



Supporting Virtual Communities

Week 2: 7th Feb– 14th Feb 2012

Week 2 Activity: **Online Debate**

Duration: up to 2 hours online, up to 1 hours independent learning

Objective of Debate: to gain a wide perspective on online tutoring and to have a greater understanding of the evolution and possible extinction of the VLE and its impact on supporting virtual learning. We will review best practices for facilitating online discussions and help participants identify strategies to more effectively utilize their time in the online discussion to create an effective online tutoring strategy.

Purpose of Debate: There are a number of reasons for this debate activity. They include:

- engaging in debates can stimulate discussion in a virtual group setting;
- providing you with an intense experience of working as a group in a virtual environment so that you develop an understanding of some of the challenges your own students will encounter;
- providing you with a possible model for a structured online debate for your own practice.

As this activity will take a bit of time and coordinating for the two debate groups, **I urge you to get this started as soon as possible** (timeline provided below) so that your group benefits from your input.

It must also be taken into account that this activity is being conducted in a short time frame with little research or preparation time. If this were part of a course in say 'Teaching Strategies for Use in Educational Technology' then this debate might be conducted toward the end of the course when participants have developed a working knowledge of scenario planning and development. I would have designed prior activities that would have related to and supported participants' ability to participate in this task. You may have previously come across the Gilly Salmon eModerating model of online teaching and learning through online networking - this debate activity would fit in at levels 4 and 5 (knowledge construction and development). We will have a chance to look at this and other models more next week.

Your group task:

- The timeframe for this debate is from 7th – 14th February.
- The stimulus topic is “**it is straightforward to teach online – if you are a good teacher in the classroom, you can be a good one online too!**”

Opinions on this topic have changed, divided and developed so it could be argued that an effective teacher in the classroom can equally teach well online – this is the Pro side of the argument.

The con side will propose that the various tools and technologies require a new set of skills - the future success of eLearning depends on appropriate selection of tools and services and the online tutor needs to draw upon a range of skills for supporting virtual communities.

This lively debate is designed to give you a voice and an opportunity to discuss the issues that arise by tutoring online.

It can be useful in the debate to bring in your thoughts on the role of technologies – given that the trends in eLearning have been well documented over the past 10 years, you may wish to explore those that have emerged for use in education and their impact on the role of the online tutor and how they can best support learning in virtual environments.

Year introduced	Technology/Tool
1993	first SMS types on a NOKIA phone
1995	Netscape Navigator
1996	Palm Pilot goes on the market
1999	Napster [Sean Fanning creation]
2001	Wikipedia, ipods
2003	skype, itunes store
2005	YouTube, bebo
Etc etc	Feel free to add in your own here...

The basic format on online debating is provided below.

Debate Format:

In true debating fashion, two groups will be established! – the *pro* side and the *con* side. I have appointed each participant into one of these two groups. You will see which group you are allocated in the discussion board for week 2.

In this debate, you will be expected to collaborate with your group members to:

- Prepare an opening statement on your group's position to the topic.
- Develop questions to cross-examine the opposing group.
- Respond to the questions from the opposing group.
- Present a closing statement on your own group's position to the topic.

- Getting started: Each group needs to choose a Chair to facilitate opinion sharing and the organization of group entries to post to the debate. For Chairs we are looking for people who will be able to contribute with more regularity over the period of the debate (it is recognized that you are all academic staff here and doing this on top of your normal jobs!) **NB – this should be your first task and should be made quickly to enable the group to proceed with the activity.**
- While normally it would be expected that you would research beyond the resources provided, in the interest of time you are only expected to access the resources in Week 2 Resources area. Although we are simulating a real student experience - I am not expecting you to do a whole lot of research - so it won't be a really 'serious' debate in that regard - the resources I have provided should fairly cover it and I am sure you all have plenty of opinions on the direction of online tutoring that you could throw in :-)

Tutor's input:

- the tutors will monitor both group's discussion but will not engage as an eModerator as the participants have the **ownership** of the debate.

Debate Timeline:

The timeline for debate postings is as follows:

You have a week to complete the debate. The timeline for debate postings is below: there is a bit of flexibility in contributing and the timeline shows the crucial deadlines.

The group areas are in the **Week 2 Debate** discussion, (in addition, the groups may wish to use wimba virtual rooms if they can coordinate it amongst themselves): there are two discussion topics set up for your group to use:

1. **Pro Preparation**
2. **Pro Closing Statement**

1. **Con Preparation**
2. **Con Closing Statement**

Once you see what group you are in, I think it would be good to negotiate your individual tasks (and thus time commitments) with your chairperson.

Tuesday 7 th Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commence debate activity; read debate format and week 2 resources
Thursday 9 th Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post group opening position statement on the debate to the relevant preparation discussion

	topic
Friday 10 th Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In same discussion topic, post questions for other group
Monday 13 th Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respond to questions posed by opposing group
Tuesday 14 th Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post closing statement on position to the relevant Closing Statement discussion topic