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LAMS: OPEN SOURCE AND OPENLY AVAIABLE IN THE UK

* The important Australian LAMS programme (Learning Activity Management Systems) is now available as an open source environment, and has been launched by the UK's DfES as part of a developmental 'roadmap'.

by David Worlock, Chairman

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When we last looked at LAMS (see EPS Insight, LAMS: lesson planning for real e-learning, 15 January 2004) it was already attracting attention as a lesson-planning environment which introduced interesting pedagogy around collaborative working and polling. In six months its stock has risen further, with some enthusiastic championing from the DfES e-learning strategy team, so that it can now be seen as an exemplar of preferred practice and a clear indication of some of the elements that e-learning may be expected to contain in the classroom. JISC starts a full-scale evaluation of the systems this month, in two phases, to be completed in March 2005. The Specialist Schools Trust and Kemnal Technology College are already acting as trial schools, and seven teachers trained in Australia on LAMS will now work with 12 regional centres in the UK, run by the Specialist Schools Trust, who will proselytize the LAMS message. If these activities are successful then clearly further support could come from within the funding allocated to support e-learning development.

And now it is going Open Source. This is a hugely important step, since it at once allows the basic programme to be disseminated freely and for free to licensed users, and it sets up, through a dual licensing scheme, a way for content developers to adopt it, incorporate it in their own work (and pay a license fee). This should be a good model for open source, with the source code held by a not-for-profit based at Macquarie University, while (as in the quoted example of Red Hat), the support work, hosting, development, training and other paid-for elements form a business model for LAMS International Pty Ltd. Publishers and other players who license it will be able to start work on it from February 2005 onwards. The e-learning Strategy Unit clearly sees LAMS as a breakthrough product, something with the power to transform teaching practice and provide confidence and support to teachers who may be hesitant to use e-learning resources outside of a lesson-planning environment. Diane Laurillard, the head of the unit, comments that "LAMS has the potential to transform teachers' and lecturers' capabilities to innovate in teaching and learning – I can imagine a future where every school in the UK may one day use LAMS".

Clearly however LAMS is not a universal cure-all, and while this enthusiasm is important in attracting attention to it, there is a danger that it will be regarded as a teaching product, not a planning environment. Its essential importance remains in its use as a lesson-planning toolkit, and its facilitation is a means to an end, not an end in itself. If there is a temptation to describe classroom experiences in collaborative learning as if they were the learning outcome itself, then they must be firmly resisted. LAMS will always be as successful as the content it moderates allows it to be, though it has to be remembered that some

of that content is going to be generated in the process, as well as supplied by third parties. Above all, LAMS produces teaching and learning experiences which can be stored and re-used, by their creator or by third parties.

There will undoubtedly be other toolsets with features that overlap with LAMS, and LAMS may indeed develop in different directions itself. The significance of this week's activity is, however, very real: we now have something to point towards when we begin a conversation about the style and content arrangement of planned e-learning lessons.

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RELATED LINKS

LAMS: http://www.lamsinternational.com/index.html
LAMS Foundation: http://www.lamsfoundation.org/index.html
Macquarie University: http://www.mq.edu.au/
e-learning Strategy Unit: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/elearningstrategy/index.cfm
Kemnal Technology College: http://www.ktc.bromley.sch.uk/
The Specialist Schools Trust: http://www.schoolsnetwork.org.uk/
JISC: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/

FROM THE EPS ARCHIVE

LAMS: lesson planning for real learning, EPS Insights, 15 January 2004
http://www.epsltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=1146

Pearson and C4 ally through KnowledgeBox, EPS Insights, 24 July 2002
http://www.epsltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=95