

1.0 Brief Project Outline

A number of authors have argued that students who are entering the higher education system have grown up in a digital culture that has fundamentally influenced their preferences and skills in a number of key areas related to education. It has also been proposed that today's university staff are ill equipped to educate this new generation of learners – the Net Generation – whose sophisticated use of emerging technologies is incompatible with current teaching practice. This project, supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, adopted a critical, evidence-based approach to investigating the 'problem' of *Educating the Net Generation*.

The project was a collaboration between staff at The University of Melbourne, the University of Wollongong and Charles Sturt University – institutions that in many ways represent the diversity of the Australian higher education sector. The project was conducted in three stages beginning in the second half of 2006.

The first stage – *Investigation* – involved surveying and interviewing first-year students and their teachers about the degree to which they accessed and used technology-based tools, how they were using technology to create and exchange information and knowledge, their skill levels with different technologies, and their perceptions of how technologies could be used in learning and teaching at university. Over 2600 questionnaire responses were collected and 50 hours of interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed.

The second stage of the project – *Implementation* – was informed by the results of the investigation and the expertise of staff in local learning and teaching environments. Five technology-based learning activities were developed and implemented within eight specific learning and teaching contexts across the three partner institutions. Members of the project team worked with teaching staff in their institutions to modify aspects of existing curricula, learning activities and assessment tasks to try to harness the potential of emerging technologies. The activities included collaborative contributions to a wiki, student-generated podcasts, blogging, photo and file-sharing, and social bookmarking. Each project was evaluated during and after its implementation, incorporating input from the staff and students involved.

The lessons learnt during the first two stages of the project formed the basis of two major outcomes of the project: this *Handbook* and a complementary *Toolkit*. This *Handbook* provides a detailed description of the Investigation and Implementation stages of the project and outlines both practice and policy guidelines associated with using emerging technologies in higher education. The *Toolkit* provides a suite of resources that can be used by teachers and academic developers who are planning modifications to curriculum, assessment, learning designs and activities to incorporate student-created content using blogging, photo-sharing, podcasting, social bookmarking and wiki-writing.

These resources and others, such as academic publications and the project website (www.netgen.unimelb.edu.au), are key components in the *Dissemination* stage of the project. In addition members of the project team conducted a series of capacity-building workshops with teaching staff, academic developers, policy developers and learning technologists at universities across Australia during 2009.

