The Willy Wagtail Tale: ICT, Multiliteracies and Community Connections

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**Abstract**

Young students pull chairs into an enclosed patio area adjacent to their classroom for a morning meeting. Much to everyone’s delight two Willy Wagtails fly into their midst, loud chirping communications interrupting conversation. One student suggests to the class that they hang a long tree branch from the patio eaves so that birds can have a place to rest. A week later, as if by magic, the birds accept the children’s invitation and commence nest building on the suspended limb. To support students’ interest, the class teacher decides to video the birds’ activity from an aerial perspective and initiate multimedia communications. In so doing, opportunities to interconnect and build relationships throughout the school and the wider community were initiated.

**Research Methodology**

Case study ethnographic inquiry conducted over nine months to explore how different curricular, pedagogical and classrooms designs impact on early childhood student’s ICT and Multiliteracies learning experiences.

**Case Study Setting**

A Western Australian Independent Community School that embraces *Reggio Emilia* teaching philosophy and is committed to providing a wide range of quality ICT resources and high level of ICT support for child initiated learning investigations.

**Image of the Child**

A unique individual who is imaginative, resourceful, competent, naturally improvises, inquires, theorises, already knows so much, has something important to say, designs meaning in myriad ways.

**Teacher’s Pedagogical Strategies**

Adopts a broad ICT definition, accommodates emergent curriculum, integrates popular culture, facilitates daily access to ICT resources in response to student’s ‘meaning making’ design requests, ensures time and space for students to share their ICT ‘hands on’ experiences and Multiliteracies learning with others.

**Community of Learners**

The school community is committed to providing students with extensive exposure to different modes of communication, have a common bond to support the integration of ICT for the purpose of exploring diverse learning possibilities. ICT is used to share students’ discoveries, knowledge and
understanding with members of the wider community. Members extend one another’s ICT expertise informally spontaneously on a needs/interest basis.

**ICT Integration**

A webcam is placed above the bird’s nest so students can observe nest activity. Soon the whole school is interested in having a ‘birds eye’ view of nest building and young fledglings’ progress. A series of computer networks are established throughout the school and, via internet connection, images are delivered to the wider community. A reporter visits the school and due to newspaper publicity the school is contacted with requests from bird watcher enthusiasts for updates on ‘bird news’, the internet images documenting the life of the Willy Wagtails. The school community access the Wide World Web seeking additional bird information. and contact, via email, local ornithologists to clarify facts.

**Multiliteracies Learning**

Students theorise ‘baby’ birds’ appearance inside the eggs, tally the number of times the adults sit on the nest, wonder what the nest is made of, which of the birds are ‘Mum’ and ‘Dad’. The birds and nest images are projected onto a classroom wall. Differences in visual, aural, gestural, spatial and linguistic bird communications are observed, discussed, role played, improvised by students. Class meetings focus on how the ‘baby’ birds have similar needs as children: care, food and shelter. Students theorise how the images from their classroom laptop are transported to other computers, discuss how this technology works, and record their personal ideas through schematic drawings, artwork and drama.

**Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

Students compare how their own family experiences are similar to the Willy Wagtails’ life; making a home, shifting house, leaving the ‘nest’, the cycle of life. A group of students use natural materials to design nests then photograph these using a digital camera. The teacher shares with them the extraordinary photographic designs of Goldsworthy (1990) which further inspires their active designing. As the fledglings mature students track and study changes in movement, activities, habits, communications and appearance. These findings, rich in diversity, are expressed in multimodal ways.

**Findings ~ Critical Reflections**

The Willy Wagtail class project accommodated students’ interests, inspired creative designs, empowered cultural and linguistic diversity and fostered community relationships. Social constructivist learning principles and a community of learners committed to using ICT to transform learning were instrumental in supporting these learning processes. These processes enriched student’s Multiliteracies learning and self expression.