

Children are the key

"Children are the key; learning platforms should be a way to empower children and teachers, but, if they become just a way of keeping records, it will have been a wasted opportunity. If it's a way for children to develop portfolios of their work which can be shared, commented on and celebrated, it will be wonderful - but, if it's anything less, it will be plodding.

"I think ICT has been too one-sided for teachers. Now, it's time for children to be set free - and we have a chance to do that. We could get a system which does clever things for the teachers, the local authority and other education partners - but, if it fails to release the children and allow them to express their creativity, it will fail."

Teacher Tim Rylands has attracted global attention for his innovative methods of raising literacy for children, using games as a stimulus. Much in demand for seminars and training days, Tim is now on sabbatical from his primary school, Chew Magna, to support schools, with training and inspiration.

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making it happen

managing and moving forward

2007

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Find out more...

Schools face decisions requiring much information, so we are running a series of three national conferences:

Tuesday 13 March: Birmingham, Copthorne Merry Hill

Thursday 15 March: Manchester, City of Manchester Stadium

Wednesday 21 March: London, Millennium Gloucester

We have a range of inspirational experts on hand (to help you to explore/discover), like Donna Rogers - who will share her grassroots experience as manager of the Ashford Primary Cluster project in Kent.

To register: www.rm.com/conferences

Alternatively, visit our new learning platforms Web site for a wealth of other useful resources to download, plus video interviews with key learning platform users:

www.rm.com/learningplatform

You can download a copy of this and previous issues of Making IT Happen:

www.rm.com/makingithappen

In the next issue...

In the next issue of Making it Happen, we'll be examining the practical considerations of planning and implementing learning platforms for schools.



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Visitors to the BETT 2007 educational ICT exhibition at Olympia, London, this January, would have noticed a marked surge in interest in learning platforms. That was because the government's ICT agency, Becta, had just released its list of preferred suppliers for its learning platform services framework agreement.

What that means is that Becta had conducted a challenging EU-approved tendering process on behalf of schools, so that they would not have to go through the same demanding process when deciding which learning platform to select to fulfil government expectations for elearning and access to available public funds. Companies supplying learning platform services were subjected to rigorous Becta checks, to establish their value and 'interoperability' (how their materials and data would work with other systems, so that schools do not end up in a technological cul-de-sac).

Schools, clusters of schools and local authorities which had been ready to take their first steps with learning platforms, but were waiting for the Becta framework results, were now ready to move. The BETT show was the exhibition at which they could talk to the companies on the list and see their products.

At RM, we are proud to be one of the Becta preferred suppliers, with our own learning platform, Kaleidos - the platform chosen for the Scottish national education network 'Glow'.

Amanda Peck RM primary Education

For more detail on the Becta Learning Platform services framework: www.schools.becta.org.uk



What does it mean for me?

So, what should schools consider, when setting out on their journey to full online integration with a learning platform? The most important thing is to talk to other schools. In this newly wired world, the government expects schools to collaborate and share, particularly in secondary, where the 14-19 reforms and the new diplomas will require online sharing of materials and pupils' data - across schools.

Indeed, many primaries are already working together effectively in clusters; one good example of this is in Kent, where teachers and learners are using Kaleidos alongside other solutions. The feedback from this initiative is fascinating; you can read all about it (and from experts from Becta, the National College for School Leadership and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) in a special Guardian supplement, created with RM's support and now freely downloadable: www.rm.com/primary/lpdownload

Perhaps, though, as schools consider the impact of learning platforms, one of the most important questions will be to understand exactly what it will mean to their constituent user groups.

Pupils

In line with current thinking on personalisation and assessment for learning, the learners are repositioned at the centre of their own learning. They have their own customisable 'eportfolio' area (required by government by 2008) and can access their learning resources in school or anywhere, including at home, where parents can see their progress.

In addition, they could perhaps send and receive information via interest groups, eg the school drama group.

Now, they can work with personalised resources, on their own class projects and collaboratively with pupils in their own school, across their local authority or even internationally, hand in hand with independent subject experts, if desired. The software also allows easy and immediate self-review and peer review, features which are proving immensely popular and motivating in the drive to get young people to engage with learning.

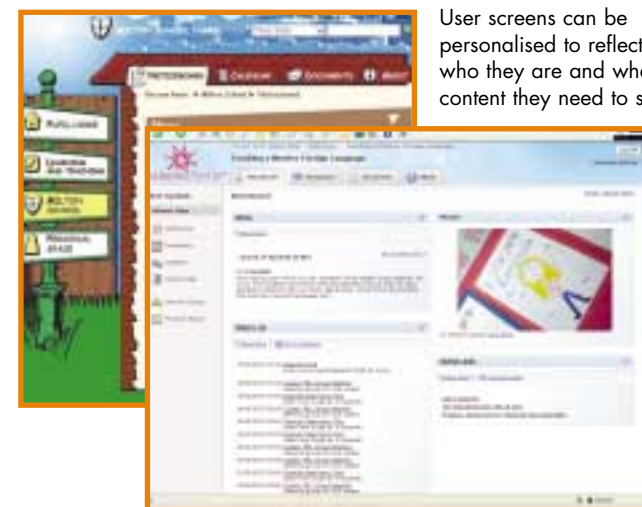


Parents

Many parents will find themselves immediately more involved in their children's education. They will be able to support them, when they work at home, seeing for themselves their children's capabilities. They may also be privy to attendance data and more feedback from teachers, depending on school policy. Of course, this depends on home Internet access, but, in some areas, this is already higher than 90 per cent, with some schools starting to develop their own policies to support home access for those families without an Internet connection.

Teachers

In addition to the whole-class teaching tools and materials already probably being used, teachers will find their world opening up. Transformed communications with colleagues and pupils will allow previously impossible collaboration. Evidence already shows that they will be able to exploit pupils' enthusiasm for online working, to develop more meaningful modes of assessment, so that children are far more aware of what they have achieved and what they have yet to develop.



User screens can be personalised to reflect who they are and what content they need to see.

making it happen

establishing a vision for learning platforms



Community

Of course, the school community is much wider than just children, parents and teachers. All staff working with schools should have a place on a learning platform, whether it's for keeping updated with school activities/ events or taking a fuller role. In some schools, for example, kitchen staff use online services to order foodstuffs and develop menus. Features like this can be built into the platform.

Every Child Matters has already transformed local authorities' structure; now, schools are getting used to working with other sectors, like Social Services. What we have seen so far is just the beginning; as learning platforms are developed, we will see the links to these organisations develop, perhaps allowing pupils' data to be shared in future.

Indeed, it may be that current reforms will not work, unless successful learning platforms are established. This involves establishing a vision, strategy, resources, support and good relationships - within and outside of schools.

Perhaps the most valuable facet of Becta's framework list is that it identifies those companies capable of conducting the demanding, responsive relationships which schools now require. There is no 'one size fits all' for learning platforms.

This technology requires bespoke tailoring for each school's needs, meaning a technology partner able to respond to demands for additional tools, features or services. With our many years' experience of implementing major school and local authority ICT projects, we are confident that we can work with you - **to live up to the challenge.**