

Snapshot Study 13

The school and its vision for digital technology

SS13 was a state funded secondary school for Years 7 to 10, in a socially advantaged area of Australia. The school's vision was to be 'a centre of innovative creativity and excellence in teaching and learning'. They saw the teachers as being on a learning journey alongside the students.

Technology was seen as being a tool or learning resource, which fitted well with the school's emphasis on innovation.

The digital technology strategy

The school started to roll out a Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) strategy with Year 7 students in 2010. It took roughly two years before 99% of students starting in Year 7 were bringing in their own devices. The school provided support for those on the government assistance program and the tiny minority who didn't bring their own device (about 3%).

The school continued to provide desktop machines for tasks that required licensed software, and some loan laptops. Students ran a helpdesk to provide technical support. Students were advised of a range of free and open source software to install on their devices. The school was planning the implementation of an eTextbook library service.

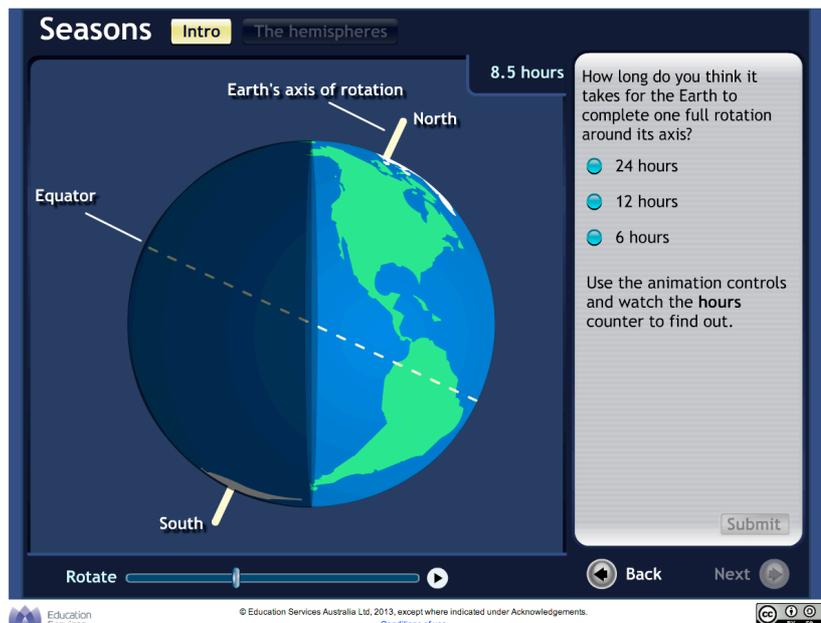
An example activity

Yr7 Science – The sun, earth and seasons

The teacher recapped the work the 19 students had been doing in the previous weeks and explained that they were moving on to study the sun and its impact on earth. Using a PowerPoint presentation on the large monitor at the front of the class the teacher administered a quick quiz about the solar system, with a particular focus on the sun, earth and seasons. Students wrote their answers on paper. Once they had completed the test they folded their paper in half, to conceal their answers.

The teacher then explained the main activity for the lesson, which was to work through a series of interactive activities on their computers. They accessed these via Fronter (the schools virtual learning environment), which provided links to the resources in Scootle (a repository of digital resources for schools in Australia). A small number of students who did not have their own device with them went out into the shared area to do the activity on desktop machines.

At the end of the lesson the teacher asked the students to reflect upon what they had learnt and note this down. They then retook the quiz from the start of the lesson to find out whether their understanding had improved.



Impact

The use of mobile devices alongside Fronter had involved the staff in additional work, including taking greater responsibility for enhancing the students' digital literacy competence across the curriculum. However, the teachers reported more innovation in their teaching and more flexibility in terms of learning tasks. There was a feeling that the staff were still on a journey to fully adapt their pedagogy and teaching activities to maximise the benefits of BYOT.

Students in Years 9 and 10 were less likely to bring in devices on a daily basis. This reflected the low uptake in the first year of the BYOT programme (these students are now in Year 10), and the fact that these students' devices are three to four years old and have broken or become very slow.

Key lessons learnt

- Provide constant professional learning for your staff so that they understand how the evolving technology can be used to enhance learning
- Communicate clearly with parents so they understand why having mobile devices is beneficial
- Make sure that the devices are used every day, preferably in each lesson, to ensure students continue to bring their devices every day
- Provide safe storage for the students' devices
- Ensure adequate WiFi access for all of the devices being used simultaneously

An emerging trend – What device

This school provided parents with advice about the pros and cons of different devices, which suggested that a Windows Netbook was adequate and better than an iPad, Android Tablet or Chromebook. This seemed to reflect a preference amongst the technical staff for Windows machines, but also issues of cost (Apple laptops, iPads and Android tablets being more expensive than netbooks), and perceived problems with using the school's virtual learning environment with iPads, Android tablets and Chromebooks.

There was evidence that the students in Years 7 and 8 were starting to bring in more than one device and making decisions about which was most appropriate to use for particular tasks.

What device	Desktop	Laptop	Tablet	Tablet +
Category	Explanation			
Desktop	Desktop machines			
Laptop	Laptops, netbooks, Tablet PCs			
Tablet	Tablets and other devices with a touch screen (but without a physical keyboard)			
Tablet +	Recognition that no one device is suitable for all tasks and students therefore need to have access to different devices for different activities.			