



Informing Parents

Parent Information Newsletter: Term 3 ♦ Week 1 ♦ Wednesday, 23 July 2008

Connected Classrooms: the digital revolution linking Narrabri West with the world!



As announced recently, Narrabri West has just had our 'Connected Classroom' equipment installed. This is part of a Department of Education & Training program to equip all NSW public schools with enhanced and exciting technology.

200 high-tech digital whiteboards and video conference facilities have been installed in schools across the state in the initial stage of the project, with Narrabri West, Narrabri PS and Narrabri HS selected to be amongst the first schools to receive theirs.

By 2011 all 2,200 public schools will have received their equipment and will be technologically linked in the largest collaborative learning community anywhere in the world.

The new whiteboards will complement the four we already have at Narrabri West, whilst the video conferencing units have created an air of excitement amongst our teachers, as we explore the endless possibilities that these state of the art resources will provide. They will allow our students and teachers to connect and interact with other classrooms anywhere in Australia or the world.

The program also includes enhanced and upgraded student email, with Google and its 'Gmail' system being awarded the contract to implement a 'new generation'

email system for all staff and students, replacing the current system.

This is the biggest technology project attempted in Australian schools and will build a collaborative learning community where schools can share great ideas and materials and store and access that material on their own network.

Student and staff users of the department's network will have online workspaces and be able to access their files from a different school or from home. Web 2.0 technology, such as 'wikis', will be incorporated into the project.

Instead of storing files on either the school's local area network or on thumb drives, students will be able to store files in a secure environment and access it where they want and when they want.

The accompanying network enhancement project will increase bandwidth capacity and speed, whilst also ensuring improved security and reliability. This will include an upgrade to the authenticated and filtered internet browsing services for every student and teacher.

The program will allow schools to take virtual excursions anywhere in the world, beam experts into classrooms for real-time lessons and to communicate with students and teachers.

It will have major benefits for teachers and students. Students can talk live by direct video links to experts like astronaut Andy Thomas at NASA, take virtual excursions to the Great Barrier Reef, rehearse together for concerts or debate online through videoconferencing.



Video-conference from the Great Barrier Reef

It will also enhance opportunities for collaboration between students, teachers, classes and schools across the

Department of Education & Training and provide the necessary infrastructure to facilitate support networks for teachers.

The innovative ways that we can use these technologies are unlimited. The program has the potential to transform the way education is delivered in our school.

Mr Maher and Mr Cornish recently attended a conference in Sydney to launch the program. This will be followed up with further local training for all of our teachers early this term. The Sydney conference provided us with the opportunity to:

- attend a range of workshops focusing on the teaching and learning potential of the equipment;
- find out about virtual excursions available through video conference;
- experience newly created teaching resources;
- hear about innovative school projects integrating digital resources and interactive whiteboards; and
- listen to leaders in the field of integrating technology with teaching and learning

Following the recent installation of the equipment, students from Narrabri West and Narrabri have already conducted test video-conferences with each other.



*Videoconference with Dr Andy Thomas
(Australian Space Shuttle Astronaut)*

There is no doubt that the Connected Classrooms Project will not only take Narrabri West's students to the world, but most importantly, will bring the world to us!

The 'A to Z' of Technology

Bringing up children in this day and age is made all the more confusing when they start talking about technology. The following guide has been compiled so you can understand the

technology trends that are happening right now at schools and with your child.

Each section highlights a different technology. You will see what it is, how it works, how you can make it safer/cheaper/available, how you can get involved and whether schools are using this technology too.

BLOGS

What are they?

A blog (which is an abbreviation of a weblog) is a personal website that can be easily updated. Blogs usually look like online diaries.

How do they work?

Anyone can blog, and there are countless websites that provide tools to do so.

Why are blogs useful?

Blogs are a great way of keeping up with friends and reading about the interesting lives and opinions of other people.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are blogging?

Explain to your child that whatever they write represents them and can be seen by anyone online. They should always consider the repercussions of publishing information. If they don't want you to read their blog, then you may have something to worry about.

Want to know more about blogging?

Go to our school's blog:

- <http://narrabriwest.blogspot.com>

Try the following websites for more information:

- www.technorati.com
- www.blogger.com
- <http://blogsearch.google.com>

CHAT ROOMS

What are they?

A chat room is a place on the Internet where you can meet and chat with other people. Users may want to find others with common interests, or just chat with random strangers. Depending on the chat room, you may be able to exchange written messages instantly, talk into a microphone, and perhaps show video of yourself using an Internet video camera (webcam).

How do they work?

Usually people register at chat room sites and log in to the room. They are free to chat with anyone else. In general there is no moderation and people can say what they like.

Why are chat rooms useful?

People use chat rooms to share information and discuss subjects of interest. They are usually free to use and members can remain anonymous or pretend to be someone they are not.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are going into chat rooms?

Most chat rooms require users to be at least 14 years old. You need to be aware of what types of chat rooms your child is going into and who they are talking to. Always remind your child that the person they are chatting to could be making everything up.

Anything your child says in a chat room can be seen by anyone else in the room at that point in time.

Remind your child to:

- Not say anything they wouldn't want the public to know — this includes any personal information
- Never arrange to meet up with anyone they meet through a chat room unless they speak to you first
- Choose a handle (online computer nickname) that doesn't give away their real name or age
- Don't reveal their location or school and don't use photos in their school uniform
- If someone says or does something that makes them feel uncomfortable they should tell their parents.

Want to know more about chat rooms?

Some of the more popular chat rooms include:

- <http://chat.myspace.com>
- <http://chat.yahoo.com>
- www.stickam.com

EMAIL

What is it?

Email is short for electronic mail. Email is a way of writing and sending electronic letters from your computer across the Internet, including documents, videos, photos and just about anything else. The NSW Department of Education and Training provides all students with an Internet and email account to help improve their learning opportunities in a safe environment.

How does it work?

If you want to send an email, you need to get your own email address, then use email software to create a message. Type an email address in the "To" line of who you want to receive the message, type your message and hit "send".

Why is email useful?

Email is a quick and easy method to transfer messages and/or documents to anyone, anywhere who is connected to the Internet.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are emailing?

Remind your children to be friendly and speak to people as they would like to be spoken to.

Remember that once they hit "send" the email can't be taken back. They should not reply to emails or open pictures or attachments from email addresses they don't know; they could contain viruses or spyware.

Want to know more about emailing?

Why not get your own free email account through Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo! Mail?

Check out:

- www.hotmail.com
- www.gmail.com
- www.yahoo.com

FILTERS

What are they?

Filters are programs that block websites based on certain key words or types of content. The NSW Department of Education and Training filters Internet access on all school computers to prevent students from looking at inappropriate material on websites, such as pornography. Filters can be used on home computers as well.

How do they work?

Basically, filters act like a sieve and only let websites through the Internet that aren't blocked. Certain websites and web content are blocked because they contain information that is deemed inappropriate and cannot get through the filter.

Why are filters useful?

Filters are great at helping your child avoid inappropriate or dangerous websites. Most are set up to block websites that contain "adults-only" content.

What do you need to keep in mind about filters?

No one Internet filter is foolproof. So it's good to keep in mind that as websites become more advanced, they may find a way to get through your filter. Always remember a filter shouldn't replace basic parenting, the best way to avoid your child looking at inappropriate material is if you are involved in teaching your child to be safe online. On another note, a lot of filters can become annoying – they end up blocking a lot of sites that aren't inappropriate for your child to see, which means you will need to be there to "unblock" any of these sites.

Want to know more about filters?

You can download a free filter at:

- www.netalert.gov.au

GAMING

What is it?

Gaming involves playing any type of the many available electronic games.

How do they work?

Most games come with instructions on how to operate them and what you need to do to win.

Why are computer games useful?

A lot of electronic games require coordination and use of logic to work out how to win!

What do you need to keep in mind if your child is playing electronic games?

Some games are for adults only. If a game is classified for 18+ it might be violent or sexually explicit. Games can also be addictive or emotionally involving. Try setting a time limit on playing games.

Want to know more about games?

Find out more about the games your child is playing or wants to play and ask them to show you how to play.

INSTANT MESSENGER (IM)

What is it?

Instant messaging (IM) allows people to chat to each other instantly using online text messages.

How do they work?

Most IM services require you to subscribe and add contacts in as "buddies".

What's great about Instant Messaging?

IM programs are usually free and are a great way for kids to help each other do their homework without tying up the phone.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are using Instant Messenger?

IM is very addictive and may take up time that should be used for school work. Like email there is no opportunity to take something back. Once your child has an IM account they can log into any computer and start chatting, meaning they might not be under your supervision when they next log on.

Want to know more about Instant Messenger?

Sign up and add your children as your buddies and test it out! Try some of these popular IM sites:

- www.ninemsn.com.au and follow the MSN messenger links
- www.aim.com
- www.messenger.yahoo.com

MOBLOGS

What is it?

Using your mobile phone to publish information on the Internet.

How does it work?

You can publish information, photos and videos directly from your phone to the Internet. Another method involves sending an MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service - like an SMS but with photos) to a moblog online site.

What's great about moblogging?

You can easily put your photos and videos from your mobile phone online where your friends can view them.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are moblogging?

If your child is constantly sending MMS to moblog sites or is logging on to the Internet from their mobile phones, this will increase their phone bill.

Want to know more about moblogging?

Some examples are:

- www.busythumbs.com
- www.moblogs.com.au
- www.twitter.com

MP3 PLAYERS

What are they?

An MP3 player (one of the more popular brands is the iPod) is used to play MP3 audio files. 'MP3' is a type of compression technology that minimises the size of audio files.

How do they work?

To put music onto an MP3 player, you need to either load (called "ripping") your CDs onto your computer, or buy music online at places like iTunes.

What's great about MP3 Players?

MP3 players can keep all of your music in the one convenient and portable location.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are listening to MP3 Players?

Noise levels and your child's hearing is important to consider. Pirate music has become a problem so it is important to remind your children that copying music that they haven't purchased is stealing.

Want to know more about MP3 Players?

See the following websites for more information:

- www.howstuffworks.com/mp3-player1.htm
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MP3

PHOTO SHARING WEBSITES

What are they?

These let you share your photos with friends or the whole world.

How do they work?

Once you are signed in to a site you can add your own photos and view other people's.

What's great about photo sharing websites?

These sites are perfect for people who never print their digital photos.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are using photo sharing websites?

Anyone who is signed up can potentially view your children's photos. The more popular photo sharing sites have guidelines that ensure any offensive photos uploaded are removed as soon as possible. Make sure any photos of your children cannot be viewed in an objectionable manner.

Want to know more about photo sharing websites?

Try signing up to one!

- www.flickr.com
- www.facebook.com

PODCASTING AND VODCASTING

What is it?

A podcast is like a pre-recorded "radio"-style program available on the Internet and can be downloaded to your computer or MP3 player. A vodcast is the video version.

How does it work?

You need to go to the podcast website and download the software, then click on the links for the podcasts that you would like to listen to.

What's the benefit of listening to podcasts?

You can download video or audio of any topic you like, from your favourite bands, news, events and radio shows to television clips and listen to it when you want.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are downloading podcasts/vodcasts?

Check that the information material that they are downloading is suitable for your child.

Want to know more about podcasting?

Try looking up a radio station website that you are interested in, and following the instructions to download the podcasts available.

- ABC Radio – www.abc.net.au/radio/
- itunes – www.apple.com/itunes/

RSS FEEDS

What is it?

Really simple syndication (RSS) feeds are an excellent way for web users to keep up-to-date with news headlines or blogs. With an RSS reader users can scan hundreds of news headlines from one location.

How do RSS readers work?

Web users sign up to a website's RSS feeds that interest them. Anytime that website is updated, a notice will appear in their reader.

What's the benefit of RSS feeds?

If you are interested in a topic, you don't need to keep checking the site for updates.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are using RSS feeds?

Just be clear on the types of sites they are subscribing to – make sure they are appropriate for your child.

Want to know more about RSS feeds?

Try a free online RSS feed program and add whatever feeds you are interested in.

- www.pageflakes.com

SEARCH ENGINES

What are search engines?

Search engines are websites that help you find information online.

How does it work?

Search engines index web pages and rate them in terms of relevancy on all possible topics. So when you type in a subject and hit "search" the most relevant website will appear at the top of the list. Paid advertising websites can appear first.

What's great about search engines?

You can type in a question or subject and thousands of results can appear.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are making use of search engines?

Remind your children that just because information is on the Internet, this doesn't make it accurate.

Want to know more about search engines?

Check out the sites

- www.google.com.au
- www.yahoo.com.au
- www.ninensn.com.au

Other great search engines for children include:

- www.kids.net.au

- www.dibdabdo.com
- www.askforkids.com

SMS

What is SMS?

SMS stands for Short Messaging Service. It is also known as a text message sent from mobile phone to mobile phone.

How does it work?

All mobile phones have the ability to send SMS. Users create a new message using the key pad and send it to a number from their contacts list or just type the number in directly.

What's great about SMS?

It is cheap, and can be used to send important messages when you don't have the time to talk or it's too noisy.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are SMSing?

Let your child know there is still a cost attached to this service, so large bills will arrive if your child is a big texter. Encourage them to only text when necessary.

Want to know more about SMS?

Go to your mobile phone provider's website to view charges:

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

What are they?

Social networking sites are websites that expand your group of friends by making it easy to meet your friend's friends. These are websites used to socialise, such as MySpace, Bebo and Facebook.

How do they work?

All you need to do is sign up to a social networking site, and then you receive a profile page to do whatever you like with. Once your friends find your page, they can add you as a friend. You can also look through your friend's friends and ask them to be your friend. You can look on any of your friends' profile pages. Users have the ability to block others from being their friends and to block others from seeing their profile page. These sites are blocked from being accessed in NSW Public Schools.

What's great about social networking sites?

These sites are great places to meet up with friends, make new friends and post photos and stories.

What do you need to keep in mind if your child is registered on a social networking site?

Discuss with your child what they go on these sites for – who they talk to, what they like about it.

Other things to keep in mind:

- Remind them to never give out private information like their full name, age or address
- Make sure they stick to the age rules of the various sites – if they are under the limit, they should wait until they are old enough. Age restrictions are in place for a reason
- Remind them that anything they put on their profiles can be seen by all of their friends (and the rest of the world depending on settings), so only put up things they are proud of
- Be careful when making new friends online – they might not be who they say they are, and your child shouldn't meet any new online friends without a trusted adult present
- If your child comes across anything that makes them uncomfortable, encourage them to talk to you about it straight away.

Want to know more about Social Networking Sites?

Check out these sites for yourself:

- www.bebo.com
- www.facebook.com
- www.myspace.com

TAGGING

What is a tag?

A tag is a word, or words, assigned to a piece of information (such as a picture, article, or video clip), that describes the content of the item and you search and cross-reference information online.

How does it work?

You might tag a picture of a parrot as "animal", "bird" and "colourful". You might then tag a picture of a tropical fish as "animal", "fish", and "colourful". Later when you want to find information about colourful animals, you could search your tagged items for "animal" and "colourful". There are websites that allow you to store your tags in one location, and for you to share your tags and see other peoples.

What's great about tagging?

Tagging helps you remember your favourite web pages and cross-reference information you've found. By sharing and looking at other people's tags, you can quickly find even more information other people like.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are tagging?

There is no structure in the way people assign tags, so following some links could lead your children to inappropriate web content.

Want to know more about tagging?

- <http://del.icio.us>
- www.technorati.com/tag
- www.flickr.com/photos/tags

VIRTUAL WORLDS

What are they?

Virtual worlds are simulated worlds created on the Internet that people can visit from their computer. "Residents" can create a new identity (known as an "avatar" – a 3D representation of themselves) and interact with other avatars in real-time, in a relatively lifelike social setting.

You can socialise, visit places, even catch public transport. Businesses are also starting to appear in virtual worlds, so you can buy anything from real estate to clothing, using virtual currency.

How do they work?

Sign up and create your virtual self, then you can start looking around the world.

Why are virtual worlds so popular?

Building a virtual "life" can be quite addictive. It can offer a world of possibilities that may not be achievable in real life.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are visiting virtual worlds?

Make your child aware of some ground rules:

- They shouldn't reveal their personal details
- They should be honest about their age when signing up. Some virtual worlds won't allow children under certain ages to join due to the adult nature of the content
- Not to respond to any comments or actions that make them feel uncomfortable - report it to the site administrators and parents
- Keep their parents in the loop about their virtual life
- If they want to meet offline, seek parental permission and take a trusted adult with them.

Want to know more about virtual worlds?

If your child is visiting virtual worlds talk about it with them and see if they will show you around and how it works. Popular virtual worlds include:

- Second Life – www.secondlife.com
The teen version is www.teen.secondlife.com/
- Zwinkytopia – www.zwinky.com
- Club Penguin – www.clubpenguin.com
- Millsberry – www.millsberry.com
- Star Doll – www.stardoll.com – a virtual paper doll world

WIKIS

What is a wiki?

Wikis are an online group of documents/web pages that many different users can add to and edit freely online. The most famous wiki is Wikipedia.

How does it work?

Wikis work on the basis that whoever is in that particular wiki's community will edit and add to the information available.

What's great about wikis?

The community that works with the wiki maintains the integrity and volume of the information.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are using Wikis?

Remind your children not to assume information is correct – there is definitely room for errors and bias.

Want to know more about Wikis?

Try the big one – Wikipedia – www.wikipedia.org

YOUTUBE

What is it?

YouTube is a video clip sharing website.

How does it work?

Users can log on and add video clips, or simply look through the site and see the video clips available.

What's great about YouTube?

A lot of the film clips on YouTube are really fun to watch and some are educational. It's kind of like watching television on the Internet.

What do you need to keep in mind if your children are hanging out on YouTube?

YouTube content isn't age specific, so your child might be viewing clips that aren't appropriate. YouTube is not for children under the age of 13.

Want to know more about YouTube?

Take a look for yourself! www.youtube.com