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Parents and children learn about the internet together

21st C. Connections – Schools & Community Libraries

Parents and children adopt and adapt to technology at differing stages and this disjunction in techno-literacy exacerbates the 'digital divide'. This divide is not only in actual access to technology, nor the use of the technology, but in understanding the potential and the threats that technology brings.

It was this divide that Blacktown City Libraries addressed in developing an innovative program to enhance the internet literacy of parents and children. This program, "21st C. Connections – Schools & Community Libraries" was developed in partnership with Hebersham Public School and was trialed at Mount Druitt Branch Library over August-September 2008 with ten parents and children from Hebersham Public School participating.

The two main aims of the program were to assist in bridging the digital divide by:

1. Addressing issues of techno-literacy and information literacy in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area by focusing on both students and their parents;
2. Assisting parents to help their children with homework and study support after school hours.

The program brought parents and their children together to learn about the internet, focusing on cybersafety, how to strategically find and evaluate information, how to use search engines, an introduction to web 2.0, including social networking sites such as Bebo, blogs and Flickr, as well as how to use library resources on the web.



Students and parents from Hebersham Public School with the Mayor of Blacktown City, Councillor Charlie Lowles (back right) and Councillor Leo Kelly, OAM (back left).

The excellent news, as evaluations showed, was that the parents and the children were delighted in the library resources, and in learning how to use the online catalogue, how to place reserves, how to find our online resources such as Encyclopaedia Britannica, and how to use our free resources to their benefit. One parent wrote, "I am elated to know when my children get stuck now I feel less threatened in knowing there is help, if I can't explain."

The school identified 10 families with children in the combined Year 3 & 4 classes at Hebersham Public School. In order to ensure the participants had a reasonably similar level of familiarity with computers, all families self-identified as internet-connected at home. Each child brought their school laptop to the sessions and used the Library's wireless internet connection. Parents used public access PCs.

The success of this trial and partnership between Blacktown City Libraries and Hebersham Public School has ensured that the program will continue in the future, but in a slightly different structure. In 2009 the Library will continue to partner with Hebersham Public School but will target every child in Year 6. The students will come to Mount Druitt Library with their parent for two one-hour sessions to learn about the internet, the wonders of the library, and how our resources will help them with their homework and study support.

There will be another course offered on cybersafety, aimed at parents. These courses are seen as an extension to the courses already successfully offered at Blacktown City Libraries on using the internet, common software packages and family history research.

Blacktown City Libraries are looking forward to maximising the full range of opportunities these courses offer, both to our customers and to our staff. Skill development and library-community partnerships to increase techno-literacy will continue to address the 'digital divide' in Blacktown.

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