'A lovely way of spending time, growing and learning'.[1] The *Higher education and nurturing of informal learning communities* project. A report for the Society for Research into Higher Education

***Abstract***
*This report is based on the testimony of people who joined independent learning communities. These originated through members' common interests in three specific Open University, UK, modules. Each module was of a different length, each designed for a different level and each presented in a different period (1976 — 1985, 1994 — 2001, 2007 —). Building on their university experiences members of the communities created structures which supported their subsequent collaborative learning. The groups became 'communities of practice', in Lave and Wenger's sense of the term, because they were created for the benefit of members who shared skills, discourses and artefacts and engaged in joint enterprises. The university's role, as both a producer of knowledge and as node within a network of cultural production, is illuminated when the long-term impact of modules is recognised.*

Despite being marginalised as 'the tradition of "autodidacts" and hobbyists outside work' informal learning may have plenty to offer to universities.[2] There has been an increase in awareness that it is 'where most of the significant learnings that apply to our everyday lives are learned', that 'informal and self-directed learning now form part of our everyday existence' and that there is much responsible extra-mural scholarship.[3] There has long been a symbiotic relationship between the formal and informal sectors. Many nineteenth-century independent, freelance, scholars received university training and subsequently made important scientific contributions.[4] In the twentieth–century Iona and Peter Opie developed their work on the culture of children largely independently of universities. Oral history, women's studies, African literature and other topics have followed science into the formal academy.[5] In this century communication technologies have provided new opportunities.[6] Many graduates who wish to acquire the new skills and knowledge (deemed necessary if they are to be part of the well-educated workforce) look not for fresh stocks of formal knowledge but to access informal learning communities built around practice.[7]

This report is based on the personal testimony of former Open University (OU) students who developed their own learning communities.[8] Although to gain an OU degree a

specified number of points have to be gained at each level, students study modules in a variety of sequences, mostly part-time over many years.[9] As students do not study on a campus but largely in their own homes using correspondence materials, broadcasts and the internet, many do not meet one another. Nevertheless they can form the groupings that educationalist Etienne Wenger called 'communities of practice'. For him these were more than networks or clubs, members also shared interests and competences, engaged in activities and discussions together, helped each other, and shared information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.[10]

In Section I there is an outline of three such communities, each based on a specific OU module. Interviewees frequently attributed their ability to study independently to their work as OU students. The university was also felt to have encouraged collaborative learning and to have helped them to improve their skills, confidence and motivation, to strengthen their identities as learners and to gain a clearer sense of the relationship between learning and the wider world.[11] In Section II the context in which the original modules were created is considered. The activities of these communities may have broader social and intellectual benefits. While 'an *alma mater* leaves an indelible mark' on alumni, former students are often wary of outreach, as it is associated with requests for donations. However, as Gallo has indicated, if 'an HEI adopts a model of building lifelong alumni relationships, instead of focusing on fund-raising, there is potential to gain wider, meaningful benefits from the alumni constituency'.[12] The personal accounts indicate how a university can maintain a network of knowledge transfer which does not assume that the flow of knowledge is only from universities and alumni are merely an income stream devoid of creativity. They also point to how collective intelligence, dubbed a 'cognitive surplus', might be employed.[13] The focus in Section III is on the ways in which the communities sustained and renewed themselves and on their impact.

**I The communities**

The OU was opened to students in 1971. Committees ('course teams') produced OU teaching materials within a central location and the materials were delivered through

correspondence, broadcasts and latterly the internet. There was also face-to-face teaching by locally-based part-time staff (called Tutors and later Associate Lecturers) and often a residential element based on a hired campus and lasting a few days for students. Tutors were urged not to concentrate only on imparting the canon of accepted knowledge but rather to encourage students to question the assumption that there was an accepted body of theoretical knowledge about which they need to learn.[14] The significance of self-esteem to learners was recognised and there was encouragement of reciprocity and mutual respect of the life experiences of other adults In addition, the OU promoted the development of student-directed learning groups.[15]

Students were not passive recipients of centrally-produced knowledge. They gathered data, assessed theories and engaged in collaborative research. In order for them to engage with hands-on experimentation and primary sources, the OU provided home experiment kits and broadcast versions of canonical dramas. Those who studied *Science: A Foundation Course*, S101, 1979-1987, collected data about the peppered moth near where they lived (that is, collectively, all over the country). These were incorporated into a peer-reviewed article.[16] Students on *The Man-Made World: A Foundation Course,* T100, 1972-1979, carried out noise experiments around the country and collected data. On one of the modules' television broadcasts the results were presented and assessed. The country's first university module in ecology, *Ecology*, S323, 1974-1985, included a project element which enabled students to follow their own interests. Students also carried out group projects.[17] By 1976 there were at least ten modules which included a project element.[18] In that year and also in 1984 and 1992 a quarter of assessed OU modules contained or consisted of projects.[19]

In 1973 support for the formation of self-help groups was offered and by 1974 there were over 1,000 self-help study groups.[20] Educationalists argued that 'a student's colleagues often represent the least recognised, least used and possibly most important of all the resources available to him [sic] and that 'the deepest foundations for learning are self-confidence, trust, belief and love'.[21] In 1975 John Ferguson, the OU's Dean of Arts, contrasted the OU with other universities where:

many students would pass through their whole student career without any effective personal confrontation with individual members of staff. In Buber's language there was no I-Thou encounter.[22]

The OU has also encouraged tutors to research their own practices, cascade the results and then take action to improve their own effectiveness and their students' learning. As a symbol of its ambitions in 1973, at the first OU Degree Ceremony, educator Paulo Freire, who stressed the importance to learning of dialogue and critical consciousness, was awarded an honorary degree.[23]

It was from within this milieu that, in 1976, a 30-point module, *Art and environment* TAD292 was produced in the OU's headquarters.[24] Taught until 1985 it was part of a broader shift towards the integration of design and art within the wider curricula.[25] Simon Nicholson (1934-1990) chaired the OU committee which produced TAD292. He was appointed by a Professor of Design within the Faculty of Technology.[26] TAD292 invited students to develop 'strategies for creative work'. It dealt with:

> the processes and attitudes of art not so much as these were evidenced in products of art but as they underlie the very act of doing art. This can be seen already from the titles which were given to some of the units in the course [module]: 'Boundary Shifting', 'Imagery and Visual Thinking', 'Having Ideas by Handling Materials'.[27]

Over 100 of the earliest students of TAD292 helped to remake the module for subsequent presentations. A survey noted that self-help groups were 'extremely helpful' on TAD292.[28] Some of those who studied TAD292 formed a society, Tadpoles, to develop ideas from the module and to 'share skills, experiences, ideas and knowledge of creativity and personal growth'.[29]

*Family and Community History,* DA301 (taught 1994-2001) was a 60-point module. It encouraged students to undertake collaborative activity related to the activity of practitioners in the community, local historians, to exchange narratives and build trust with fellow students. It also drew upon ideas associated not with the presentation of information but with problem-based learning.[30] The original local history research projects written by students were collated on CDs that were issued to subsequent students. These latter students' research often referred the work of earlier students. Later the students' reports were made available more widely, enabling the original student authors to use the research findings of the subsequent students. There were other collaborative elements to the module.[31] The OU had previously offered local history at a distance. The East Anglian Studies Resources pack, PA730, was available 1984 – 1997. Developed with the Norfolk Federation of the Women's Institutes, it was a stand-alone pack sold to the public. It included facsimiles of primary sources and recordings of older local people's personal testimonies. These gave learners opportunities to interpret material for themselves. There were ideas for activities, readings and visits. The pack was used as a resource and as a guided approach to independent learning by local groups.[32] There was also a more overt precedent in *Historical Sources and the Social Scientist*, D301, 1974-1988, which was largely the work of Professor Michael Drake. Much of this module was devoted to supporting students who engaged in historical projects of their own devising. They did not, however, share their reports with subsequent students. A report noted that D301 students received support from their tutors and that 'many students cope competently with the project without resorting to the telephone or letter'.[33]

Through their OU modules these researchers, whether they were tutors, students or former students, could gain an understanding of how research can be an active, personal endeavour which is socially mediated through a supportive group. The undergraduate module DA301 led to the creation, by students and staff, of the Family & Community Historical Research Society (FACHRS).[34] This has conducted a range of connected local historical projects, encourages links between institutionally based and independent researchers and offered its own Continued Learning courses. Immediately

following DA301 there was a national project to consider local records of infant mortality. This was run by Michael Drake, who was a course team member of DA301 and subsequently active in FACHRS. Sue Smith, who studied DA301 and was a founding member of FACHRS, described the connection:

> When we were doing the infant mortality project we were all over the country really so we could meet up with each other through FACHRS as well as independently.[35]

A further body for students and former students was formed by OU staff, Open Studies in Family and Community History. This was, in effect, folded into FACHRS at the inaugural meeting of FACHRS which was at the OU. Initially the Society's journal was co-edited by OU academic staff and contained articles based on research carried out by DA301 students.

The 10-week, 10-point, single disciplinary, level one module, T189 *Digital Photography: creating and sharing better images*, first presented in 2007, aimed to 'teach you how to critically evaluate your own and others' work in the spirit of continuous technical and artistic improvement'.[36] Students uploaded non-assessed photographs to a shared online site, and were encouraged to critique each other's pictures. The idea that learning was a social phenomenon was reflected in the Module Guide which stated: 'this is the very first online digital photography module provided by a university anywhere in the world that is structured around online collaborative photo sharing'.[37] Although moderators offer guidance it was explained that 'you will also find lots of help and support from your fellow students'.[38] Subsequently former students have established their own online groups and maintained contact with one another. These virtual communities have a more fluid structure than the other two groups. While the other two modules were taught by part-time tutors and had some residential element (a voluntary weekend for DA301, a residential summer school for TAD292) this module was moderated, not tutored. Students could ask questions of moderators but moderators were not necessarily trained to assess or support in the same way as OU

tutors. At the OU, modules are the responsibility of a team which produces the materials for teaching (which can include books, videos and online resources). As Dave Philips, the co-chair of the module team noted, moderators included a former police forensics photographer and leading members of the Photographic Society. This provided a 'huge range of knowledge we have been able to draw and give to the students.' By contrast, employing tutors would have been more restrictive, 'because we have got moderators rather than tutors it's actually given us a bit more freedom to choose who they are'.[39] The focus was on supporting learning and learners.

The communities developed ideas derived from the original modules, forged networks and gathered resources which supported their subsequent collaborative practices and self-directed, socially-mediated, learning.[40] Mary Stuart, a former OU student who went on to run a university, noted 'learning can never occur in a vacuum and students of whatever age use prior knowledge to shape their engagement with new knowledge'.[41] At the OU there has been recognition that the reinforcement of feelings of confidence and self-esteem often aided academic success.[42]

## II Models for communities

All three modules encouraged students to critique the work of fellow students in a controlled environment. T189 co-chair Dave Philips argued that:

> one of the things we do teach is peer review because one thing about learning about photography is looking at other people's pictures. So this is where the social aspect comes in of talking to each other, discussing their own photographs, so there is a learning process there.

Using the OU's 'Open Studio', students could post images online that only other T189 students could see. Comment was encouraged and guidance on this matter offered. One student noted that 'as a novice it's a bit intense at times, but the tutors and some of the more experienced students help you through'. Another posted the comment that 'through viewing and commenting on fellow students' work and receiving their

comments I have developed greater awareness of what makes a good photograph'.[43] The format was partly derived from commercial sites which permitted sharing but also encouraged peer reflection. Students were directed towards Flickr (a commercial site which enables users to 'store, sort, search and share your photos online').[44] Many formed their own groups. Dave Philips went on:

> it gives them a way of continuing the learning curve on the photography ... I actually joined the first group and then took a step back and kept out of the way … They have got confidence so they are actually interacting much more with all the other groups within Flickr.[45]

Those involved in post-T189 groups also referred to the original module as a model. *On T189 friend* one participant asked readers to 'remember one of the early tasks on T189' and suggested that they 'get back into the [T189] habit'. Another recalled that 'We set up a "How to critique a photograph" thing and that was based on stuff picked up in T189'.[46] Those who joined the online communities of photographers had opportunities to learn from one another in ways which mimicked the experience of T189. On *T189 Past, Present & Future* a question about tripods led to an informed discussion. These former students gained an understanding of how knowledge construction is an active, personal endeavour which can be socially mediated through a supportive group.[47] Their comments illustrate Wenger's view that 'learning is the engine of practice and practice the history of that learning'.[48] Mark Pearce became involved in a group:

> to continue with the learning curve that I had started with T189 because I found that talking to people and discussion of photography really helps you to learn more and take more out of what you are doing.[49]

Graham Shaw was a student of T189. He said that he enjoyed the critical appraisal, adding:

that is why we started the T189 groups ... it was the people on the course wishing

to continue to do the same ... discuss each other's photographs ... we have

competitions. ...we are all very supportive of giving each other help.

He stressed that the culture of commenting and peer review derived from the

module.[50] Christine Cheung studied T189 and joined an online group based on her

cohort.[51] She maintained contact with the group because it offered information and

interaction. Carl Dania was also attracted by the structured peer support on the module

which he found 'worked absolutely superbly'.[52]

A number of others echoed Winston Edwards, who mentioned gaining a sense of self-

esteem. He felt that T189 'gave me a lot of confidence in photography and it opened

doors in photography'.[53] Just as this module supported learners who wanted to make

further learning journeys so, when Tony Whittaker sought to conceptualise the

relationship between TAD292 and his subsequent learning he used an identical image.

He said TAD292 'opened a door that said "There is another world out there" and the

Tadpoles allowed me to go out there and play for the last 20 odd years'.[54] Alex Richards

used a similar metaphor. She said:

what it did was open up to me the possibilities for us as human beings and our

capacity for kindness and compassion and creativity and to actually achieve

things as a group that I didn't know about before.

John Leach also spoke about gaining control, though he employed a different discursive

framework. He felt that TAD292 'changed me completely because I actually stopped

looking for results and was looking at the process of what I was doing and if I didn't

want to do something I wouldn't do it. It just freed me up from the constraints of

expectation'. Edwina Nixon found that TAD292 led her to gain a 'perspective that was

very different on creativity and people consciousness'.[55] Jo Scott found the TAD292

'mind blowing' and also said it held 'the most spectacular summer school ever'.[56] One

of the summer school tutors recalled the atmosphere which Nicholson sought to create:

> he had this idea that the summer school should be what he called happenings, you know the sort of hippy thing … there certainly was this aura … the students were very enthusiastic.[57]

A study of TAD292 found the residential component to be:

> a critical factor. This was held fairly early on in the course … Many students started the week confused, even antagonistic to the course, but most left converted and went on to complete the remaining assignments eagerly.[58]

Anne Murray was an OU student who did not study TAD292 but joined the Tadpoles. She felt that:

> the way the courses at summer school were structured … meant you really had to talk to people, you had to work in groups, you had to be part of that … a lot of my confidence came from seeing other people learning how to do it, also just getting out and meeting new people.

It was exciting for her to work with like-minded people who wanted to study and who were 'eager to learn new skills, new subjects'.[59] She concluded that the society was

> about like-minded people coming together. It's about sharing experiences. There is a sort of growing together as well. Some of what happens in [the Society] really goes right back to the summer school.

Tom Nisbet enjoyed the module so much he studied it several times. He made another connection between the module and the society when he noted that 'What I got out of TAD[292] was an expanded mind, a mind that was more open than ever before, a mind

that was prepared to accept'. He then added that in Tadpoles 'you are with people who are similarly non-judgmental'.[60]

Ann Terry, an OU student and Tadpole who did not study TAD292, connected the module to the society. She noticed that at the early camps 'we used to do a lot more workshops that arose out of the course'. She added that 'looking at landscapes or looking at buildings … were things that had been part of the course'. To do these activities with fellow Tadpoles increased her awareness of the environment.[61] Jenny Fox, who had also not formally studied TAD292, noted a connection:

> when the course finished somebody who had been a tutor, knowing about the
> Tadpoles society, thought it would be good to continue and they had a couple of
> more formal summer schools weeks at Durham; then this guy stopped and
> someone else took over and that is still running.

She also mentioned that the course materials had been used to inspire activities such as poetry walks, noting that 'some people have got whole sets still'.[62]

FACHRS Treasurer Frances Brooks' paid work was in a chemistry lab and she mentioned, 'I am used to doing chemistry research. I have worked in universities all my life'.[63] However, her self-confidence was 'killed' at her workplace and only revived through studying with the OU. Brita Woods left her work in a bank because it was 'too regimented … it was making me physically ill'. She felt that 'The major thing that the OU has given to me is confidence … to meet people … in my own abilities, knowledge that I can work out and problem solve'.[64] Others in FACHRS referred to 'gaining confidence and the skills' and a new career.[65] Linda Kirk felt that DA301 led her to start to research for other people.[66] FACHRS member Diane Mehew said that she had gained research and organisational skills as well as confidence.[67] Jacqueline Cooper gained specific skills, such as 'how to do references and check your facts … put things in the right order and do your bibliography' and also a sense of confidence in her abilities. She went on to edit books and a twice yearly local history journal (a 'mixture of academic and more popular

articles') that she helped to launch.[68] She is also involved in a federation of historians 'like me'.[69] Jacqueline Cooper was a principal instigator of one of FACHRS's first projects which involved original research at local level and then the organisation of its collation by the Society. She felt that DA301 'gave me a sense of direction'.[70]

Bourdieu developed the notion of habitus to classify patterns of thoughts, beliefs, behaviour and taste in the social and cultural life of France in the 1960s. The idea has since been extended. It has been argued that a university's cultural patterns, its 'institutional habitus', affect students' expectations and conduct.[71] Positive experiences of educational institutions give learners the confidence to enjoy the benefits of what have been termed cultural and social capital and enable them to seek out collaboration and support.[72] OU students may not arrive at the OU with positive experiences of education. However, by the time those who joined the groups had completed one of these modules the interviewees felt they belonged. Bourdieu and Wacquant provided a comparison when they referred to the fish in water which 'does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world for granted'.[73] The OU's presentation of knowledge and understanding provided former students with a route towards the formation and sustaining of these communities. Group members' narratives indicate how their confidence derived from having learnt, within a formal, university, setting, about how to socially construct learning through conversations and interactions around problems. They felt that their university experiences enabled them to teach and learn with one another, achieve together what they could not have done separately and to recruit new members to sustain their communities.

In his analysis Wenger noted the importance of identity, knowledge and community to the collective construction of meanings. He proposed that a newcomer to a community of practice initially participates through a peripheral role. As a person's social engagement increases, so does their participation. The social process 'subsumes the learning of knowledgeable skills'. Furthermore, 'learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world'.[74] Jane Anderson's account can be seen as an illustration of this thesis. She recalled that she

felt 'frustrated' by TAD292 and arrived at its summer school 'in a really stroppy mood'
but that the tutors were 'inspirational' and that collaborating with fellow students led
her to relax and enjoy learning. She met with other TAD292 students for a weekend
event shortly afterwards and later took a more leading role within Tadpoles. This
involved arranging a walking holiday and running an event 'on public art because we
have got the Angel of the North and I got a book actually that was written by
Northumbria University'.[75]

These communities' founders, and most of the members, had all studied the same OU
modules. Members could interact, experience meaning making through practice and
develop a sense of belonging and identity. They could share ideas and practices and
learn new skills within a broadly sociable atmosphere. The informal communities were
sustained because they offered realistic objectives, such as research into particular
historical events or support for those seeking a professional photography qualification.
By seeing these groups in terms of Lave and Wenger's concept the similarities are
emphasised and the impact of the original OU teaching and learning on the ability of
the groups to promote mutually beneficial, collective and self-improvement is clarified.
Moreover, attention is focused on their co-creation of knowledge, the process of
collective learning through their shared experiences and practices and the shared
passion of members, irrespective of the different levels of participation.

### III Sustaining learning

Some TAD292 students organised a camp at which they developed the learning and
activities associated with the OU summer schools. Soon an annual camp was instituted
and Tadpole Society members held weekend events at their own homes, offering
accommodation to one another. Some travelled abroad together.[76] Alex Richards
recalled that:

> it was just being in another reality for a weekend when you went away. We'd all
> go and meet in each other's houses and it was like so much of ordinary life was
> suspended … There was always an element of creativity.

The community members developed their own learning. Alex Richards said that from being a Tadpole, 'I think I learnt everything… I learnt what I needed to learn' and that being a Tadpole was a way of 'trying to serve'. She connected this to her understanding of TAD292 where she felt 'absorbed in being creative and having your thinking ignited'.[77] Jane Anderson related the Tadpoles' sense of service to TAD292:

> part of the course was the creativity thing and the whole environmental thing … people's attitudes to recycling and to transport, to what we buy.

She said that on the first day of Tadcamp there would:

> usually be a walk down in the forest to a place called St Anthony's Well which usually had crap in the bottom of it because people had been throwing cans and stuff and usually we cleared it out … doing something positive for the environment.[78]

One Tadpole called the experience 'a re-familling. My family I am very fond of but I have a much wider family [and with] some of the people I have enjoyed deeper relationships'.[79] Jenny Fox described the relationship between TAD292 and the Tadpoles:

> it's always felt OK to 'have a go' and that was what the course was about, wasn't it? Really to open up your creativity to explore and not only explore the environment, you are exploring within yourself as well and that sort of continues.[80]

Although she did not study TAD292, Hilary Farrell studied with the OU and found the Tadpoles was 'a venue for learning' and that it 'empowers people who may not normally be teachers to become teachers and it encourages learner to try something new because there is no fear of failure'.[81] Jane Anderson helped to maintain Tadpoles

by revitalising it through linking it to her paid work in post-adoption support. She developed the skills honed through TAD292 and Tadpoles and then returned to Tadpoles with those skills enhanced:

> In Tads there was a lot of trust … it's very welcoming and inclusive and people all have something to offer and I think that is what I have taken into working in social work … it's not about me doing something. It's about them doing something for themselves.

She explained that which she called the Tadpoles' 'ethos' as:

> You can do things, you can change things. It's up to you but you don't do it to other people …. It is a two way thing and the people that I work with, I get a lot from them.[82]

FACHRS' members also identified common aims and created informal, voluntary, convivial, educational communities of practice based on their studies. Initially the society had regional groups based on the areas of the UK covered by the 13 OU regions and nations. Sue Smith chaired one of these but found that the distances between people were too large (the region included both Milton Keynes and the Channel Islands) to enable meetings to be well-attended. The society changed policy and focused on the national level. Members adapted the structures of the OU but gave themselves an enhanced role. For a project on allotments, contributors met academic advisor Jeremy Burchardt of the University of Reading.[83] Clive Leivers, the first Chair of FACHRS, was clear that FACHRS was in charge of the 'academic adviser'.[84] He added, 'we have managed to provide a way in which we can encourage and advise people in research'. Don Dickson felt that a FACHRS project which involved the collation of data from physically dispersed sources was:

> a classic example of how you take learning from an Open University course like DA301. You can have FACHRS evolve from that and then FACHRS itself can start

to evolve ... it becomes a learning resource and we start to deliver learning to the public.[85]

FACHRS developed a range of self-help strategies.[86] Brita Woods noted that she learnt much by running the Society's recruitment campaign.[87] She explained how in her self-help group they talked 'about how we are doing with the various chapters that we are trying to write, listening to each other's problems, and providing advice to one another'. She also mentioned the school log books project. Members uploaded data to a collective website:

> We have a member in Jersey and somebody else in Dundee ... in one school for example they have noted that the girls were paid to sew and they were asking 'Has anybody else observed this?'[88]

Michael Kemp suggested that:

> If one person went through log books it would only be a discussion based on a fairly small area. If you have researchers looking at log books in, say, 20 or 30 areas you are going to get a much wider perspective ... it's a new development in local history.

Sue Smith ran a mini-project for FACHRS. She invited members to find out about a railway stationmaster in their area from the 1881 census and other records and to complete a research form. She then collated the 93 responses she received and developed the material. This level of learning was echoed elsewhere within the society. Sue mentioned that:

> FACHRS run courses for members on writing for the journal, writing for the newsletter and how to use databases in a historical context rather than a business database ... there were courses on sources when researching a village or small areas, there was a course on photograph restoration.[89]

Angela Blaydon did not study DA301 but acquired the teaching materials after she had joined the FACHRS. While these were helpful, especially as she had studied at the OU, she added that 'I have learnt a lot from being a member of the Society ... it's given me tools to be able to find out and know where to go or how to go about it to delve deeper.[90]

The groups studied did not offer certificates for learning. Rather the prospect of sociability aided the recruitment and retention of members. Wenger saw learning as a development of communities. It can also sustain those communities. While Vanessa Worship felt that her engagement with FACHRS was 'definitely a learning experience' the social aspect of the Society was not neglected.[91] Brita Woods said 'It is lovely to be involved with like-minded people'.[92] Sue Smith said of FACHRS, 'socially it's a good group of people, we enjoy it and we are all like-minded because we've got a shared interest and I get that from it and it's good to mix with academics'.

The social elements of communities were connected to learning by Kim Haddon of T189 who noted that 'not only did it provide me with tons of useful information, but I met so many wonderful people ... We often get together for photography days and we all comment on each other's work and this has been invaluable'.[93] Mark Simmons felt that the design of T189 encouraged networking and peer assessment, which he had not considered prior to starting the module. The pleasure of offering and receiving comments was an unexpected one and was the reason that he gave for continuing to do this within the informal environment. He joined a Flickr group and both commented and received comments on his photographs and accepted a photographic challenge which led to improved pictures. He found that the group 'encourages me to carry on improving'.[94] Christine Cheung explained: 'you speak to each other about each other's photos and then you make friendships with the same people'.[95] Former T189 student Julie Wright felt that her 'the biggest change has been discovering photo sharing ... and all the wonderful people and groups I've met on this site.[96] One T189 group ran competitions, one of the aims of which was 'make you try and do things, maybe take

you outside your comfort zone but extend your experience in a really good way'.[97] Carl Dania felt that 'these Flickr groups were the best thing to come out of T189. The fact that so many have improved and developed their photography speaks for itself'.[98] He went on to mention how that success was about people working together, taking control and helping one another. He was invited to moderate an online forum established by a professional photographer and reflected that such an invitation would not have been made before he started the module. Another person posted that:

> I really started to improve after T189 thanks to these groups. For me, the OU course was a wake-up call that I wasn't as good as I thought I was :) but it's been the inspiration and support that I've had on Flickr that has really helped me improve.

A further posting concluded that 'these Flickr groups definitely helped me improve post-T189'.[99] These examples indicate the close supportive critical engagement of some group members. When Carl Dania recounted a meeting with a fellow online community member he emphasised how the relationship was based on common experiences. After this person's child was involved in a road accident Carl Dania, whose son had been killed in a road accident, offered help. 'I could relate to that and I can remember saying to her 'Look just get yourself over here with your bloody camera, we'll have a coffee' … and I know it helped her and it helped me'.[100]

### Conclusion

> We all belong to communities of practice … For individuals it means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities. For communities it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members.[101]

Wenger's proposal, that communities of practice require a domain, a community and a practice, applies to these post-OU module communities. The spirit which infused the Tadpoles derived from the 'ethos behind the TAD course [which] was, you built your

own hoops and then decided whether you wanted to jump through them or not'.[102] For FACHRS the domain was historical research, the practice involved becoming better at communicating research through interaction. In the case of T189 (a module written after notions about conceptualising learning in social terms had spread) electronic communication technologies made it possible to interact and form communities with geographically dispersed memberships. Ideas about effective support for collaborative learning had been considered at the OU.[103] In each case the original module design encouraged collaboration. Students with different levels of expertise and engagement worked together on common tasks and learned from each other. Many interviewees mentioned that the OU played a significant role in fostering their collective construction of knowledge by helping them to build a sense of confidence, by foregrounding the relationship between learning and social connections and by offering realistic objectives and opportunities to share ideas and learn new skills.

The longevity of these groups is related to their ability to act as a catalyst for learning and cognitive change. They were places where learners could teach and learn with one another and control their own learning. Just as apprentices begin learning by engaging in simple tasks and then progress from 'legitimate peripheral participation' towards more demanding tasks, so these communities offer opportunities to learning as part of their learning.[104] Membership did not require people to amass transferrable knowledge. They could, as learners, ask questions, listen to the answers given to others and teach others. Members' narratives demonstrate that they understood their formal experiences could be the basis for the creation of their own spaces for further learning. Analysis of the perceptions of the members of these communities foregrounds that the boundary between knowledge accumulated for summative assessment and informal learning is porous, that 'higher education has much to learn from its alumni' and that the measure of successful formal education need not stop at the degree ceremony.[105]

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**Acknowledgements**

[1] Alex Richards. Interview by Ronald Macintyre, 6 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. The interviewees are the people who built these communities and are proud of their achievements. I gained the approval of the Research ethics committee at the OU for my approach. In agreement with the SRHE the recordings will be placed in the OU Archive. All those interviewed were offered consent forms to sign. Real names are only used in cases where explicit agreement was obtained from participants. Those who requested anonymity have been given false names. The research questions were; What role can Higher Education play in fostering independent learners' journeys of collective, self-directed, activity?; How do informal learners conceptualise their learning activities?; What strategies have sustained informal communities?

[2] Stephen Gorard, Ralph Fevre and Gareth Rees, 'The apparent decline of informal learning', *Oxford Review of Education,* 25, 4, 1999, pp. 437-454 (p. 451).

[3] Daniel Schugurensky, 'The forms of informal learning: towards a conceptualization of the field', *WALL Working Paper, No. 19*, 2000, OISEUT, Toronto, p. 2; Rita Kop and Hélène Fournier, 'New Dimensions to Self-directed Learning in an Open Networked Learning Environment', *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 7, 2, Fall 2010, pp. 1-18 (p. 1); Ruth Finnegan (ed.), *Participating in the knowledge society: researchers beyond the university walls*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2005.

[4] Mendel and Darwin studied at university but produced their significant work later and many clerics with degrees worked on natural history, funded by the Church of England.

[5] Ruth Finnegan, 'Should we notice researchers outside the university?', *British Academy Review*, 10, 2007, pp. 58-61.

[6] Telescopes, scanning electron microscopes and supercomputer simulation models are available online. In addition, social networking sites, blogs and wikis enable people to participate in learning collaboratively. The open-source Linux system, the Apache web server, the open-source browser, Firefox and Moodle, a virtual learning environment and Wikipedia were created collaboratively outside universities. On the start of Linux in this context see Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller, *The Pro-Am revolution. How enthusiasts are changing our economy and society*, Demos 2004, available at http://www.demos.co.uk/files/proamrevolutionfinal.pdf accessed 1 October 2012.

[7] On the growth in emphasis on the capacities required see Paul Hager, Susan Holland, David Beckett, 'Enhancing the learning and employability of graduates: the role of generic skills', *Paper prepared for the Business/Higher Education Round Table*, Melbourne, July 2002, available at http://www.bhert.com/publications/position-papers/B-HERTPositionPaper09.pdf accessed 1 October 2012.

[8] Most of the interviewing of former students was carried out by telephone. On why this method has 'much to offer', see Margaret Glogowska, Pat Young and Lesley Lockyer, 'Propriety, process and purpose: considerations of the use of the telephone interview method in an educational research study, *Higher Education*, 62, 1, July 2011, pp. 17-26 (p. 24).

[9] The word module to mean a discreet unit often studied as part of a larger qualification is currently employed at the OU. In the past the word course was used in this context. In this report the words are synonymous.

[10] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 96. This theory has been developed in a number of subsequent texts.

[11] These accounts accord with the findings of studies based on the personal accounts of graduates' post-university learning. See for example, Rachel Brooks and Glyn Everett, 'The impact of higher education on lifelong learning', *International Journal of Lifelong education*, 27, 3, May/June 2008, pp. 239-254. They are bolstered by studies which drew on the narratives of adult learners. See, for example, R. Johnston and B. Merrill, 'Non-traditional students—tracking changing learning identities in the inter-face with higher education', in C. Hunt (ed.), *(Re)generating Research in Adult Learning and Teaching*, Sheffield SCRUTREA/University of Sheffield, Sheffield, 2002, pp. 141-149; Linden West, *Beyond fragments: adults, motivation and learning: a biographical analysis,* Taylor and Francis,

London. 1996; B. Merrill and P. Alheit, 'Biography and narratives: adult returners to learning', in M. Osborne, J. Gallacher and B. Crossan, *Researching widening access to lifelong learning issues and approaches in international research*, RoutledgeFalmer, London, 2004, pp. 150–163.

[12] Maria Gallo, 'Beyond philanthropy: recognising the value of alumni to benefit higher education institutions', *Tertiary Education and Management*, 18, 1, March 2012, pp. 41-55 (p. 52).

**[13]** Clay Shirky, *Cognitive surplus: creativity and generosity in a connected age,* Penguin, New York, 2010. Shirky also called the OU **'**remarkable and interesting', see http://www.shirky.com/weblog/2012/11/napster-udacity-and-the-academy/ accessed 12 November 2012.

[14] R. Lewis, 'The place of face-to-face tuition in the Open University system', *Teaching at a distance*, 3, May 1975, pp. 26-31; G. Gibb and N. Durbridge, 'Characteristics of the Open University tutors (part 1)' *Teaching at a distance*, 6, June 1976, pp. 96-102 and G. Gibb and N. Durbridge, 'Characteristics of the Open University tutors (part 2)' *Teaching at a distance*, 7, November 1976, pp. 7-22.

[15] Frankie Todd and Roy Todd, 'Talking and learning: towards an effective structuring of student-directed groups in Higher Education' *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 3, 2, Summer 1979. There has been considerable further evidence on the relationship between students' success and their participation on small study groups. See, for example, Richard J. Light, *Making the most of college: students speak their minds*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

[16] L. M. Cook, G. S. Mani and M. E. Varley, 'Postindustrial melanism in the peppered moth', *Science*, 231, 1986, pp. 611-613.

[17] Margaret E. Varley, 'Ecology projects: an innovation', *Teaching at a distance*, 2, February 1975, pp. 27-30.

[18] For an analysis of ten modules with projects see Jane Henry, 'The course tutor and project work', *Teaching at a distance*, July 1977, pp. 1-12. She included S323 in her study.

[19] Jane Henry, *Teaching through projects*, Kogan Page in association with IET, London, 1984, p. 17.

[20] David Sewart, 'Some observations on the formation of study group' *Teaching at a distance*, 2, February 1975, pp. 2-6.

[21] N. McKenzie, M. Eraut and H. C. Jones, *Teaching and learning: new methods and resources in higher education*, Paris, Unesco/International Association of Universities, 1970; J. Roby Kidd, 'How adults learn – what's new', *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 4, 1, Summer 1977, pp. 27-30 (p. 27).

[22] John Ferguson, *The Open University from within,* University of London Press, London, 1975, p. 6.

[23] Freire's degree is reported in Ferguson, *The Open University*, p. 29.

[24] The letters and numbers combination indicates the position of the module within the OU. In this case TAD refers to its combining elements from Technology (T) Art (A) and Social Sciences (D) while the first digit refers to the level at which it is pitched (ie second level).

[25] See Peter Green, *Design education: problem solving and visual experience*, Batsford, London, 1984. See also The Design Council reports: 'Design Education at Secondary level', 1980 and 'Design and Primary Education', 1987 and K. Baynes, 'Defining a Design Dimension of the Curriculum', *Journal of Art & Design Education*, 4, 3. 1985, pp. 237-243. In 1980 a degree which assessed the relationship between technologies and the environment, Engineering Design and Appropriate Technology, was offered at the University of Warwick.

[26] Nicholson studied at the Royal College of Art, London, and the University of Cambridge and, between 1964 and 1971, taught at the University of Berkeley, California.

[27] TAD292 students were offered a range of projects. These included the suggestion that the student stop activity and engage in listening. Another was to compose a score for sounds made from differently textured papers and a third was to enumerate the household's activities and categorise these in terms of role and sex stereotyping. Assessment involved a student not only submitting the product, such as a self-portrait photograph, but also notes describing the process and rationale. The criteria were not specific but involved formulations including enthusiasm, imagination and authenticity. See Philippe C.

Duchastel, 'TAD292 – and its challenge to Educational Technology', *Programmed Learning & Educational Technology*, 13, 4, October 1976, pp. 61-66 (pp. 62-63).

[28] Henry, 'The course tutor', p. 9.

[29] http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/societies.php accessed 8 March 2012.

[30] DA301 was based in Social Sciences (D) but also with a significant Arts (A) element. It was a third level course (3).

[31] The module encouraged students to develop their transferable skills by making audio and video recordings. The use of a formative Computer Marked Assignment to help students learn about census data was a further element of how the course encouraged learning through collaboration across space and time.

[32] In 1986 a tutor for the Cambridge University Board of Extra-Mural Studies organised a residential course based on the pack. Another group of learners met one another through an advertisement in a parish newsletter. See Jill Turner, 'Open learning resources for local studies', *Open Learning*, 2, 1, February 1987, pp. 43-45.

[33] Henry, 'The course tutor', p. 7.

[34] After a few years FACHRS was formally registered as a charity.

[35] Sue Smith. Interview by Ronald Macintyre 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[36] See http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/course/t189.htm accessed 2 February 2012.

[37] http://learn2.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=56319 accessed 1 May 2012.

[38] http://learn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=576650&section=3 accessed 21 March 2012.

[39] Dave Philips. Interview by Ronald Macintyre 30 May 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[40] The study has been of those who joined post-module learning groups. Analysis of those who did not has been marginalised. It is recognised that this strategy may hide the extent to which membership is framed by issues of gender, age and class issues.

[41] Mary Stuart, Catherine Lido, and Jessica Morgan, 'Personal stories: how students'

social and cultural life histories interact with higher education', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30, 4, 2011, pp. 489-508 (p. 489). Mary Stuart became Vice Chancellor of Lincoln, http://www.thisislincolnshire.co.uk/Education-changed/story-11214847-detail/story.html accessed 11 October 2012.

[42] Alan Tait, 'Planning Student Support for Open and Distance Learning', *Open Learning,* 15, 3, 2000, pp. 287-299.

[43] Two student reviews posted on http://www3.open.ac.uk/coursereviews/course.aspx?course=t189 accessed 20 October 2012.

[44] http://www.flickr.com/help/general/#1 accessed 20 April 2012.

[45] Dave Philips. Interview.

[46] rhianwhit Alphabet challengethread and Winston Edwards. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 6 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. Winston Edwards started to study with the OU in 1974 and also studied T189's first presentation.

[47] Josie Taylor, Mike Sharples, Claire O'Malley, Giasemi Vavoula, Jenny Waycott, 'Towards a Task Model for Mobile Learning: a Dialectical Approach', *International Journal of Learning Technology*, 2, 2/3, 2006, pp. 138-158; Mike Sharples, Josie Taylor, Giasemi Vavoula, 'A theory of learning for the mobile age' in Richard Andrews and Caroline Haythornthwaite (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of E-learning Research*, Sage, London, 2007, pp. 221–247.

[48] Wenger, *Communities,* p. 96.

[49] Mark Pearce. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 29 December 2011. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[50] Graham Shaw. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 26 March 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[51] Christine Cheung. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 19 March 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[52] Carl Dania. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 26 March 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[53] Winston Edwards. Interview.

[54] Tony Whittaker. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 4 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education; Alex Richards. Interview.

[55] Edwina Nixon. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 8 March 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[56] Jo Scott. Interview Ronald McIntyre, 26 March 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[57] Tim Hunkin. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 30 April 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[58] Henry, *Teaching through projects*, p. 33.

[59] Ann Murray. Interview by Daniel Weinbren, 6 June 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[60] Tom Nisbet. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 19 April 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[61] Ann Terry. Interview by Daniel Weinbren, 6 June 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[62] Jenny Fox. Interview by Daniel Weinbren, 6 June 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[63] Frances Brooks. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 30 December 2011. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. Frances Brooks Completed DA301 in 1995 and was involved in Open Studies in Family and Community History and then FACHRS of which she became Treasurer.

[64] Brita Woods. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 7 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. She became membership secretary of a village hall, toured fairs and exhibitions promoting FACHRS, organised the Society's Continued Learning programme and chaired a Gardening Association.

[65] Dick Hunter. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. He was a former teacher in adult education and Dr Anne Langley was a former senior counsellor at the OU.

[66] http://www8.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/historyofou/story/students accessed 2 February 2012.

[67] Diane Mehew. Interview by Ronald Macintyre, 3 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. She joined the FACHRS at its inception and served on its committee for some years.

[68] *Saffron Walden Historical Journal*.

[69] Recorder of Appleford History.

[70] Jacqueline Cooper. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 28 February 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. The resulting book was Michael Holland (ed.), *Swing Unmasked: The agricultural riots of 1830 to 1832 and their wider implications*, FACHRS Publications, Milton Keynes, 2005. The FACHRS Swing Project researchers 'successfully identified over 3000 reported instances of "Swing Protest" activity' in almost every county in England and that there were 67% more outbreaks of violence than earlier researchers had concluded. http://www.fachrs.com/swing/swingbook.htm; http://www.fachrs.com/swing/swing_project.htm accessed 2 February 2012. The book included contributions from Valerie Batt-Rawden, Sean Burrell, Norman Davies, Stella Evans, Reay Ferguson, Geoff Gill, Judy Hill, Michael Holland, Mary James, James S Leach, Clive Leivers and Vanessa Worship. See also Michael Kemp. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 28 December 2011. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. Michael Kemp was educated at Oxford and became a solicitor. He was responsible for turning the Society into a limited company with charitable status. Since 2008 it has been a company limited by guarantee and also a registered charity. He held the posts, within FACHRS of Minute Secretary, Secretary, Chair and Fund Raising Officer.

[71] D. Reay, M. David and S. J. Ball, 'Making a difference? Institutional habituses and higher education choice', *Sociological*

*Research Online,* 5, 4, 2001, http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/4/reay.html accessed 1 October 2012; L. Thomas, 'Student retention in higher education: the role of habitus', *Journal of Educational Policy*, 17, 4, 2002, pp. 4223–4442.

[72] Pierre Bourdieu, 'The forms of capital', in A. H. Halsey, Hugh Lauder, Phillip Brown, Amy Stuart Wells, (eds.), *Education: Culture, Economy, and Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, pp. 46–58. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Sage Publications, London and Beverly Hills, 1977. See also Stuart, Lido, Morgan, 'Personal stories', p. 500.

[73] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic I. D. Wacquant, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Polity, Cambridge,Press, 1992, p. 127.

[74] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 29, 49.

[75] Jane Anderson. Interview by Daniel Weinbren, 6 June 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[76] Tony Whitaker and four others from the course trained with the Choreographer of the Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony See http://www8.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/historyofou/story/students accessed 2 February 2012.

[77] Alex Richards. Interview.

[78] Jane Anderson. Interview.

[79] Eric Summers. Interview by Daniel Weinbren, 6 June 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[80] Jenny Fox. Interview.

[81] Hilary Farrell. Interview by Daniel Weinbren, 6 June 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[82] Jane Anderson. Interview.

[83] This resulted in Jeremy Burchardt and Jacqueline Cooper (eds.) *Breaking new ground. Nineteenth century allotments from local sources,* Family & Community Historical Research Society, 2010. Contributors were Phillada Ballard, Valerie Batt-Rawden, Jacqueline Cooper, Stewart Dorward, Jacqueline Gore, Clare Greener, Anne Langley, Clive Leivers, John Loosley, Valerie Pattenden, Diane Rhodes, Robert Ruegg, Wendy Stevens. Companion to the book was a CD containing a database of over 3,000 allotment sites and nearly 1,000 allotment tenants.

[84] Clive Leivers. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education. He had a certificate in local history from Lancaster University before he started DA301. He was awarded a prize for the best researched DA301 report.. As he had moved to another county by the time that FACHRS was formed in 1998 his contact with the OU was via Open Studies in Family and Community History. He also had chaired many civil service committees. Following an invitation from Professor Ruth Finnegan he became the FACHRS' first chair. He held the post for four years and remained on the committee for another four. He led one of the sub-groups responsible for organising conferences and the projects.

[85] Don Dickson. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 5 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[86] These included running courses, using both face-to-face, computers and video. The courses covered writing and database usage, historical records research, sources and photograph restoration. In order to complete specific projects meetings were held at which the 'more skilled people could help less skilled' as Anne Langley put it. Anne Langley. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 5 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[87] The Road show is FACHRS stall which is taken to fairs and exhibitions. It was taken to 14 family history shows in 2012.

[88] Brita Woods. Interview.

[89] Sue Smith. Interview.

[90] Angela Blaydon. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 5 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[91] Vanessa Worship. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 9 January 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education; Alex Richards. Interview.

[92] Brita Woods. Interview.

[93]

http://www.flickr.com/people/woodycheese/ accessed 29 February 2012. Two other

T189 students made similar remarks about its impact. Julie Ann Coles, felt that learning from fellow students was 'an excellent way of learning' and Michael John Deller recalled that 'peer review is a vital part of the course. The experience of being reviewed can be encouraging [and] the experience of looking at other people's efforts and framing a critical analysis can be highly beneficial to ones own work'. See http://www3.open.ac.uk/coursereviews/course.aspx?course=t189 accessed 2 February 2012.

[94] Mark Simmons. Interview by Ronald McIntyre, 26 March 2012. This recording was made with the support of a grant from the Society for Research into Higher Education.

[95] Cheung went on to meet with fellow former T189 students in Portsmouth, Oxford, Winchester, Kew Gardens and elsewhere. See http://www.flickr.com/photos/woodycheese/6247405180/in/photosof-markjpearce/ and http://www.flickr.com/photos/64883940@N08/5902448713/in/photosof-markjpearce/ and http://www.flickr.com/photos/woodycheese/5607823922/in/photosof-julieswright/ and http://www.flickr.com/photos/markjpearce/5898339085/in/photosof-markjpearce/ accessed 29 February 2012.

[96] http://www.flickr.com/people/julieswright/ accessed 29 February 2012.

[97] Mark Pearce. Interview.

[98] http://www.flickr.com/groups/744249@N20/discuss/72157625281747413/ accessed 29 February 2012.

[99] http://www.flickr.com/groups/744249@N20/discuss/72157622261438891/ accessed 29 February 2012.

[100] Carl Dania. Interview.

[101] Wenger, *Communities*, pp. 6-7.

[102] Former TAD292 student, Dale Godfrey quoted in Patricia W. Lunneborg, *OU women. Undoing educational obstacles*, Cassell, London, 1994, pp. 4-10.

[103] A study of asynchronous learning networks on one OU module concluded that students who felt like insiders rather than outsiders were more likely to succeed and that community building should be integral to the module design. The module collaborative exercises and its chair sought to encourage communities to develop and many students recognised the benefits of collaboration. See Rupert Wegerif, 'The social dimension of asynchronous learning networks', *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 2, 1, March 1998.

[104] Lave and Wenger, *Situated learning*.

[105] Ruth Williams, John Brennan and Alan Woodley, 'Alumni studies in the United Kingdom' in David J. Weerts and Javier Vidal (eds.), *Enhancing alumni research: European and American perspectives. New directions for institutional research*, 126, 2005, pp. 83-94 (p. 93).