

Bournville School & Sixth Form Eclipse Case Study

“Bournville School and Sixth Form Centre is a Specialist Business Enterprise College. We are an 11 - 18 comprehensive, catering for approximately 1,300 students.”

We were initially members of the City of Birmingham SIMS Library package pilot group, back in 1989, at the time when I was newly appointed as Teacher/Librarian, with the brief to set up and run a brand new multi-media library to serve the whole school community (with time, money and a 'library visionary' headmaster).

There was no choice about which system we would use, as Birmingham had bulk purchased the packages for the pilot group schools. This was good, from my point of view, as, not knowing one end of a computer from the other, I wouldn't have had a clue where to begin! SIMS gave me good grounding in distinguishing the various parts of a computer, and a chance to see the value of computers as library management tools. Indeed, at this time, one of the training talks I used to do around the City was on the value of computers in the library! It was quite hard to convince some Brown card system devotees that there could be any value at all in such revolutionary equipment!

After several years of using SIMS, it became clear that the system was not keeping up with developments as quickly as I would have liked. There were a number of unsolved flaws in the software, and SIMS was moving into the school office market in a big way, leaving little time for mere library issues.

The City again offered advice, but not funds, and attempted to persuade all schools to opt for an upgrade to Alice. This was at the time when MLS had not quite finished developing their new system for secondary schools, and I would have lost my funding had I waited for that to happen, so we purchased Autolib. It was set up on an independent library network of four machines, until problems on the then new whole school network could be sorted out, when the plan was that we would link to it and 'go global'! The latter was something that was never to happen, due largely to bureaucracy and lack of funding, as well as a lack of the necessary ICT support in our establishment.

“There were at this time a number of issues with that system, so having researched the numerous systems, which were now on the market, my two alternative choices were Micro Librarian and Autolib.”

However, Autolib was far superior to SIMS, and served our needs very well, until about three years ago, when it seemed that our dream of 'going global' would never be fulfilled, due to big reductions in library funding. At about this time also, the technician support in school was stretched to the limit as the often failing whole school network expanded, and many staff were struggling to learn the basics of computing (alongside other teaching duties), at a rate too slow to keep up with rapid developments in the field. Our Autolib developed minor, but annoying faults, which I could not solve, and which the overstretched technicians were not committed to solving due to other pressures, so between them and the excellent Autolib support staff, problems continued. Being unable ever to produce even close to accurate statistics became a very big issue for me.

Autolib also, had moved on, and developed a brand new system of their own, to which I could upgrade, for several thousand pounds! This was money that I didn't have, and which the school was unwilling to provide, having moved on to other, more newsworthy and government target-oriented initiatives (the library had already had a very large amount of money over the years, and was still a leader in our area, so it was regarded as being 'finished' by some short-sighted, but influential people).

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“Eclipse at last!”

My next chance came, when eLCs became available. After two years of writing bids and arguing our case, I was told that I might be able to use this route to upgrade. So, again I embarked upon the lengthy task of comparing library systems. Whilst the Autolib upgrade appeared excellent, I still hankered after Micro Librarian, confident that by now the latest system must have been thoroughly tried and tested, and very much aware that it was in my opinion, the most school-oriented system available.

MLS now seemed to have more functions that were relevant to us – and, very importantly, their information was written in plain English, which I could understand! It was definitely the most school-oriented system I had seen (and I probably looked at them all in the time it took to persuade the school to make the change!). It was a cost effective option for us – and it appeared to be developing and progressing, taking its users with it, rather than expecting them always to find extra funds if they wished to keep up with any progress made by the company. Also, MLS gave the impression of being ‘a listening company’, which would adapt to current and

changing educational needs as they arose.

Eventually, governors and ICT Committee (worn down by my repeated requests and bombarded by information on whole school benefits that the change would bring), were persuaded, and they agreed that we could have at least part of the funding from eLCs.

“Going Live...”

We eventually went live in July 2005. MLS performed the data migration from Autolib to Eclipse.

I was panic-stricken at the thought of possibly losing everything, but all went very smoothly, and the few discrepancies which did arise were dealt with efficiently by the MLS support team. The documentation that came with Eclipse was fine. I was amazed by the manual – I read it in one sitting before Dave Twist’s training visit, and actually understood it! (A first for me and a computer manual!) The training was excellent, although of course, we would have liked more time, or a return visit after having some time to learn the basics.... (We were disappointed when Dave turned down our offer of a permanent home under the library desk!)

“Initially we had our system installed on a stand-alone computer, due to delays over funding and purchase of new network computers.”

The change from stand-alone to network proved not to be as straightforward as our technicians had anticipated, but we are now networked within the library. The leap to whole school networking has still to be made. The substantial time for back up and technical support needed within our school was under-estimated, and progress has now slowed, because once the system was working for the basic procedures, the technician was deemed to be spending ‘too much time in the library’, so was directed elsewhere. I now have to request everything in writing and wait my turn for time, which can be a little frustrating. This is complicated by the fact that as a teacher/librarian I am not always able to accommodate technicians at times when they would like to work. However, the MLS technical support team have taught me things, which I have in turn ‘taught the technicians’, so major progress is being made in spite of minor setbacks!



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“Three Months On.... Using Eclipse”

Everyone is very impressed by Identikit. (Borrowing figures have increased, at least partly due to Identikit.) Children whose parents objected initially are now begging to ‘have their thumbs done’ and are very impatient when told that they must bring a note to say that their parents have now changed their minds and agree before they can ‘be done’.

Our overdue reminder notes to form groups have improved. I can now adapt them to suit individual needs, and the format is clearer than previously.

SearchStar has yet to come into its own, as the technicians are still trying to work out a quick way in to individual accounts. Once they can use those, I am sure that it too will be ‘cool’. At the moment SearchStar is installed on four machines in the library, but this will (I hope) be extended to the whole school network in the near

future (available on over 200 machines).

We also have still to link our Accelerated Reader quizzes to the system – this will add another dimension which children will enjoy (and enable fuller use of AR than we were able to achieve before).

The IT technicians have been surprised that I have solved a number of problems without their aid, due to excellent MLS support and the user-friendly manual. They were not happy with the fact that there wasn’t an easy import routine for staff details (a students.csv file had to be imported) and some time was spent trying to sort that. However, overall they are impressed by the number of functions which the system can perform and the technician who dealt with problems on our previous system has agreed that the new system is far superior to the old one.

“Conclusion – Eclipse a library system for the 21st Century”

Overall the service has been excellent and I would definitely recommend Eclipse to other schools. MLS gives us professional standard equipment and service, which are very child and teacher friendly. It has brought us into the 21st century – we were aiming to be a state of the art, modern school library, which would appeal to children, and would help us to achieve our mission of creating an environment conducive to development of independent learning and discovery of the joy of reading. We feel that the Eclipse software is helping us to achieve these aims.

Margaret Merritt
Library Co ordinator

