

Rongomai School - mastering technology

By Margaret Peacocke, former Trustee

When I started school in the 1950s, we used slates. Today's new entrants, along with all the students at Rongomai School, use interactive electronic whiteboards and mini laptops, funded by the Auckland Airport Community Trust.

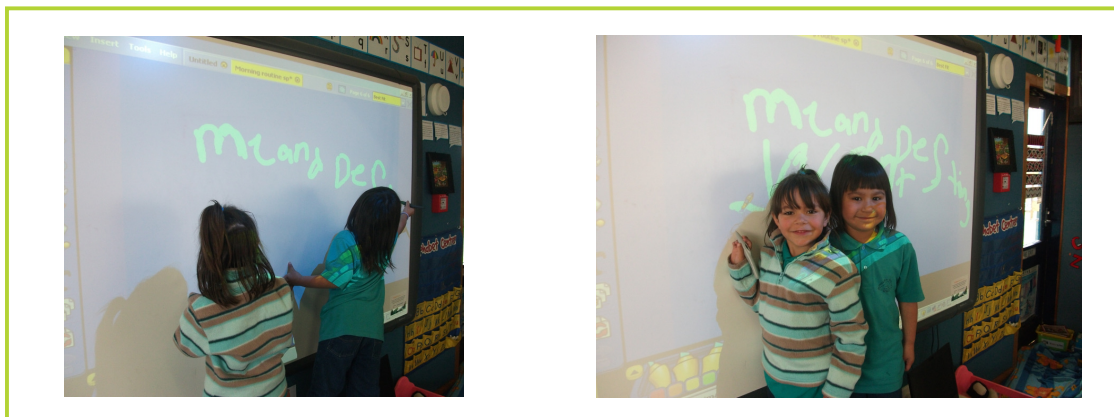
I make the point about slates to illustrate that teaching equipment and techniques are always changing and improving and that they may be unfamiliar to parents, grandparents and even, at first, to classroom teachers.

So, when Rongomai Principal, Tina Voordouw was successful in her application to the Trust for funding for interactive white boards, to use in conjunction with their mini-laptops, she had to introduce their potential as a valuable tool for learning to her Board of Trustees, staff and parents as well as the children.

Tina is very keen that her pupils leave Rongomai School confident in using and understanding the capabilities of the latest technology. Often at intermediate or secondary school, students have infrequent use of a computer suite, so pupils who already know how to make the most of these sessions are at an advantage.

Tina believes that through having the interactive whiteboards and mini-laptops (the former funded by the AACT this year, the latter two years ago) the children can build a foundation of skills and confidence upon which they can approach new technologies in the future and take advantage of the opportunities that this knowledge presents.

“Our parents want so much for their kids. They're discovering that through education their children will have opportunities in the future that weren't available to them. The funding to our school from the AACT has contributed to our ability to add value to families as well as to the children in ways that can't be measured. These parents are proud of their children for being able to use these modern technologies.”



Most learning, especially by children, occurs through being interested or curious rather than by a determination to learn a particular skill – ball handling skills are learned from playing ball games. If we enjoy the activity, we'll engage in it more, learn more and become proficient.

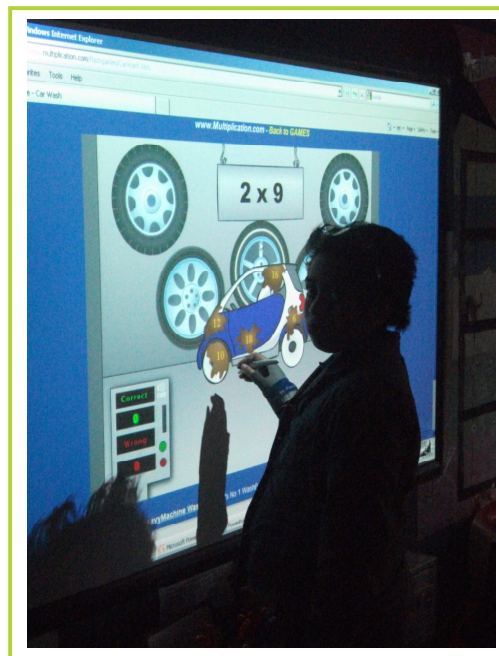
The challenge that Tina has given to her teachers this year, and the focus of most of their professional development, has been to find ways of using the interactive whiteboard technology to arouse curiosity in the children, motivating them to want to participate in ways that they will enjoy.

The teachers, in the process, have been stimulated by the opportunities that this presents to be more skillful and successful teachers, and also by the fact that pupils have been exceeding their expectations.

As Tina says, "It's great when teachers are excited and blown away by what the kids are doing."

Tina also had her staff introduce the interactive whiteboards at Board of Trustee meetings and commented that "parents are thrilled to see their children learning in a way that gives them skills beyond what the parents themselves could give them".

The electronic boards are used for virtually every lesson, every day. Tina noticed that the children were in awe of the boards to begin with, but soon realised that they don't break, they can't wipe important information and that they can save material to their computers that they want to keep.



“They’re now so relaxed and eager to use them that learning becomes self-directed.”

The teacher’s role is to arouse curiosity and provide enough background information that children can ask intelligent questions – and then pursue the answers, either through programs such as the one the school purchased on the Commonwealth Games, or through searching the internet. In the process the children are learning to read, to write and to do maths better.

This process of asking questions is not one that sits comfortably with all cultures, so one aspect of the learning for families is that it is OK for children to ask questions, and that, as adults, it is OK not to know all the answers.

The combination of curious children who are competent in literacy and numeracy, self-assured with modern technologies and confident to embrace technological advances, together with the support of families which value education, sounds like a winning formula for the future.

“Our community is so grateful and feels so privileged that our children are being nurtured by the Auckland Airport Community Trust. It increases its mana and well-being because the Trust is doing things for the community that the parents can’t.”

Tina Voordouw, Principal
Rongomai Primary School