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2021 Short-Term E-Exchange Program – Research Submission

Instructional Leadership in Distance Education

FOCUS AREAS:

1. Compare/contrast the tools we use to deliver content.
2. Outline students’ needs and how the Genesis K-6 environment is different/similar to the Riverina Access Partnership (RAP) Stage 6 environment.
3. Examine the importance of RAP face to face meetings vs Genesis all online.
4. Outline practices and processes we found most effective in online content delivery.

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As part of the International [E-Exchange Program](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/careers-at-education/scholarships-and-programs/international-teacher-exchange/short-term-e-exchange-program), a virtual exchange was completed between New South Wales and overseas counterparts. This exchange provided an opportunity for short-term one-on-one partnerships between educators with similar interests or fields.

This action research report on the shared focus area was completed following the 6-week program.

# Introduction

Remote learning was thrust into the forefront of global teaching practice in 2020. Practice in the NSW Riverina Access Partnership (RAP) after 30 years of blended learning was compared to the Genesis Online School, established as an online-only school for Years K-6 in 2020. RAP has 45 Stage 6 students from 6 small central schools while Genesis Online School has approximately 1200 students K-6 and also has a team providing resources to all schools in the Edmonton Catholic School District.

# Focus of the Study: Description of Current Practice

1. Compare/contrast the tools we use to deliver content. Eg. Platforms, protocols, teacher professional learning;

2. Outline students’ needs and how the Genesis K-6 environment is different / similar to the RAP Stage 6 environment;

3. Examine the role of RAP face-to-face meetings vs Genesis all online; and

4. Outline practices and processes we found most effective in online content delivery.

# Significant Learning: Findings

**Tools used for Delivery**

* Genesis delivers content via Google Classroom and runs lessons via Microsoft Teams. In both schools, students have their own laptops / Chromebooks.
* Genesis post daily marks directly to Power Teacher Pro, with parents encouraged to have the app installed so they can see the day to day assessment. Genesis use rubrics within Google Classroom but don't use Google Classroom for marks. They may also use Google classroom for feedback.

**Similarities and Differences between RAP and Genesis**

**Similarities**:

Year group numbering K-12 is similar.

Literacy is really important in the online context, both with reading and writing.

Hand-writing is difficult to promote in the online context, as most responses are typed or verbal.

Technology skills are important, as is effective access to internet and a working device.

Geographical distance: Both Australians and Canadians are accustomed to travelling long distances between cities and towns etc.

**Differences**:

* The Genesis school day finishes earlier (2.30pm) and the climate is colder than in RAP;
* Genesis are online only whereas RAP have hybrid classes;
* Genesis found that students were struggling with literacy levels in the lower grades. Teachers aren't able to spend the usual one-on-one time with younger students and interaction on line is different for students and staff. eg. Nodding instead of vocal responses. Genesis has experimented with encouraging handwriting a story and taking a picture as an alternative to only typing; and
* Genesis offers online homework assistance.

**Face-to-face Opportunities in RAP vs Genesis**

**Students**: RAP holds a number of face-to-face opportunities on an annual and termly basis but Genesis is not currently offering face-to-face opportunities for students, as covid-19 issues still impact the district.

**Staff**: Genesis holds regular timetabled Synchronous Teacher Meetings on Thursday afternoons, alternating full staff and faculty staff meetings, with classes finishing early. They also held an online meeting at the end of their school year (NSW Term 2) for staff preparing for the 2021-2022 school year.

**Practices and Processes**

**Induction:** Genesis has provision for a "new teacher" cohort which meets four times a year. Mentors offer their services and will often not be at the same school. Curriculum consultants are also present at the meetings.

**Preparation**: Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD) have a team preparing content, ensuring consistency in delivery across their schooling system, meaning that if students change between online and in-person learning, learning will still be at a similar topic.

**Asynchronous learning**: ECSD content follows a PowerPoint template for asynchronous learning, with the required activity for submission on the first page of the PowerPoint, allowing for quick checking of submissions.

**Parental Contact**: Google classrooms have been set up so that parents are able to easily understand and access their child's work. Short videos have been created with suggestions to assist students. Genesis will have a Family/School Liaison worker to assist in the 2021 – 2022 school year. For parent / teacher interviews, teachers will book parents in the afternoon online between 3pm – 4pm.

**Supporting staff causing concern**: When issues are identified with staff in Genesis, supervisors / curriculum advisers may reach out to offer support. This can be difficult when that support is not accepted. Supervisors can recommend strategies etc but Principal supervisors are the only ones who can enforce this.

**Online Professional Learning Strategies:** Genesis builds in questions to type in the chat and has assistant presenters joke around and monitor the chat to add “fun” to the training. Cameras are required to be on for the beginning.

# Conclusion: Recommendations

Daily assessment and reporting within the infants and primary school context, with results accessible by parents, alleviates the stress of the traditional reporting period for teachers;

Strategies to effectively boost literacy teaching and handwriting in the online context are needed in both systems;

* Face to face interactions staff to student and student to student are valued;
* Formally timetabling faculty meetings encourages staff engagement;
* A formal induction process with regular meetings for new staff, regardless of their experience, can avoid information overload and can be targeted for specific times;
* Access to programs developed by a specialised subject team would assist staff in small faculties and save duplication;
* A consistent template should be used across a school for asynchronous work; and
* An option for online parent / teacher interviews during office hours for all schools would be easier for staff and parents.

# Acknowledgements

* Aaron Ball, Genesis Online School, Edmonton Catholic School District, Alberta, Canada