the surrounding area with their families, all of whom were identified as not having English as their first language.

Of the eight students chosen to participate in the project, four were placed in one classroom in the primary school, while the remaining four students were placed in two separate classrooms at the intermediate school.

Teachers were carefully selected for their empathy with ESOL students and their ability to run an “inclusive” classroom. Their ability to use technology was not a criterion for selection. All were keen to trial technology in their classroom to raise levels of achievement for the students involved.

Project description:

Aims:

The project aimed to facilitate increased communication and collaboration between parents and students from many cultures through the use of electronic technologies, such as mobile telephones, personal computer-based video conferencing, and an online portal. Secondly, the project aimed to undertake and report on the use of electronic technologies as a means of enhancing the engagement of ESOL students in writing and other literacy processes.

The key student literacy outcomes for the project were:

- To communicate in a way that enhances increased understanding in a multi-cultural community;
- To help develop understanding of the purpose for writing;
- To motivate students to write.

Over the period of the trial, students were involved in planned online collaborative projects, with activities requiring high levels of interaction between home and school. Students and teachers were supplied with mobile phones, and four E-Mac broadband-connected computers were installed into participant family homes, and were rotated between the eight families on a six-monthly basis. It was hoped that the technology would help facilitate regular communication between the key stakeholders - school personnel, parents and students, beyond normal school boundaries and hours.

Baseline data of the students' literacy levels was gathered, and teachers observed the students' interaction in the classroom and playground at the outset of the programme. The facilitator also undertook an action-research inquiry related to the outcomes of the project.

Project participants:

Digital Bridges was headed by the project director and principal of the primary school, Allan Bull. The project facilitator, Pippa Wright, worked two-and-a-half days per week on the project, and a consultant was employed for eight days to guide certain aspects of the programme.

The principals of the schools closely monitored and supported the project, and engaged with the teachers and facilitator in reflective discussions, and directly communicated with project participants via the technologies.

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