

Interview with Prof. Gilly Salmon

Prof. Gilly Salmon from the University of Leicester was the Keynote speaker at the “10. Business Meeting” of the Austrian “Forum Neue Medien” Community on the 9. and 10. of June. At this event SIG-GLUE had the opportunity to talk with her regarding Game-based learning issues. The questions asked have been collected from SIG-GLUE Community members.

Question by: Apostolos Gamas

“It is expected that Game based Learning are more appealing than traditional learning methods for young people, based on Prof Gilly Salmon experience which is the acceptance of Game Based Learning at middle-aged people comparing with other Learning methods”

Gilly Salmon

My belief is that you cannot determine learning methods based on peoples ages, so I would actually reject that idea. That doesn't mean to say that some people would find it more or less appealing, but I wouldn't base it on ages. I mean after all, I know lots of people who spend their life playing card games and that has got nothing to do with their age. Actually it also depends what you mean by games. People play bridge and chess and a lot of people in my age are very keen on bridge. Now I have just learned how to play black jack and I think I'd come into this middle aged people.

I haven't found that dividing things up into age groups has been in particularly helpful. I think there are other ways of looking at what kind of pedagogical approach appeals to people other than age; age is too simplistic.

Question by: Hamish Macleod

Some people would seem to relish game-like activities more than others. I would like to ask Prof Salmon if she has any views about the relationship between personality and participation in, or benefit from, game-based activities - whether online or F2F.

Can she offer any insights about how teachers / tutors should introduce games to students in order to maximise their positive engagement with the activities?

Gilly Salmon

I think I'm going to say no to that one as well. There probably is a link between personality and the desire to participate in games, but I don't know what it is. I think that what we have to do at the moment is to scale up and be inclusive for everyone. Looking for personality and participation is a reductionist approach and it isn't one I would probably choose to take. What our responsibility is instead, is to have learning activities of such a wide appeal that it doesn't matter what your personality is; you'll get drawn in.

Anastasia Sfiri

What would you answer if the question referred specifically to digital games? Computer games like simulations, ego shooters, multi user games, etc?

Gilly Salmon

50% of the worlds population is under 30 and by the time people are 25 on average they have spend 10 000 hours playing digital games. Whereas those of us a little bit older have not done that. So it's easy for them. On the other hand, if something is worth while doing then it doesn't matter if it is digital or face to face. It has to do with: “do I get something out of it?”, “do I enjoy it?”.

Now, as regard to how teachers / tutors should introduce games, I don't think you can lay motivation on people. I don't think you can make someone positive. Motivation isn't something that you can come along and say: “Ok, Anastasia, here is a nice little bit motivation for you, suck this!”. It just doesn't work like that. Our responsibility is very different from that. It has do to with making it absolutely clear in advance, whatever the activity, why they would do this and what they would get out of it and what is expected of them. If they feel comfortable in the group of people they are playing with, then they are going to do it regardless of what it is. In fact, the more the teacher has to explain the more likely it is to be successful.

Question by: Lotte Krisper-Ullyett

If I met Gilly Salmon personally I would like to ask her:

whether she has experienced any limits of collaborative e-learning;

whether she thinks all types of knowledge are equally suitable for collaborative e-learning;

which tools she would prefer for her teaching and why?

Gilly Salmon

Yes, of course there are limits. There are certain kinds of knowledge that people can acquire more quickly through more traditional methods. If you think about the five stage model, up and till about level three, you don't have to collaborate, you require some knowledge or information. Otherwise I would say the limits are about time and fatigue. If you constantly give people the same kind of activity (and you often get a teacher who is so hooked that it has to be collaborative) and that's all they do, then people get collaboration fatigue. They would say: "Oh no, I don't have to participate in a group again! Give me a book to read, please!". I think you need a diversity of activity. Those are the kinds of limits. I don't think there is any kind of topic or a discipline you can't do collaboratively, but you wouldn't want to do everything that way. So it is a matter of very carefully selecting.

I think the English term "Horses for courses" is appropriate here. It's a racing term; you select the right kind of process for the right kind of outcome or race. So that would be the right kind of collaboration.

Whether all types of knowledge are equally suitable for collaborative e-learning, well, that is actually an oxymoron. You see, it depends on your view on knowledge. I'm a constructivist, so I think knowledge is individual. It has to be either acquired by the person through personal discovery and exploration, or in conjunction with others. And I think there clearly are types of information you might need to convey perhaps in simpler ways. Much of what I've done has been in the area of professional learning of various kinds and I know that's suitable.

Regarding the tools I'm a "cafélatian", which means that I like any tool that acts as a mediator between me and others. I'm not really interested in tools that deliver something to me. I like tools that enable me to work with others in some way. So I see for instance the web as a mediator rather than a delivery device. Those are the kinds of tools I prefer.

Question by: Jutta Pauschenwein

I have some experience of virtual role plays with students or participants of trainings. To play the game I'm using a learning platform with discussion forum, chat and virtual group rooms.

My experience is that people are often shy to fulfil their role - it seems there exists a lot of opposition to "become another person" and additionally there is the problem of virtuality.

I try to prepare people for the virtual role play but sometimes the whole scenario doesn't work at all.

So I want to ask Gilly if she knows some tricks how I could seduce people in a more convincing way. How should a nearly optimal game scenario look like? Where can I find guidelines or some examples?

Gilly Salmon

I can't answer the last two questions, because that's coming within your limit, isn't it? The optimal game scenarios and guidelines, I don't have those and I don't know enough about it. So I think the second two would be really what you are trying to do on the side.

Regarding the first one, I don't think you should trick people into doing anything, but that's probably a translation thing. I am often seducing people though to take part.

Anastasia Sfiri

How do you seduce people?

The way you do it is through all what I have called the level two activity within the five stage model. It is that you have to spend a huge amount of time and energy to help them feel comfortable with each other, before you can do the more difficult things later on. And I don't just mean social activities. There are three aspects to it.

- One, they have to understand something about the online environment, about their own identity, the nature of virtuality, about cyberspace and about the psychological and social environment. Your responsibility as the leader of that group is to give them a wide range of experiences.

- Secondly and at the same time, you need to introduce people to the domain of learning, and show them how they can use online resources and facilities to enhance their learning in that area.
- Thirdly you need to help people to manage their time, because time online is very disruptive. Unless you show them ways for doing that, then you will not be getting constant participation.

So there is a huge bridge to cross at level two to enable people to do that. However, if you are successful, then you can do whatever you like with them after that and obviously an optimal game scenario. Most of my experience has been with off line games. I've done a lot of very large scale games with management learners over the years, mainly in the area of creativity which I've taught for over 15 years. And obviously you often use simulations to go with it. I'd be very surprised if there is one optimal way of doing it. What I do know is that you need a very strong group identity before that would work.

Question by: Maja Pivec

I would like to ask Prof. Salmon what is her experience in application of games for learning? Which digital game she would recommend for breaking the ice and motivating the students for the semester?

Gilly Salmon

I don't actually use structured games. I use a whole range of small e-tivities, text based activities using bulletin boards. There is one thing I would like to say here. Don't try and simulate the face to face experience online here. It's better to use the special facilities that you have online in other ways. If the first thing you do is to get people to put pictures of each other up, then all you are doing is simulating the face to face experience. Whereas it is better to enable people to gradually contribute and to allow their personality to emerge, and their contribution to the group to become clear. This is other than try and stick pictures up. People need to understand their potential contribution and it needs to be through working together.

Question by: Anastasia Sfiri

Do you think that all online collaborative activities can be adapted to be played as games?

Gilly Salmon

Probably yes, I'm sure that's absolutely true, and there are quite a lot of examples. That doesn't mean to say it is also desirable, because you want people to be working together, you don't want them to compete. So there is a limit to the benefits of competition.