



MATHS: Add and subtract.

Learning has certainly become much more fun in the school of the future. Sharee Richardson, the ICT Facilitator at Peachgrove Intermediate School in Hamilton has been involved with the MiLO project and kindly photographed the children using learning objects.

She summed up the digital learning situation well when she told us, "When I'd finished taking the photos they desperately wanted to carry on, even though it was past the end of the school day".

Jeska Innes

Interview with Dr Annick Janson

We gave Doctor Annick Janson, Research Director of Microsoft Partners in Learning NZ, a call to chat about MiLO, digital learning objects, and how it's all going.

PC World: How have the teachers in the MiLO project reacted to digital learning objects?

Annick Janson: It does help teachers divide their energy and be able to use their time and teach more efficiently. They only have so many hours to teach the children, so it creates more teaching time and more value, and at the same time everyone benefits. I have teachers that have said to me, that because the children are so engaged with the DLOs, they can now use their energies in doing what they all dreamed of doing as teachers.

They've said, "Wow, I remember now, this is why I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be able to guide the children like this, but I don't get to do that often because so often I'm caught up in other stuff".

PCW: During your research for the MiLO project, how did you record the reactions of children to the digital learning objects?

AJ: In order to research we used software that can record the screen of the computer and record the voice of the children. We can tell by what's going on if they are content. This was totally above board and for research purposes.

PCW: So what kind of reactions did the children have?

AJ: I'll give you an example of a little girl with some learning difficulties. Her teachers described her as having low self-confidence and a fear of failure. She would shy away from doing exercises. So we gave her a digital learning object. The DLO was about the teaching of scientific principals; how we can regulate the right amount of heat, water and light to grow a plant. So, we had the recordings of the girl there, and she tried literally like 17 times and every time the plant died.

PCW: Oh dear...

AJ: Yes, but because it was a game it wasn't actually a failure. She didn't perceive it that way, and we know this because we could hear what she was saying. She was exclaiming, "Oh this is so fun", and "My sister says that I can succeed". The 18th time she did succeed, and she shouted with excitement, "Waaahoooooo".

What's so interesting is that in order to record her, we had to record everything else that was happening around her. At one point the lesson finished and she asked the teacher if she could stay during interval. I certainly don't remember asking a teacher if I could stay inside during interval to do an exercise.

Anyway, so the teacher said, "Okay, come and join us when you're finished, we're watching a video in the library". And then a little later we heard another kid come into the

classroom and he said, "Come watch the film, you're missing out". She replied, "No, no, I'm not missing out, I'm doing this because I want to do it."

So what we witnessed was a breakthrough in self-confidence, and overcoming a fear of failure. Basically these are two really important attitudes to learning. So it was interesting that this little girl was able to overcome all previous barriers. This is just one example, there are at least 100 more like this.

PCW: How do you feel personally about the programme?

AJ: I'm very excited. I'm trained as an education psychologist and I also have a PHD in technology and leadership. As a psychologist I sat in many classrooms observing teachers, and it was literally fascinating trying to watch them teach children and having to worry about the level of engagement. For me, to be able to report on how technology can help children learn is very, very exciting.

PCW: Is this the future of learning?

AJ: It's part of the future. Microsoft is very interested in the concept of the 'school of the future' and this ideally uses the basics of technology to maximise the human resources. So we use a computer for what it's good at, and use face-to-face time for what we're good at.