

# BLA Eportfolio Review

The BLA has carried out a review of the progress of our eportfolio project schools. The results of the review will determine whether the project should be expanded for other BLA schools and Bromley Schools in particular. For 2007-2008.

The review looked at the following questions:

- 1. What impact has the project made for your students?**
- 2. What benefits have you observed?**
- 3. What recommendations would you make to improve the software program?**
- 4. Would you recommend a whole school rollout?**

I have visited six schools to interview participating teachers and to ascertain their response to the BLA Eportfolio project. The schools visited include **James Dixon, Hayes Primary School, St Mary Catholic School, Princes Plain School, Royston Primary School and Langley Park School for Girls**. James Dixon, unfortunately have had some staff changes which have interrupted their trial, so it was impossible to get any meaningful data from them. We are going to try and re launch the project with a small group of pupils who have computers at home and monitor their progress over the next eight weeks. The other schools were more fortunate and I have summarised their responses below

## **1. What impact has the project made for your students?**

### **Hayes Primary School-Year 3-Teacher: Hazel D'Arcy**

- Early to say, children enthusiastic but they seem to be treating e-portfolios as a 'my space' type site with more focus on adding anything, just because they can! (Initial Novelty)
- Children so keen they keep changing things and deleting perfectly good work examples. They also save any work and are not always fully justifying their choices as they find reflection difficult or do not really understand the point as yet.

### **St Mary Catholic School- Year 6- Teacher: Tammy Lawlor**

- Children are engaged in their learning. The teacher has noticed that the children seek out items to put on their eportfolios and they are discerning when it comes to displaying their work.
- The eportfolio is an excellent tool for providing and facilitating peer support. It also provides a meaningful context for the development of the children's ICT skills.
- The eportfolio project has highlighted issues of equity in that not all children have access to Broad band at home.
- Teacher has observed children experimenting with adding thoughts although this area is proving rather slow to take off.

### **Royston Primary School Year 6 Teacher: Luke Hall**

- Project has had a great impact on the class. Luke has observed that children designated as 'lower ability' have excelled using eportfolios with measure improvement in their self esteem and confidence.
- The eportfolio project has provided Luke with greater insights into the social dynamics among the students in his class. The use of eportfolios have provided a meaningful context for the implementation of ICT skills to such a degree that the QCA work on ICT was shelved and the subsequent ten sessions were spent on using eportfolios.
- Children are using eportfolios regularly outside school hours and during the holiday (with no prompting from their teacher)

- 90% of students have computers at home - the school has made the IT facilities in the library available for those children making up the 10% of those without computers/broadband at home.

#### ***Princes Plain School Year 5 Teacher Carolyn Potts***

- Carolyn Potts is a Year 5 Teacher at Princes Plain Primary School. She has successfully introduced the Spider Network eportfolio to her students. Over the period of the project she has noted the high engagement among her pupils. She also notes how the introduction of the student eportfolio has improved the children's quality of their homework through their increased desire to access their eportfolios from home. Those children without computers or broadband from home are accessing their eportfolios from community organisations such as libraries.
- From a teacher administration point of view, setting, marking and correcting homework online through the eportfolio saves a lot of time and is much more efficient than marking work in exercise books. It has also reduced time spent on carrying out corrections
- The eportfolio program has allowed Carolyn and her students greater flexibility. She can log into the program at night and respond to any requests or questions that might arise as a result of a homework or class project

#### ***Langley Park School for Girls (Year 8 Iain Wallwork)***

- Tends to duplicate what the school already has in place. The program would have more impact if it was rolled out across the school or iff the feed primary schools were already using the program.
- Students were initially keen although they wanted more personalised choices (as found with sites such as 'My Spaces')
- Recommendations include
  - Different background skins
  - More flexibility
  - Coloured text and fonts
  - Greater control
  - Menu bar system to ease navigation
  - Ability to upload podcasts, music and videos

## **2. What benefits have you observed?**

#### ***Hayes Primary School-Year 3-Teacher: Hazel D'Arcy***

- Enthusiasm!! Children love the idea and are keen to add, move things and change stuff.
- Being able to add photos and then see and show them to others at school is very popular. Some children choose to work on their sites even in wet play.
- Rapid development of ICT Skills
- Children regularly log in and update their eportfolios outside school hours.
- The Add Thoughts are very popular.

#### ***St Mary Catholic School- Year 6- Teacher: Tammy Lawlor***

- Eportfolios have encouraged high levels of peer support among pupils.
- Interesting to read student reviews of their work. Eportfolio contributions of the students will be very useful to the teachers in the preparation of summative reports at the end of the year.

***Royston Primary School Year 6 Teacher: Luke Hall***

- ICT skills of the children have expanded dramatically. The use of eportfolios have provided a powerful context for QCA skills and have driven teaching and learning strategies in the classroom
- Parents have commented favourably about the use of eportfolios

***Princes Plain School Year 5 Teacher Carolyn Potts***

- Like Royston, Carolyn noted a major improvement in the ICT skills displayed by each student since the eportfolio project started. Children have developed their skills in using scanning software and digital photos to record their best work. Their file handling skills have seen a dramatic improvement.
- The project has also helped Carolyn identify areas of ICT that need further support among the children.
- The project has also brought attention to the issue of equity in access, especially for those students at home who don't have access to broadband connectivity.

***Langley Park School for Girls (Year 8 Iain Wallwork)***

- The Spider Net eportfolio program was useful for tracking students' work although responding to all work entries could involve a lot of time especially if you were dealing with more than one class.
- Great benefit for encouraging students to reflect upon their work.

**3. What recommendations would you make to the software program?**

***Hayes Primary School-Year 3-Teacher: Hazel D'Arcy***

- Children want to add videos: This would be especially good perhaps for Year 6 to record school moments, teacher interviews, classroom photos etc as a memory journal
- When teachers post comments to students can it not show their Christian names please?
- Would like to have a teacher's eportfolio- that way it would be possible to use it as a model or class management purposes and reflection of added content.
- Too easy for children to remove files- would like a 'keep' button for teachers in order to override any deletions.
- Provide a 'publish' switch in the 'Add Thoughts' area to enable children to share their thoughts with others.
- Upload work criteria may need to be simplified for Year 2-4 children.

***St Mary Catholic School- Year 6- Teacher: Tammy Lawlor***

- Videos and Podcasting- increase memory size for multi media display.
- Children would like a 'Publish' button that would allow them to share eportfolios with friends.
- Security issues need to be better addressed.
- Interface is a bit dull- program could benefit with more 'skins' for personalisation
- Can't see the point of 'factfile'

***Royston Primary School Year 6 Teacher: Luke Hall***

- Security needs to be improved (Issue may have been addressed with Administrators component-ED)
- Need to address the issue of transition- What happens when the children move to Secondary School? Is it possible to build in a component that will allow the children to save their eportfolio onto a CD ROM? Or can the structural elements of the eportfolio program be imported into another VLE/MLE program? (SCORM Compliancy)

***Princes Plain School Year 5 Teacher Carolyn Potts***

- Would like to see a feature where the children could have rights to make elements of their eportfolios available for public viewing ie to grandparents and other family members. At the moment, in order for other members of the family to see the eportfolio, the children have to provide their login and password details.

***Langley Park School for Girls (Year 8 Iain Wallwork)***

- Would like the look and feel of the program to reflect the environment of a Secondary School. The present 'look and feel' was more suited to Primary School environment.

**4. Would you recommend a whole school rollout?**

***Hayes Primary School-Year 3-Teacher: Hazel D'Arcy***

- Not prepared to recommend a whole school rollout. Needs to be trialled a little longer, perhaps to the end of the academic year to really see the long term impact and potential changes in learning behaviour of pupils.

***St Mary Catholic School- Year 6- Teacher: Tammy Lawlor***

- Not prepared to recommend a full rollout-need more time to embed process along with ICT skills among staff. More in favour of partial rollout.

***Royston Primary School Year 6 Teacher: Luke Hall***

- Definitely in favour of whole school rollout.

***Princes Plain School Year 5 Teacher Carolyn Potts***

- Would recommend a rollout for Years 3 to 6 students

***Langley Park School for Girls (Year 8 Iain Wallwork)***

- Would only recommend a rollout if all the primary schools were using the program. Not much benefit starting the program in Year 7

## Comments/Actions

Overall the results are positive. The schools with KS2 pupils were highly enthusiastic and supportive. Carolyns' comments about the ease of use for teachers in monitoring and correcting homework was very interesting considering the time pressures that many teachers feel that they are under. Luke's observation about the eportfolio use in the classroom making the QCA ICT strategies redundant was also quite telling. Initially, I would support a rollout for all Bromley Schools **provided** that the following conditions are addressed

1. Initial findings appear to indicate that the product is more pitched towards KS2 students. Some thought may need to be given to the design of the programme to suit the age levels of the students. The comments from Hazel D'Arcy and Iain Wallwork were interesting as they were more cautious in their recommendations than Luke and Carolyn (Both Year 6 teachers) who were extremely keen. This response may in part be due to the 'audience pitch'. It may be that the Spider Net eportfolio program may have to have some of its elements re designed to suit the age and interests of the audience. For instance perhaps expecting children in Foundation-KS1 to reflect on the work using the present forms may not be appropriate. This is not to say they are not capable of reflecting on their work, but it may be that we need to look at other tools to assist this project. For instance could Foundation-KS1 children use tools such as a microphone and sound recorder software (already available in Windows) to record and upload their reflections as a WAV file?
2. It would also be nice if the children could have a feature on their sites that allows them to publish their eportfolios (or sections) of their eportfolios to the world for comment. A publish button in the 'Add my thoughts' area would also be useful.
3. The Secondary audience need a lot more flexibility. Already these children are using programs such as MY Space not to mention access to blog sites which provide a similar structure to the eportfolio program although it offers more personal control. The advantage of the Spider Net program should be the security and the ability for teachers and the school to access all the students' portfolios within the one 'environment'
4. The point of transition is another issue that needs to be addressed. It can't be guaranteed that all schools will be using the same eportfolio system. How would a students' Spider Net eportfolio be adapted if the student moved to another school? Should the student 'own' the account rather than the school so they can take it with them? What happens at the end of Year six when all the children go to different Secondary Schools- some who may be using Spider Nets system while others may have their own developed as part of their MLE program?
5. It would enhance the appeal of the Spider Net system if a strategy can be found where the students' eportfolio could be downloaded and stored onto a CD/DVD ROM which the student could take with them.

Since trialing this project, other eportfolio solutions have been developed as part of the Learning Platform programs provided by Becta recommended vendors such as Fronter, Viglen and Azzuri etc. Spider Net are in the process of forming a partnership with Azzuri.

Spider Nets eportfolio solution can be purchased as a stand alone program for schools at an anticipated cost of £5 per licensed user (per student). We could further negotiate with Spider Net if directed by the board.