

Chapter 8

“Sell Your Bargains” or Playing a Mixed- Reality Game to Spice-Up Teaching in Higher Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study relates to a mixed-reality game that has been developed and used by the author in the area of Academic Development and specifically within the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LTHE) module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP). The game aims to provide a highly immersive learning experience to the players and opportunities to enhance their teaching in more creative ways as a result of their engagement and participation. The author shares details about this mixed-reality game and the pedagogical rationale on which it is based with other practitioners. The following also explores how this approach could be adapted and used in different learning and teaching contexts to transform learning in Higher Education into a more playful and creative experience which has potentially the power to motivate and connect individuals and teams combining physical and virtual spaces.

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Academic Development Unit (ADU) at the University of Salford is offering the blended PGCAP to new and experienced academics and other professionals who support learning across the university. The programme consists of the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LTHE) module and a selection of optional modules. Students complete two modules in total to gain the PGCAP. The LTHE module is the core module which is normally completed by all students before an optional module is chosen. Successful completion of the PGCAP leads also to Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). The cohort size varies between 20-30 students.

The overall aim of the LTHE module, in which “Sell your bargains”, a mixed-reality game is currently used, is to introduce students to Learning and Teaching in HE, including contemporary learning theories and their application as well as to model good and innovative practice and the use of technologies for learning and teaching. The module provides a safe environment and the time to experiment, try new things and learn with and from each other in a multidisciplinary context, face-to-face, online and on the go using no- and low-tech approaches as well as institutional and student-owned technologies. In week 6 of the core module, the focus is creative teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to think and act outside the box and instead of showcasing how creative teaching could look, they are engaged in an immersive gaming experience to discover on their own and with peers what creative teaching and learning could mean through participating in the “Sell your bargains” game. This game is played in the real world and online and players keep their real identities. Mobile technologies owned by the players and freely available social media are used and the physical location is Manchester City Centre which becomes an open classroom.

SETTING THE STAGE

This game has been developed by the author (the game organizer) inspired by the BBC TV series Bargain Hunt and Dragons’ Den. The core activity of this game has been carried out before as a field trip which included an individual challenge within initial teacher education in Adult Learning, Further and Higher Education. The approach used has been continuously refined and evolved based on feedback received from players and on self reflections and evaluation. The game organizer has found it more challenging to introduce this game in HE. Whitton (2010) carried out research linked to acceptability of games. Her findings confirm that while students in HE are willing to consider learning through games, they need to be

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