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RICHMOND

Libby Matthews

A Teacher's Reflections

KIDSMART SNAPSHOTS



IBM



*Libby Matthew at
the computer*



“ ... out of the darkness came a small voice ... ”

~ E. B. White (1899-1995), *Charlotte's Web* ~

“Yes, out of the darkness came a small voice – A voice of calmness and reason. It was my voice and it was echoing the praise and confidence of others. You ‘can’ do it! You ‘have’ done it! You have taken a chance, tried some new things and successfully integrated information, communication technology (ICT) learning in everyday practice. Having just completed a year long project with IBM KidSmart, I was full of ideas and skills and eagerly anticipating the start of a new school year”. Libby Matthews 2007

LIBBY MATTHEWS IS A PREP TEACHER WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE 2006 IBM KIDSMART PROGRAM WHILE AT RICHMOND HILL STATE SCHOOL SITUATED IN THE RURAL TOWN OF CHARTERS TOWERS, NORTH QUEENSLAND. THIS CASE STUDY HIGHLIGHTS HER PROGRAM JOURNEY, AS WELL AS HER REFLECTIONS AND PHILOSOPHY IN RELATION TO INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN HER CLASSROOM.

> **Prior to IBM KidSmart – The embarrassing truth**

Sadly, I was not always so positive. Without a doubt, I was a teacher with just enough ICT skills to get by. Turning the computer on each morning and assisting children to navigate around commercial programs was basically the extent of my ICT understanding. Within the safety of my school office, I could send emails to colleagues and search for basic thematic resources on the Internet. I believed that ICT integration was simply turning the computer on and offering it as another activity choice within an integrated curriculum. In the past I had also begun to investigate digital photography, but my ideas were limited to simple PowerPoint reflective stories and parent friendly snap shots.

I believed that the computer was an important resource needed to function in society and, as such, it was necessary to introduce its use to children. I believed that it was imperative for children to gain confidence and mouse skills, so in future years they could further enhance their skills and complete set tasks given to them by their primary teacher. Little did I realise that computers could be such a vital component in engaging learners in such a diverse context, ranging from social skills to more traditional areas of numeracy and literacy.

> **Changes to the way I work with ICT's**

I am still developing my new philosophy, but I now realise that enhancing ICT skills is still an important component of my classroom, however, I now prefer to think of skill development as a small component in a much bigger picture. Since completing the IBM KidSmart Program, I have developed a very positive attitude to working with ICTs.

Firstly, I see ICT learning all around. I no longer say, “ICT” and think , “computer.” Each day presents opportunities for children to interact with technology and for me to explicitly extend their understandings by providing the resources and/or conversations.

Children in 2007 are coming to school listening to their parents’ MP3 players or playing games on mobile phones. Numerous children play Sony Play Stations or similar console games. They can load DVDs and push buttons to stop, play and pause. The list is endless. These children are competent and capable learners; and are

accustomed to living in an ICT literate world. It is my job to speak their language and to support their learning and growing understandings.

An example of this occurred in the second week of school. While outside, I was taking some photos of the obstacle course we had just constructed. One of my students asked if he could take the photos. I handed him the camera and he asked how to turn it on. After I assisted him, he held the camera appropriately, pointed and took the photo. We then downloaded the photographs and printed them out.

This example highlights an important shift in my philosophy. I once believed that I had to specifically plan for such learning, but here it was, the second week of school and I had an expert who brought with him a wealth of prior knowledge. I had planned to slowly introduce the concept of a 'Digital Camera Licence' in Term 2. Obviously, I would need to rethink some of my preconceived notions, in particular, why wait to introduce the licence?

> Observations

One of the aspects of the IBM KidSmart program I have integrated into my teaching is the concept of 2D to 3D multimodal approach to integration. This involved taking a software program (which we referred to as a 2D experience) and allowing students to develop the same concept in familiar and transferred contexts (which we called 3D experiences). Examples included, if we were exploring the *Make a Bug* program in **Millie's Maths House**, we would also create bugs and other creatures using playdoh, boxes, collage or other appropriate material. This not only enhanced the numeracy concepts that were being developed, but also focused on descriptive language and instructional concepts, as well as problem solving and social interaction, as students had to negotiate, communicate, select material and make decisions about their creatures, in a multi-modal context.

Twelve months after starting the initial IBM KidSmart training, I am more relaxed and confident about developing these multimodal experiences, as I have seen at first hand the benefit of children recreating their understanding through different mediums. My students are now willing to revisit, build and change their thinking as part of their continual learning; and computer activities are just another station or tool that helps them achieve this.

3D integration is an integral component of my classroom planning, though to be honest, I found this concept my greatest challenge in the beginning. At the early stages of the IBM KidSmart program my class could not be enticed to continue the 3D learning approach. They would not follow through ideas or reach a deeper understanding in their learning. Their concentration was minimal. I struggled with this 3D concept for most of Term 2, as I mistakenly believed that I could not initiate ideas in a child negotiated curriculum. However, upon reflection I have realized that I had to provide more support and guidance in this early stage to scaffold the children and their ability to take a 2D experience into a 3D learning journey.

Since then I have successfully integrated a number of 3D experiences including

- *The Jelly Bean Hunt*, from **Trudy's time and Place House**, where students made up a grid on the floor using sticky tape, and then took turns giving directions starting from up, down, left and right and progressing to giving directions using north, south, east and west to find the jelly bean.



- *Sorting Station*, from **Sammy's Science House**, which allowed students to explore the concept of classification, by providing different objects to sort into 2, 3 or 4 different categories. We extended this concept to allow the students to further explore the concept of classifying. The students not only had to look at similarities, they also needed to identify differences and develop a criterion for sorting each of the objects. This was a great way to introduce living and non-living things, and then further extend this to introduce mammals, reptiles, birds and amphibians. The development of descriptive language, problem solving and negotiation skills were integrated in the learning experience, as students realised that there were many ways to classify objects. As long as criteria are established and followed, there are no right or wrong ways of performing the tasks.
- *Symbol Sandbox* from **Trudy's Time and Place House** was used to introduce symbols to explore the relationship between a map and a "real life" landscape. By focusing on spatial visual skills, students were able to interpret simple maps and develop their own.
- *My Friend* from **Bailey's Book House** also provided useful activities I have been working on with the children, where they were encouraged to make their own 3D friends from commercial playdoh, and verbally describe their features. Using the digital camera, I am capturing their words in a mini-movie. This will hopefully lead to an exploration of Claymation.

> Future

While I was never afraid of technology, the IBM KidSmart program challenged me to reassess what ICT integration is, and how it might be integrated into a negotiated curriculum. I now no longer see the computer as a simple activity choice during inside play. In previous years, I had never thought of taking learning into a 3D experience. Similarly, I had never thought of utilising technology to support specific, planned learning and teaching.

While I still have frustrating technical issues and a limited budget, I am no longer afraid to take risks or limit children to my preconceived ideas about what young children know or learn. Where possible, I involve them and engage their interest, taking every opportunity to extend and challenge their thinking, with ICTs being one of the many tools I use in this process.

My classroom has still a long way to go in achieving full ICT integration, but I am beginning to awaken and discover a world filled with light, rather than the darkness of my own insecurities about technology. This program has been a catalyst for my personal growth and has assisted me to better understand technology integration. I believe I will continue to explore new software, that will enhance and support my curriculum, and look for new ways to extend concepts through 2D and 3D integration. I believe the future will be very bright.

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