Silkwood School: Helping Engaged Students Achieve their Dreams

Silkwood School equips students for university and career success with D2L

With many of its high-school seniors spending time away from the classroom on internships and traineeships, Silkwood School has to find innovative ways to keep them engaged. D2L’s Brightspace Platform helps students build a strong portfolio of work to support university entry and enhance their career prospects.
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Christie Kijurina, High School Advisor, Silkwood School

SUMMARY
With D2L’s Brightspace platform, students at Silkwood can access their assignments and learning materials anywhere, anytime. Engaging written and video feedback from teachers helps students build their skills and stay motivated—leading to positive learning outcomes.

QUICK FACTS
- Makes learning resources accessible to students in the classroom, at home or in the workplace
- Provides a hub where students can build their portfolio for universities and employers
- Makes it easy for students, teachers and parents to collaborate on the learning journey
- Supports visual and oral learners with audio and video capabilities

PROVIDING A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION
Located in a stunning bushland setting in the Gold Coast Hinterland, Silkwood School provides a unique indoor-outdoor learning environment that helps students develop their knowledge, experience and creativity and instils freedom of expression, boldness, and a “can-do” attitude.

Once students reach high school level at Silkwood, they are already prepared for the working world, and the school encourages them to engage with the community and local businesses through internships and traineeships. As a result, many students split their time between classroom learning and workplace training.

Christie Kijurina, high school advisor at Silkwood, explains: “As an advisor, my role’s a little bit different to a normal teacher. I’m supporting students to achieve their dreams by working with mentors and the community, while at the same time ensuring that they don’t get distracted from their studies. Our seniors aren’t at school every day, so we need to find smart ways to keep them engaged.”
Silkwood recognized that a learning management system (LMS) was vital to help students continue learning while they are at home or in the workplace. However, the wrong LMS can be as much of a hindrance as a help.

“Before I became a teacher, I did my degree online,” says Christie Kijurina. “The LMS at my university wasn’t user-friendly and made life quite difficult for us as students. That really showed me that choosing the right LMS is key for any educational institution to succeed in building an engaging learning journey.”

Silkwood also knew that its LMS would have to serve more than just teachers, students and advisors.

“Parent engagement is a huge part of what we do,” says Christie Kijurina. “We need tools to help parents collaborate with us; they need to be able to see the feedback from teachers and work with us to help their children move forward.”

FINDING THE PERFECT PLATFORM

Four years ago, Silkwood selected D2L’s Brightspace platform as its LMS. Over those four years, the school’s faculty and administrators have been increasingly impressed with the evolution of the platform.

“The features that D2L offers on the Brightspace platform have come so far,” says Christie Kijurina. “It’s become so intuitive, and I really love using it. The relationship between our e-learning department and D2L is very strong too—if there’s ever an issue, the D2L team solves it pretty much immediately.”

From a student’s perspective, the Brightspace platform provides a central hub where they can interact with learning resources, upload their assignments, and review feedback from their teachers. Having all their coursework in one place makes it easy for them to build up a strong portfolio of work that they can submit as part of their university entry application, or share with potential employers.
“People learn in different ways. For some students, listening and repeating reinforces their learning more effectively than reading and writing. The ability to share course materials and feedback orally or visually really helps us personalize learning for each student—and we've found that video feedback is particularly popular.”

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“Our students can access their work at any time at any place, which they really appreciate,” says Christie Kijurina. “It keeps them connected to their education, even when they're away from the classroom and working in the community.”

Silkwood’s teachers make it a top priority to provide feedback on students’ work as quickly as possible to maximize engagement levels. In addition to traditional written feedback and grades, the Brightspace platform’s audiovisual capabilities make it possible to provide verbal and video feedback too.

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PREPARING STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS
As high school advisor, Christie Kijurina primarily works with students in the final years of their secondary education, between the ages of 16 and 18.

“We have been with these students for three years, and they've been using the Brightspace platform all the way through,” she comments. “Now, they're ready to take on the world.”

She tells the story of one international student in the current cohort who came to Silkwood speaking minimal English. Working through the Brightspace platform helped him practice his grammar, punctuation and writing style both in the classroom and in his own time. The platform also assisted his parents in engaging with feedback from his teachers, giving him additional support and celebrating his progress. As a result, his English has improved by leaps and bounds, he has passed all his Year 12 courses, and he is due to graduate successfully in the next few weeks.

“As more Brightspace features come online, the learning experience just gets better and better,” concludes Christie Kijurina. “We currently have a new set of Year 11 pupils just starting work on their senior thesis, and Brightspace gives them so many great resources they can use. With all the new features that D2L keeps introducing, I really wish this kind of technology had been available when I was studying!”