

SIG-GLUE: A Special Interest Group for Game-based Learning in Universities and Lifelong Learning

www.sig-glue.net

Communications Platform Users' Guide

SIG-GLUE is a special interest group for those interested in using game-based and game-informed approaches in higher education, and other lifelong learning settings.

The aim of the group is to promote more use, and better use, of better games in learning. The work of SIG-GLUE has been supported by the eLearning initiative of the European Commission.

The team working together to establish SIG-GLUE is made up of educators and educational researchers from Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Finland and Sweden.

The team would like to invite all those interested in the use, or potential use, of games in adult educational settings to join in communications and discussions. Contribution is the key to the value of a collaborative network.

No special computer experience or software is required to join in with the communications activities – just a web browser. All areas of the site are accessible from the Home page.

Please note that the information on SIG-GLUE site is subject to a disclaimer that also entails an ethical code of conduct. You can upload the disclaimer from the SIG-GLUE Home Page.

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Introduction

This guide provides an overview of the various features of the SIG-GLUE Web site, with descriptions of how these features might be used.

Announcements

The SIG-GLUE community is mostly about communications and “networking” – the chance to meet and talk online to others interested in games and learning.

You can find out what new communication opportunities are available on the SIG-GLUE site by regularly looking at the Announcements area. If you find an announcement of an interesting discussion topic, or new Library or Game contribution, you can then follow that in the relevant SIG-GLUE site area.

As a member of SIG-GLUE you can contribute to this area and inform or invite the community to visit your activities on the site. Your announcement will go through the SIG-GLUE administration system and will be published within a couple of days.

Newsletter

The bimonthly newsletter is an important part of the work of SIG-GLUE. It is intended as a vehicle for the dissemination of news and information about events and activities relating to game-based learning. An archive of past editions is held, with the most recent edition at the top.

The newsletter contains information about conferences and meetings, research activities, or relevant new products. It will enable you to gather the latest information in the field of game-based learning, to find out about new publications on research or educational practice, or to hear of new games for learning.

It is, of course, as important for members to be able to contribute to the newsletter as to be able to read it. Information – about a meeting you are organising, or aware of, or about a new product – can be entered through a simple web form, and will then appear in the next edition of the newsletter to be circulated, and posted on the web site.

Library

The site's Library section provides a route to all sorts of useful information about game-based learning.

In the **Literature** area you can look for materials under a number of headings: book reviews, articles, research reports, announcements and materials of SIG-GLUE events. This section of the site provides members with a way to keep up to date with the current developments in the area of game-based learning, to identify the main “players” in the field, and to find out what they are doing and saying. This will be the place where policy documents may be announced, case studies described, or suggestions about **Good Practice** can be offered. You can explore questions about the theoretical and practical aspects of using game-based approaches in teaching and learning. You will find, for example, original articles, commentaries on research, book reviews and information about events relating to the area.

The **Glossary** section provides an area in which the use of terminology can be explored and discussed. One can look at the glossary to explore the use of terminology in the field, and add comments on the definitions one finds. This is not just a static list of definitions, but allows users to contribute new definitions, or to make comments of the information that they find there.

A **links** section exists, providing pointers to useful web-based resources.

We invite you to participate in the development of the SIG-GLUE community by contributing to all Library areas, and so making the web site an authoritative and up-to-date source of information.

Games

Part of the work of SIG-GLUE has been to establish a procedure, and the evaluation criteria, for the award of a **Quality Stamp** for game-based learning materials. Items are submitted by games developers for scrutiny by an independent panel of experts and practitioners in the field. The Quality Stamp is intended both to provide independent help to those (teachers or learners) seeking to identify resources to use in the learning setting, and also to provide a context around which the game developer community can explore and discuss the nature of quality, and work towards its enhancement.

The certified games will be listed in the **Quality Games** area and will be of assured quality and usefulness in the educational setting, having been submitted by their developers or publishers to an evaluation process towards the award of a Quality Stamp. The Quality Stamp service is scheduled to start at the end of May 2006.

Those developing games for educational settings are invited to submit those games for independent evaluation, and the award of the Quality Stamp. The idea of the award process is to encourage high standards of educational practice among games developers, and to build a community of developers working with educational objectives in mind.

Those game developers who submit their products for the award of the Quality Stamp will be those particularly concerned to ensure, and to demonstrate, that their work is based on sound educational principles, and is of proven value in the teaching and learning context.

Details of the scheme, and instructions on how to submit a game for the award, are provided on the website.

An important aim of the SIG-GLUE community has been the identification of people and organisations active in the field, and the forging of appropriate collaborative links, both local and international. The **developers** and **actors in the field** sections of the web site enable members to advertise their own activities to others and, in turn, search for links to others working in the field.

If you are individually active in the field of game based learning, or are a member of a group researching in the areas, or developing game-based approaches or software, we would invite you to contribute information about your activities to the “Developers” or to the “Actors in the Field” area of the web site. These areas are intended to provide individuals and groups with an opportunity to advertise their work, and for the community to find out about the various networks, association and consortia that exist. In this way, we hope that research and development collaborations may be fostered.

Forum

The core of the communications activity of the SIG-GLUE site is the discussion forum area.

The forums provide an opportunity for network members to pursue discussion threads started by others, reading, and contributing to the discussion, as they go. Members can also start their own threads of discussion, and invite others to join in the conversations. Discussions will cover the pedagogical, technical, and the wider social issues surrounding game-based learning.

We hope that these discussion forums will provide an opportunity for ideas to be explored and developed, and new collaborations forged.

One of the two SIG-GLUE forum areas is organised into a number of **Workgroups** – particular discussion topics, or projects. To start a workgroup in this area you will need to contact the SIG-GLUE administrators to set up a new moderated discussion area for you. More details about how to start your own workgroup are given below.

The discussions in the Workgroups area of the forum are moderated, that means that a member of SIG-GLUE has initiated a discussion with a group of people and has set up the rules for

communication within it. Please check in this area the Welcome messages of the moderator to find out if and how the discussion is moderated and by whom.

There is also a more general area called **SIG-GLUE** where you can freely start your own threads of discussion, and invite others to join in the conversations. We hope that these discussion forums will provide an opportunity for ideas to be explored and developed, and new collaborations forged.

How to start and moderate a workgroup in the Workgroups Area of the Forum

We would like to encourage groups to come and conduct discussions within the SIG-GLUE forum environment. It is intended that such interaction, and the sharing of ideas and experiences, will contribute to developments in the field, and the forming of new research and development links.

If you, as an individual, or as a member of a group of colleagues, would like to start a new “workgroup” then please contact the SIG-GLUE organisation by email to contact@sig-glue.net. We would like to encourage groups to come and conduct discussions within the SIG-GLUE forum environment.

Please include following information in your E-Mail:

- Title of Workgroup
- Brief Description (length should not exceed 100 words)
- Starting date and approximate duration
- Moderator/s
- Number of participants invited (you can also use the announcements to invite members of the community)
- Availability in the Community: Public or Private

The SIG-GLUE administration office will get in contact with you for setting up the workgroup area.

For ideas of how to moderate your workgroup and achieve your aims and objectives please have a look at the **Moderation Checklist** available in the annex of this document. These guidelines will be soon linked in the Forum area of the site.

SIG-GLUE Network: Who is Who and Personal Profiles

An important point of such an online community is the opportunity that it provides for networking among its members.

Clicking on the name of any forum contributor will take you to the **personal information** that that contributor has provided about him- or herself. That person may have entered information about their occupation, the organisation that they work for, or may have given more detailed information about their interests. It is possible to upload a photograph to increase the personal feel. From this page of personal information, it is also possible to send a private message to the person concerned. If that person is presently online and logged on, they will receive the message immediately. If they are not logged on, the message will be saved and they can pick it up when next they use the system.

Members of the community can also be contacted by electronic mail, if while in their profile settings they select to make their email address available on the site.

As well as being able to find out more about any member of the network by following the link from a forum post, you can also visit the “**Who is Who**” area which allows you to search through the entire

list of all members. You can therefore search for members with shared interests; for example, to identify those who are working in the development or production of game-based learning.

We would like to emphasise that the whole point of this enterprise is to support networking and personal participation, the forging of links of common interest, and the building of a community around research and practice in game-based learning.

If you are a registered member of the SIG-GLUE community you can contribute details to your own personal profile, on the site accessible through the **Your Profile** button on the top navigation menu. Doing this will increase the sense of community, but will also enable networks of common interest to form. You can also add a photograph to your personal profile.

Register

So finally, but very importantly, we would like people to join the SIG-GLUE community, and register. There is no cost associated with membership.

From the Home screen of the SIG-GLUE site, new members can register by following the link at the top right-hand side of the page. A screen will appear on which you can set up a user name and password, and also provide some details about yourself.

If you are a registered member of the SIG-GLUE community you can contribute details to your own personal profile. Doing this will increase the sense of community, but will also enable networks of common interest to form. We suggest adding a photograph to your personal profile to increase the personal feel of the presentation of your person on the community.

Netiquette

Most users of the Internet are familiar with some informal code of conduct which encourages responsible and sensitive behaviour while communicating online. These codes are variously stated; a good example is to be found in Wikipedia at :
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netiquette>

Netiquette can be usefully summed up by saying that we should resist any temptation to behave less well online than we would behaviour in the physical world. As we cannot immediately see the impact that our words have on those with whom we are communicating, we should choose those words carefully, avoid giving or taking offence, and think very carefully about how our words are likely to be received. In the context of discussion, we should be sensitive and supportive in how we respond to the opinions expressed by others. We can engage in robust disagreement and argument, but should do so politely, and without resorting to anger or aggression.

Annex: Checklist for Moderation of Workgroups using Discussion Forums

Below you will find some issues that you might wish to consider when moderating a workgroup. A structured discussion as suggested below will help your group achieve the aims and objectives of your workgroup more efficiently.

1. Preparation Stage

Consider the Title of discussion

Consider the Aims and Objectives

- What are the main issues that should be discussed?
- What further related topics could be addressed?

Consider the Timeframe

- How long will the discussion approximately be running for?
- Which different Topics / Threads will be included in the discussion?

2. Invitation for workgroup participants

Invite participants by distributing an E-Mail message to your personal contacts

Invite participants by using the announcements service of SIG-GLUE site

Suggested content of invitation:

- give an overview of what is planned and of what can be expected by the participants, e.g. how often are people expected to contribute?
- provide a friendly environment for the participants
- briefly explain the objectives of the discussion
- give the participants a clear time frame
- ask for participation commitment if interested (optional)

3. Open Discussion in Forum

Create first Topic / Thread in the area of your workgroup with welcoming and introductory content:

- Introduce your self as the moderator who will moderate this discussion
- Write a brief introduction to the discussion
- Outline the aims of the discussion
- Outline Timeframe
- Underline the value of the discussion
- Point to any rules for collaboration (e.g. who should be responsible for open new discussion topics in the workgroup?)

Comment: The welcome topic should be already online when the announcement is posted so that interested participants find some content in the area.

4. Open first discussion topic (thread) within your workgroup

Consider and communicate concept for the first topic:

- What is the objective of this thread?

- What are the possible / expected results?

Things to consider when opening the first thread:

- Socialisation aspects are important
- Could contain a personal aspect (e.g. what is your experience with the field...) (Research shows that when the moderator shares information about his or her personal experience or context, then participation by other members of the group is encouraged)
- You can ask a first question with a personal reference to start the ball rolling.

5. Summary of First Discussion topic

Summary of discussion within the Forum Platform:

- This should be the responsibility of the Moderator, although it can be delegated by agreement to another member of the group.
- Summarise the main results of the discussion.
- Inform participants about the summary of the discussion thread
- Post the summary as a new topic, and open this up for further discussion and contributions

You might consider using the Announcement area of the Web site to draw attention to the outcomes of the discussion, and send an email to all those originally invited to participate.

- Announce the opening of the next discussion thread – outline topic (You may not need to do this if you know that the participants constantly log in to the Forum)

6. Continue with new Discussion threads as above – steps 3, 4 and 5

7. Close the Workgroup

Thank the participants

Summarise the acquired knowledge and the results

You may wish to document and publish the results; this you could do through the SIG-GLUE Newsletter and/or in the SIG-GLUE Library area. You can also post an announcement to draw community members' attention to the publication of your results in the library.

There is good advice about the role and conduct of the online discussion moderator to be found in the excellent book by Gilly Salmon (2000). E-moderating: the key to teaching and learning online. London, Sterling, Kogan Page.