Crossing the ICT Bridge: supporting students on their learning journey

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Background Information

Our education system in Tasmania differs to most other states in that primary and secondary education is offered in what is known as a three-tiered system as opposed to a two-tiered system. We have Primary school followed by High school which covers grades 7-10 and then students go on to College for years 11-12. The exception to this is the District schools (schools located in rural areas) and many non government schools which combine grades from Prep to year 12.

Throughout Tasmania there are eight government colleges, with four being in Hobart and surrounding suburbs. There is only one non-government college, Guilford Young College (GYC), situated over two campuses, one in Hobart and the other in the northern suburb of Glenorchy. Because of this the Catholic schools around Hobart go to year 10 (with the exception of St Marys College) and students then come to GYC to complete years 11-12.

About the school

GYC is the only Catholic co-educational senior secondary college in Tasmania and has a student population of approximately 950. The school is over two campuses, one in Hobart and one in the northern suburb of Glenorchy.

The Glenorchy campus has approximately 480 students and caters to a slightly different demographic than the Hobart campus. This is because we have a

significantly higher proportion of Vocational Education Training (VET) enrolled students and a greater number of English as Additional Language (EAL) students. Reasons for this include the fact that our Trade Training Centre is situated on the Glenorchy campus, which attracts VET students, and our EAL manager is based here too.

Introduction

There has been a lot written on the last decade about the idea of digital natives (Prensky, 2001) – young people who have never known a world without the internet and easy access to computers and other digital devices. The argument is made that this generation has an innate familiarity with technology and that they have therefore absorbed a sophisticated ICT skillset by osmosis. We would argue that while the majority of the current generation of students do display an undeniable capability in this area, the digital native epithet is an over-generalisation. Recently there have been some dissenting views regarding digital natives. Combes (2009) in a comprehensive study finds the idea that young people are digital natives is a perception rather than a reality. A report by the MCEECDYA (2010) confirms significant differences in ICT literacy associated with socioeconomic background, indigenous status and geographic location in Australia. Our own experience with around 480 students at GYC has borne out this unevenness and surprised us that there were still a small but significant number of students who had seemed to have fallen through the gaps and for one reason or another had not been exposed broadly to computers or ICT in their previous schooling.

Since 2015 the state authority, the Office of Tasmanian Assessment, Standards & Certification (TASC) has required that Tasmanian school leavers have achieved the Everyday Adult Use of Computers and the Internet. The standard is linked to the Australian Curriculum's ICT Capability requirements. The core components of the TASC standard requires students to have acquired skills appropriate for marking the end of a person's first stage of life-long learning after school and comprises criteria centred on the use of a computer and common software (e.g. word processing, spreadsheets, publisher), the internet and email effectively, safely and productively. Students, during the course of their studies, should be able to demonstrate competency and be checked as competent in each of the items on the list of ICT capabilities.

In 2016 our senior secondary college was successful in its application for acceptance of provider-level evidence for learners and needed to demonstrate that our students were meeting this standard. The college developed a tool that comprised a set of ICT tasks for students to complete and incorporated an assessment sheet. Each task needed a sign-off from 3 staff members.

Much of the activity for completing the assessment tool took place in the Library as the equipment and assistance was close at hand. While assisting students to demonstrate their ICT capabilities as part of the school curriculum, library staff were surprised to find a number of students were lacking the basic skills to do so. These experiences prompted the Librarian and Library Technician to work together to develop a short remedial program to improve the basic ICT skills of our students. We saw this as an opportunity to provide a service that would alleviate pressure on students and teaching staff.

Method

After conversations with different members of the teaching staff the Library resolved to offer this service in 2017. The teachers were grateful and appreciative that we were taking on the role of assisting in this task. All students need to complete the ICT checklist but our main focus is on the year twelve cohort to enable them to attain the Tasmanian Certificate of education (TCE) at the end of their studies.

We also tried to ascertain from teachers if there were any other ICT areas that may be lacking but are not on the ICT checklist. Teachers were quick to point out a number of issues such as lack of headers or footers to identify documents, inexperience with printer properties, for example, changing from double to single sided, colour, adjusting paper size or format.

Our experience with students in the Library day-to-day reflects these concerns with recurring issues such as: lost USBs that are not named, which means we have to open them up and go through documents (which usually aren't named) in the hope of finding the owner. This is a particular concern as we know that many of the students only save to USB without another backup strategy. Another common problem in the Library can be the queues that regularly build up at the printer. This is often because of documents that have images with large file sizes, resulting in delays which hold up the print queue.

Once we had determined the content of the program, we started a concerted effort of promotion, which included publicising it in the school's daily bulletin and by placing posters and flyers around the school. Teachers and tutors also were asked to communicate what the Library was offering. We have also been promoting the program by targeting year twelve students when they are at the circulation desk, and when we are on the floor and talking with students. Procrastination is common, but we try to encourage them to take up the opportunity to complete it earlier to avoid the inevitable stress as the end of year exams approach.

We planned to deliver the program in the Library during study-lines (free periods) or lunch breaks, usually in small groups of up to four or five students. We encouraged students to let us know in advance when they are coming in but are flexible if they come in without planning. Our aim is to encourage as many students as possible to come to us for help with this so we can support the teachers during this busy time of year.

Conclusion

In the early stages interest among students was very positive with many of them indicating that they would like our help with completing their ICT Checklist. Translating this interest into action was more of a challenge as the year went on and students had growing study commitments. This was combined with a natural tendency to procrastinate over a task which appeared, to them, as a low priority.

We found that most of the students we worked with were individuals as opposed to small groups. This was mainly due to the difficulty of co-ordinating them in small groups and having them all remember their agreed times. Due to time constraints we

were mostly only able to assist students with the items on the ICT Checklist and not very many of the extra IT skills that we had determined were issues.

Overall the students who came to the Library for assistance were motivated to get their ICT Checklist completed, and were appreciative of our assistance. Teachers were also happy with the model that we had devised as it alleviated a degree of pressure off them at what is a busy time of the academic year and completed the task with a higher degree of efficiency and effectiveness than would otherwise have been the case. We will continue to develop and improve our program and are already planning to deliver a similar service next year.

References

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