



## **Palatine Mini-Project: Interim Report**

An exploration of learner and tutor experience in using online synchronous learning environments across disciplines within the School of Drama and Creative Industries.

### **Executive summary**

This project is exploring the tutor and learner experiences (undergraduate and postgraduate) of online synchronous learning environments (OSLEs) such as Wimba and Eluminate in drama and cultural management at Queen Margaret University (QMU). This report presents a summary of the progress to date that the team from QMU has made in undertaking the research and the dissemination of the study to the sector. Attention is drawn to progress especially to the implementation of the OSLE in the three case studies, the initial stages of the research, the development of the literature review, the on-going dialogue with the software company and the range of dissemination within and outwith QMU. Aspects that have not worked so well are identified and potential solutions discussed. Finally, an outline plan with specific deliverables for the next phase of the project has been supplied.

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## 1. Introduction

The project team (Susi Peacock, Sue Murray, Simon Girdler, Douglas Brown, John Dean and Bianca Mastrominico) from Queen Margaret University (QMU) is investigating whether, and in what ways, tutors and learners engage with online synchronous learning environments such as Wimba and Eluminate. Using video diaries, online questionnaires, online forms and interviews, the study is seeking to:

- Build a rich picture of *actual* learner and tutor engagement with such technology across four drama programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level;
- Develop an understanding of the impact of using an OSLE in the learning experience;
- Develop guidelines and case studies for educators to improve learner and tutor use of OSLEs.

## 2. Progress

Progress has been achieved in the following areas:

### 2.1 Implementation of three case studies

Wimba is being used currently to support student learning:

- *MA Arts and Cultural Management – Douglas Brown*  
Douglas is working with four students who are completing their dissertation from outwith Scotland including Greece, Bahrain and Korea. It is anticipated that other students will trial Wimba once they commence their dissertations. The students have had inductions to Wimba and are keen to be using Wimba to liaise with their tutor through this medium. Early feedback from the tutors and students has helped to inform our discussions with the software supplier and to start development of some initial guides for students.
- *BA/BA (Hons) Drama and Theatre Arts – John Dean and Bianca Mastrominico*  
John and Bianca are using Wimba as a medium for students to show rehearsals to tutors who cannot attend these events. The OSLE works as a communication tool for tutors to watch live performances and then to provide synchronous feedback. Two sessions have so far been recorded and although in theory rehearsals can be viewed and feedback provided, the technology has limited the quality of the tutor/student interaction. This early feedback has again informed our discussions with the software supplier and it seems possible that a new software development will help resolve these issues in the New Year.
- *BA/BA (Hons) Performing Arts Management – Simon Girdler*  
Many of Simon's students complete their studies whilst outwith the institution. Wimba is being used to mentor students on placement and to enable one-to-one tutorials whilst students are off-campus. Early findings indicate that students enjoy the experience of speaking to the tutor directly.

### 2.2 Literature review

A database of relevant and emerging literature is being created. This is focussing on:

- Emergent research into OSLEs;

- Approaches to learning and teaching in drama in higher education;
- Online diaries as a data collection tool.

### 2.3 Research

- Ethical approval has been sought and granted by the institution;
- A recruitment strategy for participants has been developed and is being implemented;
- Data collection has commenced:

A collective case study approach is being used as this enables the investigation of the use of Wimba by three different groups of users, assisting understanding of this phenomenon and hopefully facilitating theorising to larger populations (Stake, 2000). Data is being collected through a mixed methods approach:

Video diaries created in Wimba	students and tutors	Tutors, Douglas, Simon and John have been completing regular video diaries (after having signed consent forms). A few students are starting to complete video diaries.
Online questionnaire	students	A few students have completed the online questionnaire.
Interviews	tutors	An initial outline for tutors has been developed and will be enhanced after analysis of the video diaries. Interviews will be conducted in late spring.
Online form	tutors	A template for gathering background information regarding the case study areas has been developed. Tutors have completed this.

### 2.3 Liaising with the software producer

As the project has progressed, issues that have emerged with the technology have been collated and the team is now working with the European Head of Development to help progress these issues. It is the view of the team that the technology should not dictate to nor confine the aspirations of the project.

### 2.4 Dissemination

- Information regarding this study has been disseminated within QMU through participation in an internal institutional learning and teaching conference (see blog for poster), through departmental web pages and through the project blog;
- A website (<http://www.qmu.ac.uk/palatine>) has been developed;
- Initial discussions about future dissemination events have been held with Palatine and JISCInfoNet.

## 3. Factors that have worked well with the project

### 3.1 Emerging literature

Key readings about OSLEs have been identified and there is a small evidence-base about the use of online diaries as a research tool. Mindmaps are being developed to summarise these articles and the literature review will be extended throughout the project.

### **3.2 Recruitment**

Whilst recruitment has been difficult at times, certain considerations have been found to assist this process. For example, recruiting participants in person has proved more productive than recruiting via email. This is possibly because approaching potential volunteers in person can add more weight to the request, as well as providing an opportunity for interested persons to ask questions.

### **4. Foreseen problems**

The project is on track and progressing well. As with any project however, there are concerns regarding recruitment, time and resources:

- Time and resources for literature review – little research has been conducted in the area of OSLEs and to some extent with the role of video diaries as a research tool. There is also a seeming dearth of literature regarding learning and teaching in drama in higher education. Therefore, it is more time-consuming to investigate a wider pool of resources than had been expected. The subject librarian at QMU has kindly helped in this area and Palatine has been approached for assistance.
- There have been some technical issues with Wimba but this is expected. Issues are linked to an individual's computer set-up. Each time such issues occur these are documented and have been used to facilitate discussions with Wimba developers.
- Recruitment for video diaries – as always student recruitment is problematic. Many studies have used substantial funds to increase participation and encourage on-going participation. Some students have tentatively offered to complete video diaries but these have not as yet been forthcoming. In January 2010, the team will hold its next team meeting and it may be felt necessary to provide some financial encouragement to increase recruitment and maintain participation.
- Case studies – it was hoped that we may have four, possibly five case studies. To date three case studies are providing a wealth of information and there is a possibility that another case study from costume drama may join us in spring 2010.

### **5. The way forward (January 2010 – April 2010)**

- Case studies – the three case studies will continue to explore the use of Wimba and Sue Murray will collate the information from tutors about the modules/programmes where Wimba is being used. An initial draft of this will be sent to Palatine in spring 2010 for feedback.
- Analysis – an initial analysis of the video diaries will begin in spring 2010. Sue Murray and Susi Peacock intend to follow the suggested format used by the LEaD Project at Edinburgh University.
- Literature review - in spring 2010, it is anticipated that the first draft of the literature review will be submitted to Palatine for feedback and comments.
- Dissemination
  - A presentation by the team has been submitted to the Enhancement Themes Conference to be held at Herriot Watt in March 2010;
  - A poster by the team has been submitted for QMU's internal research conference to be held on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010.