ACCESS ISSUES

THE COMPUTER AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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GLOSSARY

Asynchronous interactions

"A method of communication where messages are sent and received over a time period. An analogy would be posting a letter, the writer creates and sends the letter. The receiver waits for the letter and sends a reply when it is received. Asynchronous communication usually appears in the computer world as email. Email is usually personal asynchronous communication in that email is sent from one person to another."
daugenis.mch.mii.lt/UNESCOeducation/glossary.htm

Computer-mediated interactions

An interaction is a conversation that can be as simple as a single word or sentence between two people up to extended dialogue between many people. The term 'computer mediated interactions' refers to both interactions that are mediated **through** the computer and **around** the computer. Interactions mediated through the computer are electronic messages sent via the Internet using email, guest books, chat rooms, and peer-to-peer programs. These interactions can be asynchronous or synchronous. Interactions around the computer refer to spoken interactions between students and teachers or amongst students, where participants are engaged in either writing or reading electronic messages that were sent or received via the Internet.

Emoticon

"The term "emoticon" literally means "an icon that represents emotion." Emoticons grew out of the need to display feeling in the two-dimensional, online, written world. When speaking face-to-face (F2F), a person's facial expressions help you understand the meaning of what he or she is saying." Emoticons help to convey feelings or emotions online that are normally conveyed through facial expressions. Emoticons started out by combining grammatical features of the English language for example, and colon and bracket expresses happiness :). In more recent times emoticons have become coloured images.
http://www.netlingo.com/lookup.cfm?term=emoticons

Field

The field of discourse refers to what the language is being used to talk about, and is realised in terms of the ideational metafunction (Gibbons, 1999). This term is used in systemic functional grammar.

Key Learning Area (KLA)

In NSW schools there are six curriculum or key learning areas (KLAs). These include English, Maths, Personal Development/Health/Physical Education (PDHPE), Science and Technology, Creative Arts, and Human Society and its Environment (HSIE).

Mode

The mode of the discourse refers to the means by which meaning is conveyed, either through spoken or written means, and is realised in terms of the textual function. This term is used in systemic functional grammar.

Synchronous interactions

"Communication happening online between two or more people at the same time, but not necessarily in the same place. The most frequently used form of synchronous communication is online chat. Audio and video conferencing, instant messaging, and white boards are other examples".
www.csus.edu/uccs/training/online/glossary.htm

Tenor

The tenor of the discourse refers to the relationship constructed between speaker/listener or reader/writer and is realised in terms of the interpersonal metafunction (Gibbons, 1999). This term is used in systemic functional grammar.

Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

"..the distance between a child's actual developmental level as determined through independent problem solving and [his or her] potential development [level] as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or a collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978).

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates access issues associated with the use of the Internet to provide human-to-human interactions in the upper primary school classroom. In examining issues of access, a metaphor of a door is used. I suggest that doors are in place in schools but the doors are currently locked. The purpose of this study is to investigate what happens when these doors are unlocked.

In focusing on access issues the following two questions are considered.
What factors are required to provide access to the Internet for primary school students?
What are some of the effects of providing such access?

The study, which was conducted during the first half of 2001 and the whole of 2002 is informed by data collected with participants in two upper primary classrooms (grades five and six). Qualitative methodology is used, drawing on aspects of ethnography and case study methods. Data are collected through a variety of methods including observations, field notes, interviews, discussion with teachers, and by recording online interactions. A theory of learning and a theory of language are used to analyse the data.

A number of outcomes arise out of this study. It is found that there needs to be greater consideration in providing access to computers in the classroom, for without reliable technical and physical access, online interactions cannot proceed. Another finding of this study is that there are few online spaces that are reflective of the needs of primary school participants. In this study, several online spaces were developed including a class web site and a chat room. In providing access for students to the spaces developed for this study and through contact in student initiated sites, a window is opened to the students' online world where issues of identity, gender, safety, and language surface.

The significance of this study is that it contributes to an understanding of the use of the Internet in primary schools. Other areas to which this study contributes are the theoretical and methodological implications of conducting research involving the Internet as a communication tool.