Should online discussion be assessed?: group activity

Collection: Online teaching

Resource: Online Discussion in English Studies

Approximate duration

90 minutes

Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity participants will be able to make evaluative judgements about the suitability of otherwise of using formative or summative assessment in their online discussions. They will have achieved this by participating in a classroom discussion or debate, watching 2 video presentations from English lecturers and discussed the subject with colleagues in the group.

Introduction

There are a number of ways to stage this activity. In this example we have a previewing type exercise where students start to think about the subject of assessment in an online context, followed by a practical viewing activity where the participants are asked to take notes as they watch. These are synthesised in the final part of the session through group discussion.

Description of the activity

1. In the first instance students could be asked about their uses of online discussion boards/fora
   - Who is using them?
   - How long have you been using them for?

- o Can you tell us what works and what doesn't (for you and for your students) when using discussion boards? Why do you think that might be?
- o Do you set specific tasks or just let students post whenever they like?
- o Do you teach students how to use them...netiquette etc
- o How about moderation of boards...how often do you intervene in discussions?
- o How do students learn about the expectations you may have about their contributions online?
- o How frequently do you set discussion board tasks? Do other members of your department use them too?

2. One way or another the discussion you are having is going to mention assessment in an online discussion context. If it doesn't come up spontaneously then you could always ask whether anyone actually assesses student online contributions and what their attitudes are to taking that approach.

* If you get responses like: 'nobody posts in them' or ' discussions fizzle out after one or two posts' you might like to think about incorporating aspects of another activity in the Online teaching section of 'The Pool'. This activity involves looking at the design of some online discussion tasks and asks the participants to evaluate them. Alternatively you could take an extract from the *'Good Practice Guide to Online discussion'* and use that as a stimulus for the opening discussion

3. Next you tell the participants that they are going to watch a video presentation from a Medievalist at the University of Manchester (Dr Gail Ashton)..talking about how she uses online discussion and what she describes as the 'Hybrid' nature of virtual talk. As they watch the presentation (20 minutes with a 4 minute Q & A) ask them to jot down the main arguments that Gail mentions in favour of **NOT** assessing online discussions.

That Strange Animal, a Push-me Pull-me: The Hybrid nature of virtual talk
(http://vimeo.com/18789778)

4. In groups identify the 5 main points she mentions.

5. At this point you could either have a classrooom discussion about assessment or whether assessment of online discussion is a good idea.Why did Gail talk about push and pull strategies and what did she mean by them? Can you relate that to your own experiences of using VLEs?

6. Alternatively you might like to contrast Gail's talk with one from Heather Conboy & Kathleen Bell from De Montfort University where they are using discussion boards as a tool in drafting and reflective writing in a Creative Writing course. How does the approach they take differ from that of the Literature module described by Gail Ashton in the first module?

Towards assessment: Discussion Boards as a tool in drafting and reflective writing (http://vimeo.com/23688953)

7. Finally read the chapter by Rosie Miles on why you should think about assessing discussion boards and how to go about doing it (pp 22 - 26) in the Good Practice Guide written by Rosie and her colleagues in the English Department at the University of Wolverhampton (see embedded link below).
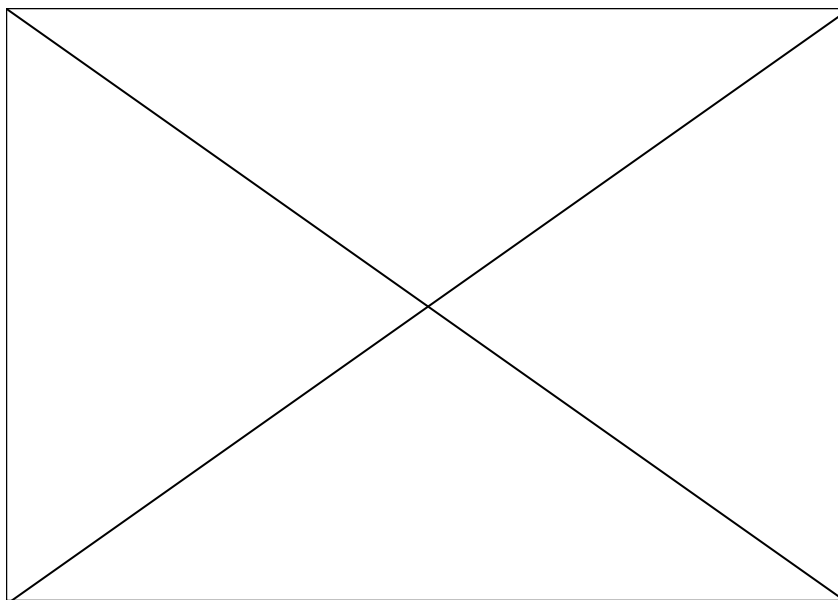
8. Groups could then summarise all the arguments for or against the formal assessment of online discussion and/or write a reflective piece on the discussion. Alternatively, they might like to suggest situations from their own practice where

Discussion boards might be useful and how or if they would integrate student work on the boards into the assessment for the course.

Links & References

- [Assessing Online Discussion](#) - A Sydney University of Technology page discussing whether assessment should occur or not
- [Text.Play.Space : Creative Online Activities in English Studies](#) - Innovative Online activities are discussed in this Case Study from the Subject Centre
- Online Discussion in English Studies: A Good Practice Guide to Design, Moderation and Assessment. (http://issuu.com/englishsubjectcentre/docs/onlinediscussion)

Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Core Knowledge 4:** The use of appropriate learning technologies

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox. http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/

Resources in the Online teaching Collection

- Online teaching: introduction to the collection
- What are VLE's good for?: resource overview
    - What is a VLE and why use it?: group activity
    - What is a VLE and why use it?: individual activity
- The design of online activities in English Studies: resource overview
    - Evaluating online activities in English Studies: group activity
    - Evaluating online activities in English Studies: individual activity
- Designing learning with new media: resource overview
    - Exploring new media and its potential in teaching: group activity

- o   Exploring new media and its potential in teaching: individual activity
- o   Designing an online activity in English Studies: group activity
- o   Designing an online activity in English Studies: individual activity
- Teaching with digital archives: resource overview
  - o   Teaching with digital archives: group activity
  - o   Teaching with digital archives: individual activity
- Online discussion in English Studies: resource overview
  - o   **Should online discussion be assessed?: group activity (*you are here)**
  - o   Should online discussion be assessed?: individual activity
- Workshopping online: resource overview
  - o   Designing an online Creative Writing workshop: group activity
  - o   Designing an online Creative Writing workshop: individual activity