

# Education Review

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## The LAMS Revolution

E-learning system captures imagination of educators, students

Just over one year since its release as freely available open source software, LAMS – the revolutionary Learning Activity Management System – is being taken up with a passion by educators across the globe.

LAMS is a major breakthrough in e-learning. An innovative tool for designing, managing and delivering online collaborative learning activities, it provides teachers and lecturers with a highly intuitive system for creating sequences of learning activities.

These activities can include a range of individual tasks, small group work and whole class activities based on both content and collaboration.

“LAMS is used around the world in all areas of education, especially schools and higher education. There has been considerable uptake in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, and growing interest in the US,” says Professor James Dalziel, inventor of LAMS and head of Macquarie University’s E-Learning Centre of Excellence (MELCOE).

“Evaluations of LAMS have been very positive. These have been conducted in several Australian states, by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, and in both higher education and school sectors in the UK,” he adds.

Dalziel designed LAMS because he was frustrated with the prevailing content-centric approach to e-learning, which he believed to be a passive and unimaginative way of using technology. “The content approach doesn’t connect with today’s students, so I decided to build a system that works in a different way,” he says.

With LAMS, teachers are able to design, manage and deliver online collaborative learning activities, while at the same time giving students a great interactive environment in which to do their work.

Its unique drag-and-drop interface transforms lesson planning into a simple, visual experience. Teachers can design a sequence of learning activities for students

that includes content and collaborative tasks. It then “runs” the sequence while allowing teachers to track and monitor student progress.

Today the system is being used in more than 100 schools and 50 universities, “but these are only the ones we know about – the true numbers are probably much higher, as the open source model means anyone is free to download and use the software without having to pay us or ask our permission”.

LAMS has been integrated with the major learning platforms – Moodle, Blackboard, WebCT, Sakai and others – allowing teachers and lecturers to easily insert LAMS sequences into their class/course page within their chosen course management system.

In April this year came the public release of LAMS V2.0 alpha, a major milestone for LAMS, as it represents the initial release of the new architecture and platform for future LAMS development for the next 3-5 years.

The new version is ready for software developers to download, compile and run, and to begin exploring how to contribute to development of LAMS V2. However, this version is not yet ready for teachers. After trials and testing, Dalziel expects the final version of LAMS V2 will be ready for all teachers later this year.

“The new version provides a platform for innovation and scalability for LAMS into the future,” says Dalziel. “We’re looking forward to continuing our development and working with developers around the world to build the next generation of e-learning innovation using LAMS.”

One of its great new features is support for languages other than English – “we have more than 15 translation efforts now underway, and many more expected in the coming months”.

Over the past year the LAMS team has been evaluating feedback from teachers, lecturers and students about the system, which has been receiving enthusiastic support.

“LAMS has an unusually strong impact on teachers and learners. Teachers feel it is the first e-learning system that really supports rich pedagogy, while students love the variety of opportunities for collaboration and interaction,” reports Dalziel.

“To this day, it remains the only system in the world ready to use in the classroom or lecture hall that supports re-usable sequences of collaborative activities.”

Dalziel adds that a consistent theme from independent evaluations is that LAMS helps teachers to reflect on their own teaching theories and practice in a very positive way.

“Even where teachers don’t use technology to run their classes, the experience of using the LAMS visual authoring environment for designing lesson plans has a big impact on them. They often describe it as helping to make conscious a process that has often been just below consciousness.

“Teachers have commented that when LAMS runs the main lesson activities on their behalf, it gives them more time to focus on individual students who may be struggling or need other help. LAMS gives them more opportunity to mentor individual students.”

There is strong evidence that LAMS encourages increased student motivation and enjoyment, and greater levels of participation and interaction from all students in a class, not just the loud or bright ones, Dalziel says.

“Students really enjoy the opportunity to use familiar tools like chat and online discussion forums to discuss educational topics in the safe, secure environment provided by LAMS.”

Dalziel says today LAMS remains the world’s leading system for digital lesson plans and is widely regarded as one of the most important innovations for the next generation of education and technology.

To find out more about LAMS go to:

[www.lamsfoundation.org](http://www.lamsfoundation.org).

Go to page 2 for more about LAMS

### Case Study: Glenorie Public School

Glenorie Public is a small primary school situated on the rural outskirts of Sydney. The Glenorie teachers have been using LAMS in a variety of interesting ways which include:

- A synchronous environment at the school in both a computer laboratory and the classroom combined with the use of Smartboards
- Homework sequences where students work asynchronously
- Creating online parent discussion communities
- Completing the departmental annual school reports.

“The use of LAMS in general, but particularly to complete homework sequences, has had a big impact on the school community at Glenorie. Every Monday, a LAMS homework sequence is run. Students are also given a paper-based copy of the homework sequence in case there are technical difficulties or have no access to a computer,” said Debbie Evans, Glenorie’s Assistant Principal.

“The students are highly motivated to complete their homework sequences using LAMS. They are often finished by Tuesday and students who are away from school through illness are still eager to complete their homework,” she said.

When students no longer had to be pushed to do their homework but were begging to get on the computer, parents began asking what LAMS was all about. Debbie invited all parents to a parent and teacher information session at the school and explained how LAMS worked. Most parents fully support this use of technology for their children with a lot of the pressure to expand the use of LAMS coming from the parents themselves.

“For example, parents with two children at the school who have one child using LAMS, want to know why the other child (in a different class) isn’t also using LAMS. Parents are excited that their children are excited about

### LAMS International Services

LAMS International is the services company dedicated to supporting LAMS with a range of products to assist organisations implement and use LAMS. Whatever support an organisation needs, LAMS International has a range of fee-based products to match. These include:

- Training
- Support
- Hosting
- Software development and integration services

For more information go to:  
[www.lamsinternational.com/product/](http://www.lamsinternational.com/product/)



learning. The homework sequences have been instrumental in initiating this excitement.”

### LAMS Community

The LAMS Community, launched in September 2005, is a free website for LAMS users to come together to share the sequences they have built and to discuss how they are using LAMS.

This website supports communities of practice around the world (generally teachers and lecturers) who are learning from each other about how LAMS benefits education.

Through the LAMS Community, educators can share the sequences they have created in LAMS so that others can use them, build on them, and adapt them.

James Dalziel says: “We have one case where an educator from India posted a message to a teacher in Australia to thank her for sharing her LAMS sequences, which could now be used in India, not just Australia, as a result of the sharing supported by the LAMS Community.”

The LAMS Community has more than 1200 members from 82 countries, and a library of around 80 shared sequences.

For more information go to [www.lamscommunity.org](http://www.lamscommunity.org).

### First International Conference

The first International LAMS Conference will be held in Sydney from the 6th to the 8th of December 2006.

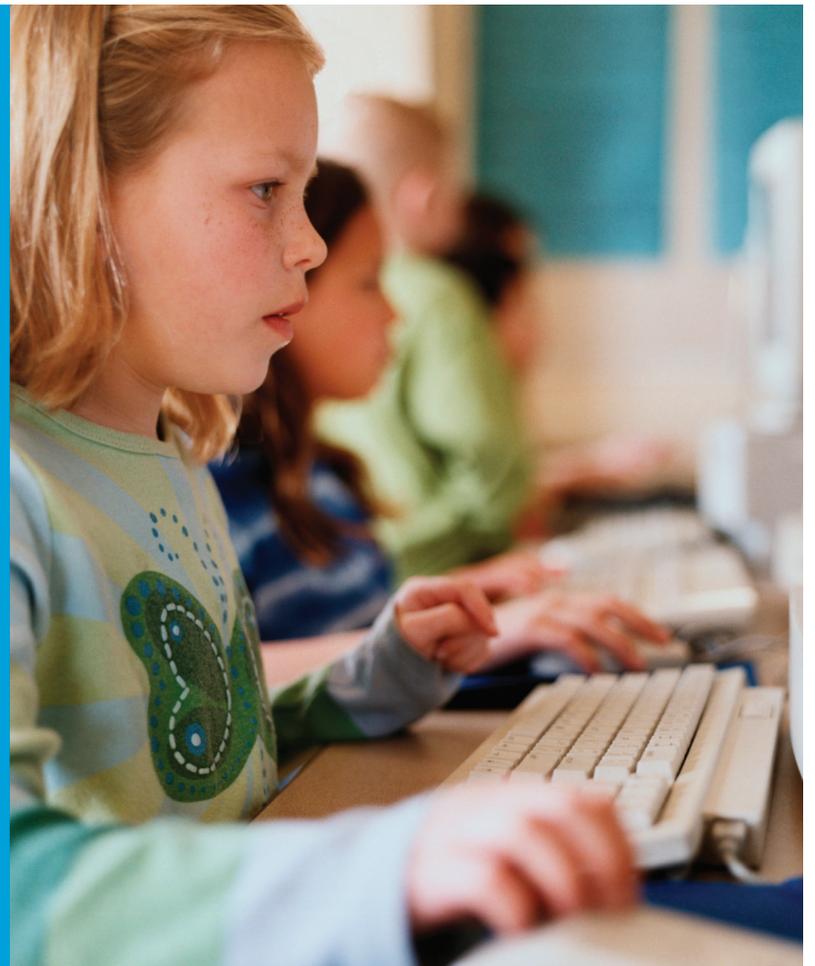
For more information go to [www.lamsfoundation.org/lams2006/index.htm](http://www.lamsfoundation.org/lams2006/index.htm)

### What’s on your free LAMS CD?

The CD contains the latest resources on how to use LAMS, case studies, videos, articles and other background information. It also contains the LAMS software and instructions on how to install it if you have the technical skills to set up a web server. For those who don’t know how to install their own LAMS server, there is a link to a demonstration server where you can get a test account to try out.

IT’S HIGHLY INTUITIVE,  
REVOLUTIONARY,  
COLLABORATIVE,  
INNOVATIVE

AND IT’S FREE.



**Transforming Education:** Macquarie University is proud to provide the LAMS e-learning platform as open source software. For more information [www.lamsfoundation.org](http://www.lamsfoundation.org)

