



** Macquarie University's Learning Activity Management System (LAMS) is emerging as the first of a new breed of e-lesson planning and design toolsets which will enable content and pedagogy to properly co-exist.*

by David Worlock, Chariman

BETT 2004 was full of VLEs and MLEs. The battle between the enterprise systems for schools is fully engaged (SIMS, Phoenix, Serco). At every other stand, earnest talk of learning objects underlined our current pre-occupation with content. Yet amongst these diverse trends, little attention seems to have been paid by developers and publishers to learning design work, (arranging sequences of learning experiences which may include content resources, synchronous discussion (chat), web polls, students posting material and structured debates) as assessable learning experiences. Noteworthy here is the collaborative requirement – teaching and learning demand pupil-pupil and pupil teacher interaction as well as pupil progression through a sequence of learning objects. As one commentator says, LAMS is not about content so much as context.

While all of this seems fairly obvious, the truth is that in the rush to express e-learning goals in terms of learning objects, like the resource-based learning fashion of the 1980s, we have tended to throw out the lesson planning with the structured text. Those who, rightly, claim that the 85% of professionally unconvinced teachers will never abandon orthodox lesson planning and textbooks while they still produce the required results in terms of achievement and accountability, may also be saying that until there is a software analogue for the teaching design process – a workflow tool for learning design – the e-learning argument is half-baked. The IMS Learning Design specification is intended to go in this direction, and may well get there in time, but this is clearly a huge project based upon work initiated by the Open University of the Netherlands, and involves a whole 'language' development – EML (Educational Modelling Language). LAMS may well be an initial starter project, and one of high value in demonstrating this major gap in the elearning armoury.

Amongst the LAMS qualities that teachers will most value are the ability to create lesson planning sequences, and then re-use them by swapping content out of them and basing them around the content for a new topic. It is not difficult here to imagine teachers or schools creating sequenced collaborative learning for re-use in different subjects and lessons by different teachers. LAMS integrates to existing LMS systems and most servers, and could be used as a standalone as well as a compatible element in school learning management infrastructure.

Last year, with IML Simple Sequencing, we reached the point of being effectively able to string content together and form learning pathways across content items. However, in the context of the teaching experience, we are now at length recognising that we need to tackle the teacher workflow and process issues head-on. For those looking for growth trends in a vibrant and noisily enthusiastic

BETT, LAMS was a ray of hope. And since both Sun and Microsoft are listed as LAMS partners, we shall undoubtedly hear more from them.

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