# ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR CREATIVE PRACTICE

Dr Stephen R Quinton & Annie English

Curtin University of Technology

## Abstract

This research project proposes to model the activities and roles of a visiting Research Fellow and an Artist-in-Residence (AIR) with the intent of applying the key educational features and strategies to the online environment. Where feasible, the aim is replicate the role of a Research Fellow online by enlisting the services of well-known artists to contribute their expertise and creative input to the teaching activities of a University School of Art. The primary purpose is to support and enhance the delivery of quality learning outcomes for the Curtin BA (Art) Online degree. The project presents an opportunity to establish wider contact with audiences that have an interest in interacting with an online AIR site to access or contribute research materials and participate in creative activities.

In the online environment students are empowered to learn both autonomously as well as actively explore opportunities to teach one another. This emphasis on independent learning is particularly prevalent when asynchronous discussion groups (bulletin boards) are used as an integral part of the learning experience. Students are given the incentive to explain, share, comment, critique, and develop course materials among themselves in ways rarely seen in a traditional classroom setting. The use of electronic alternatives to face-to-face dialogue often results in high quality discussions as students often refer to course materials and reflect on their answers before responding to the lecturer's questions or to classmates' comments. As a result, students have the opportunity to post well-considered comments without experiencing the immediate demands of in-class discussions.

The potential of online learning communities will be examined in terms of fostering independent self-directed learning and to encourage online mentoring. Existing examples of practice in online learning will be considered with a view to devising a suitable model for application to online learning communities engaged in creative practices.

Of equal importance, the project represents an example of how Curtin is able to form unique collaborations between divergent areas of interest. In this instance, the partnership combines the expertise of the Faculty of Built Environment (BEAD), the School of Art and Design, and the Learning Support Network (LSN).

## Introduction

This paper presents a brief synopsis of traditional Research Fellow and artist-in-residence (AIR) programmes and provides a comparison of how the many activities offered by a physical 'in residence' artist can be transferred to the online environment. The concept of an online AIR programme is explored in terms of the advantages for students and lecturers, the artist in focus, its application to various learning modes, and potential for research. Issues pertaining to the application of the proposed model to teaching and learning especially through the enhanced functionality of online collaboration and real-time workshops will also be raised for discussion. The paper concludes with an overview of proposed future refinements and a summary of the key factors to assist in the design of

similar models. The expected outcomes of the proposed online AIR model underscore a broad range of advantages and benefits for staff and students attending the Curtin School of Art the most immediate of which include:

1. Enhance Teaching and Learning activities within the broader Faculty of BEAD. An Online Research Fellow can be linked as an additional resource to other on-campus teaching programmes.
2. The project supports the enhancement of several established on-campus Teaching and Learning programmes at the Curtin campus at Bentley in Western Australia, namely:
     the online Bachelor of Arts (Art) degree delivered through Open Learning Australia (OLA) which is now expanding to include several Architecture and Culture units for its Visual Culture/Art History stream scheduled for availability over the three years from 2005-2007
     the BA (Art) Online also has links to programmes in the Department of Design through the unit *Art and Fashion in the 20th Century* available online for eligible students.
     the Biennale of Electronic Arts (BEAP) 2004 conference programme.
3. Engender further awareness of alternative understandings and experiences within staff and students' fields of experience and expertise.
4. Foster research and creative production through the activities conducted by an Online Research Fellow. On-campus students, online and distance education students, as well as staff and the wider community of artists, architects and designers are permitted to share the site.
5. Explore collaborative research projects to study the benefits and devise strategies for on-campus and online delivery modes led by a 'Virtual' Visiting Research Fellow.
6. Establish an opportunity for BEAD to showcase its activities within the Division of Humanities by sharing research outcomes through a more seamless mode of delivery other than the traditional 'Public Lecture'.
7. Increase the potential to attract International Research Fellows and projects which otherwise would not be accessible to Australia.
8. Broaden the available student audience. Students could network contacts with other students, industry professionals and agencies, public and private sector representatives and general specialists in the field who may be involved in related projects.
9. An online artist in residence may be a potent mentor to encourage and stimulate creative production work.

**Why an Online Artist in Residence Site?**

As the new computer and communications technologies become more sophisticated and enhance the processes by which learning can be delivered and supported, our understanding of how knowledge is constructed is constantly being transformed and redescribed. If our students are to cope with future skill demands and work practices, it is imperative they understand knowledge is dynamic and subject to constant change.  It is also vital that lecturers support students in their efforts to develop high levels of competency in complex thinking and analysis skills. No longer is it adequate for education institutions to produce well-informed, more knowledgeable students. To be successful in acquiring and managing the complexities of an information-focussed society,students require a much broader, more diverse education (Tsantis, 1991, p 3).  This involves the development of complex reasoning skills along with a sustained capacity for innovation and creativity. These skills and abilities will be crucial to success in a future marked by an increasingly cogent need to locate, analyse and adapt accumulated personal knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar and divergent contexts.

In Harper and Hedberg's (1997, p 13) view, higher order thinking skills are not acquired through traditional didactic approaches but through the learner's active involvement with information. As new experiences are encountered, learners actively apply their own interpretations and understandings of meaning to form connections with prior experiences.

In the process, new meanings are constructed. Many researchers and educational theorists have supported the notion of the learner's active involvement in the construction of meaning. Oddliefson (1994, pp 432 - 7) for example, observed how cognitive research over the preceding twenty years contributed to the accepted view that learners do not passively absorb knowledge. Instead, they construct knowledge by applying both their intellect and senses to derive new meaning. For Bruner (1973), learning involves three almost simultaneous processes. In the first instance, the learner must be exposed to new or contradictory information. Secondly, the learner must actively process new information by constructing hypotheses and modifying those hypotheses in light of new or inconsistent information. Third, the learner engages in selecting and manipulating previously unknown information through analysis and reorganisation to form associations with prior knowledge and personal experiences to derive meaning, understanding and ultimately, construct knowledge.

Complete understanding also encompasses the ability to comprehend varied perspectives, to communicate and explain effectively, and to reason using one's individual knowledge construct. It is useful to view the act of creativity or knowledge construction as a cognitive process in which the abstract combination of previously unrelated mental structures or ideas results in the formation of a new emergent whole. Anyone who has experienced that moment when a creative idea unexpectedly surfaces without apparent prior connection would agree that the resultant outcome is often much more than the mere sum of a collection of disjointed thoughts. However, it is not just the sum of the parts that is important. Of equal significance is the notion of the creative process as an expression of the relationships between various abstract components. The formation of each new synthesis leads to the emergence of new patterns of relationships, each more complex than the previous, each extending to higher cognitive levels of understanding and knowledge. What has been described to this point is in fact the goal of the constructivist approach to learning. As Glatthorn (1994, pp 449 - 55) puts it, the constructivist approach to deriving knowledge emphasises the learner as an active maker or 'constructor' of meaning and places contextualised problem solving at the centre of the learning process.

Assuming proven educational design principles are carefully integrated, the Web can facilitate access to a pedagogically rich foundation that is conducive to promoting three essential attributes of an effective learning community: active construction of knowledge; positive interpersonal relationships; and rich discursive interactivity. In face-to-face collaborative learning environments, learners are given the opportunity to share ideas and elaborate on new material. They become actively engaged in supporting each other to develop the skills needed to apply higher order reasoning strategies, critical thinking, forming hypothesis, and engaging in reflective practice. There is some evidence that an Internet-based collaborative learning environment can support such a learning community through the strategic use of online communication tools (Geer, 2000, pp 1 - 3). In this regard, the inclusion of Web-based academic support systems is critical to ensuring electronic learning environments are inclusive, accessible, instructive, and responsive to changing student needs. As McCracken (2000, pp 1 and 3) has noted, the importance of providing opportunities for communication, participation and interaction as related to cognitive development in web-based classrooms is well documented. In the online mode for example, it is possible to scaffold learning activities through the provision of personal discussion folders, live chat, personalised email, audio/video, regular updates and feedback, threaded dialogues and group discussions. Understanding how to build and manage positive social dynamics can encourage knowledge construction in ways that extend learning opportunities and build a foundation upon which more elaborate communal structures can be established (Woods and Ebersole, 2003, pp 1, 4 and 9). A useful comparison of the preferred graduate attributes that can be cultivated using various types of Information and Communication Technologies is provided by Slay (1997, p5):

| Technology | Application to Teaching and Learning | Associated Graduate Quality |
|---|---|---|

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **World Wide Web** | Electronic delivery of paper-based course work and assessment Flexible delivery to on-campus students Information repository - linking and bookmarking Simulations | operating on a body of knowledge preparation for life-long learning problem solving working autonomously ethical action international perspective |
| **Computer-mediated multimedia conferencing** | CU See-Me, allows transmission of sound and video by Internet CoolTalk - computer audioconferencing Internet-based (IP) Videoconferencing | preparation for life-long learning working collaboratively communicating effectively ethical action gaining an international perspective |
| **Email** | $ Teacher-student communication | preparation for life-long learning communicating effectively working collaboratively ethical action international perspective |
| **Bulletin Boards** | Teacher-class, expert-teacher-student, peer communication | communicating effectively working collaboratively |
| **Newsgroups** | On-line discussion with peers and experts Foreign language communication | preparation for life-long learning communicating effectively working collaboratively ethical action demonstrating international perspective |
| **MUDs and MOOs** | Virtual, interactive classroom | working collaboratively communicating effectively |

**Table 1: Graduate qualities associated with use of the Internet in Teaching and Learning**

The significance of the preceding table is that the real impact of computer and communications technologies on learning is made more apparent. Unrestricted access to information technology provides an opportunity for teachers to develop and devise learning experiences tuned to individual needs. Most significantly, it affords students a unique opportunity to engage in effective, independent learning. In turn, the electronic environment permits the teacher to become a facilitator of the student's learning rather than the sole repository and provider of knowledge. Thus, the power of technology lies in its capacity to engage co-operative learning environments or communities of learners where learning is the focussed intention, not the incidental outcome. As Gipson (1996, p 19) suggests, the liberating power of information technology extends from its capacity to redefine the learning environment in a way that allows individual potential to be truly maximised. He warns however, that technology alone cannot fulfil this goal. For technology to make a difference and serve teaching and learning, it must be viewed as a tool of educational practice, not as a panacea for educational problems. Furthermore, unless it is intentionally coupled with reformed educational practice that acknowledges the primacy of the learner rather than the centrality of the teacher, then its use will be limited. Slay (1997, pp1, 8, 10) for example, recommends the development of student-centred teaching practices and the creative use of modern technologies to deliver learning environments that are rich in interactions and supportive of a wide range of learning styles**.** Some examples

of Slay's recommendations include: using technologies to create interactive learning experiences for students; assigning research projects that require students to refine their Internet search skills (methods such as individual and group projects and problem-based learning stimulate deep learning in students); using email and online discussion groups to foster collaborative activity among students; and ensuring students are exposed to international perspectives by recruiting overseas academics as subject experts and permitting students to communicate with them while adding convenient access to a wide range of international resources available on the Web. The following table summarises the educational benefits of online learning (2003, pp 3 – 4):

| Reason | Explanation |
|---|---|
| **Facilitate varied individual learning needs and preferences** | Information technology provides learners access to instructional materials that better match their individual learning needs or preferences - without making demands on the lecturer in terms of preparation time or special skills. For example, an audio narration could accompany video, text and images and simultaneously made accessible on the Web. |
| **Overcoming difficult or long distance access** | Modern telecommunications provide access to instruction that would otherwise be unavailable due to learners' disabilities, inconvenient location, work commitments or schedule restrictions. |
| **The effective use of online productivity tools** | As more faculty and learners are provided immediate access to productivity tools (e.g., Word-processing, Email, Web), teachers can provide more frequent feedback, and students can make more frequent revisions when completing assignments. |
| **Window to the world** | Using the Web, computers, and projectors, faculty can bring into traditional classrooms otherwise inaccessible resources (e.g., information, media, people, events). |
| **Information literacy** | The expanding mass of information resources requires more sophisticated skills for finding, selecting, manipulating, modifying, and distributing information. Students (and faculty) need both additional training and experience in using information resources and tools within the academic environment as preparation for similar work elsewhere. |
| **Collaborative learning** | Email, Web-based threaded discussion boards, and other tools specifically designed to support teamwork and group communication can enable students to learn and work together on projects more easily. Technology can support many of the "collaborative learning" approaches already advocated by many faculty. |
| **Career necessity** | Employers expect employees to demonstrate comfort, confidence, and mastery of basic skills related to the use of computers and telecommunications options. While many students can acquire some of that self-assurance and competence independently, many cannot. Therefore, they need access to the right technology and training. |
| **Better communication, more "time on task": Better learning** | Educational research confirms the obvious impression that students learn more effectively when they spend more time focused on work related to a course. When email provides a convenient, attractive means of communicating with other students in the course and with the instructor, many students are observed to expend more time communicating about the subject matter – and to learn more. The most surprising phenomenon may be the rise in course-content-related communication between students and faculty AFTER the completion of a course - when the students' grades are no longer susceptible to change. |
| **Anonymity** | Email and Web options enable anonymous communications. This |

| | |
|---|---|
| | can permit some students to participate more comfortably and frequently in course-related discussions. When students can respond anonymously, faculty can more easily obtain candid responses about the progress of a course or about personal learning difficulties. |
| **Accumulating professional judgment** | A growing mountain of informal statements from faculty members, students, and others describing their convictions based on experience that their use of information technology improves the quality and effectiveness of learning. Faculty members strongly resist giving up educational uses of information technology they believe have demonstrably improved learning. "Anecdotal evidence" reflecting the professional judgment of experienced teachers cannot be dismissed. |

**Table 2: Educational benefits of online learning**

## Transferring AIR Activities to Online

The following guidelines outline the key features and activities common to many artist-in-residence programmes (Bradford County Regional Arts Council, 2003, pp 2 - 4).

1. During the residency, the artist conducts workshops or in-class presentations outside the core group.
2. The residency begins with an introductory performance/presentation, general assembly, 'meet the artist' breakfast and wraps up with a final production or culminating event such as an art exhibit, parents' night, performance, etc.
3. The artist delivers a professional development session to staff. This can include a meeting with the artist and site staff to discuss the artist's artistic and residency work and the staff's curriculum goals. The purpose of these sessions is to aid the artist and staff in the development of new skills and to introduce new ways of integrating an art form into other subject areas.

In general terms, an effective AIR programme should aim to produce certain key outcomes:

The residency impacts the community beyond the host organisation. Arrangements can be made for presentations at a parent group meeting or for a community performance or event, often involving host core group participants. Through these events, parents and other community members become more aware of a particular art form and gain insight into how arts in education is vital to the development and success of students.
The residency design gives students an in-depth experience in the artist's discipline. This includes a full-time commitment from both the artist and the coordinators involved in the residency.
Students have a direct one-on-one interaction with the artist.
The plan of the residency focuses on making a connection between the art form and existing curricula – history, math, science, literature, etc. or across disciplines.
Artists and staff work together as a team to work with the core group at all times.
There is an evaluation process at the conclusion of the residency through which artists and host site staff are able to learn from the experience and improve upon the results, implementing them in future residencies.

In the past, the Curtin School of Art has engaged a number of resident artists many of whom have conducted technical workshops, held discussions with individual students, delivered 'lunchtime' lectures, participated in the postgraduate seminar programme, displayed their work at local exhibitions, contributed to post-conference public floor talks, and produced a series of new works with assistance from students. However from the School of Art perspective, the limitations of the traditional on-campus artist–in-residence model which requires artists to physically re-locate to Perth for a fixed period of time relate to the need to ensure the availability of:

- $ the artists' time for two to three months during a twelve week semester
- $ adequate levels of funding to support the participation of international artists
- $ studio-space and private accommodation for visiting artists
- $ suitable transport
- $ time from Curtin academic staff to provide appropriate levels of support outside university hours for visiting artists. There is a 'Duty of Care' factor for any academic department hosting a visiting academic for a period of time. The 'Duty of Care' factor in relation to an online artist-in-residence would be restricted to matters relevant to Teaching and Learning.

In practice, the concept of an artist-in-residence may take many forms and is dependent upon the specific needs and preferences of the school. If the most common activities of a physical AIR are compared with the tools and facilities available in the online mode (as drawn from Tables 1 and 2), the opportunities for an online model become self-evident:

| AIR Activity | Online AIR Feature |
|---|---|
| Technical workshops | **Website:** Live or recorded presentations using still photographs or video streaming If live, two way audio interactions. |
| Individual or group discussions with students | **Discussion groups / bulletin boards / chat rooms / netmeetings:** Synchronous/asynchronous discussions designed for one on one or one to many interactions.  In addition, a group discussion for general use could be set up with the artist checking in at agreed times to answer questions and share general information relevant to the residency. |
| 'Lunchtime' lectures | **iLecture technology:** Presented live on the web and/or recorded and delivered online for students to access in their own time |
| Participation in postgraduate seminar programmes | **Video Streaming and/or electronic transcripts delivered online:** Transcripts of discussions could be made available (pdf or other) through the website. |
| Participation in exhibitions | **Photographs / video segments / presentations online:** Artwork can be documented in context and posted on the site at the end of the residency. |
| Contribute to post-conference public seminars and workshops | **Website:** Live or recorded presentations using still photographs or video streaming Two way audio interactions if live Again, transcripts can be posted online |
| Produce a series of new art works with student assistance | **Tele-mentoring using real-time cameras:** Students can work in parallel and contribute to the artwork in progress as a shared project. This activity would be ongoing and could be facilitated online using a combination of discussion groups (synchronous or asynchronous), audio instruction clips, video, images and live examples of the artist's work in progress. |
| Available for appointments with broad range of u/g and p/g students | **Discussion groups / bulletin boards / chat rooms / netmeetings:** Agreed times and/or timetables could be facilitated online in a similar fashion to the MS Outlook calendar application |
| Exhibit own work at local shows | **Website:** Live or recorded presentations using still photographs or video |

| and participate in the post-conference public floor talks | streaming<br>Two way audio interactions if live<br>Real time cameras to provide student access to artist's 'work-in-progress' |
|---|---|

**Table 3: Comparison of common artist-in-residence activities with online facilities**

Several examples of AIR projects are available online. Whilst none of the sites selected provide the full extent of features proposed in this paper, nevertheless each site is an indication of the potential applications that can be achieved. The examples outlined below provide some insight into the variety of applications currently delivered online, the reasons for establishing the website, and the main features made available to users.

The Walker Art Centre:
> http://calendar.walkerart.org/search.wac?toCategory=605

> Although not a 'virtual' online site as exemplified by the model proposed in this paper, the Walker Art Centre website is a good example of how the activities and works of several art forms can be made available online. In their own words, the centre itself is a catalyst for the creative expression of artists and the active engagement of audiences. They actively examine the questions that shape and inspire individuals, cultures, and communities. The categories of online features include: Dance, Film, Artist, Residencies, Classes and Workshops, Exhibitions, Family Events, Festivals, Free Events, Lectures, Talks and Readings, Sculpture Garden, Music, Special Events, Theatre, and Tours. The page also includes profiles of each artist and multimedia presentations of their work all of which is archived to enable continued long-term access.

> A new Walker Art Centre scheduled to open in 2005 will include increased indoor and outdoor facilities allowing them to share more resources - from objects in the permanent collection to books in their library to an inside view of the artist's own creative process. Increasingly, the ability to link ideas from different disciplines and art forms is seen as a model for cultural institutions of the future. The planning for expansion also will encompass the development of a sophisticated infrastructure to support the presentation of art and provide personalised learning opportunities. A key aspect of the design will be a "town square," a sequence of spaces that will draw people for informal conversation, interactive learning, and community programs.

Designing Futures:                               http://www.designingfutures.com.au/

> Designing Futures in contemporary practice is a professional and business development programme for Western Australia's most innovative and talented designer-makers. Initiated by Craftwest as an expansion of the award-winning Designing Futures initiative, this site monitors the development of the WA craft and design sector across all media and disciplines. A unique feature of the site is that as the user navigates through the available links, a personalised display of preferred material is dynamically assembled and displayed.Featured members and exhibitions includes works by: Frank Bauer, Dinosaur Designs, Geoff Warn, Andrew Last, Jon Goulder, and F!nk Products.

> The site (or knowledge space as it is termed) also documents the residencies, public talks, mentorships and exhibitions so that the growing design community can experience all dimensions of the programme and contribute to discussions, debates and collaborations using the space itself. In turn, the community of people engaged with the space aim to make it self-sustaining and adaptive to the needs of all participants. In this way, as the programme expands to accommodate more fields

of design and more people become engaged, an ongoing expanding community is facilitated to provide assistance, advice, stimulation and support for new users.

The Ohio Arts Council's Arts in Education Program places professional artists in a wide variety of educational and community settings. The programme emphasises an in-depth involvement in the arts and focuses on the creative process of making art. Professional artists are at the core of the programme. Their presence in communities is a catalyst for learning and fosters greater awareness of the role of the artist and the arts in our society.

During a residency, participants come to understand the artist's experience, insights, traditions and unique vision. Residencies give participants opportunities to develop confidence, share their own ideas and create as artists. Participants discover that they must make decisions and critical assessments to communicate through the arts. The main features of this site include: Artists, Photographs and Video documentation, Definitions, Calendar, Evaluation and Resources.

**Benefits of an Online AIR programme**

For the Curtin School of Art, an online A.I.R would provide a new level of interactivity and collaboration between on campus students and the broader online community. It would also provide distant online students a reasonable reflection of the on-campus experience and a greater sense of community and collaboration with other online learners. As noted beforehand, participation in online programmes increases interactivity for students and their peers, in turn an important contributory factor in lowering attrition rates (McCracken, 2004, p 3).

The Bachelor of Arts (Art) degree has been available for three years through Open Learning Australia (OLA) and at present is experiencing unprecedented growth. Given the pressing need to accommodate this unexpected growth, plans are underway to expand this tertiary education offering to a wider population. The online Research Fellow project described in this paper presents a unique opportunity to partially meet this need and to develop new national and international partnerships. Moreover, there are a number of factors relevant to the needs of the university, lecturing staff, and students to consider:

For the University:

The budget allocation for an Artist-In-Residence for a typical duration will be fully expended on the time allocated by the artist to participating in the Curtin Online Teaching programme. *The benefit is increased investment in teaching and learning for the same cost. The cost of travel, per diems and studio expenses can be re-allocated to the development of new technology to teach creative production skills online.*
The educational Design technology developed to facilitate the Online-Artist-In-Residence has strong potential for re-application to Visiting Research Fellow programmes across the university. *The benefit is an expanded provision of Visiting Research Fellows to all university faculties and schools.*
Research activities in the area of Creative Production will be supported with potential for further growth through the use of electronic arts technologies. *The benefit is an increased potential for the university to establish new online research partnerships.*
Existing cultural programmes such as the Biennale of Electronic Arts hosted by Curtin will provide simultaneous access to the online Artist-in-Residence website. *This will expand the public programme of the Biennale by linking the Curtin Online Artist-In-Residence to the premiere Electronic Arts event in the southern hemisphere and thus*

*providing valuable exposure to its increasing local, national and international audiences and partners.*

For Staff:

The use of interactive online teaching facilities would significantly expand the contribution made by the online Artist-In-Residence programme. Opportunities for cross-involvement between online teaching programmes and on-campus teaching programmes as well as increased opportunities for building networks, establishing links and forming partnerships with national and international artists and institutions would naturally follow. *The main benefits would be support for cross-involvement between university on-campus programmes and online programmes, and connections for creative production exchange between university staff and other national and international artists and institutions.*

For Students:

Art students benefit from exposure and interaction with a broad cross-section of art and artists. The current Faculty staffing model for the BA (Art) Online is based on staffing the programme separately from the On-Campus program. The BA (Art) Online is still in its infancy as it only commenced three years ago and has just produced its first graduates this year. Consequently, the number of staff involved in online teaching of art practice is small. *The benefit is an expanded range of possible national and international Artists would be made available to students.*

It is envisaged that the Online Artist-In-Residence will be actively engaged in the BA (Art) Online discussion groups for designated units (relevant to the Visiting Artist's practice) for each OLA Study Period. *Students enrolled in the BA (Art) Online program will benefit from the creative input of the Online Artist-In-Residence as an additional source of feedback and response to their work.*

Students enrolled in the BA (Art) On-Campus degree will also be offered limited access to the online artist-in-residence site.*This will be managed by a Coordinator from the On-Campus degree and could be established as part of an online workshop for on-campus students*.

Students enrolled in the first two years of the BA (Art) in Curtin's four regional campuses in Western Australia is managed by Curtin's Centre for Regional Education (CRE). Currently these are small groups with one lecturer in art practice teaching seventy-five percent of the curriculum for each of the two-year levels. *These students will also be permitted access to the expanded opportunities offered through the provision of an Online Artist-In-Residence.*

*Students enrolled within the Faculty of BEAD postgraduate programmes undertaking related research projects will be able to consult with the Online-Artist-In-Residence.*

If designed with student autonomy in mind, the online environment fosters independent, self-directed learning. Students can be encouraged to manage their own use of Internet links, search engines, discussion boards, chat, e-mail, and other media to establish ad hoc or pre-planned study groups. Online students are also given a distinct advantage over their on-campus peers in that they are afforded the opportunity to e-mail questions to their lecturers as and when required and to engage in dialogue that is difficult to emulate within the classroom. Establishing the expectation for every student to respond intelligently and thoughtfully engage in ongoing 'discussions' assists to further enhance the educational value of these activities.

Another interesting educational option made possible by the Web is online mentoring (Bonk, Malikowski, Angeli, & East, 1998). Mentors may include experts in the field, practitioners, and peers to provide feedback, support, practical insights and wisdom directly related to a unit or content area or to extended 'discussions' that may encompass broader learning experiences. Examples of online mentoring practice may take the form of questions sent to experts and responses received via email, synchronous and asynchronous chats with

experts at set times or as required, or expert evaluations of learners' work and ideas. The strategic use of online mentors introduces unique opportunities for engaging learners and drawing them into the periphery of learning communities that previously were unavailable in the classroom environment.

## Online Communities of Learning and Communities of Practice

The goal of many online developers is to create virtual teams, classes, or learning communities that for one reason or another share a common goal. Through such synergies learners recognise the need to assist and support one another. Online courses can be designed to facilitate online learning communities as evidenced by special names or identities for team workspaces, interactive commentary on peer work, titles given to various activities or terms, and continual exchange of student accomplishments, their use of online resources and examples of overall online participation. Among the tools and features that might contribute to creating a sense of community are chat rooms, calendars, instant messaging, member profiles, shared Web links, work galleries, general announcements, archives, application sharing, drop boxes, member surveys and polls, online libraries (e.g., online articles) and information portals (Bonk, 2004, p13).

Within an online community of learners there is often a sense of identity, membership, shared knowledge and recognition for the accomplishments of all participants (Wenger, 1998). Typically, there are shared goals and a common space in which to work collaboratively to fulfill the agreed goals. Using these resources, lecturers, mentors, practitioners, and students with diverse skills and interests can 'meet' whenever they want, learn about new programmes, trends, or initiatives, and find resources and materials they consider useful for their respective learning needs. Once engaged, all collaborators can share documents, chat with guest experts, post items in their own workrooms, collectively browse Web sites, and interact via mailing lists and discussion boards. It is envisaged there are several disciplines or fields that would benefit from some type of online mentoring or expert support. Examples that immediately come to mind include the areas of Design and Architecture.

Collaborative forums as described above also take advantage of the expertise that many learners bring to the virtual classroom while providing a means to contextualise knowledge in an authentic learning environment. For example, by using videostreaming technology, participants in a community of practice may focus on developing a shared sense of ownership, permit dynamic adjustments to accord with the needs of all users, enable wider audience participation, and to generate new communities of inquiry. In addition to video, online sites may include lesson plan transcripts, examples of student work, hyperlinks to lesson plans, various Web resources, and teacher reflections on overall progress. Finally, special interest groups could also be permitted to conduct online discussions on any aspect of the available content. Ultimately, the goal is not only to create an online community rich in resource sharing, but also to facilitate dialogue and provide on-the-fly or just-in-time support.

## Concluding Thoughts

In this paper, we argued the feasibility of transferring the tried and tested artist in residence model traditionally used to encourage excellence and creativity in undergraduate and postgraduate art students to an online mode. Whilst not expected to be a perfect substitute for the physical presence of a well-known artist, nevertheless there are clear benefits for both artist and students in engaging a web-based environment as an integral part of their learning experience.

We submit the Artist in Residence model will pave the way for the adoption of a broader, more holistic, creative, and flexible framework for structuring the learning process. Such a model is necessitated by changing expectations in graduate attributes that includes a

capacity to apply advanced thinking and analysis skills to the creative resolution of complex tasks. This view is further premised on the need to broaden students' experiences by devising collaborative learning environments that are inclusive, evolutionary, and encourage conceptual understanding as an integral part of the learning process. Within this framework, the provision of a broad range of strategies for promoting creative thinking and interpreting the many views inherent within a community of artists and students will naturally lead to enhanced learning outcomes.

As in all applications of this type, the effectiveness of information technology in contributing to learning will be a function of how well the technology supports a particular model of learning and the appropriateness of the model to the chosen learning approach. With these factors in mind, the online AIR vision will encompass several goals to enable:

> individual learners, teachers, and related support professionals to better connect to information, ideas and each other using effective combinations of pedagogy and technology - old and new, on-campus and online.
> teachers, learners and academic support professionals to quickly access quality resources and support services and as a consequence grow to believe in their own ability to improve teaching and learning.
> teachers, learners and academic support professionals to share responsibility for improving teaching and learning knowing that those with knowledge, experience, and wisdom - especially the faculty, both individually and collectively retain the ultimate responsibility for guiding the learning process.
> all participants to be involved in teaching and learning throughout life. That is, "The best way to learn a subject is to teach it". Learning by teaching is truly one of the most powerful ways to learn.
> learners, teachers, and academic support professionals to be proficient in locating, evaluating, selecting, and implementing instructional options so that they also receive frequent opportunities to exchange ideas and information about: academic content, skills, knowledge, and understanding; educational and technological options; and communicating face-to-face, via telecommunications, through all media.

And a final thought to reflect on (Gilbert, 2000 p 1):

> In higher education, we do not need a vision of the perfect curriculum, the perfect textbook, the perfect Website, the perfect classroom, the perfect campus, the perfect home study, the perfect carrel, or the perfect combination of media.  We need a vision of improvement and change – how to keep moving forward, how to know when we're making mistakes, and how to correct them.


**Biographical information:**

Annie English, BA (Fine Arts) Hons (UWA). MA (Monash).

Annie English is the Coordinator of the Bachelor of Arts (Art) available online from Curtin University through Open Learning Australia. Besides her role as an Academic Coordinator and arts educator, Annie English is an art writer for national publications, an independent curator of contemporary art exhibitions and a former assistant-curator at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

Dr Stephen Quinton, BEd (Curtin). MEd (UWA). PhD (UWA).

Stephen Quinton is employed by the Learning Support Network at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia as an academic lecturer and researcher in the design and delivery of multi-modal learning environments. His current research interests include the development of a database managed learning objects framework as applied to the design of online

learning environments and the adaptation of learning styles and multiple intelligences theory to the provision of customised learning solutions.

**Reference List:**

Bonk, Curtis J. (2004). The Perfect E-Storm emerging technology, enormous learner demand, enhanced pedagogy, and erased budgets Part 1: Storms #1 and #2 [Online].*The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education.* June. Available: WWW Ref. http://www.obhe.ac.uk/products/reports/pdf/Bonk.pdf

Bonk, C. J., Malikowski, S., Angeli, C., & East, J. (1998). Web-based case conferencing for preservice teacher education: Electronic discourse from the field. *Journal of Educational Computing Research.* Vol. 19, No. 3. pp 267 - 304.

Bradford County Regional Arts Council. (2003). Everything You Need To Know: What is an Artist in Residence [Online]. Northern Tier Partnership for Arts in Education (NTPAIE) Artist In Residence Program. pp 2 - 4. Available: WWW Ref. http://www.bcrac.org/forms/whatis.pdf

Bruner, Jerome and Anglin, Jeremy M. (1973) Beyond the Information Given - Studies in the Psychology of Knowing, Toronto, Canada: George J. McLeod Limited.

Geer, Ruth. (2000). Social interdependence in collaborative interactivity in an internet based learning environment [Online]. In 'Distance education: an open question?' Available: WWW ref: http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/24005/20020403/www.com.unisa.edu.au/cccc/papers/non_refereed/geer.htm

Gilbert, Steven W. (2000). A New Vision Worth Working Toward -- Connected Education and Collaborative Change [Online]. February. Available: WWW Ref. http://www.tltgroup.org/gilbert/NewVwwt2000--2-14-00.htm

Gilbert, Steven W. (2003). Why Bother? [Online]. Teaching Learning and Technology group. March 4th. pp 3 – 4. Available: WWW Ref. http://www.tltgroup.org/gilbert/WhyBotherArticle.pdf

Gipson, Simon. (1996) Feral, Facsimile of Facilitated? Technology Serving Teaching and Learning. Tridos School Village, Chiang Mai, Thailand: Learning and Teaching: Implications for Gifted and Talented Students.

Glatthorn, A. A. (1994). Constructivism: Implications fir Curriculum. International Journal for Educational Reform, Vol. 3, No. 4, October. pp 449 - 55.

Harper, Barry and Hedberg, John. (1997). Creating Motivating Interactive Learning Environments: a Constructivists View. Perth, Western Australia: Academic Computing Services, Curtin University of Technology. 14th Annual Conference Proceedings of the ASCILITE. pp 11 - 31.

McCracken, Holly. (2004). Extending Virtual Access: Promoting Engagement and Retention through Integrated Support Systems [Online]. Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration. Vol. VII, No. I. Spring. Available: WWW Ref. http://www.westga.edu/%7Edistance/jmain11.html

Oddliefson, E. (1994). What do we want our Schools to do? Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 75, No. 6, February. pp 432 - 7.

Slay, Jill. (1997). The Use of the Internet in Creating an Effective Learning Environment [Online]. Paper presented at the Third Australian World Wide Web Conference, Lismore, Australia. Available: WWW Ref. http://ausweb.scu.edu.au/proceedings/slay/index.html

Tsantis, Linda A. (1991) <u>Technology as the Catalyst</u>, Aston Clinton, Bucks, UK: Accelerated Learning Systems Limited.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Woods, Robert and Ebersole, Samuel. (2003). Becoming a "Communal Architect" in the Online Classroom - Integrating Cognitive and Affective Learning for Maximum Effect in Web-Based Learning [Online]. <u>Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration</u>, Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring. June 27th. Available: WWW Ref:
http://www.westga.edu/%7Edistance/ojdla/spring61/woods61.htm