

## **INTEGRATING ICT IS NOT AS EASY AS IT SEEMS**

**A Review of *Integrating ICT and multicultural aspects within a classroom: the SAIL project* by Caruana-Dingli, Michelle (2005).**

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“When ICT was introduced in schools, it was thought that it would **revolutionize** the manner of teaching, yet substantial progress is still required to actually integrate ICT into classroom practice.” (Caruana-Dingli, 2005; emphasis the author’s)

Information Communication Technology (ICT) is certainly not a new thing in the education field and the teaching and learning process. However, it seems that little has been done to truly integrate ICT into classroom practice more than the occasional slideshow and lecture notes.

According to the article *Integrating ICT and multicultural aspects within a classroom: the SAIL project*, Caruana-Dingli, Michelle cited Wenger and Syneder in the journal of *Intercultural Education* 2005, saying that teachers do not “acquire skills in the use of ICT educational purposes during their initial training, even though various in-service training programmes have been introduced.”

This means that, although teachers may have been *introduced* to programmes that train them in ICT skills, that does not necessarily translate into *usage* and *acquisition* of such skills in both their daily lives and the classroom. Why is this so? The author shall suggest a reason as to why this is a common occurrence.

Therefore, what is proposed to overcome this problem is the nurturing of a learning community in which its members are able to share knowledge and experience besides forming interactions and relationships that make up a supportive network. The SAIL (Specialized Animated Interactive Learning) project is one such project that is discussed in the article that champions this cause.

However, this paper will only discuss the main issue and problem in the article *Integrating ICT and multicultural aspects within a classroom: the SAIL project* by Caruana-Dingli, Michelle (2005), a brief summary of the article, challenges faced by the teacher in

integrating ICT in the classroom, the solution proposed, and the pros and cons of incorporating a similar project in the Malaysian classroom.

### **What is the issue?**

As aforementioned in the introductory section, it is undeniable that teachers *have* been exposed to programmes and in-service training for using ICT skills in the classroom. However, there is no true integration of ICT into classroom practice so far. This could be due to teachers' lack of confidence in using the technology, and thus this hinders and inhibits them from practicing such skills in the classroom.

### **What is the main problem?**

In order to enhance teachers' self-confidence and esteem with regards to the use of ICT in the classroom, teachers will have to alter their view of the teaching and learning process, as well as form a new image of their own role in the classroom from mere deliverers of information, to facilitators of the knowledge-seeking process.

### **Summary of the Article**

The SAIL project is used in this research paper article as a solution to the main problem above. Although this project's main aim is not to solve the main problem of teachers not integrating ICT in the classroom, the end-result of using this project seems to work to the teachers' advantage.

The philosophy behind SAIL project has two components: the development of a software package as a tool to attain specific objectives, including cooperative learning, and the use of the software package in the classroom which provides teachers with opportunities to attain and use new skills and teaching methods.

Five primary schools in Malta were involved in the project, with four female and one male teacher directly involved as subjects in the research paper. They were required to compile project materials for SAIL, meet up as a group to discuss chosen teaching methods

and materials, apply them into the classroom as well as reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching and record them into a log.

The teachers used the SAIL project in teaching their classes on the topic of the Roma community. They searched for information and knowledge on freeware package available on websites (project materials on SAIL) and even interacted with a virtual Roma community in order to better understand the life of the minority Roma community and encourage empathy. Issues of prejudices and biases against these minority ethnic groups were addressed, but most importantly, although differences were noted, commonalities were highlighted as well. Finally, students were asked to produce an end-product that was presented to the class.

During the entire process of conducting the SAIL project, the five teachers involved met regularly to discuss the approach they were adopting, the problems they were encountering and how they could be overcome.

### **Challenges faced by the Teacher**

There are three main aspects that the teacher struggles with, with respects to integrating and using ICT in the classroom:

a) **Functional**

The teacher may have a misconception as to the functions of computers in the classroom. Some teachers may see computers merely as a “light relief” in the mainstream “serious” teaching and learning that goes on in the typical classroom. Some see it as an alternative means to keep the disruptive ones occupied. Teachers need to realize that the computer has many more uses that may aid and facilitate students’ learning in interesting and effective ways.

b) **Practical**

The teacher finds it difficult to find additional time to carry out “computer work” in an already overloaded subject syllabus. However, teachers must understand that ICT needs to be integrated into the lesson rather than taught as an isolated subject. While the latter is also acceptable, the former will eradicate the problem of having to find more time outside of the lesson to use ICT tools.

c) Emotional

Many teachers fear technology because they believe that they lack the skills to use them effectively. Teachers need to know that it is not impossible to acquire these skills. Practice in using the skills will increase confidence and self-esteem to the level sufficient enough to use ICT in the classroom well. Teachers just need the right attitude and the willingness to learn.

### **The Solution**

The collaborative learning that is employed in the SAIL project seems to have helped the teachers the most in not only gaining their confidence to use ICT in the classroom but also in altering their view of themselves and the teaching and learning process.

The teachers engaged in meaningful discussion whereby they questioned and challenged the effectiveness and appropriateness of each other's teaching methods and approaches. Nevertheless it is done in a supportive environment with the goal of helping one another improve their teaching. They also discussed the problems that they experienced in applying ICT in the classroom, and suggested ideas and ways in which they could eliminate the problem. They worked collaboratively together, working out technical glitches or implementation hiccups to ensure smooth teaching and learning.

This aspect of the project has drastically increased the teachers' confidence in applying ICT in the classroom. Teachers go through what has been planned with the group and they slowly learn to improve with the shared knowledge and experience from the others. When teachers have planned carefully and in detail, with support from others, they gain confidence in what they are about to deliver as well as the method in which they have chosen to deliver it; in this case, using ICT in the classroom.

Besides that, their view of teaching as well as their perception of their role as teachers has changed. By working collaboratively with others in planning, the teachers understand that working together to construct knowledge and information should be what the teaching and learning process is about. With ICT in the classroom, a more student-centred approach is employed, and students are able to work on their own, sharpening their ICT skills during the process. The students also work together, using information from electronic sources to

collaboratively form an understanding of the topic. Teachers then, are merely facilitators of this process, providing them with the opportunities to use ICT and learn along the way.

By forming a learning community (as the five teachers have done in the SAIL project), the main issue and problem of integrating ICT in the classroom are solved.

### **Pros and Cons of using the SAIL Project Approach**

The SAIL project, according to the article, has produced positive results albeit in a Maltese primary education context.

The teachers have benefited significantly from the project. They have gained more confidence in using ICT in the classroom as tools for facilitating students' learning. They have also learned the value of cooperation and collaborative learning through a supportive learning community network. The class has also a freer learning environment, where the students are able to practice independent learning – with the use of ICT; teachers learn to reduce control over the lesson to allow for a more student-centred approach. In addition, teachers are more willing to take risks and engage in a process of change that could only be a result of their confidence, enthusiasm and motivation. Teachers also involved themselves in the sharing of knowledge and experience with other teachers which facilitates personal growth.

Students have also gained a lot as a result of the change in the teachers and their methods. Students enhance their ICT skills like information-searching and critical analysis of information. As mentioned in the article by one of the subjects with the pseudonym David, "...they are really keen to research on their own." There is more exploration and discovery learning in the classroom than before. Team-building is also encouraged where students tend to work in pairs and groups in discussion and expressing their opinions when previously it was individual work. Integrating ICT in the classroom has also enhanced students' creativity seen clearly in the production of various types of materials.

However, such a project also requires a lot of time in planning and even for setting up the tools and equipment needed in the classroom for the lesson. This falls mainly on the responsibility of the teacher. He or she has to ensure that everything needed for the lesson is

prepared beforehand. Even so, technical problems do occur during the lesson, wasting precious time and energy in the process. The effectiveness of the lesson also depends on the experience of the teacher in using and applying ICT in the classroom. For inexperienced teachers, the overall impact of the lesson and what was supposed to be taught may be lost when the tool or technology used is either inappropriate or used ineffectively.

Finally, the most important factor of all is facilities provided in the school itself. How much a teacher can do using ICT is dependent on the facilities that the school offers for the use of the teachers. Computer labs and LCD projectors may not be sufficient for an elaborate lesson that aims in developing students' specific ICT skills. The Maltese state primary schools involved in the research paper had "three to four desktop computers in every classroom," and "Internet access is available on all computers." In reality in Malaysia, not every school has such facilities, even in urban areas. Therefore, the sort of technology that a teacher can use may be more limited in nature as compared to these Maltese schools.

## **Conclusion**

Integrating ICT in the classroom is certainly not as simple as it seems. In truth, knowing something in theory does not make applying it in real life any simpler.

Teachers lack the confidence in applying ICT in the classroom. Some even have a misconception as to what the teaching and learning process really is about and their role as a teacher in the classroom.

In order to overcome these issues and problems, a learning community like the one employed in the SAIL project needs to be nurtured. In doing so, teachers and students will definitely benefit in the long-term besides enhancing the teaching and learning process as a whole.

Implementing this project or certain aspects of this project has its pros and cons. As discussed earlier, there are many advantages to implementing this project. Significant and positive changes can be seen in both the teachers and the students. However, such challenges such as time, teachers' experience and available facilities may deem this project difficult, application-wise.

Still, these cons, or challenges for integrating ICT in the Malaysian classroom should not hamper a teacher's efforts to do so. Students will benefit from any meaningful integration of ICT in meaningful activities, however simple or insignificant it may seem. These skills are transferrable and are lifelong learning skills that students will need in the long run. Therefore, teachers should not give up and continue to do whatever possible to harness and hone students' potential and skills.

## **REFERENCES**

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