

## Getting more go from MiLO

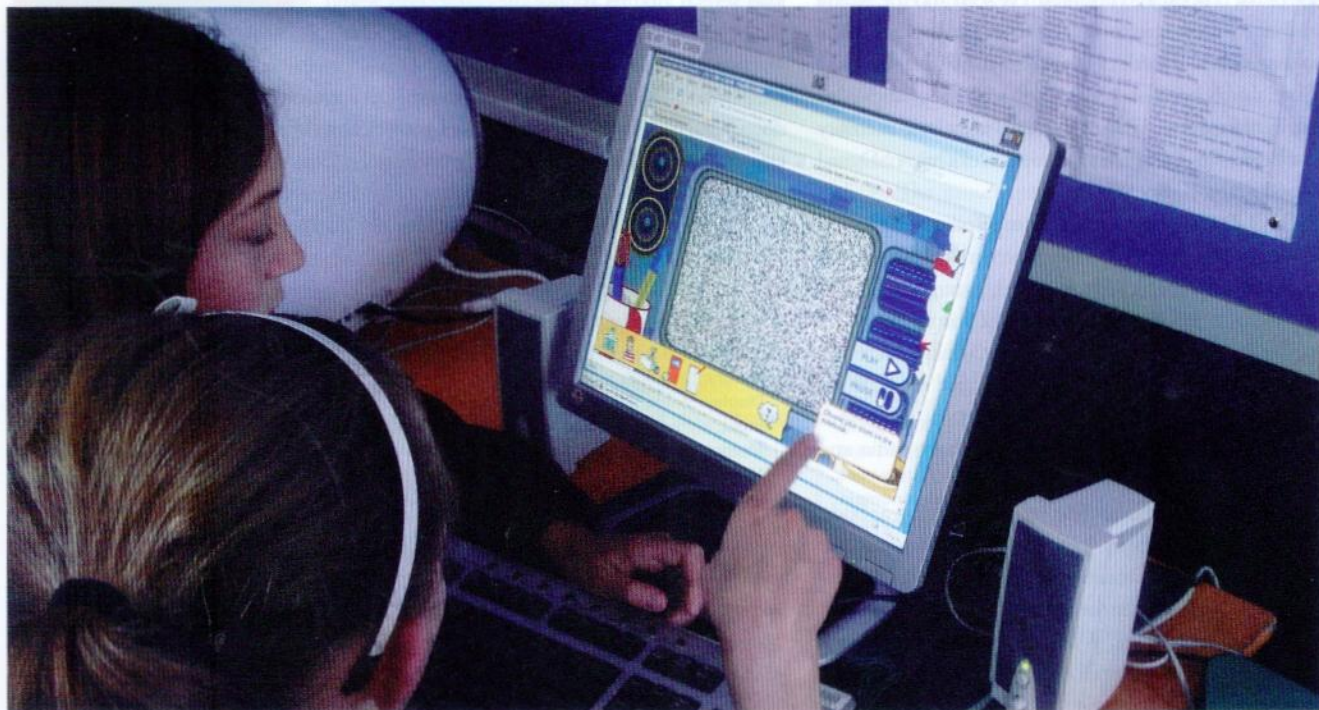
Forget seeds in yoghurt pots, kids now grow bean plants digitally. Not even George Orwell could have envisioned this. Learning certainly isn't what it used to be, mind you, nor is teaching.

**THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT** is really changing the way New Zealand children learn and are taught. After all, a computer literate child gains access to a promising future. For this reason we should probably offer some thanks to Bill Gates. He's been doing quite a bit for our kids lately, \$2 million dollars worth to be precise, only you may not have been aware of it.

It goes something like this; Microsoft has funded a global programme dubbed 'Microsoft Partners in Learning', which aims to further the use of digital technologies in education and reduce the digital divide. This programme is active in 54 countries around the world. Each country is given funding and decides how best to use it together with its Ministry of

Education, its educators and its community. In developing countries the money is needed to teach even the most basic of computer skills to the teachers.

Fortunately, in NZ we're quite advanced in ICT (Information and Communication Technology), but there's always room for improvement. Since 2004 our \$2 million share has been used to



**ATTENTION BENEFIT:** Peachgrove Intermediate students have a blast with digital learning objects.

## What's your next challenge?

New Zealand's ICT jobsite



fund a number of innovative projects. This is where MiLO comes in (and we don't mean the drinking chocolate).

So, if you don't mix it with milk, what exactly is MiLO? The Microsoft Learning Object project, affectionately nicknamed MiLO, is one of the projects funded by Microsoft NZ Partners in Learning. MiLO aims to identify where digital learning objects may aid learning within specific curriculum units and focuses on research to guide their future implementation and development.

### So, er, what exactly are digital learning objects?

Long multiplication on paper was the norm when the *PC World* team went to school back in the dark ages. It was boring, tedious, and required a huge amount of internal motivation. Fortunately for the new generation times have changed and so have teaching methods.

A digital learning object (DLO) is best explained as interactive digital material specifically designed to teach something, and do so in a fun way for a child. You can look at them as computer games if you want. Well, from a child's perspective it's certainly an engaging computer game.

Essentially what you do with a DLO is push and click on different buttons to interact. They're particularly useful for teachers when a concept is hard or dangerous to represent visually, or when repetition is needed. The MiLO team tells us that digital learning objects are proving to be very engaging for children, which is obviously crucial to the service of learning. After all, if there's no engagement, kids will not learn.

### That's well and good, but how do teachers get their hands on them?

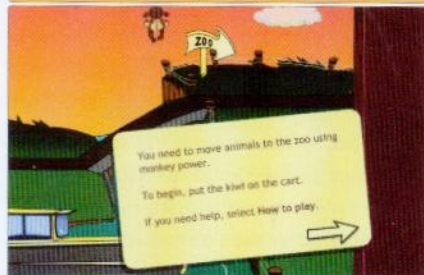
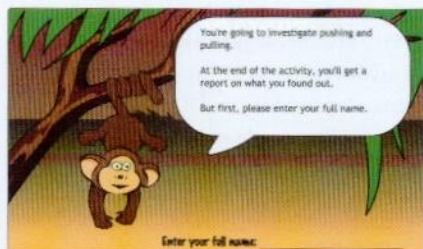
In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education has partnered with the Australian Learning Federation to get funding and has made a whole library of digital learning objects specifically for Kiwi schools. These are posted on the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website, which acts a gateway to the collection and is where teachers can register and access them for free. See [tki.org.nz/r/digistore](http://tki.org.nz/r/digistore). As of 3 October, 1,934 Kiwi schools were registered for the digistore.

### What other projects does Microsoft have in the pipeline?

As an extension of the MiLO project, MELLO is being developed. Yes, another cool abbreviation. It stands for Multi Media E-Leadership Learning Object. Still in its developmental stages, MELLO is a compilation of the research material from MiLO.

Dr Annick Janson, Research Director of Microsoft Partners in Learning NZ, says her team has literally hundreds of video clips, including interviews with teachers, films of children in class room situations using different kinds of learning objects, and interviews with principals. This material will be categorised and ultimately used as a professional development tool for teachers.

Clearly a higher importance is being placed on the use of technology in teaching and learning. It's not just that though, there's a buzz in the air, and a new enthusiasm for education.



PHYSICS: Push and pull.



LANGUAGE: Give me my sardine feast.

# What rules your universe?