



Creating one classroom, bridging 2,000 miles

Australia

Project name:
Our Culture

Teachers:
Hugh Soord and Phil Lockhart

School:
Como Secondary College, Perth and
Oombulgurri Remote Community
School, Kimberley region

Learning areas:
Bridging cultural, social and
geographic gaps

Objectives:
To provide students and teachers with
opportunities to learn collaboratively,
broaden their worldview, and deliver
positive outcomes in the areas of
literacy, numeracy and ICT

Outcomes:
Development and enhancement of
literacy and technology use, with
regard to communication, student
awareness and appreciation of
different cultures

“The link that we were able to establish with technology enhanced my students’ access to the curriculum and consequently the outcomes for them.”

— Phil Lockhart, Oombulgurri Remote Community School

This project is based on a cultural exchange between two diverse communities in Western Australia: indigenous students of the Oombulgurri Community in the Kimberley region and students at Como Secondary College in Perth. The objective was to encourage students of each community to exchange and compare characteristics of their culture and develop a greater understanding of cultures that are different from their own.



Situation

During the 2006 school year teachers Hugh Soord of Como Secondary College and Phil Lockhart of Oombulgurri Remote Community School designed and implemented a technology led project called ‘Our Culture’ to promote cultural understanding and exchange between their students. The project was initiated to connect two diverse groups of students separated by 2000 km and develop a collaborative partnership between a teacher based at a remote and isolated school and one at a metropolitan senior high school. Over time the project evolved into a peer-mentoring relationship, where higher standards of achievement were aspired to by both groups of students. The students at Como Secondary College generally had little or no contact with Aboriginal culture outside of the metropolitan area. Similarly, the students at Oombulgurri were unaware of the multicultural aspect of most metropolitan schools in Australia.

“I think the technology gives teachers an opportunity to try different ways of teaching.”

— Hugh Soord, Como Secondary College

Objectives

The initial goals of the project were pursued by encouraging the students of each community to exchange and compare characteristics of their culture and, from this, develop a greater understanding of cultures that are different from their own. Using MSN Messenger, e-mail and Microsoft Office PowerPoint the students began sharing details of their life, community and cultural history. Instant messaging afforded the naturally shy Oombulgurri students with an anonymous way to communicate, while Hugh and Phil shared resources and stayed in almost daily contact, planning and evaluating lessons.

The remoteness of Oombulgurri community means the students there have very few peers to compare their work to - this project was to raise their awareness of the quality of work being produced at other schools and set benchmarks for their own achievements and aspirations. The exchanges of work and collaborative learning that resulted became largely student driven. This inspired independent research from the students in an effort to more fully understand their new found friends and learning partners. A powerful student driven peer-mentoring situation developed, and evolved during the project.

Outcomes

One of the major outcomes includes an improvement of understanding and use of the English language, and development and enhancement of literacy with regard to communication, student awareness and appreciation of different cultures. On one side, this project improved student understanding and awareness of technology and its applications, especially within a classroom environment, but also contributed to the preservation and conservation Oombulgurri's unique culture, showing the wider Australian and world community the richness of the Aboriginal culture in general. This project also enabled teaching programs to be modified to incorporate ICT in the classroom, fulfilling plans coming from Western Australia's Department of Education & Training. The use of ICT also provided a platform to achieve higher rates of literacy and numeracy amongst Aboriginal students.

By exchanging class work, and even without teacher-direction, the Como students developed a mentoring relationship with their Oombulgurri counterparts, which raised the standards of writing of the Oombulgurri students, and the technology capabilities of all students. “The link that we were able to establish with technology with the larger Metropolitan school enhanced my students' access to the curriculum and consequently the outcomes for them”, says Phil Lockhart, the teacher from Oombulgurri Remote Community School. “I think the technology gives teachers an opportunity to try different ways of teaching. If students have a tool that allows them to interact with the knowledge and express their creativity, they will learn a lot better”, emphasizes Hugh Soord from Como Secondary College in Perth.