

First in class

Dynamic and creative learning environments cultivate opportunities for learning communities, writes **Sarah Armstrong**.

Learning Possibilities, together with Exigy – a local software solutions provider – strive to deliver e-Learning solutions to learning environments.

Schools, education authorities and central government organisations can drive success through creative learning climates. A modular e-Learning platform has the capability of serving as the working vehicle for the cohesive delivery of education policy initiatives such as personalised learning, parental engagement and the creation of a climate for 21st century learning.

Recent findings from evaluations of international schools running on e-Learning platforms describe the solution as pivotal in helping educational bodies align ICT with school improvement objectives and subsequently benefit from the associated raised standards. A strategy-focused eLearning solution offers powerful tools and new methods of teaching suited to create knowledge-based economies.

At the heart of the solution lies an internet-based platform that

provides a comprehensive toolset for collaborative working, document and content management, social networking, and improved communications. This platform is aimed at facilitating communication, improving effectiveness of school organisation, supporting information management processes and helping to share effective practice.

By placing schools at the heart of local communities, governments would be aiding social and community cohesion. Through the delivery of a wider learning concept, rather than just the traditional classroom approach, learners would be more actively participative in their education.

An e-Learning platform allows students to pursue personalised learning pathways and provides an online learning space. This idea is particularly sustained through the e-Portfolio, which is the students' personal space where they can post work to be reviewed, approved, stored and possibly made available to a closed audience. Here, they can even set goals and reflect on

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personal progress and broadcast information through e-mails, discussion boards and forums.

By enabling tri-directional learning discourse between child, teacher and parent, all parties can

closely observe learners' progress. Teachers would be given access to readymade scaffolds upon which they can build their lessons as well as assign work, track progress and provide feedback to individual learners. Parents are also given opportunities to be more involved – they can follow their child's ongoing progress through internet-enabled reporting tools integrated with school student management information systems. Thus, schools would be able to experience a relevant and engaging solution which addresses online reporting targets and promotes active parental engagement.

Dynamic and creative learning environments are thriving as learners are becoming increasingly engaged and more networking tools are being deployed. The platform extends the opportunity for schools to share expertise and resources through virtual channels. This paves the way towards the co-construction of knowledge with teachers, mentors and peers through web technologies such as blogs, wikis and collaborative

sites that extend learning opportunities well beyond school hours.

At a national level, the ultimate outcome would be the emergence of learning communities, whereby schools previously working in isolation or even in competition would be forging links and raising standards.

These developments contribute to systemic change and improvements across educational institutions. A coherent e-Learning framework enabling advanced learning environments provides the benchmarking tools and the next steps in terms of school policies and classroom practice.

Professional development needs to underpin such a logical and inevitable shift towards dynamic learning climates so as to provide a mechanism for schools and educational authorities to measure success and continue their journey towards the teaching-learning transformation cycle.

Ms Armstrong is director of learning at Learning Possibilities.

Techiquette

Don't speak

Put people on speakerphone without warning and you risk a public outrage. Manners please, says **Technology Sunday**.

A couple of embarrassing moments this week. Well, it was more like those crawling seconds when the world just stops and dire need clenches hunger-like at your stomach.

Chapter one: I'm driving along when I get a call from a friend (yes, I did pull over to answer). "Where should I take my mum for lunch?" he queries with a Sunday skip in his voice. A dozen suggestions and much gossiping later, the conversation turns manly (read: rude) and I belch out a whopper of a dirty one-liner.

As soon as I stop laughing, I sense a big ice cube of silence on the other end of the line. Then the phone dies, and I just know that something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Later on, the same friend messages me: "My mum was in the passenger seat. She spent the entire lunch asking me what a (cue: rude word) means." His mum is close to 80 and a veritable saint.

Chapter two: a close contact sets me up with one of her colleagues for a business chat. Now this top brass is called 'hope'. Well, he's not really called

hope, but he should be because he's a personification of hope; a walking proof that even a man with no dress sense and whose head rattles when he walks, can still make it. The meeting went five out of 10, and later on, my contact calls me. "So, how did it go?" she asks.

And, being eternally blunt, I give her the full 'hope' metaphor. Seconds later, I hear a harrumph on the other end of the line – it was 'hope'. "April Fool," I verbally shuffle, taking a pot shot at some form of jokey excuse. I haven't heard from both my contact and her colleague since then.

There is a moral here. And that moral is: yes, putting people on speakerphone is great during conference calls, when everyone knows they're being listened to. Otherwise, it's a stupid function.

It makes it hard to hear what other people are saying, especially when they're speaking 10 at a time. And you never know when people have upped and left or are just twiddling their thumbs, turning your conversation into a soliloquy.

Phone calls should be private. Switch to speakerphone, and you lose your friends, family and job.

