

Introduction

Chapter 5 focuses on the effects that a reality game such as *Survivor*© exerts on the dynamics and complexities of group functioning in a web-based module. The discussion begins with a description of areas of special interest as these became evident from week to week. Each of these summaries is followed by a commentary on the significant happenings of each particular week.

The following question guided reflection in this thesis:

*How could a web-based module that was inspired by the ideas from the reality television show *Survivor*© affect the various types of interaction and the dynamics between the adult learners?*

To make the answers to this question more explicit, the researcher formulated two sub-questions:

- *How did the reality game elements affect the group's functioning?*
- *How did the above-mentioned elements affect the complexities of the dynamics of the group?*

These sub-questions will be addressed in the chapters 6 and 7. In this chapter, though, I

would like to take the reader on a journey through the 6 weeks as they progressed, in order to get a feel for the dynamics at play in this module.

Prelude

It was in discussions with the course creator and monitor, Professor Johannes Cronjé, that I agreed to approach the module on elearning on the basis of a metaphorical recreation in cyber space of the television reality show *Survivor*©. We agreed that this particular metaphor reflected the ethos of the MEd programme with great accuracy because the master's course had acquired a reputation over the years for being a demanding course in which learners were plunged into the deep end and in which they were required to rely heavily on collaboration and peer support.

Initially I jotted down some of my own ideas, and analysed the *Survivor*© game as it was presented on television. I then structured the various elements of the game to reflect the particular outcomes of the module. These preliminary notes went through a number of cycles of improvement and refinement before they eventually evolved into the module as it was presented.

Professor Cronjé had already been using *Yahoo Groups* as a primary communication tool between himself and learners in earlier modules, and it was decided that we should

make use of this facility initially to act as the hub for the elearning module. Prior to engaging in this research, I had been part of an international research team that had investigated the educational potential of a number of free Internet applications, products and services. Because the group of which I was a part had examined *Yahoo Groups* and *Yahoo Messenger* as part of its brief, I was familiar with how they worked and with their potential in the educational environment. This 'prior knowledge' turned out to have both positive and negative spin-offs.

Because I had thoroughly examined all the functions of *Yahoo Groups* as a member of that earlier research group, I was excited by an opportunity to use their software in an authentic educational setting even though the amount of advertising (by means of which the site is maintained and financed as a free service) was a highly distracting feature. Because I was already familiar with the various tools and because I planned to use them in a new and constructive way, my sense of what was traditionally possible on the Internet was significantly expanded. I envisaged, for example, how I would put up the assignments in the 'Files' functionality, how learners would use the 'Photos' section to introduce themselves, and how we could make use of the 'Links' section to share interesting and relevant Internet addresses with each other.

It did not, however, occur to me to verify whether or not all the participants were actually using the web-based version of *Yahoo Groups*. I had simply assumed that all the learners would access the discussions in this way. What I did not realise was that the majority of the learners would opt to receive their *Yahoo Group* messages in the e-mail form that is automatically forwarded by *Yahoo* to private e-mail addresses. This option is one that users can select when they initially sign up for *Yahoo*: they can choose either to have the mail forwarded to their e-mail addresses (push), or they can also obtain access to the web-based environment for the group, which includes quite a number of additional features (pull). This oversight of my part precipitated disastrous events within the first week of *CyberSurviver* because there are vast differences between these two ways of access.

Summaries of Weeks 1 – 6

In this section, the main activities of the module for each week of study will be described.

Week 1: 18 – 25 July 2002

Week 1 began with a short face-to-face introductory session during which I introduced myself and explained how the module was going to be presented through the medium of the *Survivor*© metaphor. I

also warned learners of the risks involved in playing a game such as *CyberSurviver*, and told them about the research project that we had planned.

Twenty-four people attended this introductory session. Since I had not been involved with this group before the eLearning module, I did not know any of their names or faces. It was therefore difficult for me to know who in the audience were legitimate students and who those were who had other interests in the module (this latter group being those who – for whatever reason – had no intention of enrolling formally at that stage).

I therefore went ahead and divided the people in the room into 4 tribes of 6 members each. The learners were asked to locate themselves on an imaginary straight line (continuum), one end of which represented a thorough working knowledge of the Internet, while the other end represented complete ignorance and unfamiliarity of the Internet. They were then numbered in sets of 1 to 4. After that we grouped all the ones, and then all the twos, and so on until the last person, together. The newly formed tribes were then asked to come up with a unique tribal name and slogan with which to identify themselves.

It was at this time that I also directed them to *Yahoo Groups* where, earlier the day, I had posted two documents to the 'Files' section.

One was an introduction to the course, and the other contained the individual and tribal assignments for that first week.

Unaware of the fact that the learners were all excited by the prospect of playing the game and that they were therefore not paying sufficient attention to the fact that the two documents they needed to download were available in *Yahoo Groups*, I left the contact session that evening, fully expecting the first buzz of activity early on the next day (Friday, 19 July 2002). I anticipated that learners would begin to plan their activities with a sense of urgency after they had accessed the assignment document and realized that they had precious little time in which to complete rather a lot of work.

This anticipated frenzy of activity did not happen – neither on the Friday, nor on the Saturday, nor on the Sunday that followed. The first real signs of activity began to appear on Monday as learners began to wonder what exactly they were suppose to be doing. By that time I was worried, faced as I was with a number of unanswered questions such as:

What exactly has gone wrong? Why did they not respond? Did they not grasp the information about the assignments? Have they found the assignment – but perhaps not understand what to do? Are

they all perhaps working quietly but frantically behind the scenes?

On that Saturday afternoon, I posted my first message in the hope of nudging them along:

I hope that you are all by now well on your way with both your individual and your tribal assignments.

I then went ahead, confirmed the names and slogans of the 4 tribes, and repeated the grouping of the various members of the tribes.

Tribe 1: Uno

Slogan: Uno, we are number 1!

Members: Roleen, Brian, Wendy, Catherine, Gabrielle, Larissa

Although I felt decidedly uneasy about the lack of activity, I nonetheless tried to remain true to the game by adding an undertone of suspense by writing at the bottom of the list:

Tribe 5: To be seen...

A message giving the learners a couple of pointers for Assignments 1 and 2 followed soon afterwards. I also requested the tribes each to appoint a spokesperson for the week. I was still under the impression that the learners had all accessed the

assignments, and was hoping that they were quietly communicating behind the scenes in order to complete them in time.

Week 1's Immunity Challenge in which learners had to play an online game and post evidence of their highest score to *Yahoo Groups* were posted later on that Saturday afternoon (14:10). A poll that inquired whether learners had access to the Internet from home or from work, was posted very early on Sunday morning (00:24). One of the purposes of the poll was to ascertain whether learners were going to be able to work together synchronously. It was also intended to serve as an explanatory indicator that might account for the absence of activity online over the weekend. Only if hardly anyone had access to a personal computer at home could the weekend's prolonged (and by now ominous) silence be adequately explained.

The poll asked the following question:

I have access to a networked computer (one that is connected to the Internet) ...

- *at home*
- *at work*
- *both at home and at work*
- *neither at home nor at work*

On the evening of Saturday, 20 July 2002, the first lonely voice was at last 'heard'. One of the learners who had been unable to attend the contact session, wanted to know

to which tribe he had been allocated. I responded soon afterwards by posting the name, slogan, and names of the members of his tribe. I also got the opportunity to restate where the learners could find the tribal and individual assignments for the week. On the following afternoon (at 14:00), another learner in his tribe, Emma, also responded and told him where he belonged. I was relieved to know that at least 2 people had by now accessed their e-mails and that I could deduce that some activity was taking place.

It was, however, not until the next day, Monday 22 July, that the majority of learners, slowly but surely, started to realise that there was more to the assignments than met the eye. When they started asking questions, I found myself wondering whether they had misunderstood my instructions, or whether they simply had not yet gone to the site to download them.

To my question (*Yahoo Groups*, Monday 22 July 2002, 20:31):

How are the tribal assignments coming along?

Brenda (*Yahoo Groups*, Monday 22 July 2002, 22:16) responded with:

What tribal assignments?

A couple of minutes later (22:31), Dawid responded with:

These are in the PDF docs you should have received a few days ago!

I was encouraged to know that Dawid, at least, had found the assignments and was now encouraging the others to go and find them as well.

By the Monday evening, I ventured out again and asked how the tribal assignment was coming along. By the Tuesday, 23 July 2002, full-blown chaos has erupted on our CyberIsland. Those learners who had actually found the assignments and the introduction, realised what was involved. They had consequently panicked and had urgently tried to contact the other members of their respective tribes.

Late on Monday evening 22 July (23:17), Dan wrote:

I think we need to get cracking asap! [snip] I don't mind who's the leader, we just need to get going.

By Tuesday afternoon, 23 July 16:34, Geronimo responded and addressed the members of his tribe:

I URGENTLY need all your e-mail addresses! Please let me have it!

By Wednesday morning, 24 July, some learners had still not accessed the web or

their e-mails. This created very high stress levels in those tribal members who were already onboard and who were frantically busy with the assignments. Lisandra (8:59) wrote:

*Todd, Madeline and BA:
We haven't heard anything from you guys. Are you experiencing some problems? I will appreciate it if you can send us your e-mail addresses so that we can get going with our web page.*

As many of the learners had not yet understood the nature of the module, they were not active online and did not log on regularly as they had been requested to do in the initial contact session. This frustrated those learners who realised that the deadline was looming and that they had not yet made any progress whatsoever.

It was only after Ted had replied to my e-mail (the one that once again explained where learners were suppose to go to find the assignments that were posted the previous week) that it dawned on me that many learners had initially only registered for the e-mail functionality of *Yahoo Groups*.

My message read:

The assignments are all listed in the .pdf file that was uploaded to this site (see the link in the frame on the

left hand side of this site) last Thursday.

Ted responded (*Yahoo Groups*, Tuesday 23 July 2002, 16:47):

Your e-mail message on my screen does not have a frame on the left side, nevermind a link. Furthermore I cannot access E-Learn2002 from my present Yahoo ID!

Only then did I realise that many of the learners did not even know that a web-based interface was available for the module and had thus never even visited it. Only after further investigation did I find out that *Yahoo Groups* presented members with a choice of registering for e-mail access only (in which case any mail to the group would be forwarded to an e-mail address of their choice), or to register for access to the web-based version of the group as well.

As it turned out, many of the learners were unaware of the second option and had thus never realised that the notes and assignments were posted there. They were in fact waiting and expecting the information to appear in an e-mail message from myself!

By then, it had become clear to me that the learners were not going to be able to complete the assignments in time for the stated 25 July 2002 deadline. The level of

panic and disorganisation were escalating to an unacceptably high level. Even though it is often argued that a certain amount of stress and pressure can increase productivity and maximise learning, the situation we had there was both destructive and unhelpful. Most studies show that high levels of anxiety decrease the storage and processing capacity of working memory and impede the ability to make inferences (Darke, 1988a; Darke, 1988b).

As one student (Brenda, *Yahoo Groups*, Monday, 22 July 2002, 22:16) put it:

Am I the only dof [dense] one? This is a nightmare.

Dan (22:31) responded soon afterwards:

That's the point!

Conyne (2003) states that every classroom group has a developmental life span, similar to that of any other organism. He states that students, in the initial phase of group formation,

can be expected to look for direction, to become oriented, and to search for an increasing degree of security and trust.

This certainly was true of the *Surviver* tribes. The majority of the learners spent the first couple of days trying to figure out what was

expected of them, where they could find the relevant information, and how they could get a grip on the game approach to their learning.

However, the chaos that had erupted had the potential to become completely destructive and to negatively affect the intended growth in learning. One after the other, requests for an extension of the deadline began to stream into my mailbox.

To soothe the 'cyber trauma' that most of the learners were experiencing, I decided to call an emergency face-to-face tribal council to

- explain once more how the game worked
- discuss both my expectations and those of the learners
- respond to any urgent questions or comments that they might have
- lay down a few ground rules for the coming weeks.

I requested the lecturer, who was teaching the learners on a face-to-face basis on Thursday evenings, to give me some time out of his contact session to debrief the learners on the happenings of the first week. Permission to spend some time with the learners was granted.

Some comments from learners by the end of week 1 are listed here. Jasmine (sound

clip on personal web page) stated the following:

My overall impression of this week on Cyber Island is one of an overwhelming curve. I have never learned so much in one week. I think the most gratifying experience was to overcome my own insecurities to work online. A down side however is the terrifying thought of receiving my telephone bill at the end of the month.

I have been struggling tremendously with the technicalities, trying to understand the operation of the different programs in which we have to work. At times, I actually felt claustrophobic with all the e-mails coming in and not having enough time to read through and appreciate them all. However, I had a general feeling of a positive experience of all the wonderful people out there willing to share their experience...

In her response to the activities of the first week, Gabrielle (sound clip on personal web page) commented:

The table below summarises Week 1 on CyberIsland:

Table 12: Summary of Week 1

Initial number of learners for Week 1	24				
Active learners (These learners were actively involved in the various activities of the week.)	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)
	Catherine	Dan	Warren	Beatrice	-
	Brian	Lisandra	Brenda	Mabel	-
	Gabrielle	Helen	Samantha	Geronimo	-
	Roleen	-	Ted	Jasmine	-
	-	-	-	Emma	-

Lurkers (These are learners who had not formally quit the module. But they were either not working synchronously with the rest of the group, or else they were not actively taking part at all.)	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5-NeverDie)
	Wendy	BA	Catherine	Nadia	-
	Larissa	Madeline	James	-	-
	-	Todd	-	-	-
Discontinued learners (These are learners who formally dropped out of the course during this week.)	Names		Reasons for discontinuing		
	Emma (Tribe 4)		Emma still had to complete some BEd modules at the same time as doing this eLearning module that is part of the MEd course. She decided that the workload was going to be too much if she attempted to complete them simultaneously and officially withdrew from the module.		
Significant events	Date		Nature	Purpose	
	18 July 2002		Synchronous session	To introduce the facilitator and the concept of the <i>Survivor</i> ® game	
Number of asynchronous postings	Yahoo Groups			WebCT	
	142			0 (Not yet introduced)	
Tools, products and services used	Web-based			PC-based	
	Yahoo Groups (Messages, Files, Polls, Members)			Word processor (such as <i>Word</i> or <i>WordPerfect</i>)	
	Various search engines			Graphics tool (such as <i>Paint</i> , <i>Corel Draw</i> or <i>PaintShop Pro</i>)	
	Shareware/Free web hosting service				

Assignments	Individual		Tribal
	Add to personal homepage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A photograph of yourself • Short Curriculum Vitae • The answers to these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are your expectations in terms of the module? ○ What is your current level of comfort with the Internet? • An online poll on any topic related to the module. 		Search for free/shareware applications available on the Internet. Design a website in one of these free applications and present the free and shareware Internet applications that were found by the tribe.
	Report on the educational value of a specific shareware/free web-based application.		
Challenges	Immunity		Reward
	Play the <i>Photo Shoot: Africa</i> game online http://www.cbs.com/primetime/survivor3/games/index.shtml . Post evidence of your highest score to <i>Yahoo Groups</i>		Explain the differences between synchronous and asynchronous communication. Explain what an IP address is. How do you know what your IP address is at any given time?
Polls	Date	Number of replies	Content
	20 July 2002	17	I have access to a networked computer (one that is connected to the Internet)... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at home (35 %). • at work (12%). • both at home and at work (47 %). • neither at home nor at work (6%).

Week 2: 25 July – 1 August 2002

The second week started with the much-needed synchronous face-to-face session. In this session, I started by once again explaining the concept of the *Survivor*® game and how the game elements are intended to guide the structure of the eLearning module. This time round the learners were more attentive because by now they had realised the extent of the module.

A number of misconceptions were cleared up. One learner, for instance, had not realised that being voted off meant that you lost your place in your original tribe and that you were, in addition, no longer in the running for the Grand Prize. Another wanted to know why they were not allowed to talk about the game. It was explained (for a second time) that only face-to-face and telephone communication was prohibited, and that they certainly were allowed to discuss everything and anything with their fellow learners in the online environment. This rule was introduced to compel them to use the mediums of communication that the Internet has to offer, both synchronously and asynchronously, in order for them to fully understand the capabilities and limitations of the medium.

Another learner wondered how it was possible to fit in all the assignments into the

time available in one week. They did not, up to this point, fully understand that the nature of the module required of them to log in regularly and actively to participate on a daily basis. Many of the learners still thought they could complete the assignments in their own time – so long as they were completed by the time the module ended. We also dealt with my own expectations as the facilitator, and with theirs as learners and tribe members. Below is a list of ground rules that we agreed upon in this session:

- *You need to check your Elearn2002 Yahoo Groups web site on a regular basis for new additions. This means that you have to visit the site AT THE VERY LEAST once every two days.*
- *The Elearn2002 Group will be the hub for all our mainstream communication. You MUST therefore, have access to the web-based version of the group, even if you continue to receive your messages via e-mail.*
- *All new assignments will be clearly labelled (per week) and posted to the 'File' section in the Elearn2002 Group. It is YOUR responsibility to go and find them there. The following week's assignments will normally be posted on a Thursday evening.*
- *You need to discuss your plan of action for the tribal assignments with your fellow*

'Survivors' as soon as possible after the new assignments are posted. This is important because each week will be packed with activities that you will not be able to complete to an acceptable standard if you leave it to the last minute.

The most important outcome of this session was the fact that they now understood how vital it was to access their *Yahoo Groups* on a regular basis. They understood that it was unavoidable that they would have only a limited time available for each new assignment – simply because of the extensive ground that we were covering in the module. I strongly believed in the value of providing learners with opportunities to experience the various facets of elearning in hands-on situations. Apart from extensive exposure to the tools, services and products available for educational use on the Internet, I also believed in the value of being a *power user* of the Internet. This did not mean that I wanted them to be web programmers or IT specialists after they had completed the module. It simply meant that I required them to feel comfortable and competent in the online environment, and that I wanted them to have a comprehensive idea of what is possible (and available) on the Net, and to understand how these functionalities could best be utilised in an educational set-up.

The learners also got the opportunity to share their fears, concerns and observations. The main areas of concern that were discussed were (1) the time and cost implications that participating in this module entailed, (2) access and technology problems, and (3) the implications of possessing only limited Internet and computer literacy skills.

I spent a great deal of time addressing concerns about the cost implications of the module. As Internet access is not free in South Africa, and thus every minute spent online is billed at variable rates, this was a very real challenge and not one that could be lightly swept aside. I explained to them that the costs they incurred by having to be online was but one of the sacrifices that they were going to have to make if they wanted to complete the degree because the very *nature* of the module required learners to spend a large number of hours online. One helpful alternative (for those for whom it was feasible) was for learners to work on campus in one of the computer laboratories. This arrangement would cost them nothing (in connection fees) because they were registered as students of the University. This was perceived by many as being an inconvenient solution because all of the learners worked in full time jobs during the day, and many also had family obligations and engagements in the evenings.

I communicated the crucial importance of the hands-on approach very strongly indeed

to my learners. I impressed upon them that the module had been deliberately designed so that they (the learners) would *learn* about *online learning* in an *online* environment. They needed to do this so that they themselves (who would one day teach learners in the same situation) could experience all the advantages, disadvantages and idiosyncratic situations that arise in an authentic elearning environment. I shared with them the philosophy of *having been there*, and having had first-hand exposure to the realities of online teaching. If the module was to be successful, the learners had to understand fully what the opportunities and challenges are that a person faces in an online educational environment. This was only possible if they had already experienced it themselves.

Although they appreciated the communication between themselves (the learners) and me (the facilitator), the learners were pleased to see their tribal partners in the flesh because this gave them a much-needed opportunity to share contact details and to draw up a feasible plan for working together on the collaborative tribal assignments. We also used this session to hand out the prizes to the winners of the Reward Challenge. The winners got a small box of chocolates (Roleen) and a mouse pad (Jasmine) respectively. I felt that it was appropriate to also give each of the other learners who

participated in the Challenge a consolation prize in the form of a mug mat (Dan and Geronimo).

It was agreed that the deadline for the first week's assignments would be postponed until 12:00 on Saturday, 27 July 2002, so that everyone could get a fair chance to succeed after a confusing start. It was furthermore decided that the assignments of the following week would not be distributed before the above-mentioned deadline had been reached.

I responded (*Yahoo Groups*, Friday 26 July 2002, 12:38) to a question in this regard by saying:

I will put them up tomorrow once all the other assignments are in (the cut-off time is 12:00). I think it is only fair to give all the tribes the same amount of time.

By Saturday morning (26 July 2002, 7:46), I posted the second week's assignments and the learners could start with the work for the week. At 9:04, I also posted the Immunity Challenge for this week. This time round the learners had to complete a typing test that they downloaded from the Internet.

Most of the learners had by then managed to complete the first week's assignments, even though there were a couple of learners who were still battling with technicalities. Catherine

(Yahoo Groups, Saturday 27 July 2002, 13:19) commented:

I am experiencing some problems with the uploading of my files. Please have patience. I am not giving up yet!!!!

Catherine struggled throughout the afternoon, and, by 16:11, she posted yet another message:

I have a lot of trouble uploading my files.... Any advice form the ones who managed to do it all?

She eventually managed to complete the assignments with no help from her peers on Sunday, 28 July 2002, 11:10:

My personal website is now more or less working! What a struggle. I am just happy to say that I learnt the most I could out of it, as I received no help from any outside party.

On Sunday, 28 July 2002, 16:55, I revised the deadline for Week 2's Tribal Assignment. I deemed the assignment important enough to allow the learners the opportunity fully to explore the educational potential of both *Yahoo Messenger* and *NetMeeting*. The deadline for the Tribal Assignment (alone) was therefore

extended until the next week (7 August 2002).

As the Saturday deadline also coincided with the end of Week 1, the learners were required (for the first time) to vote off one member from each of their tribes, to assess the members in their own tribe in terms of their team effort, and to conduct peer assessment of the work of the other tribes. Unfortunately, the server on campus, on which the voting station was hosted, went down, and as we were by now well into the weekend, there was little hope of getting technical support to remedy the situation. I posted a message (*Yahoo Groups*, Saturday 27 July 2002, 8:02) to this effect, and requested the learners each to send me a private e-mail that would tell me the following (quote):

1. *Your assessment (out of 25) of each of the other tribal websites.*
2. *The name of the person you would like to vote off your team.*
3. *Your assessment (out of 25) of each of the other individuals in your tribe in terms of their collaborative behaviour (team work).*

This backup plan had its drawbacks because some learners did not use my personal e-mail address (even though it was provided and explicitly requested), and instead posted their evaluations to the group as a whole. The votes had all come though by Sunday evening (*Yahoo Groups*, 28 July 2002, 23:08),

I was able to post the names of those who were voted off to the list.

The following people have been voted off and will start up the new tribe 5: Wendy, BA, Ted & Nadia.

Could you guys please get together and decide on a name and motto for the new tribe ASAP?

Hang in there!

By Monday (29 July 2002, 12:07) the problems that had put the voting station beyond use had been fixed – although it would be more than a week before we would need to use it again. Since the deadline for the next collaborative exercise was only 7 August 2002, learners would only need to vote again at that time.

I nonetheless spent some time during this week correcting some technical errors in the voting station (such as the incorrect spelling of usernames), and I made certain that learner names were correctly grouped in their corresponding tribes.

At 23:20 on that same night, I posted a message in which I requested the learners to keep the evening of 7 August open for a synchronised contact session online and warned them that they would have to download and test the application (*InterWise*) prior to that date.

I furthermore wanted to know from them what had happened to the learners from whom I had heard either nothing or very little. At 21:22 I left the following message to this effect:

I need to know whether the following people are still on the course. If your name appears on the list below, could you please contact me at my MWeb address ASAP? The address is...

Wendy, Larissa, Todd, BA, James, Catherine, Nadia

If I haven't heard from you guys by Thursday, 1 August 2002, I will assume that you are not taking the ELearn module this time round.

To this request, only Larissa and Ted responded by stating that they were still in the game. Catherine and Helen officially announced that they had withdrawn from the course. Because I received no feedback at all from Wendy, Todd, BA, James, and Nadia, I deduced that they would not be active members for the remainder of the game.

It was actually Saturday, 17 August 2002, 21:05, before BA and Wendy replied jointly in an e-mail:

... we are still battling to register with E-LEARN [...] We also wish to inform

you that even though we were a bit slower to catch in, we now see the light in the tunnel. So, we got your message and are really working on it. We have managed to complete our URL activities in time, and even promise you to see more responses from us.

Thanx for your patience and your loving concern.

Throughout the module, I was extremely worried about the fact that these learners were not keeping up with the rest of the group. After the 4 weeks during which the module ran, they had still not managed even to access the *Yahoo Groups* web page where all the activity had been going on, let alone play their part in the tribal assignments, which I valued more than all the other assignments.

I relayed my concerns to the course coordinator by sending him an e-mail asking for guidance:

How worried do I need to be about the guys that hardly react at all, and when they do, are totally past recovery/past hope/helpless? Guys such as Wendy and BA seem entirely out of their depth.
[Translated]

The course coordinator replied to this cry for help by stating (in a private e-mail message, Friday, 2 August 2002, 09:23):

Guys who can't keep up, must fail. The MEd (CAE) is not a welfare organisation. [Translated]

At another time (private e-mail message, Friday, 8 August 2002, 18:57), he reiterated this sentiment by saying:

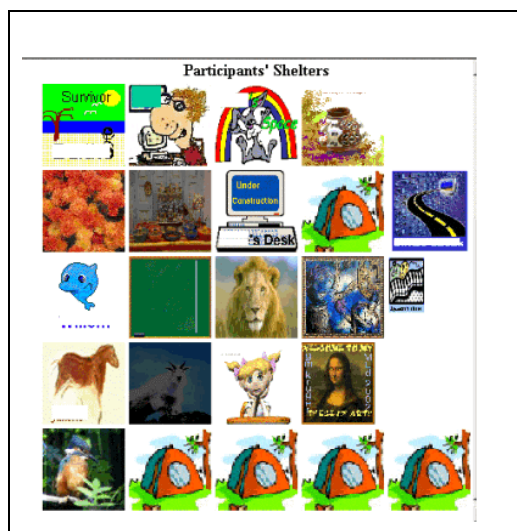
I am comfortable if some of the slower learners fall off. This course is not for 'sissies'. [Translated]

I had thus to accept the fact that some learners were simply not going to have what it took to complete the module successfully. I was also under immense time constraints at that time, and that made it extremely difficult to attend individually to learners who could not keep up with the predetermined deadlines that punctuated the course. Although my natural instincts and educational bias were such that I would have very much have preferred to take whatever action was necessary to prevent these learners from falling out of the course, time constraints were so great that this option was simply not possible at that time.

Week 2 ended with the majority of the active learners having successfully ftp-ed or linked their personal homepages to their shelters in

Hagar, the experimental server hosted by the Faculty of Education (Figure 12).

Figure 12: The Shelters on CyberIsland



Beatrice commented on her experience during the first week (Comment on Personal Web Site):

The speed is that of a roller coaster but one has no option but to join in the fun.

It was fascinating to see Beatrice making use of another game metaphor, namely 'ilinx' to describe her first week on CyberIsland. Ilinx types of games are founded on dizziness and vertigo, typically such as experienced in a roller coaster ride (Callois 1986).

The table below summarises Week 2 on the 'Surviver' CyberIsland:

Table 13: Summary of Week 2

Initial number of learners for Week 2	23				
Active learners	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)
	Catherine	Dan	Warren	Mabel	-
	Brian	Lisandra	Brenda	Geronimo	-
	Gabrielle	-	-	Jasmine	-
	Roleen	-	-	-	-
Lurkers	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)
	Larissa	Madeline	Samantha	Beatrice	Ted

Discontinued learners	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)
	-	Helen	James	-	Wendy
		Todd	Catherine		BA
		-	-		Nadia
Reasons for discontinuing	Learner	Reasons for discontinuing			
	Todd (Tribe 2)	Todd did not respond to my request for confirmation of his continued participation, and was therefore regarded as one of the learners who had withdrawn from the course. He did however mail a link to his first attempt at making a personal website during this week, and he requested help from his tribal members to make a screen print. This activity, however minimal, indicated that he was still participating.			
	Helen (Tribe 2)	Helen's work required her to travel. Because of this, she could not continue because of the difficulties of connecting to the Internet.			
	Catherine (Tribe 3)	She withdrew for personal reasons.			
	James (Tribe 3)	James was actually an undergraduate-student assistant in the audience during the first information session and should not have been allocated to a tribe in the first place.			
	Nadia (Tribe 4)	Nadia did not respond to my request for confirmation of her continued participation, and was therefore regarded as one of the learners who had withdrawn from the course.			
	Wendy (Tribe 5)	Wendy also did not respond to my request for confirmation of her continued participation, and was therefore regarded as one of the learners who had withdrawn from the course.			
	BA (Tribe 5)	BA did not respond to my request for confirmation of her continued participation, and was therefore regarded as one of the learners who had withdrawn from the course.			

Significant events	Date	Nature	Purpose
	25 July 2002	Face-to-face (synchronous session)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To explain once more how the game works To discuss the expectations of both the facilitator and the learners To answer urgent questions To lay down some ground rules
Number of asynchronous postings	Yahoo Groups		WebCT
	272		Not yet introduced
Tools, products and services used	Web-based		PC-based
	Yahoo Groups (Messages, Files, Bookmarks, Polls, Members)		Word processor (such as <i>Word</i> or <i>WordPerfect</i>)
	Yahoo Messenger		Graphics tool (such as <i>Paint</i> , <i>Corel Draw</i> , or <i>PaintShop Pro</i>)
	NetMeeting		Sound recorder and microphone
FTP programme (such as <i>CuteFTP</i>)			
Assignments	Individual		Tribal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FTP your personal homepage to the CyberIsland on Hagar [a local experimental server]. Personalise the picture of your shelter on the virtual island. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Download <i>Yahoo Messenger</i> and <i>NetMeeting</i> onto your computer. Add the other Survivors to your list of friend/contacts.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add a sound file in which you give your impressions of the first week on the CyberIsland to your personal homepage (on Hagar). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange to meet synchronously and experiment with the various communication functionalities. Draw up a table that compares the educational value of the various functionalities. Upload the table to your tribal website. Peers assess the work of the other tribes.

Challenges	Immunity		Reward
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Download a free demo version of Typingmaster 2002 (http://www.typingmaster.com). • Type for 2 minutes. • Make a screen dump of your results and e-mail it to ELearn2002. <p>Person with the highest net speed wins Immunity this week.</p>		-
Polls	Date	Number of replies	Content
	25 July 2002	10	<p>Will you be ecstatic (and forever grateful) if I extend the deadline for the first week's assignments until noon this coming Saturday?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aaah, yes please! (100 %) • No way. I worked really hard to be ready on time. It won't be fair at all! (0%) • Any which way is OK with me. (0%)

Week 3: 1 – 8 August 2002

Week 3 started with most learners experiencing huge levels of relief because of the progress they had made and the satisfaction that their accomplishments had given them. Most of them were also exhausted because of the pressures that the deadlines for individual assignments and accompanying technical difficulties had exerted on them. However, as Lisandra (*Yahoo Groups*, Thursday, 1 August 2002 1:11) put it early one morning:

I am finally able to say that my website is now in Hagar and if I can do it ANYBODY can do it!!

I posted the week's assignments at 10:45 on Thursday, 1 August 2002. These only entailed the new individual assignments for the week because the tribal assignment from Week 2 was still being processed. As this week's highlight was the synchronous contact session on Wednesday, 7 August 2002, in which we planned to use *InterWise* (a commercial Israeli

product available locally and one that specialises in voice-enabled synchronous elearning), much of the initial communication this week dealt with the logistical arrangements to get the *InterWise* participant software downloaded and installed.

I wanted the learners to experience a commercial product of this nature and selected *InterWise* because of my prior positive experiences with this system (in spite of our limited South African bandwidth). The Executive Management of the local company who distributes the product here in South Africa was kind enough to sponsor the session in exchange for the opportunity to receive local exposure. With *InterWise*, learners log on at a set time for a session of a predetermined length, and interact in real time with the facilitator and the other learners through the medium of voice (audio), chat (text), and, for example, a PowerPoint presentation.

Our *InterWise* contact supplied the learners, via e-mail, with full and detailed instructions on how to download and install the software they were going to use on Wednesday evening. They were also reminded to register themselves as new users at the *InterWise* Communication Centre.

Each learner was also requested to arrange a session with the *InterWise* Technical Support Staff in order to run a few tests on the system. This was done to ensure that all learners were not only up and running by the time the real session started, but that they were also all familiar with the basics in terms of what to expect and how to communicate with the program.

The learners all indicated one after the other that they had completed the required downloading and testing of the software. The air seemed to be full of excitement and anticipation as the contact session drew closer.

On Wednesday morning, 7 August 2002 at 8:57, Lisandra stated (under the heading *Tonight's the night!!!!*)

Just to inform everybody that I am also ready for tonight's session and I am really looking forward to this one!!

Our session was scheduled for 2 hours, starting at 20:00. From about 19:00, quite a number of learners were already 'taking their places' in the classroom so that they would have adequate time to deal with any problems they might have logging on. As Brenda (*Yahoo Instant Message*, Wednesday, 7 August 2002, 19:18) confessed:

I logged on early ...was afraid I would not get a proper seat! [...] Dan has

*been in and out of here all day –
much too curious!* [Translated]

hardware limitations, could not download the system.

to which I responded with:

*Seems to me you did the same
...lol.* [Translated]

*I wont be able to attend this session,
my hardware at work cannot support
the necessary software, and I don't
have ready access from home.
Good luck to everybody, I am
extremely jealous. Enjoy, Larissa*

The evening went well and many learners commented afterwards that they were pleasantly surprised by the quality of the sound and visual material.

Larissa's computer turned out to be totally inadequate for the purpose of this module as it couldn't even run the latest version of Internet Explorer (Version 6 at the time). The computer at her home was meant to be there for the sole purpose of her husband's business activities and because of this, it was not available for her to use. On Tuesday, 13 August 2002, 17:43, she stated in a WebCT posting:

Dan (WebCT posting, Tuesday 13 August 2002, 09:22) commented:

*I must say that, all things
considered, I think the session went
very well, and I enjoyed it
immensely.*

*I was unable to access the software
on my work computer. For starters it
has no sound card. I tried to get the
system going at home on the bread-
and-butter-generating machine in
the middle of the night, but soon
realised there was no point as ... on
the Wednesday evening I had to
attend a school function.*

Eleven out of the 16 learners still active in the module were able to connect. Not all of them, however, were successful in attending the session from home. Geronimo and Jasmine, for instance, made alternative arrangements beforehand, and joined up at Geronimo's house because Jasmine was experiencing hardware problems with her computer at home.

Others such as Gabrielle, who had moved house during the week, missed the e-mail requesting her to test the system before the Wednesday evening session in the domestic chaos that accompanied the move.

There were those like Larissa (Yahoo Groups, Wednesday, 7 August 2002, 11:18) who desperately wanted to attend, but who, because of her computer

Gabrielle experienced a traumatic week, to say the least. Apart from having to move, her work computer was stolen from her office on the Saturday of that week. She therefore had many personal challenges to cope with during the week.

Although Samantha certainly attempted to download the *InterWise* software on Tuesday, 6 August 2002, she experienced cookie problems that she did not seem to be able to cope with – despite an e-mail from myself with instructions on how to correct the settings. We never heard from her again with regard to this problem, and, sadly, she subsequently missed the Wednesday evening session.

Although Beatrice made contact with the group during the week, her postings dealt with the individual assignments of the *previous* week. She made no mention of an attempt, successful or otherwise, to download the *InterWise* Participant software, or to test the system beforehand.

Madeline had been extremely quiet up to this point, and had made no contact with the group that week. She did, however, attend the session, but because she had no microphone attached to her computer, she was not able to communicate with the rest of us. Neither did she use the chat facility to join the discussions.

Afterwards, though, she commented (*WebCT* posting, Monday, 26 August 2002, 23:17):

The preparations and the actual participation in the session made us to learn to use technology and to share the wonderful experience with others. This was a lovely experience even with my family. [...]

The session was a wonderful and informative experience. [...]

This was an experience of a life time even though there were a few technical problems.

Wendy, BA, Todd, and Nadia did not make any contact with the group during that week, and neither did they attend the synchronous *InterWise* session.

Even though this was a very new way of learning for most of the learners (only Mabel had previously been exposed to the product), they easily became accustomed to its format and very quickly started to participate in a stimulating and satisfying learning experience.

It has to be acknowledged, though, that the nature of the mini-lectures presented during this *InterWise* session by the 4 nominated tribal representatives, were very traditional in the sense that they were all presented in linear format, and were constructed as conventional lectures that utilised PowerPoint

presentations in conjunction with ready-made chunks of pre-digested text to serve as content.

As Dan (WebCT posting, Tuesday 13 August 2002, 09:22) commented:

I did feel that one failing was in the lack of interactivity. [...] I feel that if the instructor is just going to read through a PowerPoint slide show, we might as well cut a CD and mail it to our learners...

The general absence of interactivity and creative presentation should be understood in the context of their unfamiliarity with the product and their lack of experience of what might be possible to achieve in a medium such as *InterWise*. I am convinced that if they had been given further opportunities to explore the full potential of the medium, they would have been able to come up with far more stimulating and creative presentations.

The majority of the learners expressed their surprise and astonishment at the high quality of the *InterWise* session.

Brenda (WebCT posting, Wednesday 14 August 2002, 16:00) made the following comment:

... I was very sceptic about the online session. What if the mic

doesn't work, do I speak too loud or too soft, will I remember the tenses, what if my dear computer starts with his tricks again... As time grew nearer I was convinced that this was going to be a disaster. What a pleasant surprise! With the exception of one or two hiccups, nothing major went wrong. I was amazed how easy it was to get connected and everything set up.

Will I use it again? I think that one will have to be very short sighted not to use this very versatile tool.

Brian, in a WebCT posting dated Monday 12 August 2002, 21:11, commented on the limitations of bandwidth by stating:

I really think it went well. For me it was a new experience. I didn't think it could work so well in South Africa.

In a WebCT posting on Tuesday 13 August 2002, 20:03, Geronimo mentioned that he was

pleasantly surprised with the 'smoothness' with which the evening went! I have a 28K modem (yes I know, ancient) and I did not have any problems hearing or speaking to anybody.

Dan (21:01) replied almost an hour later with:

Yep, I have been working with the Internet since 1992, but have never used this technology, I was amazed ... when you understand a little more about routing and the IP protocol you become even more amazed.

Earlier that morning, Dan (WebCT posting, Tuesday 13 August 2002, 09:22) also commented:

After logging in to Interwise to test the system for the first time, I was amazed by the technology! Being able to hear the instructor's voice, have him take over my computer to adjust some settings was actually almost better than having the instructor lean over my shoulder!

He added:

Communication [...] was just about as good as speaking face-to-face, this I would say was something that stood out for me. It was also as if, because of the medium, people tried to express their ideas more concisely and even their enunciation of words seemed

more measured than in usual conversation.

Warren (WebCT posting, Wednesday 14 August 2002, 10:22) said that he

found the InterWise session very exciting. I was stunned by the sound quality, the standard of the presentations (considering it was our first attempt), the graphics, the tools available, etc.

Others though, like Mabel (WebCT posting, Wednesday 14 August 2002, 15:59), were not as excited about the experience:

I was more than a bit excited towards to oncoming encounter. There had definitely been elements of anticipation, tension and enthusiasm on my part. These elements are great contributors in a learning situation. [...]

The situation we took part in on Wednesday night went (for me) something like this: I was listening to a conversation, passively and without the ability to participate due to bandwidth problems

The bandwidth is more than a temporary technical difficulty. The fact that not everyone can join has its

pedagogical price. Are we willing to pay that price?.

Although the lack of adequate bandwidth is certainly a problem in South Africa, this particular learner's problems were unrelated. However, with limited knowledge about the *InterWise* system, and computer hardware, learners often did not know who or what was to blame when they experienced technical difficulties.

The synchronous *InterWise* session was wrapped up by a brief tribal council session, during which each of the participants was given an opportunity to share his or her experience of the module thus far. Central challenges addressed included:

- Technical (hardware, software and connectivity) difficulties experienced
- Lack of sleep and amount of time spent in front of the computer
- The heavy workload and the high-speed pace of the module

- The high cost implications of being online for so many hours on a daily basis
- The fact that some tribes were experiencing a serious lack of communication in addition to large amounts of underlying personal conflict.

On the positive side, many of the learners commented on how they had enjoyed exponential levels of personal growth and learning during the experience, and how they had enjoyed every minute of the module, despite recurrent feelings of being overwhelmed by the number of new things that they were learning. The excitement of being privileged enough to experience the full potential of online learning in this manner also became evident in a number of responses.

The end of Week 3 once again required each of the tribes to each vote off a member. As most of the tribes only had 2 (or at most 3) active members left, a restructuring of the tribes became necessary. The week ended with all tribes assessing the work of the others, and an asynchronous voting session.

Table 14: Summary of Week 3

Initial number of learners for Week 3	16				
Active learners	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5-NeverDie)
	Catherine	Dan	Warren	Mabel	-
	Brian	Lisandra	Brenda	Geronimo	-
	Gabrielle	-	-	Jasmine	-
	Roleen	-	-	-	-
Lurkers	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5-NeverDie)
	Larissa	Madeline	Samantha	Beatrice	Ted
Discontinued learners	Names	Reasons for discontinuing			
	-	-			
Significant events	Date	Nature	Purpose		
	Wednesday, 7 August 2002	This <i>InterWise</i> session was: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • web-based • synchronous • audio-enabled • geographically dispersed. 	To expose the learners to a commercially available product that allows for real-time, voice-enabled educational contact even in spite of unavoidable hindrances and obstructions such as the limited bandwidth available in South Africa		
Number of asynchronous postings	Yahoo Groups		WebCT		
	69		1		
Tools, products and services used	Web-based		PC-based		
	Yahoo Groups		Word processor (such as <i>Word</i> or <i>WordPerfect</i>)		
	Yahoo Messenger		Presentation programme (such as <i>PowerPoint</i>)		

	<i>InterWise / CampusWise</i>	Microphone and speakers / headphones
	<i>WebCT</i>	
Assignments	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Tribal</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Download the <i>InterWise</i> software. Test you system's compatibility with the technical staff from <i>InterWise</i> prior to this session. Show up on Wednesday, 7 August, and participate actively. 	Continue your investigation into the capabilities of <i>Yahoo Messenger</i> and <i>NetMeeting</i> in an educational environment.
	<p>By now your own web site contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some personal information a photograph a paragraph stating your expectations for the course a poll a sound file. <p>This week you must add links to sites that will perform conversions on your behalf (such as, for example, degrees Celsius to degrees Fahrenheit).</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select one member of each tribe to facilitate an interactive and entertaining mini learning event of about 15 minutes on the topics provided in the synchronous <i>InterWise</i> session. All the other members of the team must – individually – compile a report (600 words maximum) on one of the topics provided. 	

Week 4: 8 –15 August 2002

This week's assignments were posted to the group on Thursday 8 August 2002, at 20:03. In spite of this, Week 4 started at a very slow pace, possibly because the

Friday was a public holiday and thus the start of a long weekend. Learner activity only picked up again from Monday, 11 August 2002.

It was during this week that I officially introduced the commercial Learning Management System (LMS), *WebCT*. After a number of technical problems with usernames and passwords, most learners intuitively managed to use the Bulletin Board for their responses to the Individual Assignments of the Week. A couple of learners, though, got stuck on the University of Pretoria (UP) student portal, and posted their messages to a general message board that is open to all students of the University who use *WebCT*.

The *WebCT* environment at University of Pretoria is set up in such a way that there is a student portal (with a general bulletin board) that allows learners access to a number of University services. Learners then have to click on the link that specifies "Registered Courses" before they are shown a list of courses that are available to them in *WebCT*.

What happened was that some learners logged into the Student Online Services (SOS) page, and immediately started posting their responses on the general message board instead of first accessing their Elearning course. If they had first accessed their own Elearning course, they would have been able to post to the dedicated Bulletin Board that is a feature of the course.

Dan was the first to highlight the problem in a private e-mail to myself on Tuesday, 13 August 2002, 15:22:

It seems that not everyone is posting their messages in the same place i.e. in WebCT. Does it matter?

After some discussions about the problem in *Yahoo Messenger*, I finally realised what had happened. I also realised that it was impossible for me (as a lecturer accessing via the Lecturer's Portal) to access the University's SOS without an active student number. I was therefore not able to see the interface that the learners encountered when they accessed the site, and could consequently not immediately suggest to them the correct path to take. Dan took it on himself to contact those who were posting outside of the module, and to explain to them that they should first access the course.

Dan made all the others aware of this problem the following day in *Yahoo Groups* (Wednesday, 14 August 2002, 11:01):

Please note that some people have been posting to the wrong bulletin board.

Catherine was one of those who was using the wrong discussion forum. She responded on Wednesday, 14 August 2002 at 16:18 with:

Thanks Dan! I just saw the others there and posted mine there too, but moved it when I read your note (around 2 am.)

Mabel (WebCT posting, Wednesday, 14 August 2002, 11:14) posted her response on the correct Bulletin Board within the course:

Sorry, until Dan's e-mail I was sure I was in the right place.

Lisandra similarly realised that I was referring to posts in our *Yahoo Group* e-mails that she was unaware of, and she informed me about this in an e-mail. When I accessed the course through the Lecturer's portal, I was unaware of the fact that some learners were already discussing the assignments for the week on the general (student) board. Luckily, this problem was soon resolved as the learners, once they had been made aware of the mistake, cut and pasted their previous comments and postings into the correct message board that was reserved only for the module.

It was not long after the introduction of *WebCT* that learners began to complain about the *number* of different programmes that they had to use. Lisandra wrote on Wednesday, 14 August 2002, 14:34:

I am really getting very confused as to where we all need to go to to read up on the groups messages and discussions (Using Yahoo messenger; WebCT; UP Messaging Bulletin Board and Yahoo Bulletin Board!!). Will we from now on only chat on WebCT or are we still going to use this Bulletin Board as well?

Since it was important for the learners to have a 'home' base, I decided that *WebCT* provided them with an integrated learning environment that was safe, easy to use and free from distracting advertising. I furthermore wanted to encourage learners to make use of the new environment because it would provide them with the opportunity to experience what a commercial LMS has to offer. I posted my thoughts on this matter in a response on Wednesday, 14 August 2002, 18:13, entitled *Communication Channels*:

Even though we may still use ELearn 2002 Yahoo Groups for general questions and comments, I would like to suggest that we move our discussions to WebCT for the latter part of this module.

This is simply because I would like you to experience the difference in the two mediums (one a Freebie and the other one a LMS available commercially). I would advise you to

check both of these communication channels on a regular basis.

You may still use Yahoo Messenger in the background with your tribal mates and other friends, however this will not be our official meeting ground. As for the UP Discussion Board, it has nothing to do with our course and is there for a different purpose.

This week was further characterised by issues surrounding the peer assessment strategy by means of which we were allocating marks to the various tribal assignments. Sensing that emotions were starting to run high because of assessment *malpractices*, I requested the learners to suggest criteria for the peer assessment of their work, and the assessment of their tribal member's collaborative behaviour (team work). The learners then posted their preferred criteria to WebCT, after which I consolidated their inputs into 2 rubrics that I required them to use for that week's voting exercise.

It seemed that the learners encountered fewer technical difficulties with that week's tribal assignment for which they had to create a number of games (in a web-based environment) based on a topic relevant to the module.

The week ended on a high note with the announcement of the Grand Prize. On Thursday afternoon, 15 August 2002, 17:20, the e-mail went out under the heading *Surviver GRAND PRIZE!*

Great news! Johannes turned the Dean's arm and convinced him that the winner of our Surviver game deserves a break after all the trauma that this module has put you guys through.

SO, the Grand Prize will be..... (do you hear the drum roll?)

A weekend away for the winner and his/her family in a self-catering unit on a well-known resort not too far from Pretoria!

I am convinced that whoever wins the final battle will agree that their family/loved ones have also felt the impact of this module (both emotionally and financially!) and that they therefore deserve the break as much as the winner him/herself.

After this mail, all that was needed to wrap up Week 4 was a reminder to learners to go to the voting station before midnight struck. The outcome of this voting session was important because the majority of the tribes had become too small to function properly.

Table 15: Summary of Week 4

Initial number of learners for Week 4	15				
Active learners	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)
	Catherine	Dan	Warren	Mabel	-
	Brian	Lisandra	Brenda	Geronimo	-
	Gabrielle	-	-	Jasmine	-
	Roleen	-	-	-	-
	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)
Lurkers	-	-	-	-	Beatrice
					Samantha
					Madeline
					Larissa
Discontinued learners	Tribe 1 (UNO)	Tribe 2 (e-Learn-along)	Tribe (E-Go)	Tribe 4 (Virtual Eves)	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)
	-	-	-	-	Ted
Reasons for discontinuing	Names	Reasons for discontinuing			
	Ted	Ted had been out of town, first for business, and then for a congress. This made it impossible for him to connect on a regular basis. By the time he got back from his various trips, he had lost too much work to be able to catch up. He therefore announced that he would not be continuing with the module.			
Significant events	Date	Nature	Purpose		
	8 August 2002	Introduction of <i>WebCT</i>	To expose learners to the features of a commercial Learning Management System		
Number of asynchronous postings	Yahoo Groups		WebCT		
	69		54		

Tools, products and services used	Web-based	PC-based
	<i>Yahoo Groups</i>	Word processor (such as <i>Word</i> or <i>WordPerfect</i>)
	<i>Yahoo Messenger</i>	Presentation programme (such as <i>PowerPoint</i>)
	<i>InterWise / CampusWise</i> <i>WebCT</i>	Microphone and speakers / headphones
Assignments	Individual	Tribal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access <i>WebCT</i> and create your own password. • Once inside our course, post a message to the bulletin board in which you share with us your impressions of the synchronous <i>InterWise</i> session. Reply to at least one other of these 'impressions' postings. • In another posting, comment on key factors to consider when planning and presenting an event such as the one we experienced on Wednesday evening. Once again, reply to at least one other 'key factor' posting. 	<p>Create at least 6 different web-based games/learning activities (such as 'Hangman', 'Rags to riches' or a 'Scavenger hunt') related to the selected topic.</p> <p>Make use of the free 30-day trial period provided by <i>QUIA</i> (http://www.quia.com/web/index.html) or any similar web-based tool for this assignment.</p>
	This week you should add a jigsaw puzzle that (when assembled) makes a picture of yourself. You may wish to use this site http://www.jigzone.com or something similar.	
Challenges	Immunity	Reward
	What is a LMS? How does it differ from 'Content Providers'?	What is a bulletin board thread? How can one expand or collapse a thread in <i>WebCT</i> ?

	Could you name a couple of LMSs?	After a slow start to the required discussions on <i>WebCT</i> , the following reward challenge was posted: A reward is offered to the person who opens the discussions on the topic on the <i>WebCT</i> Bulletin Board.
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Week 5: 15 – 22 August 2002

The assignments for Week 5 were uploaded to *Yahoo Groups* (and to *WebCT*) on Thursday 15 August 2002, 17:05. I followed this correspondence up with an e-mail (17:27) that warned learners about the change in our approach for the last 2 weeks of the module.

As from this week, our focus will shift from 'process' to the 'product'. You will see a distinct change in the type of assignments for this week.

I was happy with the experience that the learners had gained in the previous weeks, and was hoping to focus their learning on a higher cognitive level by getting them to synthesise and evaluate their learning so far.

I therefore shifted the focus on technical skills to a stronger emphasis on a holistic understanding of the elearning theme of the module. The aim then was to begin the process in which they would synthesise

their knowledge about elearning while they continued (at the same time) to work together collaboratively in their new tribes.

As Thursday evening drew to a close, I reminded the learners that they had to visit the voting station before midnight. I also reminded them of a warning I had delivered during our very first contact session (*WebCT* posting, Thursday, 15 August 2002, 23:48):

Remember that I told you at our first meeting that you shouldn't get too comfortable in your groups? Well, as most of the tribes are getting rather small by now and the Tribal Assignment for this week is rather big, we are going to shuffle the tribes for the latter part of the game.

After the voting station had closed at midnight I reorganised the tribes. I divided those that still remained in the game between Tribe 6 and Tribe 7, while I left those who had been voted off in Tribe 5. At this stage, it did not seem necessary to subdivide Tribe 5 because only a handful of those members were actively participating in the learning activities.

The message that went out on Friday morning, 16 August 2002, 01:53, stated:

As from this week (in other words, for Tribal Assignment 4 already) you are regrouped as follows:

Tribe 6: Brenda, Geronimo, Lisandra, Dan and Roleen

Tribe 7: Brian, Warren, Catherine and Jasmine

Kindly decide on a name and a slogan for your new tribe and post it to our WebCT bulletin board.

One of the learners who had been voted off was worried because her name did not appear in one of the two remaining 'active' tribes. She had not yet realised that she had already been voted off on Thursday evening. The intention was that she should join forces with the other members of Tribe 5. However, as they were mostly inactive, this represented quite a setback for her and for those others who were still actively involved at that stage.

Apart from the adaptations that accompanied the shuffle, a large number of 'tongue in the cheek' complaints arose when learners read about the upcoming online test the following week.

Dan was once again the first learner to respond (Thursday 15 August 2002, 23:59) with the following subject heading:

TTTTTTTest ^&^*%\$#@*

The body of the message asked:

WWWwhen why hhhhow is this going to happen ????

DDDDan

Catherine soon replied (Friday, 16 August 2002, 00:06) with

Dan, my jaw is flat against the ground! You, afraid of a test?! How must the rest of us feel? [Translated]

Geronimo also responded in horror (Friday 16 August 2002, 00:14):

Thought we were through with that!!!!!!

:-0000000000h nooooooooo!

:-)

After all the complaints I had received from learners that led me to believe that they actually *hated* the constructivist style of learning style in which I facilitated the module, I certainly was not expecting this type of reaction to the announcement of a formal test. It seemed as if they were all horrified by the prospect of having to write a traditional

three-hour-long test, even though it was an online and open-book test.

I responded jokingly (Friday, 16 August 2002, 01:45) by saying:

When we do things in an unconventional manner, you guys moan! When we then do things in a more traditional manner, you moan even more!

What AM I to do... ?!??

Don't panic (this is what YOU need to do!). The test will be web-based. The idea is once again to provide you with the opportunity to personally experience e-testing. [...]

Did I mention that the test would be 'open book'? Hope that alleviates some of the stress!

On Monday, 19 August 2002, 01:43, I posted a spreadsheet with the preliminary assessment of the learners' individual tasks to *Yahoo Groups*. At 01:51, I posted the following message:

Please note that I have posted the assessments of the Individual Assignments to the 'Files' section of ELearn2002. You are welcome to discuss any problems with me. You

will note that I gave you 0 if I couldn't find a specific assignment, whilst missing links also influenced your marks. If you let me know where I can find the assignments and fix the links soon, however, I may reconsider your marks.

You will also notice that I only added those students who responded to my e-mail asking for your student numbers, initials and surnames. I take it that the others are not going to complete the module this time round.

This message brought about a number of frantic e-mails with learners indicating where they had corrected any missing links, had updated their sites, and had completed outstanding assignments.

By means of this exercise, I concluded that only those learners who had responded in reaction to their marks not being posted, were still interested in completing the module.

The week ended with some learners feeling extremely satisfied and happy because they were finally functioning well as part of an active learning community. Others however felt rather sour and resentful because they were obviously experiencing some degree of discomfort in their roles in their new tribes.

Table 16: Summary of Week 5

Initial number of learners for Week 5	15		
Active learners	Tribe 5 (Tribe5-NeverDie)	Tribe 6 (Cyber-Squatters)	Tribe 7 (E-Eagles)
	Mabel	Dan	Warren
	Gabrielle	Lisandra	Brian
	-	Brenda	Catherine
	-	Roleen	Jasmine
	-	Geronimo	-
Lurkers	Tribe 5 (Tribe5-NeverDie)	Tribe 6 (Cyber-Squatters)	Tribe 7 (E-Eagles)
	Larissa	-	-
	Samantha		
	Madeline		
	Beatrice		
Discontinued learners	Names	Reasons for discontinuing	
	None	-	
Significant events	Date	Nature	Purpose
	16 August	Shuffle of tribe members	To ensure that proper collaboration and optimal learning takes place
Number of asynchronous postings	Yahoo Groups	WebCT	
	62	12	
Tools, products and services used	Web-based	PC-based	
	Yahoo Groups	Word processor (such as <i>Word</i> or <i>WordPerfect</i>)	
	Yahoo Messenger	Presentation programmes (such as <i>PowerPoint</i>)	
	InterWise / CampusWise	Microphone and speakers / headphones	
	WebCT	Graphics tool (such as <i>Paint</i> , <i>Corel Draw</i> , or <i>PaintShop Pro</i>)	
Search engines (such as <i>Google</i>)			

Assignments	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Tribal</i>
	<p>Follow the clues and find the 5 web addresses of articles that you should work through with great care in preparation for the test next week.</p>	<p>Create a clickable concept map of all the elements related to teaching and learning by means of the Internet.</p>
	<p>Add any ONE of the following features to your personal web page:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a horizontal bar with scrolling text. The scrolling text should contain at least 5 benefits of elearning. (For an example, go to http://javascript.internet.com/scrolls/line-scroller.html) • a floating image containing a message that, when clicked, will take you to a motivational slogan that promotes elearning. (For an example, go to http://mailbox.co.za/index.pwm) 	-

	OR	
	Write a paragraph or two (total: approximately 150 words) about the use of special techniques such as scrolling or blinking text, animated gifs, sound files, bright colours and opinion polls on an educational web site. Tell us when it would be appropriate to use these devices – and when it would not. Post these paragraphs (as well as a list of 5 benefits of elearning) to your shelter.	
Challenges	Immunity	Reward
	Complete the Immunity quiz in <i>WebCT</i> . The person with the fastest completion time, and a 100 % score, will win Immunity this time round.	-

Week 6: 22 August – 2 September 2002

After uploading the new assignments on Thursday, 22 August 2002, 09:34, Week 6 began on a positive note. For the first time since Tribe 5 was established, some of the learners who by now had joined the tribe, made a special effort to reorganise themselves and to collaborate with the others in the tribe. Warren initiated this idea with his personal e-mail to me on Wednesday, 21 August 2002, 07:29. He wrote:

I am very keen to continue with the exercises (in the right way) as I learn a lot by doing them – Any suggestions? Can't we create another tribe for those who want

to go through the exercises (without competing for a place as a winner), and who are still serious about the learning experience? I know that Gabrielle, for example, is keen to join somewhere on the same principle. Tribe 5 isn't really an option, since most of those learners are not taking this seriously. [Translated]

On Wednesday, 21 August 2002 at 09:00 I responded as follows:

Could I suggest that you and Gabrielle make contact and try to work together on last week's 'concept map'? [...] And by all means, ask Larissa and Mabel whether they have yet slotted in with one of the other

tribes. If not, they could possibly also work together with you guys. I would very much like to see that everyone makes use of the opportunity to learn as much as possible, despite underlying tribal problems. [Translated]

Warren appreciated my response, and immediately made contact with the other learners. They also responded favourably – as one can see by Lisandra's response, as forwarded by Warren on Thursday, 22 August 2002, 07:48:

*Hi Warren and Gabrielle
Wonderful!! I had no idea that you have also ended up in Tribe 5. Less than nothing is going on there. I don't even know who all the members are suppose to be. It would be an honour to join you capable guys. I would certainly learn more from you than I would have on my own (struggling). Just tell me what to do.*

Warren also forwarded Mabel's response:

Yes!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I will be more than happy to join this group (I am a 'group learner' – I hate it when I have to learn by myself) just tell me what have you done by now and what should I do. Do you/we have a name for the new group? Have

you made a website for the new group? By now I manage to work with Dream Waiver quite well and I can do another site.

As Roleen was one of those voted off at the end of Week 4, she too was invited to join the new tribe.

It was clear that none of these learners wanted to associate themselves with the (by now) totally dysfunctional Tribe 5. They thus chose to call themselves 'Tribe X'.

On Friday, 23 August 2002, 13:15, I indicated this week's tribal assortment and encouraged learners to make full use of the week's opportunities.

Tribe X immediately went ahead and created a new tribal homepage for themselves. Then, as a team, they came up with a rather solid concept map in no time. They also went ahead with the final tribal assignment and created an online learning intervention of substance by using the cost-free web-based service *NiceNet*.

The main theme for the week's discussions was the electronic test that was due to be written on that Wednesday. I was bombarded with questions such as this one from Roleen (*WebCT* posting, Tuesday, 27 August 2002, 09:00):

Can you please give us more information on the logistics of the test:

shall we, for example, be able to start, work for 1/2 hour, disconnect, start again? What if there is a power failure? Or what if the computer bombs out? Or what if your internet connection bombs out? [Parts translated]

I realised that the fact that they were not sure what to expect made the learners edgy and anxious even though I had built in some prior experience in using the WebCT's quiz tool in the short Immunity Challenge quiz that had done the previous week. I tried to set the scene and assure them that they would not be penalised by external factors such as power-cuts in a WebCT posting dated Tuesday, 27 August 2002, 11:09:

I would like to put your mind at ease and say that the test you will write tomorrow is not the end of the world! Once again, the test assignment is all about being a learning experience in itself. You will be on the receiving side and will gain first-hand experience of doing an online test. I assume that you will then be in a better position to advise people about the various aspects of online / networked learning once you have experienced all the aspects yourself. [Challenge me on this if you disagree!] [...]

About tomorrow's test:

1. *I will set up the test in sections so that you needn't be online for the entire period of 3 hours without a break. You will be able to access a section, answer the questions for that section, and submit your answers. This implies that you can take a break after each section before you attempt the next.*

2. *Only your first attempt will be marked. That means that you should open a section, complete it, and submit your answer once you are satisfied with your response. Once you have submitted your answer, you should not go back and add anything, as only your first attempt will be valid.*

3. *However, I know that there is always the possibility of a technical hiccup; you may lose your connection, there may be a power cut, etc. The test will therefore allow you to access each section of the test at least 3 times. If you do need to make use of these extra attempts due to technical problems, please notify me of the reason by means of e-mail.*

Good luck!

I was interested to note that some of the learners who had lurking very quietly in Tribe 5 suddenly woke up when they heard about the test. It was almost as if this type of learning event was something with which they could at last identify. I got the impression that the constructivist style and the collaborative nature of the module was experienced by them as 'foreign', 'alien', and therefore difficult, while a summative test was something that they felt they could relate to.

Samantha (Saturday, 24 August 2002, 22:54) replied to my mail that was entitled, *The end is in sight!*

Just when some of us are beginning to enjoy pros, cons and challenges this cybermodule is serving us. It's not only "THE END IS IN SIGHT" but also 'The light is in sight' to some of us who've been in the dark for the better part of this module.

Most learners managed to write the test without too many technical problems except for Brenda, who had been using Lisandra's Username and Password all along in order to access *WebCT*. She could, however, not use the same method of access with the electronic test since the test was set up in such a way that only the first attempt (and therefore, Lisandra's attempt) was accepted for marking

purposes. We had urgently to organise a *WebCT* account for her personally, and she only then completed the test on Saturday, 31 August 2002.

In order to prevent learner from having to complete the test in one full session, I broke the assessment into 3 manageable sections of approximately 45 minutes each. *WebCT's* survey tool was then used to add a fourth section, namely a Survey. It was explained to the learners that they had to complete the Survey (which was not intended for marks) in order to have the remainder of their tests marked. This arrangement ensured that all learners would complete survey with the much-needed feedback on the module.

Because I had never before used the Survey tool, I did not realise that *WebCT* does not reveal the identity of the person completing the survey. As the learners also did not know that their responses were going to be anonymous, the freedom with which the expressed themselves was not influenced.

On Wednesday, 28 August 2002, the tribes went to the voting stations to vote off the last members from the remaining tribes. On Thursday, 29 August 2002, they then made their final votes, this time to identify the sole *CyberSurviver* who was to win the Grand Prize out of the group of 5 remaining 'live' tribal members.

At 14:42 on Thursday afternoon, 29 August 2002, I sent a light-hearted message to the group under the subject heading 'One last web page...'

to be visited as part of the *Surviver* module:

<http://207.89.188.135/eoti.htm>

Figure 13: The End of the Internet

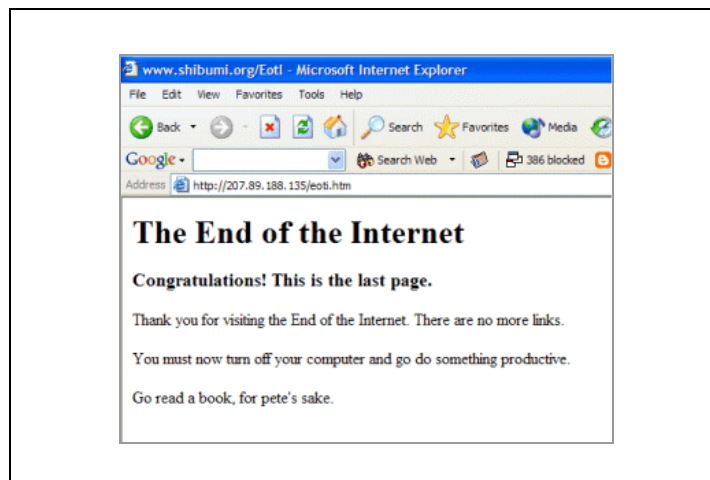


Figure 12 shows what the learners found on this page. The text read:

The End of the Internet

Congratulations! This is the last page.

Thank you for visiting the End of the Internet. There are no more links.

You must now turn off your computer and go do something productive.

Go read a book, for Pete's sake.

Many learners responded with smileys and emoticons, and Larissa (*WebCT* posting, Thursday 29 August 2002, 17:16) contributed:

Hi fellow survivors

That is exactly what I am going to do for the next 6 days: visit the Mpumalanga reserve and climb a few trees, read a book etc. Thanks for an amazing experience, and all the help along the way. See you next week.

Lisandra (*WebCT* posting, Thursday 29 August 2002, 16:45), though, responded with the following:

What an anticlimax!!! When I saw the heading I held my breath when I opened it – wondering if the last drop of blood, sweat and tears was now finally going to be removed from this already unstable mind and body! :-)

Thanks, Linda, it was a steep learning curve – although certainly unforgettable and worthwhile!!

[Translated in part]

On this lighter note, I wrapped up the *CyberSurviver* module online, and left for the University to meet the learners face-to-face in one final Tribal Council.

The debriefing session went well, with learners were eager to share their experiences and to ask the unanswered questions they still harboured. At the end, the Dean announced that Geronimo was the sole *CyberSurviver* to remain. He had won by a large margin because he had by far received most of the final votes.

All that was left to be completed was the final individual assignment that required the learners to write a scientific article of such a standard that it could be considered for publication in an academic journal.

And, with the deadline for the submission of the articles clarified, a couple of tired, but satisfied, learners left the Tribal Council and went straight to bed!

Table 17: Summary of Week 6

Initial number of learners for Week 6	15			
Active learners	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)	Tribe 6 (Cyber- Squatters)	Tribe 7 (E-Eagles)	Tribe X
	-	Dan	Brian	Warren
		Lisandra	Catherine	Roleen
		Brenda	Jasmine	Mabel
		Geronimo	-	Gabrielle
	--	-	Larissa	
Lurkers	Tribe 5 (Tribe5- NeverDie)	Tribe 6 (Cyber- Squatters)	Tribe 7 (E-Eagles)	Tribe X

	Samantha	-	-	-
	Madeline			
	Beatrice			
Discontinued learners	Names	Reasons for discontinuing		
	None	-		
Significant events	Date	Nature	Purpose	
	28 August 2002	Online test	To allow learners to experience everything that is related to taking an online assessment at first hand and in person.	
	29 August 2002	Face-to-face contact session	To conduct our final debriefing by means of a face-to-face Tribal Council and to announce the <i>CyberSurviver</i> Winner of the Grand Prize.	
Number of asynchronous postings	Yahoo Groups		WebCT	
	74		14	
Tools, products and services used	Web-based		PC-based	
	<i>Yahoo Groups</i>		Word processor (such as <i>Word</i> or <i>WordPerfect</i>)	
	<i>Yahoo Messenger</i>		Presentation programme (such as <i>PowerPoint</i>)	
	<i>InterWise / CampusWise</i>		Microphone and speakers / headphones	
	<i>WebCT</i> (Specifically the Quiz and Survey tools)		Graphics tool (such as <i>Paint</i> , <i>Corel Draw</i> , or <i>PaintShop Pro</i>)	
	<i>NiceNet</i> (or a similar online learning environment)			
Assignments	Individual		Tribal	

	<p>Prepare for an online test by reviewing what we have done so far in this module.</p> <p>Go to <i>WebCT</i> and write the formal test.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for an appropriate tool, such as <i>NiceNet</i> or <i>Yahoo Groups</i> that will allow you to host a learning event online. • Then plan a learning intervention that will teach your learners a basic skill, and show how you would make appropriate use of the following components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a synchronous communication tool ○ an asynchronous communication tool ○ the use of the Internet as a source of information ○ multimedia (for example, clickable pictures, scrolling text, sound, video and/or animation) ○ a poll ○ an online game/learning activity e-testing
	<p>Write a publishable scientific article of approximately 5 000 words on the topic that is listed next to your name. The level and standard of writing should be of such calibre that you could submit the article to an accredited academic journal once you have completed it.</p>	
Challenges	Immunity	Reward
	-	Who can tell us what the word 'cache' means? Why are files sometimes stored in the cache? Why would one sometimes wish to bypass the cache?

Closure

Chapter 5 aimed to provide the reader with an overview of the 6 weeks during which *CyberSurviver* ran. Explaining how the elements of a reality game were introduced in an online course for adult learners, was the focus of this chapter.

In the following chapter, I will discuss some of the complexities that became evident in learner functioning, both individually and in groups, that were the result of the introduction of game elements, specifically those that were based on the television reality game, *Survivor*®.