

# Enhancing Electronic Learning for Generation Y Games Geeks

**Sophie Nichol**

*Deakin University, Australia*

**Kathy Blashki**

*Deakin University, Australia*

## INTRODUCTION

This article explores a purpose built learning community, or that which Bruffee (1999) refers to as “conversational community,” of University students. The community functions primarily as a collaborative learning environment, specifically for students studying games design and development at Deakin University. Specifically this article focuses on the electronic, or online learning, “Web community” of the games students. The students typically use the online environment as a supplement to face-to-face lectures and tutorials in games design and development. The games students at the centre of this article are affectionately referred to as “Games Geeks” (with their approval!), and are demographically considered, by virtue of their age, to be Generation Y (those born between 1979 and 2000). Generation Y, and the games students in particular, are collaborative learners with an increased disposition for peer learning and social relationships. Communication amongst Generation Y is continually shifting between face-to-face to online modes, and culturally specific languages such as Leet Speak (Blashki & Nichol, 2005) have evolved as part of these slippery social negotiations and hierarchies. Within the game students’ social and educative milieu, learning via traditional “transmission” forms (the hallmark of university education), is eschewed for a more collaborative and participatory method supplemented by mentor relationships and constructive conversation amongst peers. Active participation and a sense of belonging to a community of knowledgeable peers, allows students to grant authority to their peers for “constructive, reacculturative conversation” (Bruffee, 1999, p. 12) of their work and ideas. Acceptance into the community is dependant upon students being willing to submit to this authority.

Participation in a community, such as that of the games students, assists in building the skill of interdependence in students, which helps them in turn to build creative skills (Blumenthal, Inouye, & Mitchell, 2003). Game students are not normally associated with creativity, and are perceived to be more comfortable dealing with numerical bits and bytes. However, creativity is a primary skill required by the game students for success in their chosen studies and career. Creativity comprises of four key components in interaction: person, process, product and environment. Whilst all of these factors are of equal importance in the exploration of creativity, the focus of this article is the underrated “environment,” also known as in this article, a purpose built learning community. Often the environment is determined as merely a creativity support tool deemed an integral part of the technology (IT) component. The authors prefer the term creativity support system, as the goal of our environment is to support creativity, not emulate it (as is the goal of artificial intelligence). The creativity support system (purpose built learning community) in this article embraces three crucial components: creativity, reflection and environment. Web communities are constantly evolving and adapting to the use made of them in much the same way as any community of people, and reflection is a skill that aids the process of change in Web communities. As Martins states:

*Building a Web based community does not consist of merely placing software on the Internet. The way people interact in a community contributes strongly to its long-term evolution. (Martins, 2006. p. 284)*

Furthermore, technological design of the Web community is also facilitated via reflection within each games student (Nichol & Blashki, 2006). Not only does reflection help to continue engaging the students within the community, but it also draws in new members.

This article will explore the establishment of a purpose built collaborative electronic environment for university students, specifically games design and development students, via a participatory design process, in which the students are responsible for the design, development and some implementation of the environment (in both social and technical dimensions). From assimilation within the purpose built environment the games students have become creative e-collaborators. The over arching goal of these purpose built environments is to facilitate creative and reflective activities and behaviours within the games students, thus enhancing their learning within the games discipline. The type of activities the purpose built learning community aids the game students with, includes: communication with peers, mentors and teachers, access to learning material and assignment submission, face-to-face collaboration, brainstorming, and “play.”

## BACKGROUND

The “purpose built” learning community of this article comprises an online Web community in conjunction with a face-to-face “games room.” The online Web community is implemented and facilitated within Deakin University’s Deakin Studies Online (DSO) online teaching and learning Web site. The online community is nominally supervised by the staff involved in teaching the game students, however as discussed later and in more detail, the presence of the staff does not effect the natural “flow” of conversation in the community. The game students of this article use DSO for units such as Fundamentals of Games and Audio and Visual Elements of Games. Within each unit, various areas of

discussion are available for the students to use, from general “student talk” to “current affairs.” The Web community encompasses multicampus communication between the games students. The games room is a physical environment that comprises a number of desktop computers as well as a game console playing area (see Figure 1).

Note boards, desks, and whiteboards are also available to offer students a place for work as well as play. It is located in a quiet room with sufficient space to accommodate more than 20 people. This environment has its functional and aesthetic roots in the studio environment first described by Blashki (2000) and used to facilitate student-oriented learning in information technology students during the 1990s. Within such an educational setting, the studio environment “provides students with the ‘practical’ subjects that establish closer connection/links between experience, knowledge and practice” (Blashki, 2000). Schön (1987) similarly explores this with his Reflective Practicums, suggesting that such environments assist students in overcoming intermediate zones of practice. In this article, the “intermediate zones of practice” (games design and development) combines traditional programming with elements of narrative in the design of games. The combination of these two environments in which students collaborate face to face in addition to the online CSS for learning and creativity is known as a “hybrid space” (McDonald, 2005). The games students participate in the hybrid space because of their automatic membership into the community based on their choice of the games major, and also to improve their skills and competencies in the study of games (McDonald, 2005). In addition the high level of motivation experienced by the games students was an overwhelming factor in their continued

*Figure 1. Games room*



5 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/enhancing-electronic-learning-generation-games/12433](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/enhancing-electronic-learning-generation-games/12433)

## Related Content

---

### Smartphone Effects on Youth: Case of United Arab Emirates

Badreya Al-jenaibia and Alyzia A. Almansouri (2020). *International Journal of e-Collaboration* (pp. 82-96).  
[www.irma-international.org/article/smartphone-effects-on-youth/249671](http://www.irma-international.org/article/smartphone-effects-on-youth/249671)

### The Vineyard Approach: A Computational Model for Determination of Awareness Foci in E-Mail-Based Collaboration

Adriana S. Vivacqua and Jana Moreirade Souza (2008). *International Journal of e-Collaboration* (pp. 41-59).  
[www.irma-international.org/article/vineyard-approach-computational-model-determination/1970](http://www.irma-international.org/article/vineyard-approach-computational-model-determination/1970)

### Videoconferencing as an E-Collaboration Tool

Michael Chilton and Roger McHaney (2008). *Encyclopedia of E-Collaboration* (pp. 693-698).  
[www.irma-international.org/chapter/videoconferencing-collaboration-tool/12500](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/videoconferencing-collaboration-tool/12500)

### Secure and Effective Key Management Using Secret Sharing Schemes in Cloud Computing

Shahin Fatima and Shish Ahmad (2020). *International Journal of e-Collaboration* (pp. 1-15).  
[www.irma-international.org/article/secure-and-effective-key-management-using-secret-sharing-schemes-in-cloud-computing/244177](http://www.irma-international.org/article/secure-and-effective-key-management-using-secret-sharing-schemes-in-cloud-computing/244177)

### Working Effectively in a Matrix: Building and Sustaining Cooperation

Jennifer Forgie (2013). *Interdisciplinary Applications of Electronic Collaboration Approaches and Technologies* (pp. 228-237).  
[www.irma-international.org/chapter/working-effectively-matrix/68614](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/working-effectively-matrix/68614)