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Conference Proceedings

Long and Short Papers

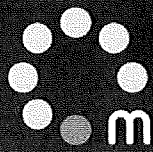
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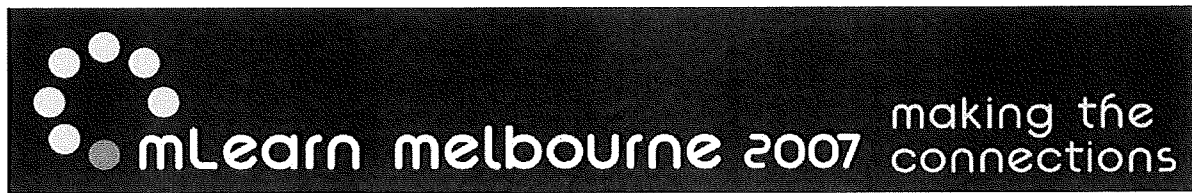
Long & Short papers were subjected to a double-blind review process by an international panel and evaluated on the basis of their significance, originality, and clarity of writing.

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Mobile learning research and development is a challenging field involving collaboration across the globe; contributions shared formally and informally with colleagues enrich our conversations and combined understanding in this evolving field.

Melbourne, the host city for mLearn 2007, provided a rich variety of sessions; from the Doctoral Consortium held at The University of Melbourne to the illuminating sessions held at the Melbourne Exhibition and Conference Centre.

The international conference series provides fertile space for an exchange of ideas and challenges surrounding teaching and learning with mobile devices.

This publication contains the papers from the mLearn 2007 conference 16 – 19 October 2007; we hope you will find the papers presented here valuable for reflection and future initiatives.

Austin Norman
Victoria University

Jon Pearce
The University of Melbourne

Please note that papers contained within appear exactly as submitted for the mLearn 2007 Conference, and have not been subject to editing.



About mLearn

mLearn 2002 was the first European workshop on mobile and contextual learning, held at the University of Birmingham. mLearn 2003 was the first Conference, held in London. Both were supported by the European Commission, and spawned the start of a series of international conferences on Mobile and Ambient Learning. The first fully International Conference was in Rome in 2004 with delegates attending from Australia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, the UK and USA.

MLearn 2005, in Cape Town, was a key research and networking event for researchers, strategists, educators, technologists and practitioners from all over the world. Attracting participants from more than 60 countries, the MLearn series has become the world's largest conference on mLearning and emerging ambient technologies.

MLearn 2006, the 5th World Conference on Mobile Learning, in Canada, continued to stimulate critical debate on and research into theories, approaches, principles and applications of mobile devices for promoting learning.

Australia, through the efforts of a small group of enthusiastic professionals, holds a leading position in the development of mobile learning and conferring the hosting of this conference on Melbourne is recognition of the status of Australia within the International community.

mLearn 2007 also saw the formation of the International Association for Mobile Learning. If you would like to receive further information about joining the association, go to www.iamlearn.caryloliver.com

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USING MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how mobile technologies are being used to promote community development, peer support and engagement in university sports websites and how such technologies are being used, or could be used, in an academic context. Although the term is as old as civilisation itself, for the purposes of this paper clanning is defined as a sociological phenomenon observed on the Internet by futurist Faith Popcorn that occurs wherever people gather virtually to discuss and promote common feelings, ideas or ideals. Clanning may lead to benefits such as increased enrolments, increased motivation and reduced stress. Although clanning is most apparent in team sports, clanning is also seen amongst those using mobile technologies, whether acquiring cachet from their area code, downloading the latest ring tone and playing it in unison in the stadium or showing their colours with an appropriate wallpaper or ring tone. Sports mobile portals, websites or parts of websites designed for access via mobile phones are compared with education portals containing sector specific resources and services. The portals are examined for exemplars of mobile technologies and techniques suitable for the promotion of clanning in open and distance education.

Author Keywords

clanning, mobile portals, peer support

INTRODUCTION

Although the term is as old as civilization itself, for the purposes of this paper clanning is a sociological phenomenon observed on the Internet and defined by futurist Faith Popcorn (2007) as "belonging to a group that represents common feelings, causes or ideals; validating one's own belief system". Popcorn sees the trend as a response to the increasingly impersonal nature of modern life, no more impersonal than on the Internet. Internet gamers also claim the term as their own. Clans may often contain many sub-levels with which the individual can identify or aspire to. Internet gaming clans for example are subdivided into guilds, which compete in tournaments. The centuries old New Zealand Maori social structure (Britannica 2007) of iwi (tribe), hapu (sub-tribe and landowner) and whanau (extended family) is an example of a well-ordered clan system and though based on extended family ties shows the same sort of hierarchy as those in gaming sites. The ancient clans of Scotland are another example of clanning being around for some time. The author argues that instead of being a new phenomenon born of the Internet, clanning is really an ancient phenomenon and more an innate response to gather with those of like mind than a response the Internet. Clanning is viewed as a powerful binding force, on the macro-level binding the individual to the institution, and on the micro-level binding together members of a virtual study team. The trust necessary for easy communication and interdependent peer support is established faster if the individuals involved already feel that they and the others in the group are already part of a larger whole. Such oneness or belongingness is flagged by means of the visual and auditory symbols described later. The author has previously searched for clanning promoting exemplars with respect to peer support, comparing the provision in team sports and academic websites. With mobile learning hesitantly appearing in New Zealand, the author continues the quest for exemplars of clanning for peer support, this time in the mobile online environment.

Clanning 101

Team sports, stands out as the best examples of clanning in action. Football and rugby, two of the oldest and most popular of team sports have well developed clanning and promote that clanning electronically through their websites. So to see exemplars of the use of techniques to promote clanning via mobile websites, football and rugby websites would seem to be a good place to seek some answers. Some of the requisites of clanning will be examined and team sport mobile websites will be compared with those of Universities (College and University Home Pages, 2007) in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States to see if and how the necessary tools for mobile clanning are provided.

A superficial examination of any University website shows that University colours are as ubiquitous as Team colours. There are as many University coats of arms as there are Team insignia. Fraternity songs (Sigma Phi Epsilon, 2007) and alma mater songs appear as often as Team chants. Rowing or football competitions between rival Universities are as common as long held grudge matches between competing sports teams in neighbouring cities or countries. Memorabilia, scarves, mugs, sweatshirts in

the "team" colours abounds in the websites of both Universities and team sports. There are so many similarities between clanning in both University and team sports websites, but the question is - have sporting websites moved ahead in the area of clanning through mobile technology, leaving University websites tethered to their desktops? Should we be looking at team sport websites to see the future of mobile tertiary education?

In the sporting websites, opportunities for gathering information about the team such as statistics, membership of the team, and team chants are complimented by sophisticated facilities allowing fans to receive pushed information via SMS about anything from the latest goal scored in real time to future ticket availability. Fans can download songs associated with the team; team chants and even show their identification with the team clan by purchasing ringtones of the crowd's roar and mobile wallpaper related to the team insignia or stadium. Some of these items are only available within the stadium and for obvious financial reasons fans are encouraged to show their membership of the clan by playing their tunes in unison. Such downloads, riding on the back of the Crazy Frog ringtone (BBC News, 2005) are recorded in the UK Singles Charts displayed prominently within the stadium. Fans can text chat with the team members and send SMS to them. They can share their enthusiasm, and challenge other fans in tournaments and quizzes to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge of the team. These competitions echo the tournaments of the Internet gamers and the rowing competitions of Oxford and Cambridge Universities. These exciting facilities are swathed in a glittering wrapper of moving graphics and sound. By allowing the clan member to identify with and be identified with the clan the feeling of belonging is intensified. This brings repeat business and a lifelong association with the team. A comparison of the home pages of the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team (2007) and UK Liverpool Football Club (2007), two teams with a fanatical fan base, with those of Cambridge University (2007) and the University of Liverpool (2007) in the UK, the University of Otago (2007) in New Zealand, and a number of US Universities show clear differences in the levels of excitement and mobile communication facilities available at their respective sites. This is covered later.

CLANNING AND MOTIVATION

Hunt (2000) describes an example of how clanning aids motivation.

"Every night Mary Ann Woirhaye does the unthinkable. She sets her alarm for 4:30 a.m. because every morning she gets up and walks three miles while the rest of the world sleeps. How has Mary Ann managed to stick with this early morning fitness routine for more than three years? Simple. She knows that someone is waiting for her. Two people have made a commitment to show up. The secret of Mary Ann's success is that she chooses to be accountable, not only to herself but to another person who shares her desire to become physically fit. And how is this working out? Extremely well, she reports. The faster she and her buddy walk the louder they talk. And laugh. They even argue from time to time. They share their lives and brainstorm their dreams. They get so involved they don't notice the miles clicking away. The deep friendship that has resulted from this daily event not only makes the task possible, it makes it enjoyable."

Students often study together to their mutual benefit in both contact and distance education. In an article on study buddies in "Connections" the official newsletter for students of The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand (2001) students are quoted saying:

"We just clicked", says Leigh-Ann. "We both had a goal that we wanted and were prepared to put our heads down and get on with the job."

CLANNING AND STRESS

Roizen (1999) suggests that joining a group reduces stress. The importance of reducing stress during periods of intensive study and especially just before exam time is obvious. Dehne (2000) in an article on the future of private colleges makes the following observation:

"Many colleges are noticing the increased interest in theme houses — facilities where students choose to live together to speak a language, talk about science and technology, or provide community service. A college itself can be a "clanning" experience. Small colleges devoted to the environment, great books or a conservative Christian viewpoint are essentially "clanning." Of course, a reputation for serving a certain

"clan" can be risky for a college that is already homogenous. If the concept of affinity groups continues and grows, it is possible that only students with similar interests will attend some small college."

Dehne clearly sees the importance of clanning in small colleges; so can we extend this into the University?

Oxford and Cambridge Universities are organised as a series of colleges, within a larger entity, with different colleges specialising in specific subjects or leisure interests. American fraternities are an excellent example of clanning, whereby new members are invited to join, or apply to join fraternity houses with particular interests or allegiances within the larger University. So clanning has been entrenched within the larger contact Universities for hundreds of years.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF ACADEMIC MOBILE CLANNING

Contact Universities often place much of the burden for clanning on the Student Union. Their support for the Union is often merely financial. Are they also ignoring the importance of clanning via mobile technology within the broader University? Clanning is as important for prospective students as for Alumni. Distance institutions in particular must have regard for the clanning needs of their students, over and above the provision of summer schools or learning management systems. Failure to provide for clanning may leave learners feeling isolated and disconnected (Liu et al, 2007). These feelings of isolation and the lack of community could result in low retention rates (Eastmond, 1995).

An examination of the website of the Open University (2007) of the UK showed no opportunity to SMS for information or receive information by SMS regarding the University. There was no mobile portal. In the Alumni area mobile number was not requested. The OU Life Screensaver acts as an RSS feed updating students with information every 20 minutes via the Internet and is paid for by advertising. Just a small step to mobile wallpaper, ringtones and pushed text?

At the University of Liverpool (2007) there was no mobile portal or option to send or receive SMS information. Alumni complete a form to request to be kept in touch with others. An email address is requested but is not a required field. There is an opportunity to enter an alternative phone number, but a mobile phone number is not specifically requested. The University offers dial up access and suggests users could use their mobile phone as a modem to access their services when off campus and away from home. Interestingly access from a home desktop computer is viewed as mobile computing. Several mobile devices are supported by the University Computer Services. Advice is provided about Bluetooth.

At the University of Otago (2007) in New Zealand there was no mobile portal. The Alumni form does not specifically mention a mobile number and does not offer an option to enter an alternative number. Conversely staff are encouraged to use mobile phones by having their plan under the Corporate plan. Perversely students are charged to use the remote access to the University network and voicemail is optional. A wireless LAN (802.11b/g) has been deployed. Streaming media services are available.

The University of Waikato (2007) has no mobile portal and no way to send or receive SMS. A mobile number is not requested. The University links its website to the New Zealand Alumni Associations in Thailand and China. The University has several ways of allowing students to show their clan affiliation with the University including a University signet ring and Visa card.

Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (2006) partnered with a major telecommunication company to use SMS to accept entries for a competition. This could have provided an excellent mobile database for later use. There is no mobile portal, or any way to send or receive SMS. A mobile phone number is however specifically and prominently requested on the online enquiry form.

In none of the sites were there any opportunities to do what could be termed "play before you pay" that might encourage prospective students to visit the institution's site and connect with those already studying. Such pro-clanning strategies could pay dividends in terms of student enrolments and assist in pedagogical terms by creating understanding of online culture and behaviour whilst also establishing relationships before they attend either virtually or in real life. Online discussions on subjects taught at the institution are little different from the free public seminars at contact institutions. More social online discussions around hobbies would be equivalent to an online student orientation.

We need to turn to the United States to see examples of the embedding of team sports clanning within the University website. Since 2001 the University of Miami (2007) appears to have understood the clanning power of sports, with an athletics link to the Miami Hurricanes site, which sports sales of ring tones, wallpapers and alerts. A link back to the University is provided on the Hurricanes website along with a glowing testimonial. There are other links within both sites providing channels whereby a football fan can suddenly find him or herself reading about the local University. Florida State University (2007) clans with the Seminoles and includes a brief promotional movie talking about the university while showing footage of swimming, football and all things non-academic. The University has also adopted the model for their "Everything FSU" website. Interestingly this website does not link via the red colour of the Seminoles as the main site does, apart from the text colour. Instead the green of the Seminoles site dominates. At Washington University in St. Louis (2007) advice is provided on accessing email via a mobile device, though SMS or pushed SMS is not available. Wireless access points are explained and appear to be ubiquitous using 802.11b WiFi. The University links to Bear Sports via an Athletics link. Bear Sports does not appear to have the same mobile facilities found on other sports sites. The Miami University (2007) website is linked directly to the Miami Redhawks site with a prominent Redhawks link, perhaps expressing the greater importance placed upon this association. As would be expected there is a link to a site providing wireless alerts, ringtones and wallpapers via CSTV. UCLA (2007) links to a generalised "Happenings" page with links to the UCLA Bruins plus other sports, arts and lectures. The links to the Bruins appears to be less pronounced than in 2001. What appears to have happened is that the basis for clanning has been broadened and now includes things other than football. By supporting a more diverse range of sub-clans the University stands to draw in a broader range of people. The University provides RSS links from the main site regarding Happenings at the University ranging from ballet to lectures. Students can also add reminders to their calendar. Predictably the Bruins site has a wireless page that pushes scores and headlines to mobiles, but not by email or to palm pilots. Live audio and video available though it would appear this is only available to PC.

By supporting a team of heroes that young people can identify with the Universities encourage clanning between city and university, and develop a feeling of local connection to the University. Young people will already feel an affiliation to the University before they enrol and continue that association later through the sports team or Alumni associations.

CLANNING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Most educational establishments, both contact and distance providers, have websites. Increasing numbers of those Universities also have courses using electronic delivery systems such as Blackboard (2007). The Blackboard delivery system has a facility for the creation of online components for clubs and other organizations with the same features as the course delivery system. This allows the club members to discuss issues both synchronously and asynchronously and organise various events through the system. This supports the development of social groups within courses, promoting clanning and stimulating peer support.

The author has used regional study groups and national-ethnic study groups within his courses and this has often stimulated peer interaction, if only due to the reduction in group sizes. Therefore clanning is apparent even via distance education and exploiting the motivational and stress reducing properties of this experience. Perhaps distance education should be renamed "we-education", due to the many one-to-one relationships and small groups that spring up naturally within a suitably moderated online environment both between students, and between students and tutor.

Where to from here?

The University of Wales (2007) offers the opportunity for students and alumni alike to identify with the institutional clan in all future on-line communication, by means of an academic e-mail address for life e.g. username@univ.bangor.ac.uk. Harvard (2007) also provides e-mail forwarding and in addition extensive communication facilities. The power of such signs of affiliation should not be underestimated. What more powerful status symbol than John.Smith@harvardMBA.com as a permanent electronic badge of status and clan affiliation to be displayed with pride on a business card? With the kudos of area codes now apparent will organisation mobile codes connected to Universities and prestigious organisations be far away, e.g. Harvard 12345?

Clanning via mobile communities offers the opportunity of attracting new students to online or contact courses by changing the University's website from a closed information source, into a portal with a strong community element that is open to all (Looney 2000) and accessible from the University's home page. By supporting groups of people currently not enrolled on University courses, who have similar interests in computing, rugby, classical music, arts or any other interest and allowing them to discuss their special interests in the University's mobile communities, educational establishments could attract potential students on the basis of the quality of the community support they provide. At first glance, this might appear to be gross commercialisation of education, a spider's web or fishing net, but there is little difference between such virtual community groups and the rowing and rugby clubs of Cambridge and Oxford, or of the commercial sponsorship seen at many team sport events. Should this way of attracting students be widely adopted, competition between institutions to offer better communities would be fierce. To differentiate themselves from the other institutions offering the same sort of communities, Universities might invite prestigious visitors or sporting heroes to participate in the discussions in the various communities. Once again, there is little difference between this and the University visits of celebrities such as Michael Jackson to the Oxford Union. Competitions between similar virtual communities at different Universities reminiscent of the rowing contests of Oxford and Cambridge might develop. Just as the sports teams draw young people to the contact University, so the mobile communities could help connect potential students to the distance institution. People are often drawn to distance education because of the anonymity it affords and are likely to be less wary of mobile communities unrelated to academic study. Some may lack the confidence to take part in tertiary education. A friendly supportive community that is always just a SMS away is just the sort of atmosphere to establish confidence and do the necessary groundwork for understanding more complex ideas later. As with the clubs in schools and colleges around the world it is the participation of friendly experts in these communities that allows students to acquire the skills to move to the next level. There is no reason to suppose that reasoning and discussion skills should be any more difficult skills to acquire through a mobile community than through a contact group.

CONCLUSION

Future mobile educational portals should consider offering free and open Internet community building opportunities, perhaps linked to team sports initially, but diversifying to a wide range of other special interest communities. By offering opportunities to form relationships on the site, institutions are likely to gain a growing number of potential students with specific interests that can be targeted with courses of particular interest to them, in a medium that they are already familiar with. Opportunities exist to allow potential students to gather at the doors of the distance institution, to sustain them with strong supportive relationships throughout their University career and maintain those relationships, both with fellow students and the University throughout their working life. Exemplars of techniques that could be used to promote clanning can be found on any team sport website. The author encourages academics and registrars alike to leave their "dreaming spires" and visit the sports field and realise that clanning is a means of interesting the majority of the population who never undertake tertiary study. The author has no plans to carry out a more extensive study of this area but believes that further research needs to be carried out with respect to the relationship of mobile clanning to distance and contact university community building.

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