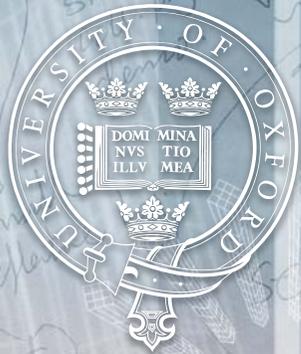# TALL OXFORD

Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning

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To watch a video of this talk go to:
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Emerge

Cultural capital and community development in the pursuit of dragon slaying

(Massively Multiplayer guild culture as a model for e-learning)

If an aspiration of e-learning is to move away from simply providing online programmes of study, demarcated by subject, to increasingly fluid spaces in which students can build social networks, then we need to understand how contemporary collaborative and participatory environments encourage the formation of these types of groupings.

Some of the most sophisticated examples of online community creation and management take place in and around Massively Multiplayer Online environments (MMOs). The current apex of this field is the 'guild' system which suffuses the World of Warcraft MMO. Guilds are effectively goal-oriented clubs or societies, many of which utilise both the latest Web 2.0 technologies out-of-game and multi-channel text chat and VoIP systems in-game both to organise and to socialise.

This project collected data from an ethnographic study comprising self-reflexive observation and semi-structured interviews conducted over a period of six months with guild members. This included into a study of the social software used out-of-game by community members that acts as a communication base for the guilds.

The data was analysed using Wenger's theory of 'communities of practice' and Baudelaire's notions of cultural and social capital. This underpinned the formation of the ten principles for community facilitation in immersive environments. It also highlighted the importance of a combination of informal and formal spaces and activities which can lead to a greater sense of 'belonging' and a stronger sense of community.

The challenge now is to translate these principles into practical guidelines for teaching and learning in environments such as Linden Labs Second Life or Sun Microsystems Darkstar platform.

Ten principles for encouraging the formation of a community of learners in Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVEs).

1. There should be shared or mutually supported goals.
2. Members need to be able to control the presentation of their identity.
3. There has to be a smooth learning curve.
4. The MUVE should be part of a larger ecology of services.
5. There should be flexible grouping systems.
6. Members need to feel a sense of ownership.
7. There should be an opportunity for roles to emerge.
8. There have to be frequent opportunities to generate and exchange capital.
9. There should be a combination of structured and 'free' activities.
10. Members need to feel they have influence within their community and over their environment.

For a detailed description of these principles go to:
http://tallblog.conted.ox.ac.uk/?p=45