

CASE STUDY



Follow North East Lincolnshire's Early Years pupils on a 'Learning Journey'

Extending the use of Netmedia's Learning Platform ('Virtual Learning Environment') by providing a vehicle for exchanging information with parents.



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During the Autumn term 2005, the Early Years education team at North East Lincolnshire LA were working to develop practitioner skills in observing, documenting and planning for foundation children's learning and ways of sharing this learning journey. The LA identified the VLE as the most effective way to communicate with parents and carers about their children's learning experiences.

Ten Foundation Stage settings in the LA were invited to take part in the project, including the Childminding Network, day nurseries, pre-schools, nursery classes and reception classes. Two practitioners from each setting were asked to commit themselves to attending training and meetings and co-ordinate the project within their settings.

Observation and 'creative' capture made easy by the VLE

Initially a day of training was delivered by the project team on sharing learning journeys, the documentation process and uploading onto the VLE, including:

- Images and video from cameras
- Children's daily diaries including menus, equipment requirements for trips etc
- Scanned examples of children's work
- Sequenced images and text
- Hyperlinks to PowerPoint or Word documents.

This created a lot of enthusiasm and creativity among practitioners. For example, one setting used found interesting ways of recording children's voices.

At the conclusion of the initial stage of the project, some settings were documenting children's learning within the VLE and using the information gained to share with parents and plan for children's needs. Other settings had set up the children's Learning Platform and established a group of parents who wanted to participate in the project and so had begun the journey.

Positively impacting practitioners, pupils and parents

Reviewing this initial stage of the project across the settings, the LA found that it had already had a positive impact on the groups taking part and gained useful feedback to take this project to the next stage. The documentation of the 'Learning Journey' on the VLE had an impact in the following ways:

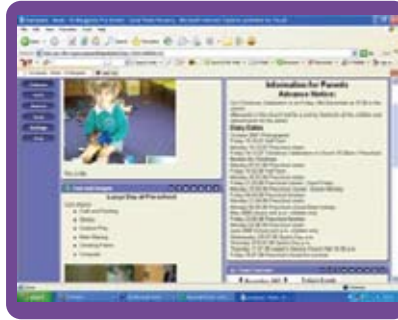
Practitioners	Pupils	Parents/Carers/Grandparents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised awareness of how ICT can be used to enhance children's learning • Increased confidence and ability in using ICT, e.g. with digital cameras, computer skills, manipulating images • Developed skills in using the Learning Platform • Recognised the value of digital cameras to visually record observations • Increased use of ICT for administration, communication and other purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased child-centred planning through practitioners recognising children's interests, learning styles and developmental needs • Enjoyed seeing themselves and friends interacting • Shared their experiences with parents and carers • Enhanced experiences of ICT, for example, through their learning journeys seen at school and later at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interested and excited about being involved in their child's learning experiences • Pride in seeing children show them a slide show of the day's events and share their feelings about a visit for example.

Discovering the 'best bits' of the VLE: Childminders v. Pre-school

Following this project review it was determined that the needs of these two main groups were different and therefore required different approaches to further extend the usage of the VLE.

The Childminding Network

The Childminding Network practitioners successfully developed a link with the home via the VLE. It was used to upload their children's learning journeys and shared online with parents who logged in regularly to their children's Learning Platform and communicated back to Childminders.

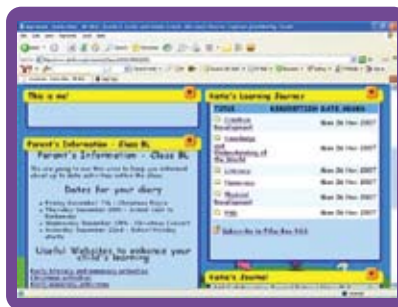


It also provided evidence and documentation of their childminding activities which saved them a huge amount of time and effort preparing for OfSTED inspections.

As the children are quite often picked up and dropped off by people other than the parents, the use of the Learning Platform to communicate with parents electronically has enormous advantages. The childminders have found that the flow of information has been much improved through using the Learning Platform.



One Childminder summed up their experience: "At first I was like everybody and found myself asking what difference will this make for me? However... seeing lots of examples of how different people use it you find yourself wanting to upload pictures and to use it as your main form of communication with parents or outside agencies. It's a great way of talking to each other in private and you can put calendar notices up so you don't have to constantly remind parents about a day off coming up and so on."



The Childminders want to further develop their use of the Learning Platform to create more effective e-portfolios for the children. As well as receiving training on the more advanced features within the Learning Platform, they also want to extend the use of the VLE to a larger group of childminders as well as making the children's portfolios available when they enter mainstream education.

The Pre-school Settings

Pre-school practitioners initially found it difficult to use their pupil e-portfolios because of the way they

had been set up. However, they have been redeveloped to include information about the day-to-day-activities of the preschool and children's assessment records. They have also developed a process whereby the children's e-portfolios can be electronically transferred to their next school to support transition.

This academic year, the pre-school settings will further develop the use of the e-portfolios by:

- ensuring that the e-portfolios are regularly populated with the pupil's assessment data e.g. digital images, scanned work, text
- ensuring that the e-portfolios are regularly populated with the information about the day to day activities of the preschool
- planning a launch for parents to demonstrate how the e-portfolios will be used.

Parents join the fun!

A "launch" took place when the parents picked their reception children up after school and were shown how to access their child's learning journey on the VLE. The parents were taken into the school's ICT suite and given the opportunity to login to the VLE to have a look at their child's learning journey with support from the teachers and the ICT Consultant. The parents' response was very positive and because the parents had their children with them, they really enjoyed discussing the uploaded images of their children doing various learning activities.

Summary

This VLE project has demonstrated the positive impact that can be made across all parties and the great strides in communication that can be achieved with the VLE. The home-to-school link is such a vital one in increasing pupil academic achievement, with an added bonus of the sense of pride that both pupils and parents can feel in the process.

The next few months will see further support and training being provided by the Local Authority to its current settings and the extension of the VLE to new childminders, settings and schools. The 'learning journey' continues!....