

ELESIG EVENTS

ELESIG SPRING SYMPOSIUM

University of Exeter 27-28 April 2011

A residential 24-hour event on the theme of 'Students as Change Agents' at the University of Exeter from 1300 on Wednesday, 27 to 1600 on Thursday, 28 April. In addition to the usual Members' Corner, Small Awards and Dragons' Den, we anticipate inputs from a number of students on their role and perspective on engaging with the change and transformation agenda in higher and further education with keynotes by the QAA and NUS.

ELESIG SUMMER SYMPOSIUM

University of Hertfordshire 17 June 2011

A joint symposium with the ALT sponsored LERSIG (Learning Environment Review Special Interest Group) that will update delegates on the current state of play regarding the review and implementation of VLEs in further and higher education institutions and consider the impact on learner experiences. Expect the programme to include inputs from practitioners, policy makers and students, so make a date in your diary now for Friday, 17 June at the University of Hertfordshire – immediately following the Blended Learning Conference.

Welcome from the new Chair

I WILL BE TAKING

over from Rhona Sharpe as Chair of the ELESIG Organising Committee from

January 2011 and I

have a large pair of (metaphorical) shoes to fill. I am Senior Lecturer in e-Learning at the University of Bradford (<http://tinyurl.com/CarolHiggison>) and am currently President of the Association for Learning Technology (www.alt.ac.uk). I have been involved in ELESIG since it



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More ELESIG small grants awarded in October 2010

ELESIG ORIGINATED FROM a Higher Education Academy initiative to create special interest groups. Today the work of ELESIG is enabled by the contributions and efforts from a number of sources including individual members, and participating institutions that occasionally host events. ELESIG has also enjoyed the support of JISC for some individual events and is also grateful for the contributory grant it receives from the Higher Education Academy.

These contributions and grants have enabled us to award another round of small grant awards of up to £500, to those working in the area of student e-learning experiences. In October 2010, a review group formed from members of the ELESIG Organising Committee looked at the bids to see to what extent proposals would:

- share knowledge and practice about learner experience research
- develop a shared repertoire of resources of benefit to the ELESIG community
- be achievable within the time and resources available.

Once again the small grants scheme was heavily oversubscribed with some excellent proposals. Here are details of four of the awards made.

- Ginny Franklin at Loughborough University will be writing an annotated bibliography on the use of online reading lists in student learning.
- Carole Gordon at the University of Aberdeen will be making recommendations for planning and running synchronous online learning activities, based on evaluations of learners' experiences of these events.
- A new regional group, ELESIG Wales,



Great things from small grants

will be offering face-to-face and video conference meetings during the 2010–11 academic year, led by David Lewis (University of Glamorgan) and Chris Hall (Swansea University).

- Tünde Varga-Atkins and her colleagues at the University of Liverpool will be producing guidelines on using the nominal group technique with electronic voting systems to research student experiences of e-learning.

We look forward to seeing feedback on these and the other projects' progress through the ELESIG site, in the webinar series and at future ELESIG face-to-face events during 2011.

Amanda Jefferies

a.l.jefferies@herts.ac.uk

on behalf of the ELESIG Small Grants Programme

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started, both as one of the founding members and as an active member of the organising committee.

I have been involved in e-learning/ technology enhanced learning for more years than I am willing to admit. I always find something new and exciting to challenge and interest me and I get to work with enthusiastic and like-minded people. I think ELESIG fills a gap in e-learning research, and through the work of its members, it is contributing to the development of a strong evidence base of learners' experiences of e-learning. ELESIG is helping to build the research capacity of our community.

ELESIG, like the rest of education, is facing difficult times ahead but I think we are starting with a distinct advantage – our members. As an organisation we don't have a lot of money but we do have a huge pool of talent, experience, expertise and a willingness to share and learn from each other. I look forward to working with the new and expanded Organising Committee, Mark Childs, our new Vice-Chair, and you, our members, over the coming 18 months to consolidate and expand on our achievements.

We, the Organising Committee, cannot do it on our own. We need you to get involved in a large or small way by bringing ideas, suggestions and your active engagement to the group. I would like us to achieve our 2000th member by the end of my office as Chair so invite your friends and colleagues to be involved. If you want ELESIG to do something, tell us or, better yet, help us organise and develop new resources and services. You can get involved by taking part in our events, contributing to the online community www.elesig.net and bringing your ideas and talent.

I look forward to an inspiring and productive time ahead.

Carol Higgison, Chair of ELESIG

ELESIG welcomes the ELFYSE SIG

ELFYSE IS A national special interest group supported by Middlesex University and the Higher Education Academy. It brings together practitioners from further and higher education with those who are interested in how learning technologies can support the first year experience (see <http://elfyse.middlesex.wikispaces.net/>).

There are many similarities between ELFYSE and ELESIG. Both are concerned with the learner experience, although ELFYSE narrows its focus and specifically considers how learning technologies can support student transition, retention and progression within learners' first year in higher education. The need to improve student support, student satisfaction and retention rates has prompted institutions to consider the further exploitation of the significant investments they have already made in learning technologies. In response to this and at the request of practitioners, the ELFYSE SIG has provided a short-term focus on issues related to the first year experience within the wider investigations and evaluations of learners' experiences of e-learning.

The ELFYSE group held two events in 2009/10 and has been gathering specific examples of where and how e-learning has assisted individual institutions and the wider



sector in aiding persistence and enhancing the first year student experience. They will shortly be publishing a set of case studies and an overview of practice.

In order to help continue the work of ELFYSE and promote the resources it has created, the materials from the ELFYSE events, along with their final reports, will be made available through the ELESIG online community site. The 67 members of the ELFYSE group have been invited to join ELESIG.

We look forward to joining ELESIG and hope that being part of a larger and more established community will be of benefit to our members.

ELFYSE SIG Co-ordinators:
Kyriaki Anagnostopoulou
Head of Research, Innovation and Educational Technology
K.Anagnostopoulou@mdx.ac.uk

Deeba Parmar
Senior Research Fellow, Middlesex University

ELESIG's 1000th member!

I HAVE BEEN at the Open University since 1982. Originally I worked in the Science Faculty (my background is in Biology) but since 2005 I have been a Lecturer in the Faculty of Health & Social Care. I have had an interest in technology-enhanced learning since the pre-WWW days of the very early 1990s when I was producing interactive tutorials on CD-ROM. At the moment, I am mainly interested in the



development of students' digital literacy skills. I also run the Faculty's online repository of shared learning resources, create e-learning materials for the repository and work with other academics to integrate e-learning materials into their modules. I am just beginning to become involved in research on student experiences of technology-enhanced learning and want to engage with other researchers and practitioners with similar interests. So when I heard about ELESIG at the 2010 ALT-C conference, it sounded perfect and I joined up straight away. I'm looking forward to working with other like-minded individuals.

Marion Hall
m.j.hall@open.ac.uk

The life-grid methodology

– a participatory and qualitative research technique

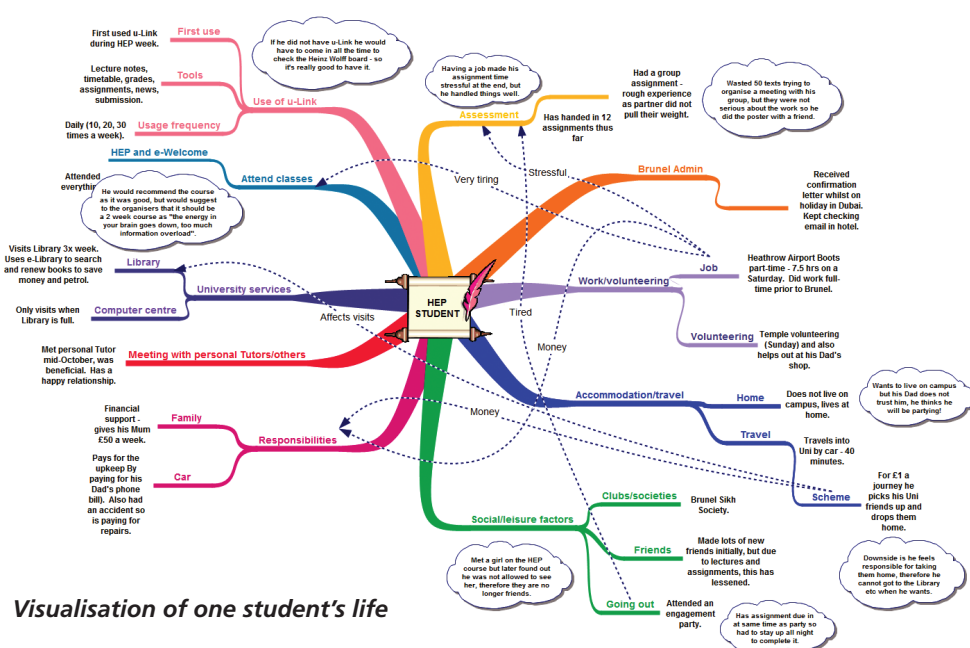
Natalie Parnis shared her experiences of using the life-grid technique in a Members' Corner slot at the October ELESIG event. Here Natalie and colleagues explain how it has been used in research at Brunel University.

Background

The life-grid is a data collection tool used during interviews to structure a series of personal events into a chronological sequence. In previous years, the life-grid was used primarily as a potential tool to collect retrospective data in epidemiology (Bell 2005). In the UK, first uses of the life-grid backdate to the late 1980s in the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) (Dex 1991). The use of the life-grid was further developed by Berney and Blane (1997, 2003) in health research to extract quantitative data from the qualitative interviews undertaken during the study. In their view 'the life-grid approach is extremely flexible and allows for the subject to determine the recall cues. The researcher can quickly identify those areas which assist the recall process whilst simultaneously developing rapport.' (Berney and Blane 2003 p. 19).

The use of the life-grid in the works of Parry, Thomson and Fowkes (1999) shifted towards exploring the tool's potential as a qualitative research tool to enable subjects to recall life events linked to notable life or world events that occurred at that point in time (e.g. WWII, Kennedy's Assassination) or personal events e.g. births, deaths, marriages. One of the research findings in Parry et al's (1999) work suggests that the life-grid technique established a good rapport between the interviewer and the subject and instilled a spirit of joint effort which encouraged interviewees to become more engaged in the data collection process.

Brunel's adaption of the life-grid method
The research team from Brunel University



Visualisation of one student's life

has adapted the life-grid approach for its use as a qualitative and participatory interviewing technique to gather a rich narrative of students' experiences during their first year at University.

Brunel's transitional experience life-grid

The life-grid developed is composed of ten different student life domains on the horizontal axis (Liaison with Brunel admin, Work/Volunteering, Accommodation and Travel, Social/Leisure factors, Responsibilities, Meet with lecturers/Personal Tutors, Use of University Services, Attend Classes, Use of u-Link and Assessment). During the interviews, students were asked to share their experiences of these different life areas over the first term at University (weeks shown on the vertical axis). Students were probed to recall any life events occurring during that period (flash bulb column) which might have had an impact on their experience on one or many of the life domains at that point in time. In addition to the life-grid's known use as an aide memoire, the research team found the tool useful as a reflective aid. It can be used to provide students with a situation analysis to help them realise the impact of certain habits in some life domains, and the impact these have on other areas, and also

to think of possible changes to address a given situation.

Visualisation of one student's life

More information about Brunel's use of the life-grid can be found on the ELESIG's Resource Cloudscape on Cloudworks under Methods in Learner Experience Research - <http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloud/view/4192>. Further literature references about the history of the life-grid can also be found on the last slide of the presentation uploaded on this site.

Natalie Parnis natalie.parnis@brunel.ac.uk
Dr. Linda Murray linda.murray@brunel.ac.uk
Dr. Julia Stephenson julia.stephenson@brunel.ac.uk
Anu Sharma anu.sharma@brunel.ac.uk

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Offers and wants

THEORY IN LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

http://www.alt.ac.uk/callforpapers_altj_theory.html



Guest editors Laura Czerniewicz, University of Cape Town, South Africa and Chris Jones, Open University, UK are calling for papers for a Special Issue of Research in Learning Technology, the Journal of the Association for Learning Technology (Volume 19, Number 3).

This call for papers on theoretical approaches in digitally-mediated environments aims to investigate and develop the conceptualisation of theory in the field of learning technology. Theory can be contrasted with practice and is often associated with the particular forms of research given value by higher education institutions. Technology is constantly changing and yet theory aims to stabilise and order change so that a degree of permanence is introduced into this sea of change.

Abstracts can be submitted to either of the guest editors for informal feedback as soon as possible and papers should be submitted via the Manuscript Central online submission system at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/calt> before 31 January 2011.

For other queries and guidance relating to the call please contact the Special Issue Editors:

Chris Jones –
c.r.jones@open.ac.uk

Laura Czerniewicz –
lauraczerniewicz@gmail.com

Editorial

What are our aims – now and future?

THE AIM OF ELESIG is to build capacity for undertaking learner experience research and increase the impact of this research. We do this through sustaining a community with events, resources, publications and small grants. Our 1100 members are able to develop learner experience research methods, share their findings and build connections with others.

Each year we make time to take stock of how well we are meeting these aims. In 2009/10, as well as running the usual events and online community, we:

- set up a resource collection on Cloudworks to collate resources produced and recommended by ELESIG members (<http://tinyurl.com/ELESIG-Intros>)
- supported the creation of our first regional group - ELESIG Midlands (<http://elesig.ning.com/group/elesigmidlands>)
- increased involvement from students and student groups e.g. through iLEXSIG for international students (<http://elesig.ning.com/group/ielesig>)

Committee members

Haydn Blackey, University of Glamorgan
Lesley Diack, Robert Gordon University
Palitha Edirisingha, University of Leicester
Shalni Gulati, City University
Peter Hartley, University of Bradford
Carol Higgison, University of Bradford
Amanda Jefferies, University of Hertfordshire
Rae Karimjee, City University
David Mathew, ELESIG member
Martin Oliver, London Knowledge Lab
Malcolm Ryan, University of Greenwich
Binhui Shao, Open University
Rhona Sharpe, Oxford Brookes University
Gemma Towle, University of Northampton
Helen Whitehead, University of Nottingham
Roy Williams, University of Portsmouth

- secured continuation funding from the Higher Education Academy which enables us to continue hosting an online community on Ning, run the small grants scheme and publish newsletters
- agreed Terms of Reference and succession planning for the Organising Committee and its Chair and Vice-Chair.

Our plans for 2010/11 focus on our original conception of ELESIG as a community of researchers, explicitly built on principles of community of practice. As the membership continues to grow, we hope to engage more of our members in community activities.

Specifically, we aim to:

- make our events accessible to more members
- increase the content and profile of our resource collection
- share out the responsibilities for online facilitation amongst members
- develop structures to support specialist interest subgroups and regional groups
- engage members in the processes of running and organising ELESIG.

Consequently, you will notice a number of calls for participation in community activities over the coming months. There are lots of ways you, as ELESIG members, can get involved. We will be looking for members to organise and contribute to our schedule of webinars, to write pieces for our newsletters and to moderate and facilitate our online presence and to set up new subgroups. If you would like to be involved in any of these activities please do contact any member of the Organising Committee by email or in our online group at <http://elesig.ning.com/group/organisingelesig>

Finally, please do join me in welcoming Carol Higgison, who will become the new Chair of the ELESIG Organising Committee in January. I hope you will all offer her all your support and ideas for taking the community forward.

Rhona Sharpe
rsharp@brookes.ac.uk

ELESIG

ELESIG is an international community of researchers and practitioners from higher and further education who are involved in investigations of learners' experiences and uses of technology in learning. ELESIG members work together to share knowledge and practice and develop a shared repertoire of resources which will be of benefit to the community and the sector.