

Submission
No 55

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS

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Date Received: 11/05/2005

Theme:

Summary

LAMS Case Study
Using LAMS in Teacher Training
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As the inventor of LAMS, one of the great pleasures of my role is seeing LAMS in action with teachers and learners “at the coalface”. One of my recent experiences of this was for a fourth year unit from the Teacher Education Program (TEP) offered in the School of Education, Australian Centre for Education Studies (ACES), Macquarie University. The students in this course had already had considerable practical experience in schools and were seeking new skills and knowledge to enhance their teaching and to receive their Graduate diplomas. Many of these trainee teachers were studying part-time while teaching during the day.

Maree Skillen, the course convener, invited me, together with my colleagues Robyn Philip and Associate Professor Donna Gibbs, to meet with this group to explore the use of LAMS at a face-to-face unit seminar. Together we built a sequence about “What makes an effective teacher?” and then the teachers participated in the sequence as students (during the face-to-face seminar) by working with computers to debate the question and share ideas and resources with each other about the qualities of an effective teacher. This was a great example of trainee teachers understanding the system’s potential through the experience of being students in LAMS themselves.

After using LAMS in this way in their face-to-face unit seminar, there were two follow-up tasks. First, the trainee teachers were to continue to use LAMS as students over the coming weeks to discuss ideas online while they were away from the face-to-face seminar. This meant that the discussion started in the seminar could continue beyond the constraints of time and place imposed by the limited time available for the face-to-face session. This illustrates one of online learning’s best-known benefits.

Second, all trainee teachers were given an assessment task which was to author their own LAMS sequence that could potentially be used with their K-12 students. They were then to share this sequence with the seminar group, and explain the rationale behind their design choices. They found this a fascinating challenge, as LAMS raises many interesting questions of both pedagogy and technology during the authoring/design process.

As a result of this experience, a number of these trainee teachers have subsequently used their sequence with K-12 students in their daily lives as graduate teachers. This illustrates the complete circle of using LAMS in Teacher Training: initially trainee teachers learn about LAMS by being students themselves, then they begin to author sequences of their own, and then they run these sequences as teachers with their own students.

An exciting aspect of this example is the way that teachers can be exposed to new educational technology during professional development, such as in a university Teacher Training course or degree, and then experiences during this course can be transferred to their daily lives as teachers working with K-12 students.

Macquarie University is not the only example of this “virtuous circle” in action; Simon Walker from the University of Greenwich in the UK recently discussed similar experiences of using LAMS in Teacher Training as part of the UK JISC-sponsored evaluation of LAMS.

My own sense is that this example of using LAMS may have far reaching consequences for Teacher Training in the future. There is much to recommend the “virtuous circle” of using educational technology within Teacher Training courses, followed by course participants “walking the talk” by using the technology itself in their own teaching with K-12 students.

I imagine a future where the educational tools used for training tomorrow’s teachers can be immediately used by these teachers themselves during their own practice teaching. Because the LAMS software is freely available to all, there need be no constraint on the transfer of technology used in Teacher Training to the “coalface” of classroom teaching.

Another exciting prospect of this “virtuous circle” is that not only can teachers use the sequences they develop during Teacher Training within their own classroom teaching, but that teachers can share these sequences with each other, hence disseminating good practice among teachers from a grassroots level, and from university-based Teacher Training courses to the classroom. This sharing of sequences has the potential to begin a new wave of educational transformation through dissemination of good practice – but in a revolutionary new format we could call the “digital lesson plan”. That is, the good practice being disseminated is not merely a textual description of good teaching ideas, but rather it is presented in the form of the actual processes of implementing the educational activities through technology. Teachers who receive digital lesson plans from colleagues can immediately “run” them with their students, or adapt them to suit their local context.

While Teacher Training has already begun to use educational technology, the LAMS approach provides a powerful new tool for both Teacher Trainers and teachers themselves. The distinctive feature of LAMS, which is unlike all other educational technologies, is that it creates digital lesson plans that can facilitate a flow of collaborative online learning activities. Further, these digital lesson plans can be shared among teachers, much like paper-based lesson plans were in the past, but with far greater impact through their implementation via technology. The transformational potential of LAMS arises from this revolutionary digital lesson plan approach combined with its use in Teacher Training and its “flow on” to the classroom.