



iLibrary – Internet revisited

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Rationale

iLibrary was created to empower students' use of the Internet which would assist them in becoming authentic 21st Century learners.

It was felt that students have become complacent towards the role of the Internet in education, utilising a tiny percentage of

what was on offer. Although the iLibrary program is arguably another incarnation of a string of programs run by the library in an attempt to imbue students with essential library skills, it has succeeded in presenting an entirely new approach.

As the definition of "library skills" changed, so too did each course and approach. Previous courses focussed heavily on research-based skills and inquiry learning. While not aiming to detract from the importance of such skills, the rationale for iLibrary was vastly different.

The iLibrary program aims to illustrate the vast nature of the Internet and show students just some of the myriad of applications and resources available to them. At the same time, the program aims to equip students with the appropriate skills to critically evaluate the Internet and its applications in terms of their educational merit. In this way, students can return to being users of the Internet, rather than mere consumers.

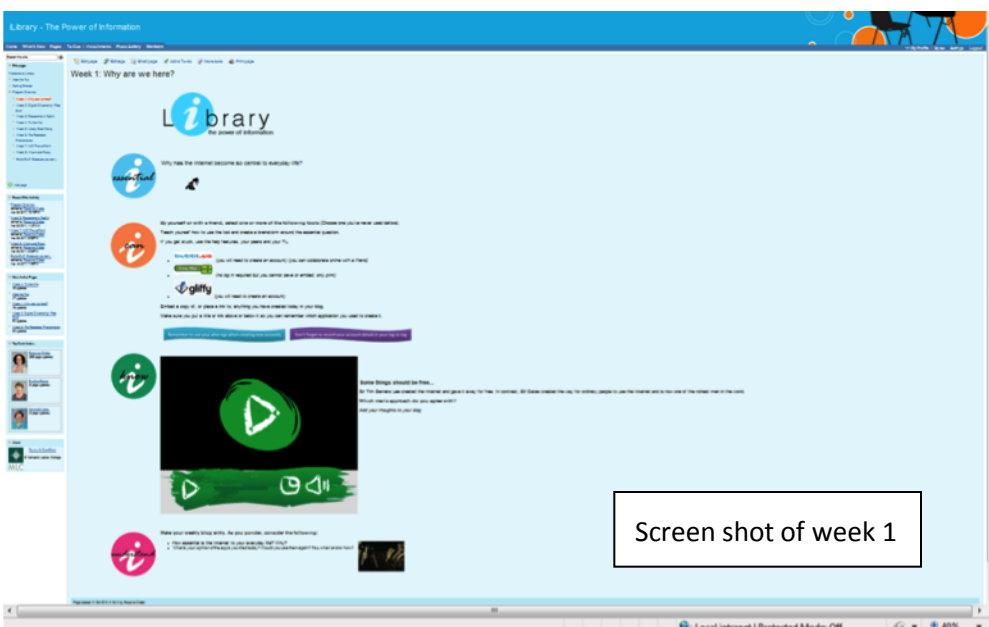
The aim was for the course to be radically different from anything students have or are currently undertaking. It was to effectively re-introduce the Internet generation to the Internet.

So what does this type of program have to do with the library?

Born on the cusp between two generations, I have arguably one foot in both generation X and generation Y. This means that I am old enough to remember life before the Internet and personal computing but young enough to rely on the Internet multiple times a day. However, our students are firmly in generation X. They take computers, mobile phones, the Internet and now mobile phones that are computers and the Internet, for granted. It was this, coupled with my enthusiasm for my industry, that motivated me to create the iLibrary program.

As a recent graduate of a teacher-librarianship course, my passion was not with the literature (sorry books) but with the essential 21st Century life and learning skill: information literacy.

Information literacy is the responsibility of the entire society but seems to fit best under the library's umbrella as teacher librarians are uniquely placed to view students and their curriculum holistically and do not have allegiance to any particular subject area.



Information literacy refers to one's ability to locate, filter, sort, understand and convey information. True information literacy empowers students to choose the right tool for the task, and not be slaves to well known resources. For example, students should be able to select from a variety of search engines and information sources to locate their online information and then choose an appropriate presentation medium.

The tyranny of Google and PowerPoint must come to an end!

The Program

The iLibrary program is a compulsory subject for year nine students and runs for one term. Under the College's curriculum model, all year nine subjects run for one term during this time.

The iLibrary program consists of seven lessons, a set-up week and a consolidation week. Each lesson is discrete to cater for absences and cancelled lessons without compromise to student's learning. Despite this, all lessons contribute to a student's overall understanding and create a complementary course.

The program is delivered online, via a College wiki on the Intranet, but is also supported by a teacher librarian in a library classroom setting.

Students maintain their own individual blog where they record their thoughts, creations and findings throughout the program. Blogs are also housed on the Intranet but each blog is able to be read by any student

undertaking the course and students are encouraged to view and comment on each other's work. The class teacher librarian also uses the comment function on student blogs to give feedback to students. Although the program is dynamic and changes slightly each term in response to student feedback and personal experience, themes and issues covered include: digital citizenship; the implications of social media; alternatives to PowerPoint; things you can do with Google and alternatives to it; and library tools and databases.

Based on the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, each lesson consists of several distinct sections: iEssential, iCan, iKnow and iUnderstand.



Each week is framed by an essential question. The question is not designed to be answered but to provide a focus for the lesson. The question is open-ended in that it provides for multiple answers but is worded simply enough to prompt immediate thought and opinion.



This section provides the content for the lesson. This typically consists of a selection of web 2.0 applications, based around a theme or a collection of online readings on a topic.



This section presents a short video and discussion question/s. Videos range from sections of documentaries to comedy routines and spoof songs.



This section provides two or three questions, designed to provide a prompt for the student's weekly blog responses.

Learning Journey

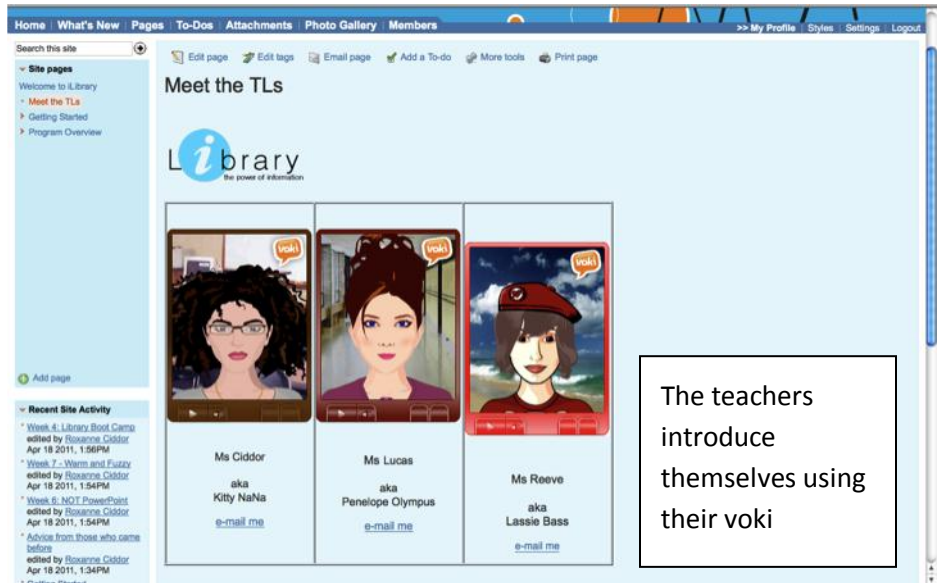
Although the concept of iLibrary was approved, the time allocated was one single forty minute period a week. In an environment where periods are usually seventy minutes, this presented its own set of challenges.

The aim was for the course to be radically different from anything students have or are currently undertaking. It was to effectively re-introduce the Internet generation to the Internet. However, the question was how to do this without having students turn off, especially as online safety goes hand in hand with Internet use and discussions on online safety increasingly lead to rolled eyes and switched off students. The iLibrary program wanted to empower students through the course, rather than focus on the "do nots" and the dangers of the Internet. As such, Internet safety was deliberately not explicitly

covered in the program. However, the course was coordinated to complement the Online Safety and Ethics (OSE) program which is already a part of the pastoral care curriculum at the college at year nine. The next challenge was a bit more complicated. Previously, the College had maintained a policy that students were not to use external applications requiring registration due to concerns for personal safety. As such, blogs and wikis were facilitated via the intranet. However, iLibrary aimed to show students over thirty web 2.0 applications, with a fair percentage requiring registration. This issue was soon overcome with a new policy and procedure. Students were instructed to create alter egos or aliases (a fun task in itself) and to undertake the course using that alias. In this way, their online presence would be obscured. To further this safety measure, students created a new email address, through a provider such as Yahoo or Hotmail, using their alter ego or alias name. Lastly, students maintained a "log-in-log" of all of the places that they registered and the log in details they used. If the registration for a site requested personal details such as location or security questions, students were advised to provide false information. Not only did these measures ensure a secure online presence, but they allowed students to simply shut down

their alternative email address after the program to avoid possible future contact from applications. One of the highlights of the course, according to the students was creating an avatar to represent their new ego.

would expect. Explaining the rationale and the way in which the program would run would require patience and a fair bit of charisma. Another challenge was how to ensure students undertook the course as a serious subject and



Using Voki, students were able to customise their avatar's appearance, voice and background. They could then give it words to say and embed it in their blog using source code. Instructions were provided but most students were familiar with the process of embedding source code. The next challenge that was presented by the iLibrary program was to explain the rationale and structure to students. We had to reassure them that technical difficulties and frustrations was just as much a part of the course as the successes they would experience. Furthermore, students seem to be creatures of habit and not as keen to try new things as adults

that it was viewed favourable by the rest of the faculties. To this effect, the program was to be included in the term report, with a minimum of sixty per cent of the lessons to be completed in order to achieve a passing grade. However, although a teacher comment appeared on the report as well, some students were aware that less effort could be applied to a pass/fail subject such as this. Despite this, it was agreed by the teaching team that the subject did not lend itself easily to a marking scale and hence had to remain a pass/fail subject. The course itself was designed to allow students to be independent and self-directed. This was encouraged by

providing a predictable structure to each lesson but allowing students to complete the tasks in any order. This also meant that they could prioritise their own areas of interest as well as apportion their time as they saw fit. Most importantly, this structure was designed to acknowledge the vast technical knowledge that students already have. As one student aptly put it: “we are the iGeneration- we don’t need to be told how to use the internet”.







As such, teachers were there only to show students “how” when they were requested to do so. Applications were presented and students were essentially instructed to teach themselves how to use them. In this way, students felt empowered rather than frustrated as having to go at the pace of the teacher or class. The teacher occasionally led a discussion or screened the week’s video on the projector but otherwise remained a point of assistance rather than a director.

The Cool Bits

Throughout the course, students are challenged to consider their use of their computers beyond Google, Facebook, Twitter and PowerPoint. They experiment with over thirty online applications, view numerous video – some informative, some satirical – and reflect on their use of the Internet and its applications in their learning. Here are the top ten ‘cool bits’ from the program (according to

student feedback and the writer) in no particular order.

A list of links for all applications listed can be found at the end of this article.

- 1 
- 2 
- 3 
- 4 
- 5 
- 6 
- 7 
- 8-10 

videos:

- Twouble with Twitter
- Facebook in real life
- Death by PowerPoint

Evaluation

All members of the iLibrary team are extremely pleased with the way that the program ran during term one. Considering that every single aspect of the course was new, there was relatively little that “went wrong” and student feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Also, only one lesson was lost to other activities, so the entire course was able to be delivered.

Probably the best way to demonstrate the success of the course is via the words of the students themselves. It is interesting to note that even though Internet safety was not an explicit part of the program, many students still commented on its importance in relation to the iLibrary course.

Here are some comments made via student blogs and the end of term evaluation survey. (Note: student comments are unedited.)

- *There are many highlights hidden in these classes, such as the understanding of the value of the internet, its social importance, its media use and many other aspects.*

What do you feel you have gained from the iLibrary program?

- I think i gained new skills every lesson and would love to do this program for longer.
- I have gained knowledge of how to research more effectively and of different websites.

- I've gained a further understanding about particular areas of the internet and can walk a way with a rather change outlook on the internet and different computer programs.
- I have learned about new programs and sites that will help me in my everyday life
- There are many highlights hidden in these classes, such as the understanding of the value of internet, its social importance, its media use and many other aspects.
- I feel I have gained a sense of safety on the internet through this project. It has familiarised me with the search engines, referencing and the social-network components. I have enjoyed completing questions and reflecting on the lesson by submitting our thoughts on our blog.
- A greater sense of how powerful the internet is and there a so many good sites out there that we don't know about.
- From the iLibrary program I have gained more confidence in using the internet to it's full potential and have been introduced to a wide range of different websites, some of which I found extremely useful and would consider using again in the future.
- I have also thought deeper about parts of the internet that I previously took for granted.
- I have gained a great insight on different programs that are substitutes or alternates for other well known programs or websites.

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The iLibrary course was designed to allow students to be independent and self-directed rather than led by the teacher. Explain how this did or didn't work for you.

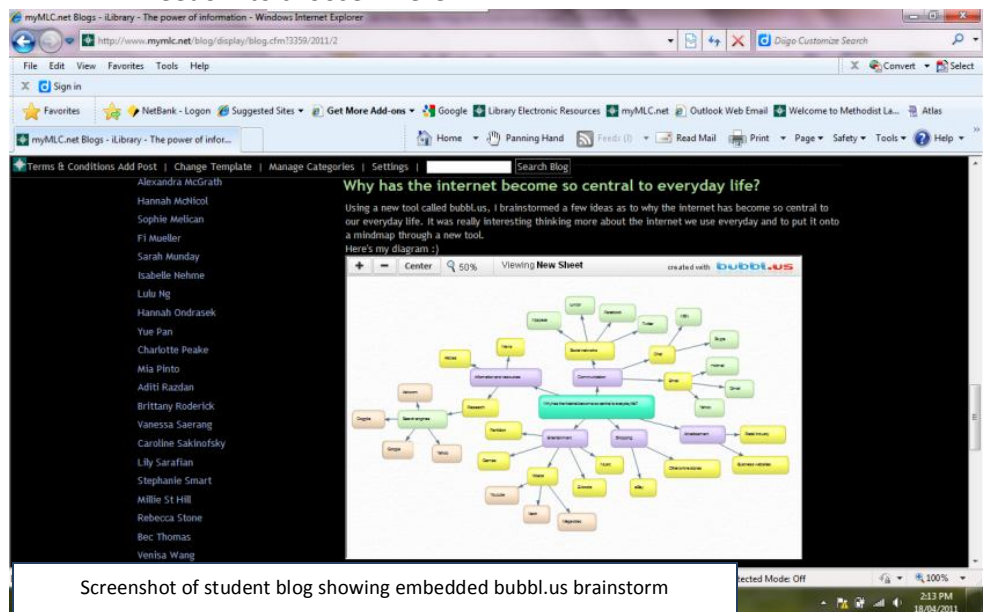
- The iLibrary course I found did work quite well as it did allow students to be independent and self-directed. In a sense, it gave the students a choice and freedom in the time spent on different programs and activity. This freedom allowed us to fully develop new skills and learn how to us different programs.
- It was great because I was able to explore these new programs in my own time and I think having the freedom to choose where

to look I was able to enjoy it more.

- I think that it was great to have a lesson plan to work from, but there was also flexibility for personal extension. I found it great because I looked at all the sites, but I could then spend more time on the ones that I liked. This set up was great.

How has your attitude towards using the library changed?

- I think that my attitude towards using what the library has to offer has definitely changed. During this time, I have found many useful researching links in which I feel are more reliable than what Google has provided on the internet. I have found that the library contains many websites for researching in which are decent and convenient to use - for example, Britannica. Using these websites will benefit me as it will save time and the information found will be quite accurate as well.



Screenshot of student blog showing embedded bubbl.us brainstorm

Future Directions

Term one was about testing the course. It was about testing the technical aspects as well as the suitability of the contents and structure for the year nine audience. Thankfully, it passed these tests with flying colours and student feedback exceeded expectations.

The program will run similarly next term with some minor changes. Previously one week has been devoted each to Twitter and Facebook. During term two, students will choose one of the two sites. This is to avoid repetition of ideas and concepts.

There will be an effort to present more information in student-friendly language, as well as in original format. For example, summaries will be provided for denser information articles and complex documentary sections. This is not only to aid in understanding of concepts but to provide easier access to the information for students for whom English is a second language. Students will be encouraged to interact with each other more often. This will be via the comment function on the blog platform and trials of using forums within the colleges learning management system will also be conducted. It is hoped that the course will remain dynamic and that the web 2.0 applications presented will be constantly added to and updated, as well as the selection of issues presented.

There are also plans for a forum to be conducted midway or at the end of the course, with guest speakers. However, this may need to be a long term aim as it requires a fair amount of logistics and planning. Lastly, the biggest dream of all will be for more time to be devoted to the program to allow for deeper discussions. Despite this dream, the amount of trust that the college has placed on the program and the teaching team has not gone unnoticed or appreciated. Without the support of the college administration, cutting edge courses such as these would remain ideas.

Links

Voki –

<http://www.voki.com/>

Bubbl.us –

<http://bubbl.us/>

Toondoo -

<http://www.toondoo.com/>

Storybird –

<http://storybird.com/>

Glogster –

<http://edu.glogster.com/>

Prezi –

<http://prezi.com/>

Flickr –

<http://www.flickr.com/>

Twouble with Twitter (YouTube) -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN2HAr0A12w>

Facebook in real life (YouTube) -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrlSkU0TFLs>

Death by PowerPoint (YouTube) -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpvgfmEU2Ck>