



** The beta version of LAMS V2 was launched in July. What new features are available, and how can publishers get involved?*

by Kate Worlock, Director

LAMS V2 has been almost two years in the making, and is intended to move from beta to full release in October 2006. The team at Macquarie University in Australia responsible for the new version listened closely to feedback from the LAMS community and introduced a range of new features to supplement the existing toolset, which already enables teachers to achieve two significant tasks: easily create, run and manage sequences of learning activities using a drag and drop interface, and share these sequences (or "digital lesson plans"). While these tasks sounds relatively simple, the ability to create, share and re-use lesson plans has proved of real value, and has been facilitated for the past year by the LAMS Community, a global online community for all teachers, administrators and developers that use LAMS. This provides a forum for sharing digital lesson plans, as well as being a venue in which people can ask questions about LAMS and share their experiences with others. At the beginning of July 2006 the LAMS Community had 1300 members and 100 shared learning sequences.

LAMS V2 offers a wide range of new features including multilinguality (versions in 17 languages are currently being created by the members of the open source community who contribute to the development), a WYSIWYG editor for all activities, the option to run the system online or offline, and the option for teachers, parents and students to export portfolios (records of student activities). This last feature is very interesting – the portfolio can be exported into a virtual learning environment (LAMS is integrated with Blackboard, Sakai, Moodle and others), and is crucial to enabling students to go back and look at previous work, including looking at what they and their classmates have said in online chat sessions. This directly supports the UK Department for Education and Skills' focus on personalised learning.

Support for LAMS at the grassroots teaching level is strong and growing. A group of schools from the Specialist Schools Trust undertook a trial of the system and found that their students were more engaged, and that teachers found the system effective because it allowed them to reflect on their teaching practice. The system remains low profile in marketing terms however, with the majority of users finding out about LAMS and its developments through viral marketing or via the LAMS Community.

While LAMS is open source, there are opportunities for publishers to work with the software to enhance their own offerings. A commercial arm, LAMS International, exists to manage dual licensing for companies such as publishers who want to offer a product which incorporates LAMS functionality but not under an open source licence. Interestingly, LAMS International may also be an emerging competitor for online publishers, as it is beginning to produce its own content. James Dalziel, the driving force behind LAMS, sees the digital lesson

planning concept as complementary to the printed text, and envisages publishers creating a new kind of textbook, an entity half way between a print text and a workbook which is tightly coupled to the online content. However publishers interact with LAMS, it will be important for them to understand and where possible tap into the grass roots movement behind services like LAMS, Sakai and Moodle where usage is in some cases reaching significant levels - Oxford University just reported that Moodle, the open source learning management system, exists somewhere in 56% of all U.K. higher education online learning institutions. Environments like LAMS offer a window for publishers to look ahead at how teachers and schools are likely to be working in years to come, and as such are invaluable for strategic planning and development.

© **Electronic Publishing Services 2006**

RELATED LINKS

LAMS Foundation: <http://www.lamsfoundation.org/>

LAMS International: <http://www.lamsinternational.com/>

Sakai: <http://sakaiproject.org/>

Moodle: <http://moodle.org/>

FROM THE EPS ARCHIVE

Elgg: giant steps towards personalised learning, EPS Insights, 4 July 2006
<http://www.epsltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=2002>

LAMS and SAKAI: integrating learning design into the SAKAI process, EPS Insights, 27 October 2005
<http://www.epsltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=1755>

LAMS: getting into the Moodle, EPS Insights, 14 June 2005
<http://www.epsltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=1&updateNoteID=1629>

20 to watch in 2006, EPS Focus Report, December 2005
<http://www.epsltd.com/accessArticles.asp?articleType=3&reportID=81>