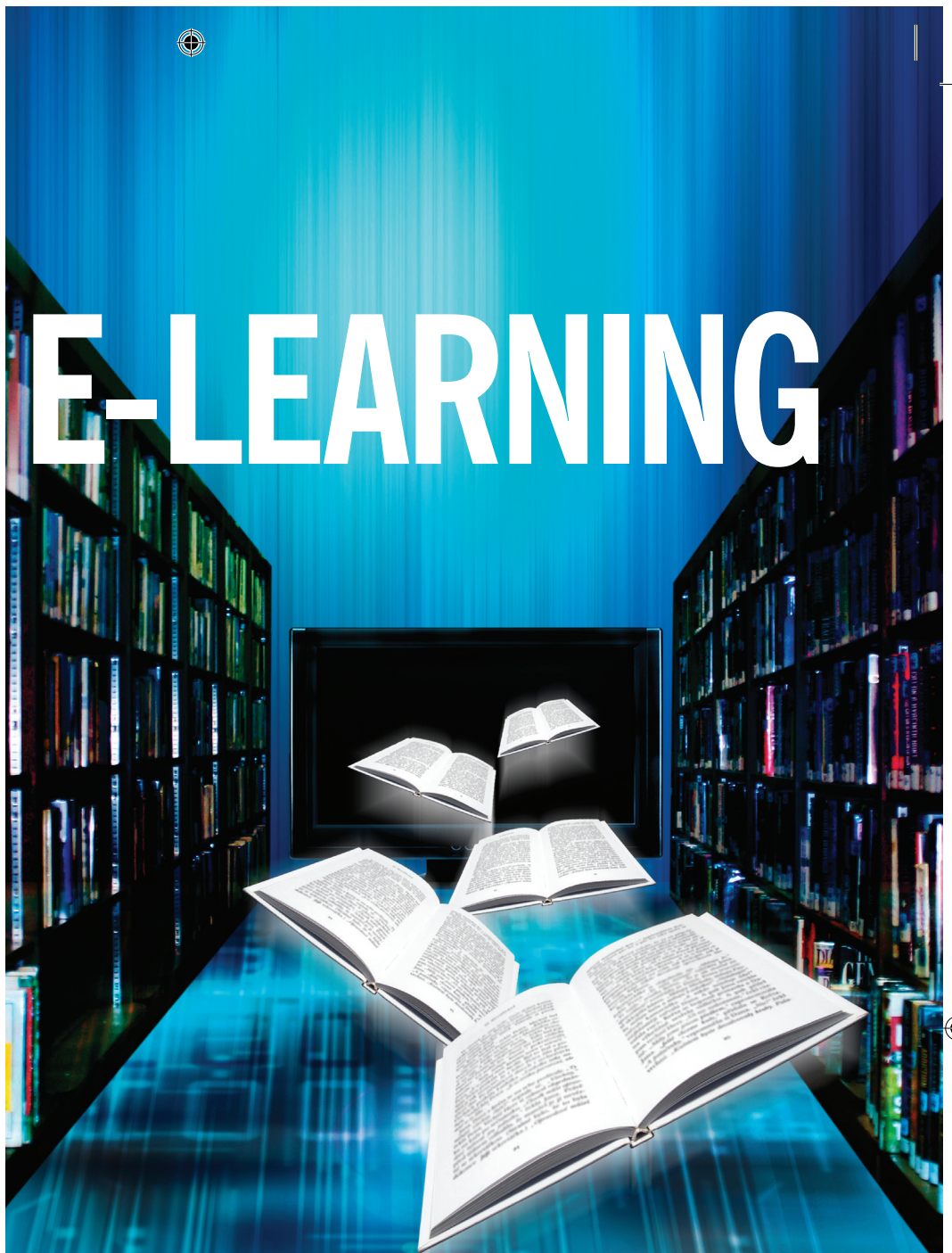


*Finding it difficult to see the point of using virtual learning environments (VLEs), beyond keeping senior management off your back? Or maybe you're put off by the technology? As **Anthony Anderson** explains, it's worth investing some time integrating your school's VLE into your teaching – the benefits are anything but virtual*



We all know why every school has a virtual learning environment (VLE): it's because they are an entitlement which schools and colleges have to provide. As such, it is probably wise to make the best of the situation and find something which can vaguely count as a digital resource, has a loose relation to music and do a quick upload. This is usually enough to keep the line manager happy for a while and is one thing less to worry about.

If we are honest, we've all had these kinds of thoughts at least once in a while. This is a shame, because VLEs can extend and revitalise learning and repay the effort it takes to build something of quality. Reading a forum where students have been exchanging ideas about their latest A-level set work or sharing some of their favourite music, and realising that this learning has been taking place late at night when school would never be open, or seeing the effect of such sharing during a discussion in a lesson, can open up your mind to the possibilities.

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INTEGRATING VLEs INTO YOUR TEACHING

Adopting the VLE platform at your school into your normal pattern of teaching is a good habit to form. It will **quickly build a library of resources**, make it easy to find and retrieve supporting materials, and help students to take initiative and ownership of their own learning. Using a VLE as a repository in this way is perhaps one of the most immediate and useful applications which this kind of digital learning offers. Whenever I complete a new resource, handout, score for a composing stimulus or PowerPoint, I upload it onto our VLE at the same time. This practice makes the same learning material available to students as is available to me on my laptop. Gone are the frustrations with lost handouts which you know you gave out or the head-scratching which can accompany student requests on where to find out more in the information you have given them; 'It's all

on BOLL' (Beauchamp On Line Learning, as it is at my college) is the simple but powerful answer I can give. No more searching through folders and trying to remember to do odd bits of photocopying for... who was it again? Now the responsibility also rests with the student. The resources are there – can they be bothered to access them?

It is also a fantastic way to **track student usage**. Who has been on most recently? Who uses the service the most? What is the most popular resource? Answers to these questions make for more effective teaching the next time you meet your class. You now know who you need to encourage to make better use of the support available, which resources you need to work on improving, or which successful ones you can build on. All of this makes for a new dimension in classroom delivery. »

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