BERTIE BRINGS BRIGHTNESS

St. Aidan's old boy, Bertie Ahern will bring a little brightness and light to the school's students today. The Taoiseach, will be launching a product that could actually make study easy and attractive for the bright boys in St. Aidans. He will be launching Setanta, a project that could revolutionise learning in our schools.

The Setanta Project is a collaborative ICT Project between the School of Computer Applications, Dublin City University (D.C.U) and St. Aidan's. The project aims to develop courseware which will support the secondary school curriculum and be stored on a school intranet. Teachers will be able to access the courseware from their classroom computer and present subject material in new and interesting ways. The project draws on the skills, teaching interests and needs of the students and staff of St Aidan's school, and merges these with the expertise, research interests and needs of the staff and students of the School of Computer Applications.

Setanta Saviours

The driving force behind the Setanta project is St. Aidan's teacher, Ray O Neill. Ray came up with the bright idea in the first place and put all the very time consuming proposals together. He then used his renowned persuasiveness to convince the school management of the project's potential and usefulness. The school principal, Bro. Cashel enthusiastically supported the venture.

Ray then sought the expert cooperation of Dr. Alan Smeaton of DCU's School of Computer Applications. Margaret Farren and Ray Walshe joined the team. Vital technical support and finance was offered by Seamus Knox from NCTE and as they say the rest is history...

The Setanta Project leader, Ray O' Neill (right) in action during the last visit by an Taoiseach to St. Aidans. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair was also present to launch the North South Schools Link Project.

Art and Science do mix!

DCU expertise
(l to R) Marie Mooney, Margaret Farren (lecturer) and Deirdre Pentony.

A collaborative link has been established between the art teacher, Sonya Kinch, at St. Aidan's and two third year students, Marie Mooney and Deirdre Pentony on the BSc in Computer Applications course in DCU.

The most common visualisation model suggested by the Sonya Kinch for Art History, was a museum environment where the learners could navigate themselves at their own through the Virtual Art Museum (VAM). The two Computer Applications students decided to implement a Virtual 3-D Environment using VRML. The various contents of this VAM would be stored in a database on the central server, but the teacher could select the specific content for the VAM, by deciding on a theme. Once the VAM has been created and placed on the server, the learners can browse through the virtual environment and view paintings by artists. Furthermore, if they click on embedded links, the information on both the painting and the artist will be in textual, audio or video format. The project was successfully completed and is now available for student use. It is envisaged that this project will be further enhanced and extended over the coming months.

Setanta for students….

Almost 20 pupils received special training during the project. We asked a few of the participants for their opinions…...

Last October, we started working on the school's art database for Setanta, with each student being assigned a particular artist to work on. I was covering Jan Van Eyck, which was interesting because I had heard about him before as part of the Junior Certificate History course. At the time I didn't realise that it would take the best part of a year to finish, but I soon found out that there was a lot more information on Van Eyck than I thought possible. Eventually I managed to sort through it all and learned a lot at the same time.
Ronan Fahy.

I was working on an artist called George Seurat for Setanta. I had never heard of him before, but I suppose this was a good thing as I learned more about the artist then I did about computers.
A few weeks ago we took part in a Front Page 2000 user course, where Ken Maher taught us how to design web pages and how to make them look interesting. The whole experience was great, and as well as enjoying ourselves we learned a lot, and got a lot of work done too.
Neil Hosey,

Teachers go back to school
Almost 100% of the teachers in St. Aidans who formerly could not use computers or whose skills were a little rusty have taken part in a special training course associated with the Setanta project.
The training which took place after school will allow all teachers to be familiar with how the new intranet system will operate. It will also permit some of the teachers to design and prepare on line classes. Chalk and talk will soon be a thing of the past. Pictured above are teachers Aisling Brennan and Monica Mahon

The Setanta project, for me, was one of the most useful courses ever. We learned many computer skills, such as spicing up our web sites! It was cool.

Kevin James

Teacher, Pat Hastings (above) explains the new system to his Biology students

Animated about Maths
A further project, under development by science teacher, Pat Hastings, includes the use of an animation package, to explain maths and science concepts. These animations can be stored on the server and accessed for presentation purposes during class.
It is intended that emerging technologies will be explored and further collaborative ICT projects will be developed between the School of Computer Applications and St. Aidans.

Too shy to ask?

Intimidated by all this computer speak and don't want to show your ignorance? Here's a few new words with which to impress your granny...

VAM Virtual Art Museum

VRML Virtual Reality Makeup Language

ICT Information and Communications Technology

INTRANET An internal SWW…..School Wide Web.

Virtual Art Museum in action
Teacher, Sonya Kinch demonstrating the virtual gallery and proving that you do not have to visit Paris to enjoy the Mona Lisa.

Future Plans

No more cramming?
If the project is successful, the aim will be to extend the range of subject areas covered, make it available to classroom size groups and of course to other schools. The skills and expertise we have gained in St. Aidan's in developing the model can be passed on to other schools to create a similar system specially tailored for the specific school. Teachers can use the intranet as a teaching aid without having to look through endless databases and web pages to find what they're looking for. At the same time students on the traditional last minute cram before an exam would be able to find the information they want quickly.

Want to know more?
Detailed information on the project is available on the St. Aidans website:
www.iol.ie/~aidanscbs/setanta
While you're on the web check out the following:
www.compapp.dcu.ie
www.ncte.ie

Setanta Newsletter was edited by Stephen Reid
May 19th 2000