

The Virtual Learning Network in New Zealand

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ePrincipal's group

Abstract

The Virtual Learning Network (VLN) supports the concept of classrooms without walls, where students and educators have the opportunity and flexibility to connect with their classes 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The VLN brokers the connections between teachers and learners; joining clusters, schools, groups and individuals who are learning through online programmes and/or using video conferencing for curriculum support

The VLN has grown substantially over the last few years with over 160 online courses on offer. There are also 12 ePrincipals/eLeaders around NZ representing clusters of schools from the Far North to the deep south. This group, whose focus is the establishment of effective eLearning within secondary and primary schools, is using tools that were initially the domain of distance education and, while still using them to link students in geographically separated locations, is using them in normal school environments to create greater levels of flexibility in terms of the way students can access their learning, their teachers and each other.

Traditionally, video conferencing has been used as the primary synchronous method of communication within the VLN schools, with a learning management system (LMS) used for asynchronous support; but things are evolving to a situation where the LMS is becoming used as the primary focus, with VC as support. We see the growing importance of virtual classrooms / online learning environments for classroom teaching and learning, leading to the development of blended learning environments, which are personalised, flexible and respond to the learning needs of individual students, be they face to face or distance learners.

As a geographically distributed, professional learning community, we model what we would like our students to be doing - collaborating and communicating through the use of video conference, cell phones, email, listserves, blogs, wikis, a shared web environment (VLN), and other web 2.0 tools such as flickr and del.icio.us etc.

The focus of this presentation is firstly to inform delegates about the Virtual Learning Network (VLN), and then describe some of the exciting things that are happening in this network, from both a student and a teacher perspective. Emphasis will be given to how the network is responding to the learning needs of the 21st century student, and the opportunities for others to participate through contributing courses or learning experiences.