

Title: **Technology and Its Role in Supporting Student Communities of Practice**

Presenters: **Joanne Smailes and Pat Gannon Leary**
Northumbria University

Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- consider potential of technologies to create student communities of practice
- contemplate how technology based communities of practice can be utilised to improve learning
- reflect on the impact of diversity in technology assisted curriculum design.

Session Outline

This paper takes as its premise the fact that universities should strive to design technology based peer support systems for students to engage in and focuses its investigation on the potential use of communities of practice (CoPs) to support peer based student interactions whilst also accounting for the potential diverse needs of that population.

Why? In the 1990's, the concept of a "community of practice" (CoP) was one of the most important developments in the educational theory (Wenger 1998). (Smith and Bath 2006) note that as peer interactions, including the social, are essential determinants of graduate outcome, therefore, the notion of a learning community (i.e. CoP), should be reinforced within any innovations for supporting student learning.

Furthermore, the two most regular technology based activities undertaken by students are the use of University systems which support their learning and accessing social networking sites. (Joint Information Systems Committee ((JISC) 2008). (Kirriemuir 2008) EduServ Foundation study highlights the increasing number of UK universities which have a presence in the Virtual World Second Life.

University Systems are aware of student engagement with their own in-house technologies, e.g.. virtual learning environments (VLEs) but knowledge of student engagement with social networking and virtual worlds is often derived from anecdotal evidence.

This paper seeks to redress this by trying to increase understanding of technological models for enhancing learning and student engagement. The approach taken includes a consideration of the relevant literature combined with analysis of primary data designed to gain more definitive evidence of student activity in different technological domains. In the light of this evidence, the advantages and disadvantages of the three virtual models in respect of supporting peer based student interactions within a CoP are considered.

References

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Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.