Developing Digital Literacies

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Developing Digital Literacies

About
Access to the Internet and the use of technology is an essential part of the everyday school environment for young learners. In disadvantaged communities, confidence in using technology is particularly relevant because technology is a valuable learning tool for engaging students and developing literacy skills.

A partnership initiative focusing on digital literacies was undertaken in a primary school located in an Indigenous community in Queensland. Around 170 of the students (99 percent) and over 65 percent of staff at the school are Indigenous.

Aim
The central aim of the initiative was to build capacity and to develop aspirations for learning beyond the school context. The two focus areas were:

- visiting the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) to gain an understanding of the university environment and interacting with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous university students.

The Project
The Digital Literacies project team included six pre-service teachers in their second year of study and a local educator from the Aboriginal Kabi Kabi people. The project team worked together to prepare literacy activities on iPads to reinforce the learning that was being carried out in the classroom. They then made regular visits to the school to work alongside the classroom teacher to implement the activities.

A real favourite of the students was the app, Book Creator, which allowed them to create eBooks. Students learned how to use the app to take photos, draw and record speech and sounds to help them write narratives and poems. They would record themselves reading their texts and then played them back to each other amid much giggling.

University:
University of the Sunshine Coast (USC)

Theme:
School Engagement

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at hearing their own voices. With frequent use of the app, students developed confidence in reading and creating texts. The Kabi Kabi educator, who has familial ties with the community, made regular visits to the school and worked alongside the project team to support the students’ cultural literacy by engaging them in Indigenous painting, drama, music (didgeridoo) and storytelling activities. Activities generally finished with a coda linked to respect, working hard at school and achievement.

After several months of regular contact, strong relationships were established and the project team’s visits and contributions became part of a routine the students and indeed the whole school and the wider Indigenous community were familiar with. The learning and teaching interactions between the pre-service teachers and the school students were positive for a number of reasons:

- the pre-service teachers were young and enthusiastic and they arrived at the school with interesting digital literacy activities that were fun and engaging for the students;

- the shared communication included conversations about what a university was, why people went to university, and what the pre-service teachers did at USC; and

- the pre-service teachers talked to the students about their career aspirations and encouraged the students to participate fully in the literacy activities and achieve successful outcomes with their work.

On-Campus Visits

The visits to USC provided students with first-hand experiences of a university environment. They sat in a lecture theatre and listened to a respected Kabi Kabi woman welcome them to USC. As she was from the same Indigenous community, much of her welcome was familiar to the students. She told students it was her personal wish that they work hard at school because she would like to see them return to USC to complete a degree (just as her own son was doing). The students also spent time at the University’s Burunga Centre, which provides a social and study space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at USC. At the Burunga Centre the school students connected with USC’s Indigenous students who spoke about their career aspirations and what they had done to become a university student.

The school students were especially interested in ‘seeing’ what the university students had to do in class. When shown some examples of work many commented that it didn’t look too different to the work they were doing at school except that it was harder. They also commented that while it was probably harder, it looked like more fun than being in a classroom because you could be at a computer all day! However, the more significant comments included the students’ interest in coming to USC to study teaching, drama or sports science.

Lessons

While the visits to the school and to USC were extremely successful, the project team experienced challenges that required them to adapt to the school and community context. Changes in the composition of the classroom, student absences, visitors to the classroom, family bereavement, community events and student disengagement all had impact on what had been planned and the extent to which the learning activities could be undertaken.
Evidence of Impact

The Digital Literacies project helped to build students’ literacy and supported students to build aspiration. The two-tiered approach of making regular visits to the school to implement digital literacy activities and the visits to USC provided the students with lived experiences about aspirations beyond the school context and the necessary learning and application that is required to achieve successful outcomes.

Of particular significance was the contribution of the local Kabi Kabi educator in engaging the students in cultural learning. His cultural knowledge was invaluable in supporting the project team’s understanding of the cultural protocols necessary for working in the community. The success of the Digital Literacies project can be attributed to the support of the school community and the local community who work tirelessly to build capacity and develop aspirations through quality experiences that are embedded in a rich cultural context.