

Enhancing learning through electronic information: a Victorian networks' approach

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Boy, am I seeing the world! I have been to Israel, the USA, UK, Asia, ... I am awe-struck at how small our world has become. Internet offers some fantastic opportunities to access the world from our school library. It's up-to-date, real-time, interactive communication. I have accessed libraries at some of the biggest universities in the world, I have looked at the most recent (like yesterday's) research into the structure of the human genome. I have

librarian, Fran Hegarty, saw a need to maximise information provision and sharing among schools, public libraries and tertiary institutions.

The OEIN was formally established in August 1993 with a focus of providing resources for teachers of studies at the VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) level. A special emphasis was placed on Information Technology, Science and Psychology as these studies were seen to be most in need of resource support.

sectors in the region to maximise resource provision.

OEIN operated initially using pervasive low-technology: the fax machine, hardcopy newsletter and telephone. Matched with this has been an introduction of high-technology facilities for access to national and international databases, in particular Internet and NEXUS.

Participants have been involved in regular meetings and workshops which sought to explain the scope of resources and technology available through Swinburne University of Technology library and to give direct instruction on basic computing, the use of e-mail, listservs, the NEXUS Information service and the Internet. Many participants in this network seem inspired by the potential that the network and its associated services have to offer for them personally and further to their school communities.

The long-term vision of an interactive information environment in the Outer East will see information sharing operating at three levels.

Level 1: The provision of information to participants of the network from the resources which are held within the network.

Level 2: Information provision maximised through the use of e-mail communication, electronic networks and databases like Internet and NEXUS.

Level 3: Professional exchange and professional development via networking arrangements will give the opportunity to those in public, tertiary and secondary sections to have a more complete understanding of the needs of their clients across the educational and community sphere.

The visionary nature of this pilot project has significantly changed teachers' awareness of the range of information resources available. This group of teachers are at the forefront of investigations into the integration of electronic information within current teaching practice. The need to address the challenges of accessing and sharing electronic information formats and sources is recognised as a vision of the future which all those who seek to provide information must meet. ■



Teachers and teacher librarians in the Outer East Information Network working through a tutorial program

accessed hospital libraries which store images of the human body using the latest technology (PET scans, etc). My mind is spinning from the trip! I am working through the Internet lessons (and I even did my homework). I am starting to compile a list of areas where I think Internet access would open up education, especially in the areas of VCE sciences and junior social sciences.'

This comment from Pembroke Secondary College Science teacher Steven Blackwell was the affirmation that the Outer East Information Network (OEIN) was looking for. The OEIN is one model which has been developed to improve resource provision for teachers and students using electronic information.

It began in 1992 when Swinburne University of Technology opened a new campus in the outer east of Melbourne at Mooroolbark, a regional area traditionally under-represented in tertiary participation rates. At the same time Swinburne

The network provided:

- dial in access to the Swinburne Library catalogue;
- physical access to the Swinburne Library, particularly the Mooroolbark campus;
- membership of Swinburne library for teachers participating in the pilot;
- searching service for teachers of particular subject topic areas;
- document delivery service for specifically requested articles or general searches;
- information exchange within the network through the newsletter and in e-mail communications;
- access to information available on Internet;
- opportunity and site for a professional network among teacher librarians, VCE teachers and local information providers;
- professional development activities using the expertise of the teaching staff at Swinburne University; and
- cooperation between all library