Pull out and keep

The New Zealand Curriculum

Update

Teaching and Learning

Welcome to *The New Zealand Curriculum Update*

Curriculum Updates support school leaders and teachers as they work to design and review their school curriculum, in line with the New Zealand Curriculum and with current knowledge and understandings about effective classroom teaching.

Curriculum Updates are published in the *Education Gazette* and are available online at http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum_updates

This Update explores educationally powerful connections in the digital world through case-studies of how such connections are enabling and enriching students' learning.

Creating educationally powerful connections

Educationally powerful connections occur between individuals, organisations, and cultures and have an explicit focus on student learning. The importance of such connections is highlighted in School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why: Best Evidence Synthesis [BES] *(2009, page 43).*

This Update takes the idea of educationally powerful connections a step further – into the digital world of networking through social media, blogging, and video conferencing; of going on virtual field trips; and of having 24/7 (all-day, any-day) access to learning.

The case studies in this Update describe how schools and communities are co-operating through virtual learning networks to "open up new and different ways of learning" for their students (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, page 36). E-learning, unconstrained by time and space, may:

• assist in the making of connections

• facilitate shared learning

• assist in the creation of supportive learning environments

• enhance opportunities to learn.

New technologies that are more sophisticated in their capabilities, as well as easier to use, more affordable, and more portable, will generate further opportunities for educationally powerful connections within and beyond the school community.

The questions school leaders, teachers, whānau, and family need to keep asking are:

• How can we extend and enrich the community within which our children and tamariki learn?

• What part do digital technologies have to play in this process?

What do educationally powerful connections look like?

> **CASE STUDY**

The Virtual Learning Network Community

… classrooms without walls, where students have the flexibility to connect … 24/7

http://www.vln.school.nz/pg/groupcms/view/40043

The Virtual Learning Network Community (VLNC) involves over 180 primary and secondary schools and kura, each contributing to the network in some form. They frequently belong to multiple communities, and the "membership" of the VLNC is constantly changing.

While many VLNC schools are smaller and located in regional townships or rural areas, a growing number of large urban schools are joining the community. More than 10 000 students are learning through 24/7 environments and in 199 programmes of study. Organised web and video conferencing meets the needs of 1500 of these students.

The VLNC aims to ensure access to quality education at local or regional levels anywhere in New Zealand:

- through providing "rich and relevant" online learning experiences based on real-world contexts
- by nurturing students as powerful learners, who participate actively in every aspect of their learning.

The VLNC vision of community-centred learning recognises and celebrates diversity. It aims to go beyond existing best practice to lead educational transformation.

The new curriculum talks about globalisation and making links across the country and world. VLN does this for us. At this stage, we are actively connected to other parts of New Zealand, developing working relationships.
I can see in the future that this concept could go international – exciting!

Principal, participating school

Schools involved in the VLNC use a range of digital tools to support and enhance their student's learning by:
- providing access to curriculum learning areas unavailable in a particular school or because of timetable clashes
- enabling students to engage with content or community experts who can enrich curriculum delivery
- providing students with the chance to collaborate, and share learning experiences, with students from around New Zealand.

The VLNC schools report encouraging results: they have been able to provide their students with opportunities to develop aspects of the key competencies and exercise digital citizenship, and the students are demonstrating improved academic engagement and motivation across the curriculum learning areas.

The future of our children will revolve around and [develop] through technology. The VLN is guiding our children towards this future focus. It allows us to use our technology in an effective and "learning to learn" manner. Our learning tools are being used to create learning opportunities.

Principal, participating school

The VLNC primary community

The purpose of the VLNC primary community is to develop e-learning collaboration throughout the primary sector. The underlying principle is reciprocity – sharing expertise and resources to give students more choice and greater learning opportunities.

The primary community was initially established to provide online language classes for year 7–8 students but is expanding into other curriculum areas. The community's students can currently learn French, German, Japanese, Spanish, and te reo Māori online and are working together on an astronomy project.

The Spanish class was excellent; the kids really enjoyed it, and [they] are highly motivated. They are using Spanish in their blogs and can't wait till their next lesson.

Deputy principal, participating school

Member schools employ a variety of digital tools to collaborate and to support learning. Students can also use these tools to access learning resources and activities and to connect with their teachers and classmates at any time, while at school or at home.

For us, it is huge, being from a small rural school. For them, being able to learn online really broadens their horizons because they are actually able to interact with kids from schools around the country.

Parent of student involved in the primary community

For the primary community, the major success is a broader range of learning opportunities through school collaboration and sharing. A further success has been students' development of the key competencies, in particular, managing self, relating to others, and participating and contributing.

The website for more information on this project is http://www.vln.school.nz/pg/groups/935/vln-primary

The VLNC secondary communities

From the FarNet Schools in the far north to the Southland Interactive Learning Communities in the deep south, over 126 secondary, area, and composite schools and kura, both state and special character, are working together to provide a broad range of curriculum and learning opportunities for their students.

For these secondary clusters, year 11–13 NCEA programmes are a major focus. However, member schools are also involved in a wide range of other opportunities, including career education, business ventures, and mentoring for the New Zealand Scholarship examinations. Activity across years 9 and 10 is increasing. Students participate in virtual classrooms and field trips, connect with experts, and take part in collaborative learning projects. The secondary network has links with tertiary and national organisations such as Telford Rural Polytechnic, Natcoll, Te Papa, and the National Library.

More information about the secondary communities can be found at http://www.vln.school.nz/pg/groups/572/vln-community

Secondary students comment on the impact of classes in different formats:

I think that … you … learn in a different way … it … makes you more independent and makes you think outside the box, and you really need to think about what you are going to do.

I think it has really helped me emerge from being the very shy introverted person I've sort of been.

It is good because I am doing the subjects I want to. So it is setting me up for the future really.

Teachers value the impact that learning through the VLNC has on students:

Certainly, growing in … confidence … I think blended learning has been a huge advantage to her in terms of her connections [with] people, in the relationships she has built … [it] has enabled her to really blossom.

I think it has probably empowered her because it has given her a lot of different ways of attacking things, so she has a lot more strings to her bow. When they are doing stuff, she has a lot more experience to draw on.

> CASE STUDY

Te Kāhui Kura o te Whaitua Mātihiko

This virtual cluster of kura is having a positive impact on the learning of more than 600 Māori-medium students across the Whanganui, Ruapehu, Manawatū, Taranaki, and Wellington regions. The students participate in a range of online learning activities, developed for Māori by Māori and aligned to *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (2008) *and Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori* (2010).

The cluster schools develop and co-construct activities to support curriculum achievement for students in years 1–8. They use an activity management tool to author and organise resource material into electronic content repositories. The cluster schools also use a web-conferencing product as an instructional tool to support joint teaching practices and an e-portfolio system to support assessment.

The students learn both individually and collectively. As a result of the cluster activities, they are typically much more engaged in their learning, suggesting topics for new learning activities and voluntarily accessing the learning environment from home. For those students who do not have access to computers at home, the programme provides both exposure to and experience in the digital world.

To learn more about this project, visit the group's pātaka/storehouse at http://tepataka.vln.school.nz

Te kōhauhau

As I have grown, I have had time to absorb and understand the direction that [the system we are using] has to offer and the benefits our tamariki will achieve in this modern e-learning programme. It's cool … all the tamariki love it …

The activities will benefit students who are excelling as well as students who are not.

The taiao as we know it is becoming more technologically based. If we can provide our tamariki Māori with lots of experiences and exposure to technology, this will be beneficial for … generations of tamariki Māori in the future.

Kaiako in the cluster

> CASE STUDY

ELLINZ online

Through the English Language Learning in New Zealand (ELLINZ) pilot, 35 students from six schools are working together with their e-teachers and e-tutors to accelerate their English language learning. Through the pilot scheme, they receive the expert guidance they need and also work with other students on collaborative projects that meet their specific English language learning needs.

Two ESOL-trained e-teachers use digital conferencing tools to facilitate two live sessions a week. The e-tutors (teachers, and/or teacher aides) support the students in the live sessions and then guide them through independent follow-up activities.

To interact with each other and with their teachers, students use a range of digital tools, including online messages, wire posts, blogs, forums, voice threads, and collaborative learning spaces on the open source Elgg online community platform.

Teachers are able to interact with student contributions and give targeted feedback using digital presentation tools. They are also able to foster student collaboration.

To learn more about this project visit: http://www.ellinz.vln.school.nz (This is one of the two 24/7 websites available to support the students in their learning).

This form of e-learning has encouraged J to open up ... as this is e-learning, he doesn't feel the pressure of his classmates looking at him while trying to answer questions ... I am personally proud of his achievement and [of] what we have come through together as a team.
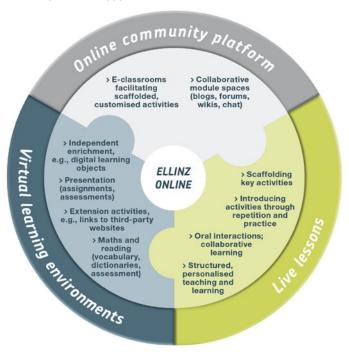
ELLINZ e-tutor

T's language has improved out of sight while on the programme. He can put sentences together orally and in writing. He could only say his name at the beginning of the year.

Teacher at a participating school

A and J enjoyed the challenge, opportunity, and "privilege" of creating an animal presentation, which is something they have not done before.

ELLINZ e-tutor

The ELLINZ model

Guiding questions *He pātai*

- To what extent is our school using digital technologies to enable and enrich our curriculum delivery?

- How could we collaborate with other schools and our wider community to provide a richer learning context for our students?

- When we use digital technologies in our classrooms, is the tool or the learning the focus?

- Is our school community aware of the range of digital technologies available to us?

- Are we providing our students with enough opportunity to connect with the wider world as they undertake their learning?

- Are there equity issues that we should be addressing?

Helpful resources

> **Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI)**
http://www.tki.org.nz/
Te Kete Ipurangi provides schools with a wealth of information, resources, and curriculum materials to enhance teaching and learning.

> **Digistore Te Pātaka Matihiko**
http://digistore.tki.org.nz/ec/p/home
Digistore is a storehouse of digital content to support learning across the curriculum from early childhood to senior secondary.

> **Software for Learning**
http://softwareforlearning.tki.org.nz
This information is provided to help teachers select and integrate software as part of a rich learning environment.

> **The Virtual Learning Network Community**
http://www.vln.school.nz/pg/groups/world
Read about the VLNC communities and the tools they are using. Information on how to become involved is provided at http://www.vln.school.nz/pg/groups/25604/getting-started-on-the-vln

> **Best Evidence Syntheses**
http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515
Access *School Leadership and Student Outcomes* (cited on page 1 of this Update) and other key research to support teaching and learning.

> **Education Counts: E-Learning**
http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ict
In 2010, the Ministry of Education identified a need to further explore the use of virtual learning environments and e-learning, particularly in the context of te reo Māori and kāupapa Māori education. A literature review and related research reports are published on this page.