EKIDS - The new discussion list for K-12 school children

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INTRODUCTION

The internet is a wonderful way to communicate, but most of this communication goes on between adults who often use the various email discussion lists which are maintained by the list owners of listserv, listsproc, majordomo and other list handlers. A new list called EKIDS has recently been created especially for school children from K-12. EKIDS — an acronym for Electronic Kids Internet Discussion Server was announced on Australia Day 26th January 1995. The list is run from the City Beach Senior High School computing centre in Western Australia.

City Beach Senior High School is the first school in Western Australia to have become fully affiliated to AARNet and hence to have full internet access available to students and teachers at the school. In fact, the school is believed to be the first in Australia to have developed its own WWW server site which became operational on 15th September 1994. Cres Thursby-Pelham is the part–time computing coordinator at the school and has devoted most of his spare time during the past nine months to setting up, maintaining and developing this unique school internet site. He also lectures in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia where his research interests are in educational use of the internet in schools.

AN AUSTRALIAN FIRST

This is the first list of its kind for school children in Australia and is believed to be the first open and unmoderated list for K–12 children globally. The list is in fact open to anybody who may be interested in K–12 education including teachers, parents, friends and members of the community. However, the discussion should not be dominated by adult talk and the kids should feel confident that they have a lot to offer their ‘friends’.

REFERENCES

parents and teachers on a peer–to–peer basis. The aim of EKIDS is to get school children to telecommunicate freely with each other through the electronic medium of the written word. This can be from school or with an internet connection at home, thus providing the motivation for children to learn how to use the internet in the open and friendly environment of a children’s email list.

Already on the EKIDS list, there has been a keen sharing of interesting information about relevant usenet newsgroups and favourite world–wide web sites as well as email address exchanges with other schools in many countries. But discussion is not just limited to internet talk. Topics such as the sports the children play or games they watch have been talked about in a collaborative way. There has even been critical assessments of movies and plays which they have seen. It is as if they, the children, have become their own media critics.

A lot of this information sharing already happens in the classroom, around the playground, or at home on the telephone or at the dinner table. This list aims to capture and direct some of this energy in an effort to provide a meaningful purpose for internet use by children. Usage of which is independent of spacial and temporal separation and does not have some of the prejudices of racial, physical or gender characteristics. This free–flow of mental energy is thus not clouded by the child’s first–look impressions or physical opinions of his or her peers or superordinates.

The list discussion is not limited to a particular topic and list members are free to open up new topics for discussion. There have already been some interesting threads developed. Examples such as year–round schooling, limitations of internet use in schools, local wildlife and environmental issues, musicians talk, as well as many requests for electronic pals (‘e pals’).

The process of positive feedback as vitally important to this means of communication. Each child is able to provide constructive comments and criticism about another child’s posting to the list. Flaming or destructive and negative comments are not encouraged. Herein lies the importance of the written word. The child can take time to reflect upon what has already been said and rather than rush back a comment, as might be the case with voice communications, the issues can be

One Example of EKIDS Posts

From: “Michael Seal” <MSeAL@alma.k12.ar.us>
Organization: Alma High School
To: ekids.citybeach.wa.edu.au
Date: Tue, 14 Feb 1995 15:39:15 CST
Subject: EKIDS: EPALS–Musicians
Sender: City-Beach_Senior_High_School@citybeach.wa.edu.au
Reply-To: ekids@citybeach.wa.edu.au

EKIDS – Electronic Kids Internet Discussion Server
I am Michael Seal A 16 year old Alto Saxophonists from Alma, Arkansas U.S.A. I am involved in marching, concert, and stage band at my school. I would be interested to hear from any musicians about any trade secrets, upcoming events, or just interesting stuff that goes on in the band room.

My school is going to the Solo & Ensemble competition in a few weeks. I am preparing a solo for it. Are there any other similar competitions going on? Are there any young Saxes out there searching for advice? Are there any veteran saxes that might have a tip they wouldn’t mind passing on? I’d love to hear about what’s happening at any orchestra’s or symphonic bands anyone might be a part of.

MSeAL@ALMA.K12.AR.US

EKIDS – Electronic Kids Internet Discussion Server
> Has anyone else in ekids got any weather stories they can share?
> Canberra just had the wettest January on record. The longrange weather forecasters who were predicting no rain from November through March haven’t yet reappeared. The weather here right now is beautiful, and tomorrow, our whole school (all five of them), is going to the Royal (that’s probably not correct any more) Canberra Show. Even though the school is based on a farm, we are expecting to see different sheep and different cows to the ones we have at home! First stop though, we are going to Parliament House, as the Gyuto Monks from Tibet are chanting and sand-painting there until Saturday. My sons and I heard them at the National Gallery recently, and were utterly transfixed. Should be a great experience for the rest of the class.

bye for now.

Andrew

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EKIDS – Electronic Kids Internet Discussion Server
School’s hot—I wish!!
Right now it is snowing here in Rochester New York. This winter it has been nice—not a lot of snow and not freezing cold. Only one day out of the winter so far we had off. It was the day the windchill was about 20–40 degrees below zero.

A couple of winters ago Rochester was hit with a bad ice storm. On my street almost all the power was gone. We still had the power except our TV. We had off school for about 2 weeks. When we went out which was barely ever, I had to wear a hard hat so if an icicle fell on my head. My friend didn’t have her power at her house so she spent a whole week at my house.

I remember I went out on my porch in the morning where my parents were and this guy was sawing branches off in the middle of the street because they fell off the tree. And right when he walked away, all these branches and ice fell right where he had been standing. He could of been killed.

The ice was beautiful but it was very harmful alot of the trees were killed during that week. Some trees were uprooted other had no branches. People said it was the worst ice storm ever.

But we made it through it :) All the batteries and flashlights and candles were wiped out of the stores, the food that didn’t need microwaves or to be

Hope you liked the story and it’s all true!!!

Mary

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more carefully weighed up in context and thought given to a well reasoned response or argument. In this way everyone benefits.

Children are also encouraged to provide information about a topic with which they are familiar and to write about this within their own experience. For example, there have been posts to EKIDS about the quokkas living on Rottnest Island and the recent tropical cyclone Bobby which was experienced firsthand by an ekid. It is envisaged that some of this information will be databased and form part of a child-written encyclopedia.

There are few rules to be followed other than the usual email netiquette which the children soon pick up. The rules suggested are common sense. For example, the subject header should be as meaningful as possible and that requests for epals should be clearly stated in the header and that once an epal has been found then further emailing should take place privately and not through the list. In the documentation file that automatically comes with the list subscription, it is clearly stated that with each posting to the list the following should be provided: a return email address, real name, school and geographical location of the sender. Again, these are only guidelines but ones that make good sense to all users.

There is a useful byproduct of EKIDS in that it teaches children how to use a 'real' list giving them the confidence and experience to join other lists that might interest them. Who knows with whom we might be sharing our thoughts one day, on some of the more established lists. More than anything, the motivation to create a list for Australian school children lay in the fact that there is nothing there for them other than a highly moderated list in the United States. One of the outcomes has been to broaden the base of communication skills between children from many different backgrounds, societies and cultures.

I do admit to giving the list a gentle nudge now and again to provide some guidance and to generate fresh ideas for discussion. It feels somewhat like being the principal of a global high school. However EKIDS does appear to be taking a life of its own and it will be interesting to see the just what direction it takes in the future. There are currently over 150 EKIDS list members in the first month and subscriptions come in daily. Perhaps the virtual classroom has, in reality, just begun.

WHERE TO FIND EKIDS
All email to EKIDS is archived daily and made available in html (hypertext mark up language) for anyone with WWW access to view on the school’s server at URL: http://www.citybeach.wa.edu.au/ekidsarc.html.

To subscribe to EKIDS send an email to: majordomo@citybeach.wa.edu.au with text body subscribe ekids.

To find out more about EKIDS see the information URL at: http://www.citybeach.wa.edu.au/ekids.html

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**WCCE/95**

"Liberating the learner"

The conference philosophy will offer topical issues in every aspect of Information Technology and Informatics in Education. The heart of the conference will be the presentation of refereed papers, supplemented by demonstrations and professional groups.

Papers have been invited from people who have experience in applying Information Technology in teaching and learning, and from teachers of Informatics. Papers will be presented by teachers and trainers, policy makers, researchers, computer scientists and software designers.

Papers will draw on personal experiences, reflections on successful practice, research results and prospects for future development.

All papers submitted for presentation at the conference will have been reviewed by three international experts identified by the Programme Committee. A selection of papers, will be published in the conference proceedings and presented in conference sessions as Full Papers. Another selection will be published as abstracts and presented in Short Paper sessions or as demonstrations linked to the main conference themes.

Within the overall context of Liberating the Learner, papers will be presented at the conference in streams which are of interest to both experienced professionals and those relatively new to Information Technology. The themes will appeal to people involved in all levels from elementary and primary through secondary to tertiary and vocational education.

Authors and presenters will reflect the state of the art in 1995 and are expected to write about one or more of the following themes:
- Knowledge as a resource
- IT as a catalyst for change
- Learner-centred learning and lessons from primary education
- Flexible and distance learning
- Integration of IT into education and training; quality and cost benefits
- Changing role of tutors
- Teacher education
- Evolution of informatics as a subject for study, including methodology and practice
- Educational software and hardware infrastructures
- Accreditation of competence and evaluation
- Equity and social issues
- Progress in developing countries
- Implications of artificial intelligence
- Visions of future IT developments
- Evolution of national policies
- Vocational education

Contact
If you require further information please contact either the Australia representative of IFIP Committee TC3, Ms Sandra Wills, Tel: (03) 344 7432, or the Conference Secretariat, WCCE/95, Margaret Street, Birmingham B3 #DW, United Kingdom, Tel: +44(21) 428 1258.