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KIDSMART SNAPSHOTS



GRACEMERE PREP

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Digital Story Telling: A Tool for Improving Literacy



IBM®



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GRACEMERE STATE SCHOOL IS LOCATED 10KM WEST OF ROCKHAMPTON IN THE CENTRAL QUEENSLAND TOWN OF GRACEMERE. THE SCHOOL HAS FEWER THAN 300 PRIMARY CHILDREN FROM PREP TO GRADE 7, WITH A HIGH PROPORTION OF LOWER INCOME, SINGLE PARENT AND INDIGENOUS STUDENTS.

> Investigation

“How can we use ICT as an integrating tool to increase motivation and participation of boys in multiliteracies?”

During this investigation, Gracemere Preschool had a high percentage of boys (15 of 25,) many of whom were reluctant to participate in extending and scaffolding play-based episodes to deepen their literacy understandings and skills. Right from the beginning of the year it was the boys who were always timetabled to use the computer, and if they were not using the computer, they would watch and interact with the other preschoolers currently on the computer. The next hurdle was to capture this enthusiasm for technology and use it to diversify into other areas of learning. We observed four boys in particular, who were developmentally delayed in their language and social skills, and documented their technological journey.

After the first couple of IBM KidSmart seminars we realised we could tap into this enthusiasm with technology to engage these boys in experiences of increasing complexity in multiliteracies to achieve a deeper understanding of learning. As we changed our pedagogical practices and our view of technology as merely the computer, a stand-alone educational tool, was transformed to technology's being an interconnected component of child initiated learning processes, we observed these boys successfully interacting with others and developing a positive attitude to learning.

> Observations

Two boys, who previously had difficulty conversing with others, used the technology for a month and were given an opportunity to explain and direct other children in the use of the software, Jellybean Hunt, Fribbles and Freddie Fish. They were tutored on various 3D activities associated with the programs, for example, we made a large grid on the floor, where students had to take turns either giving verbal directions to each other to locate a jelly bean, or be the one following the directions, similar to the ant in the software program, Jelly Bean Hunt from Trudy's Time and Place House. The key concept from Fribbles, a program from Thinkin' Things involved students using attributes of the characters to identify and predict a particular “Fribble.” This was extended in the 3D activities, where students would make characters using play doh and collage. The students would then take turns giving out clues for the other person to select the right character, such as “purple one with stripes.” By developing and implementing a multimodal approach to teaching concepts, we observed the oral language skills of these two students develop notably, as the students were required to engage in conversation with the other children, which also supported their independence and confidence, and which extended to other activities beyond the computer.



We also observed two boys, whose play during inside time was not developing. It was boisterous, unstructured and they were very reluctant to scaffold their play episodes to construct new knowledge and skills. We noticed that, when their play was connected with technology, these boys were among the first to engage, and their type of play also changed. When African animals were added to the preschool, in response to a member of the preschool having visited Africa, these two boys used the animals to re-enact fighting scenarios and were very reluctant, even with adult interaction, to change this play or research and construct props (jungle habitat) to extend their play. They were also unwilling to transpose their play into any written or drawn form. The boys were encouraged to explore software programs that allowed them to take on the roles of authors and publishers, such as Make a Story from Bailey's Book House, where they could investigate the concept of characters, setting and plot, and also Make a Movie from Sammy's Science House, which emphasised the importance of correct sequencing. The next week the digital camera was introduced as a tool for the children to use to record their play episodes during the day. When it was suggested the boys could use the camera to record the interactions of the African animals, and then a photostory could be created to retell their play, we noticed a new direction to their play. After discussing that fighting scenes would not be appropriate to show other preschoolers, they went about unaided, creating a story about two animals and their search for water. They took their own photos and created their own photostory, including their own story line and narration, with much enthusiasm. They were so proud of their accomplishments and the literacy skills used were more complex than these boys had employed before.

One year on:

This year we have endeavoured to extend learnings when making claymations. The children were given more control over the process. They 'brainstormed' various claymation ideas and then were asked to research the behaviour, lifestyle and environment of the Australian animal they had selected. This research was then included in the claymation story line, scenery and production. The finished product was then critiqued to establish good points and improvements for future claymations. The children were engaged and motivated to research their animal to find out interesting facts. Children who had previously been reluctant to delve into books were observed keenly seeking information and joining in conversations about the storyline. Positive interactions ensued while setting scenes and taking



Students used different mediums to share stories, including puppet shows, claymation and role play.



*Leanne Paxton
– prep teacher*



photos. Everyone wanted to type in storylines and credits and the reluctant children effectively critiqued the claymations. The whole process enabled all children to construct new knowledge and skills with increased motivation and participation.

> Future Direction

One extremely pleasing outcome of the program is how integrating productive ICT practices into the Early Childhood curriculum has become such a natural process. When the Prep children negotiate their learning program, I am constantly thinking which technologies can be implemented to enhance, inspire and complement their learning.

Another interesting outcome of the program was how independent and competent the children are at using various technologies. At the beginning of our journey the computer experiences, particularly use of the digital camera, were almost totally supervised and teacher directed. As the program progressed, we observed the children using the technologies skillfully and responsibly. We now provide the children with technologies to use autonomously and in a child directed fashion with a great deal of success.

On reflection, our beliefs and practices have dramatically changed, not only in what we use the computer for, but also in how we allow students to engage with the resources. At the commencement of the IBM Kidsmart program, technology was used in the curriculum by way of a stand alone computer. It was not integrated into my planning; we did use the digital camera, but mainly to produce pictures for class books. This program challenged my notion of what real integration was; that having the computer on with relevant software options was not integration. We now have a vast range of effective strategies to incorporate technology with 3D learning experiences into a play-based curriculum. We are now looking at more ICTs that we can utilise in our Prep program, in particular an electronic interactive whiteboard. We are now confident to try new ICT experiences that promote a deeper knowledge of numeracy and literacy, particularly with reluctant learners. IBM Kidsmart has transformed our use of ICTs into an interconnected and integral component of an effective child-negotiated play-based curriculum that makes a significant difference to the learning outcomes of prep children, particularly reluctant learners.

THIS INVESTIGATION HAS HIGHLIGHTED HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOCIAL AND LITERACY SKILL OF PRESCHOOLERS, ESPECIALLY BOYS.

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