

## ICT<sup>1</sup> in the LOTE<sup>2</sup> Classroom

Mater Christi College is a Catholic girls' secondary school. It was established in its present location overlooking Belgrave (Victoria, Australia) in 1963. Though originally conceived as a small school, rapid population growth in Melbourne's eastern suburbs and its reputation for excellence has seen Mater Christi grow far beyond that envisioned by its founders. Today the College enrolment exceeds 1,000 students and includes students from several Asia-Pacific countries. In a caring atmosphere of Christian love and understanding, which encourages excellence in all things, the College provides educational programs relevant to the individual needs of its students.

In Year 7, all students study both French and Chinese and then specialise in one or the other in Year 8. In 2009, while the 2010 timetabling process was well underway, a potential issue emerged. Among the various constraints that acted on the College timetable, were the allocation of Year 8 students to their chosen Language Other Than English (LOTE) and the creation of core groups. In fact, a student's LOTE had a significant bearing on which core group she entered. Our 2010 numbers dictated an odd number of core groups, but an equal

split of students selecting Chinese and French.

An additional piece to the Year 8 LOTE puzzle was the full implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IBO) Middle Years Program (MYP) from Year 7 to Year 10. One of the requirements of the MYP is that all students study a LOTE; the IBO refers to this as Language B, while Language A is the student's mother tongue.

The compulsory inclusion of LOTE from Year 7 to Year 10 placed a further onus on the College to ensure it offered an authentic learning experience for all students. In previous years, students could discontinue LOTE after Year 8 and, generally speaking, the students who continued with LOTE were already intrinsically motivated.

In 2008, Mater Christi College employed two young, highly motivated and talented LOTE teachers: Jessie O'Sullivan taught French and Cathy Wu, Chinese. Both teachers had quickly demonstrated their ability to engage students, and a preparedness to try new initiatives. In light of all these factors, the following course of action was undertaken.

Seven core groups of approximately 24-26 Year 8 students were established. Three core groups consisted of students learning Chinese, three core groups consisted of students undertaking French, and one core group consisted of half-French and half-Chinese. As with all core groups, the half-French half-Chinese core group would remain together for subjects such as Humanities, English

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and Religious Education, however, when this core group had LOTE, the class would split in two. Cathy and Jess were asked to take these two small LOTE classes. However, there was an expectation that both teachers implement at least one significant teaching initiative and continue to develop this initiative throughout the year. It was anticipated that insights gained during 2010 could be applied on a broader scale in following years.

The initiatives, their implementation and evaluation were carried out in close liaison with the Director of Curriculum, Tony Kolb. A summary from each teacher follows and offers a successful model for others who may experience similar challenges.

### **1 Chinese (Cathy Wu)**

2009 was an exciting year for me. Apart from having more involvement in school activities, I also very much enjoyed teaching three of the Year 7 classes and a Year 8 class. The keenness to learn Chinese among the Year 7 students was quite encouraging.

However, I was frustrated that these students had very limited exposure to an authentic Chinese environment as part of their learning. Their language learning was confined to a classroom environment. Without a meaningful context for language learning, there was a danger that students would quickly lose interest and motivation. With many parents expressing their desire for their daughters to continue to learn Chinese, I saw an exciting opportunity ahead.

The thought of establishing a learning partnership with a Chinese school had been on my mind for a while, but I had doubts about how feasible this might be. I first mentioned my proposal to the Director of Curriculum (Tony Kolb) of Mater Christi College towards the end of

2009. It occurred to me that the ideal school to approach as a partner would be the one where I taught in China. Tony was very supportive about the idea and its implementation. We discussed how we were going to carry out the linking up plan and with whom we should talk.

A series of emails and teleconferences between the two schools followed. A partnership was formally ratified early in 2010 when several teachers and students from Mater Christi visited our new sister school in Suzhou.

Facilitating communication between the students of two schools (in two different countries, with two very different cultures) would require proper computer facilities and appropriate software. While there is a multitude of online communication tools available, such as MSN and Skype, our main concern was to find a communication tool that was safe and conducive to educational use. After some investigation it was decided to trial Tokbox, an online communication tool created for communication, education and conference purposes.

I first trialled Tokbox internally with my Year 8 students. Except for a slight voice delay, the communication tool worked well. I then planned to assist the school in China in setting up Tokbox during our College's visit to the country in March.

Before setting off for China, we organised the agenda with the Suzhou No.1 Junior Secondary School, which included a formal induction of students from both schools, a student 'buddy' program, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, a tour around the school, and some activities for students. We also planned to conduct a trial Tokbox call from Suzhou to our school with a staff member at Mater Christi College standing by to test its usability. This trial was doubly successful, as not only did it

show that communication between the two schools was possible, it also allowed us to carefully guide our Chinese partners through the process.

The visit to the Suzhou school in April was one of the highlights of the trip. We received a very warm welcome and everything went smoothly and according to plan. Each of our students was grouped with a buddy and many tried hard to communicate using their Chinese language skills during activities. Some of them made friends with their buddies, and promised to keep in touch via email. The possibility of having one-on-one communication between the students from both schools in the near future was very promising. We kept in touch with the No. 1 Junior Secondary School when we returned to Melbourne. My Year 8 class was very much looking forward to forming a bond with their Chinese peers. Some of the students had already received warm emails from students in China by the time we returned to Australia. Although their language skills were still fundamental, our students replied in Chinese and were very keen to write as much as possible.

The first formal link-up between the students of the two schools had mixed success. Technical issues prevented a seamless audiovisual link, however, the process itself generated a lot of interest and enthusiasm amongst the students in both schools. We hope that further experiences through this program will continue to provide the students with real and authentic language learning experiences.

## 2 French (Jessie O'Sullivan)

At the end of 2009, I was approached by the Director of Curriculum at Mater Christi College who outlined the teaching challenge as a condition of my taking this small LOTE class. My initial re-

sponse to the idea was to implement some strategies that further motivated and engaged students in the study of French language and that also fostered an increase of communicative activities within the classroom, thereby making oral communication in the LOTE central to student learning.

Retaining student interest, motivation and engagement in the LOTE and particularly upholding its relevance to the students in Years 8 & 9 can be quite challenging. While use of technology had been accessible and implemented in previous years – largely as a research tool for assignments, presentations and revision via the use of online language programs – these rarely retained students' interest for an extended period of time, and frequently became fairly repetitive.

In addition to this, I witnessed minimal student engagement in LOTE *outside* the classroom environment. The idea of creating an online space that could be accessed from home, such as a Wikispace, presented some interesting solutions.

### 2.1 Implementation of a Wikispace 2010

My first task was to familiarise myself with some of Wikispaces' basic applications and possibilities. I then created a space entitled *MaterFrancais2010*. This wiki is a private one, accessible only to the class members and me as Content Manager.

The fact that this space was designed and reserved *only* for this class heightened its significance to the students. They could feel that it was their *own* to a certain extent. The ONE condition attached to this space was: NO ENGLISH allowed. So all pages, including my instructions were in the LOTE (French). This has not been an issue *at all* (although, early in

the term one girl wrote a response in English, which just happened to *mysteriously* disappear!).

The initial set-up of the wiki was relatively easy and user-friendly, but it took some initial trialling on my behalf and several lessons to coordinate student membership to the wiki. Interestingly, I found students just as reluctant and tentative with the wiki as I was initially. Gradually we became more confident with its basic tools and functions through experimentation and sharing feedback and observations – we were all learners here.

I designed a welcome page in French and created a personal profile page, serving to model language in the LOTE to speak about one's personal world and I also incorporated photographs. Students then created their own personal profile page. They found this activity engaging and furthermore, they were able to use the modelled language, not only from my personal page, but importantly from *each other's*. I felt that this process encouraged cooperative learning, and students could share new language in the LOTE that they came across on each other's pages.

Another use I implemented was the '*What did you do during the holidays?*' page. This was a swift homework task that reinforced the use of the past tense. I modelled a sentence of my holidays and included a holiday picture from France, to which the students added their own sentences. This was a very efficient way to monitor whether students completed 'homework' as such. My aim is to eventually increase this kind of interaction with the wiki... whereby students take the initiative to add language.

The wiki did raise student interest when it was first introduced, but I have found that the space needs to be constantly

used both in and outside class, in order to retain student interest, and to build student confidence in use of the wiki. Students have not yet taken the initiative to add independently to the wiki in the LOTE.

## 2.2 Variation in Uses for Student Learning

An additional use of ICT included the use of embedded worksheets and PowerPoints. Inserting documents, audio files and presentations available for students to upload from the wiki is a practical way of minimising distribution of worksheets in class and getting students onto individual work. Students have found this engaging and it allows them to move through exercises at their own pace; for example, they can consult a PowerPoint of the lesson over and over again if necessary to understand a task or language feature, such as grammar. The incorporation of sound files has been particularly successful, whereby students are able to access the files, download them and practise pronunciation/answers for oral tasks. A possible variation for oral tasks would be for students to record themselves in the LOTE and to upload it on the wiki as an assessment task. This could minimise the anxiety involved in traditional class presentations. Having headphones with microphones would be needed here, and I have yet to find a way to do this in class.

## 2.3 Observations

While obvious benefits include accessibility from home and the possibility to upload and embed a variety of links and resources to maintain student interest, an unexpected dimension of the wiki presented itself: monitoring student use.

This created an effective means of monitoring the students' contribution to the wiki and homework could be more interesting for students via use of the wiki, which in turn could be easily monitored.

Furthermore, students have expressed an interest in the possibilities of using such a space as a learning tool. My general assumption was that the students already knew how to use a Wikispace and that they would be keen to assist and offer their own ideas for its effective use. In fact, it was the opposite; they were unfamiliar overall with the application and initially reluctant. Students have at times asked whether the Wikispace would be a continuous aspect of French throughout the year. They were intrigued, but a little perplexed as to how to use it. Wiki has certainly generated curiosity and has students thinking, but the challenge I am currently confronting is to determine how to find ways to retain its interest.

Despite the students' initial curiosity to use the space from home, regular use of the wiki has to be reinforced continuously, as it easily becomes redundant. It is admittedly very time-consuming to prepare new online activities frequently to keep the space "fresh" and interesting, particularly when encountering system limitations of available software, such as loading up large audio files. A further time-consuming aspect is becoming familiar with the wiki's possibilities. You need ample time to experiment with its various functions in order to use it more creatively.

In conclusion, implementation of Wikispace in a learning environment did present new possibilities in the LOTE class-

room, generating initial interest and ideas in students. However, it is important that the wiki is constantly updated so that it remains a live space; for example, regular, new and changing content, communication/networking with other students to heighten experience of and exposure to authentic language from both the LOTE community and learners of the LOTE. For this to happen, one could suggest that this space be shared by either several classes, or become an opportunity for team teaching where the responsibility of adding to and updating the space is not the task of only one teacher.

### 3 Conclusion

The traditional landscape of the school is rapidly changing, as student learning increasingly draws on resources well outside the college boundaries, or to state it differently, the college boundaries are expanding to global proportions. In addition to these broadening horizons, the concept of the school day is taking a new shape. Communication between students at Mater Christi College and Suzhou are not limited to the hours of 9am to 3pm, nor is student and teacher contribution to the French Wikispace.

While a number of issues have been identified from this trial, two of the most significant have been that developments in ICT have opened a wide range of valuable opportunities, and schools must work hard to maximise the use of these opportunities in order to provide authentic learning experiences to their students.