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**THE ROLE OF PARTICIPANT DISCOURSE
IN ONLINE COMMUNITY FORMATION**

**Coordinatore del Dottorato
e Relatore
Prof.ssa Gabriella Di Martino**

**Candidata
Dott.ssa Margherita Rasulo**

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To Giancarlo, Alex and Danny.

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1. INTRODUCTION

‘What amazed me wasn’t just the speed with which we obtained precisely the information we needed to know, right when we needed to know it. It was also the immense inner sense of security that comes with discovering that real people...are available, around the clock, if you need them. There is a magic protective circle around the atmosphere of this particular conference’.

Rheingold, H., *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier, 1993*

1.1 Speech Community – Discourse Community

The phenomenal growth of communication through computers, known as Computer Mediated Communication (henceforth CMC), has gone hand-in-hand with the widespread use of the global network of the Internet. Digital technology has marked the era of the instant transmission of information, text and knowledge around the world, and today millions of people are engaged regularly in text-based CMC. Computer Mediated Communication by challenging structures, practices, and cultural ideas has made a significant effect on the presentation of ‘the self’ and the perception of ‘others’, thus stimulating an enormous interest among trans-disciplinary experts on social interaction, eager to discover the dynamics of online behaviour in virtual and mediated environments. Furthermore, by displaying new types of text that exhibit semantic and syntactic innovation, CMC has challenged what are commonly known as modes of oral and written discourse and has become a new form of communicative practice among online participants.

Digital technology has also provided a window on the processes of *community formation* on the Internet, facilitating its development while challenging the traditional concept of ‘community’, defined as a limited geographic area quite similar to a neighbourhood. Even in the presence of community members that differ from one another in terms of age, culture, economic benefits, language and other features that would possibly hinder communication in the physical world, these ‘social

aggregations' emerging from the Internet (Rheingold, 1993, p.5), attract more and more people from all corners of the world, who are interested in 'talking' to others with similar social needs, such as obtaining information, developing new friendships and sharing knowledge, with just a click of a few keys.

It is a well-known fact that participation is the life of any community and without contributions from its members, the community itself would probably cease to exist. However, in order to generate participation, a community's rules and practices must be made explicit to its incoming members, which implies their full involvement and understanding of what membership requires. The definition of a '**community of practice**' offered by Lave and Wenger is probably the closest instrumental description of community belongingness. The authors argue that members who 'have different interests, make diverse contributions to activities and hold varied viewpoints' are part of a community of practice. They further specify that the essential characteristic of membership is 'participation in an activity system, about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities' (Lave and Wenger, 1999, p.23).

All of the members of the Australian and the International Communities in this study have come together in a course-based virtual environment to create a 'community of practice', their intention being the acquisition of e-moderating skills for online teaching. The educational nature of the goal provided the framework within which the participants shared their previous experiences as educators in various domains, and despite their individual differences and interests, they fully participated in the community by engaging in activities that led to group solidarity and socialization, albeit within a limited period of time.

There are a number of reasons why these new online environments greatly resemble small **speech communities**. Borrowing

from Bloomfield and Labov, who state that a speech community is composed of members who share similar linguistic rules and agreed-upon norms (in Swales, 1990), it is possible to define a speech community as an essentially situated environment, which cannot be considered in isolation from the social relations that shape it. These features are clearly identifiable in the communities in this study, in which the participants have a common goal to achieve, share the same language to discuss the subject at hand and the same motivational and social needs that are conveyed through daily conferencing tasks.

Swales argues that within speech communities ‘the communicative needs of the group, such as socialization or solidarity, tend to predominate in the development and maintenance of its discursal characteristics. The primary determinants of linguistic behaviour are social’ (Swales, 1990, p.24). The participatory mechanisms of the present communities confirm this characteristic, as evidenced by the linguistic behavioural categories listed in Table 16.

Online communities, to some extent, also resemble discourse communities (Swales, 1990). By identifying a discourse community under the overarching term of a ‘special interest group’, Swales specified the six fundamental communicative needs, many of which are shared by the International and the Australian Communities in this study, as shown in the table below:

Discourse Community (Swales)	The International Community; The Australian Community
‘a discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals’	The public goal is to acquire skills in e-moderating.
‘a discourse community has mechanisms of inter-communication among its members’	The e-moderator communicates instructions, tasks, and guidance to the participants, and the students communicate with the e-moderator and with all the other participants by completing the tasks.
‘a discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms	The participants as well as the e-moderator provide feedback within a highly participatory system of communication.

primarily to provide information and feedback.'	
'a discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.'	According to Bhatia (1993: 16), 'each genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discourse resources'. The online communities have developed expectations of discourse that are compatible with its goals and with the type of activities and interaction that go on in the conference environment. The e-moderator behaves in a specific way, giving guidance and suggestions, adopting the kind of language that participants recognize. In turn, the participants behave in specific ways and adopting language forms and discourse styles that are recognizable as online features of discourse but at the same time, particular to that group of participants. Anyone joining the group would have to learn their language of interaction.
"In addition to owning genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis."	E-moderation has its lexis, participant interaction patterns have a specific lexis, as well as personal lexis that participants contribute to the group patrimony, similar to a face-to-face group. The lexis can be analyzed and subsequently interpreted.
"A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise."	With respect to this particular requirement, virtual communities have some universal features, which are part of any face-to-face group system. As regards the two communities in this study, all participants share some kind of knowledge of teaching techniques, as well as a shared purpose of learning how to guide others online, which also requires having basic computer skills and knowledge of CMC.

Table 1 Definition of Discourse Community (adapted from Swales, 1990, p.24-27)

1.2 The Concept of Genre

As online interaction becomes more widely used even in educational situations, and as more learners of all age levels participate in electronic discourse, language experts may have to consider how to respond to such unconventional use of language and structuring of ideas. What is essential to understand is *if* and *how* these changing conventions may be contributing to the construction of online professional learning communities and to the development of a new 'genre', and whether it is

insightful to focus on a different concept of 'genre' in order to understand the complex nature of CMC.

According to Swales, one of the characteristics of 'genre' is 'a class of communicative events ... in which language (and/or paralinguistic) plays both a significant and an indispensable role' (Swales, 1990, p.45). Furthermore, as Swales argues, 'genres' are 'communicative vehicles for the achievement of goals', characterized by 'some shared sets of communicative purposes' (Swales, 1990, p.46). As Chapter Six illustrates, CMC is basically composed of communicative events with unique paralinguistic features built into the language itself. Indeed, Chapter Six presents a plethora of communicative purposes that are carried out exclusively through the use of language phenomena (Table 16), thus exhibiting 'various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience' (Swales, 1990, p.58). Nevertheless, whether CMC constitutes a prototypical genre is still debatable, even in the presence of the recognizable characteristics discussed above.

There are no doubts among experts, however, that CMC is a new **communication mode** with a unique use of genre variables. By referring to the work of Halliday, Yates states that there is an important difference between genres and modes of communication and it lies in the register features of field, tenor and mode. The field is defined by the situation. In the case of CMC, the focus of the field is the interaction itself, as it is lacking a specific situation and 'a singly-defined discursive object'. The tenor of the communication in CMC interactions is 'limited by the lack of the semiotic field, to those presentations of 'self', which take place within and throughout the CMC text'. As concerns the mode, Yates explains that the mode of CMC is neither speech-like nor written-like, yet it shares many features of both modes. Thus, 'taken together these similarities and differences make clear the complexity of CMC as a mode of communication' (Halliday in Yates, 1996, pp. 45-46).

The data analysis conducted in this study confirms the hybrid nature of CMC and the complexity of the purposes it serves, therefore constituting a possible characterization of a new genre. Nevertheless, the discussion above also draws attention to the difficulty of finding an all-encompassing definition of CMC, as research in this field is still in its infancy.

1.3 Implications for ESP

The realm within which this study takes shape is English for Specific Purposes; it is both the theme that underpins the study as well as its ultimate purpose. Borrowing from Boswood who proposes that ESP should evolve into a wider ranging field called *Communication for Specific Purposes* (CSP) (Boswood, 1994), the heart of this discussion focuses on the view that ESP should also include the study of the *interaction* that characterizes online discourse communities. Widdowson states that ‘communication is ... clearly closely related to community and culture. If you do not share a communal view, a common culture and the linguistic categorisation which goes with it, then communication will prove difficult’ (Widdowson, 1998, p.6). In point of fact, the investigation of the online communities in this study involved looking at Widdowson’s ‘aspects of a common culture’, that are represented by ‘shared assumptions, beliefs, values (and) conventions of behaviour’, which define particular discourse communities (Widdowson, 1998, p.9).

The assumption related to ESP is that we need to think in terms of English *for* Computer Mediated Communication, rather than English *of* Computer Mediated Communication (Widdowson, 1998), in order to capitalize on the pedagogic advantages that are offered by online communicative events and authentic language behaviour. Boswood argues that ‘the concept of *communicative event* can serve as a structure which can unify insights from ... disparate fields, a structure on which practitioners can base a new, and wider ranging conception of Specific Purposes Teaching’ (Boswood, 1994, p.1). Furthermore, he states that if

the communicative event is operationalized into concepts, it can lead to ‘new types of achievable objectives, more realistic learning activities, improved motivation, a new sensitivity to cultural communication patterns, and the potential to transform ESP’s passive attitude to authentic texts into a proactive engagement in developing the effectiveness of communication practices in industry’ (Boswood, 1994, Abstract).

CMC does not usually generate clearly structured texts and this is one of the reasons why it has not been universally contemplated as having ESP status. According to Boswood, what causes ESP to ‘shy away from dealing with social conversation’ and with less formal kinds of interaction in general is its primary activity of looking at the linguistic and discourse features of conventionally organized texts, rather than the interaction between text and context (Boswood, 1994).

However, given that CMC generates events occurring in context, and that it is not possible to separate the text from the communicative event in which it occurs, at this point, it is useful to recall the previously discussed idea of ‘genre’. It follows that by referring to online communication as belonging to a ‘genre of events’, rather than to a ‘genre of texts’ (Hymes, 1986), can help ESP, and therefore the study of CMC, move towards the inclusion of a *communication studies paradigm* among its specialities. It is precisely this movement that confirms the underlying pedagogical inquiry of the present research, as well as the belief that the observation of people speaking, listening, writing and reading online constitutes rule-governed language behaviour, which is to be fully included and exploited in the field of ESP.

1.4 Background of study and Corpus Description

This study describes the discourse behaviours characterizing the processes of community development of two online groups involved in professional training. Participants from both groups were associated with educational contexts, but one group consisted of international

participants, while the members of the other group came from different parts of Australia. The overall aim of this study is to demonstrate how online community (Hiltz, 1994)¹, or virtual community (Rheingold, 1993)², is possible to achieve even with groups that convene online for a limited amount of time, and how members generate specific and recognizable community-oriented behaviours manifested through the use of language. For the sake of clarity, the terms ‘online’ and ‘virtual’ will be used interchangeably in this study, as they both represent the new definition of ‘community’ on the Internet.

By contrast, the assumption stated above is also based on the belief that not all groups who meet on the Internet automatically constitute a community. Hence, it was necessary to conduct a comparative analysis of more than one online group in order to determine the recurrent properties that are indicative of community formation and identity. To further challenge the hypothesis that online groups with a pre-determined lifespan can, and naturally tend to create community, the International group was purposely chosen in order to assert that even under the influence of cultural differences, community formation was not hindered. According to the data, the online environment had an obvious levelling effect on the discourse behaviours that all participants gradually adopted, although it was necessary to re-interpret some behaviours according to the linguistic phenomena displayed by the international members.

It is important to underline the fact that the two groups were chosen also because they shared the characteristics of a well-defined history and a common purpose for taking the e-moderating course. Similarities between the groups reduced the number of variables that are inherent to a comparative study of this nature. As Herring states, ‘ideally, two data samples that are compared should differ according to only one

¹ Online community: term was first used by R. Hiltz as the title of her book.

² Virtual Community: term was first used by H. Rheingold in 1993 in the book, *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. It means that the primary interaction is electronic or enabled by technology.

dimension, such that if differences in behaviour are found between the samples, they can plausibly be attributed to that dimension of variation' (Herring, 2006, p.4). The cultural factor of the International community was the dimension of variation identified between the two online groups. Furthermore, it is important to mention that, although the methodology used was not prevalently ethnographic in nature, an element of participant observation was possible within the International group, as the researcher of this study was a regular member of the course, thus contributing greatly to the understanding of the dynamics of online behaviour and computer-mediated communication. As many Internet researchers sustain, you cannot do research on virtual communities if you are not part of one yourself.

Online behaviour is 'visible' by means of discourse, which is mainly text-based and read on a computer screen. Analyzing this behaviour called for an effective method of analysis known as Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (Herring, 2001). Through CMDA it was possible to identify and describe online phenomena through observations of how participants 'performed actions' through the use of language.

The corpus of this study is composed of 1824 messages posted by participants to the First Class Conferencing System during their course attendance. The investigation consisted in analyzing the linguistic phenomena presented by the two 'E-Moderator Courses', henceforth referred to as 'The International Community', and 'The Australian Community', in the assumption that both groups should be granted 'community status'. Entire messages or parts of messages have not been altered in any way, and have been presented in the original form with no corrections made in terms of spelling, grammar and syntax, as these features are essential in understanding specific online behaviour (Chapter Eight).

The thirteen international participants were from four main language backgrounds: English and its varieties, Japanese, Spanish and Italian. The

twelve participants from Australia shared the same variety of English, of which they presented interesting features in terms of specific regional jargon, often unknown to other members of the group. All participants discussed and planned ways to become efficient e-moderators in their own educational. The community conferences were moderated by an e-convenor who also assigned the specific tasks to be accomplished within a timeline of five weeks (Charter Three).

As concerns the ethical issue of privacy protection, permission was granted by the participants themselves and by Dr. Gilly Salmon, the designer of the e-moderating courses. The understanding was that the corpus of messages was to be used for research purposes only, and under the condition that private information, such as names, gender or economic status, should not constitute ground for bias and should therefore remain undisclosed. Hence, the decision was made to identify the participants in the International Community by their country name: Participant Japan, Dublin 1, Dublin 2, etc., and the Australian Community members by the letter of the alphabet: Participant A,B,C, etc. Furthermore, it is important to mention that as the concepts of ‘community membership’, and ‘community lifespan’ have not been explicitly defined in the literature, and since the typical usage of ‘membership’ also deals with members who do not actively contribute to the community, but still take part in its activities silently, this research defines a member as anyone who participates in a community by either posting or reading messages regardless of frequency.

1.5 Research questions

Guiding this study is the assumption that **community** is possible to establish online (Rheingold, 1993). Although numerous research studies have extensively investigated this concept, and have established evidence of community existence, it still remains a slippery one, calling for more specific accounts focusing on the processes of formation. This is one of the reasons why it is much more illuminating to investigate *how*

community is formed online, what the mechanisms behind this phenomenon are, and about the nature of participant behaviours in a specific community, rather than questioning its mere existence.

One of the general beliefs on true community formation is conveyed by Jones, among many other scholars who have given their own definition of online community (Chapter Two). Jones argues that community can exist only if it satisfies four basic conditions: that it has ‘a virtual common public space’, where there is ‘a variety of communicators’, with ‘a minimum level of sustained stable membership’, and ‘a minimum level of interactivity’ (Jones, 1997). The communities considered in this study fully satisfy all of these conditions, but what remains quite unclear is the concept of ‘minimum level of membership and interactivity’ in reference to time. How long does a group need to develop community status? Is it possible to achieve it in the time limit of five weeks? Based on participant observation is the assumption that it is possible to establish community in five weeks, especially within a specific community-oriented environment, although it is necessary to acknowledge that ‘the sense of belonging’ needs a minimum amount of time and social interaction to develop and grow.

Hence, as mentioned previously, this study questions whether people who come together for a limited time period can develop community status, and explores ways of looking for the evidence of such an accomplishment. For the sake of clarity of purpose, two general research questions and sub-questions have been articulated:

1. How do online groups become a community?

- a. *How do they choose to constitute community and to what extent do the participants perceive themselves as a community?*
- b. *How does language index patterns of assimilation to community membership?*

2. What are the discourse behaviours that characterize an online community and what do they indicate?

- a. What kind of behaviours exhibit the formation of an online identity? How does self-expression comply with community concerns?*
- b. To what extent do interaction patterns and shared language resources display features of a new online language?*
- c. What are the differences in online behaviours when a group of people from different countries come together in a new community grouping?*

The next chapter discusses the meaning of online community and briefly explores the different types that are present on the Internet. The chapter also focuses on the characteristics of Computer Mediated Communication and on the features of online discourse. It goes without saying that studies addressing the concept of online community from any perspective, presuppose a comparison with traditional communities, although it is not the purpose of this study to focus specifically on these differences and/or similarities. Nevertheless, it is useful to explore the reference as an element for further insight into the processes of communities moving onto the online environment.

2. THE CONCEPT OF ONLINE COMMUNITY

'We are made for conversation with our kind... (and to) communicate and share in the communication of others'.

John Dewey, *Characters and Events*, Vol. I (as quoted in Preece, 2000, p.7)

2.1 Characteristics of an Online Community

An online community or a virtual community, is a computer mediated social group who gathers online to participate in conferences about an issue of interest and who shares opinions and experiences. An online community is also viewed as a 'place' where people with the same interests find answers to their questions. However, a simple definition will not suffice to describe the complexity of online community existence. Indeed, it means different things to different people, depending on the context, the social structure and the technical framework that characterize the community itself.

Notwithstanding a plethora of articles and publications on the subject, the literature does not provide us with an agreed definition. The Dictionary of Sociology states that 'the term community is one of the most elusive and vague, and is by now largely without specific meaning' (Abercrombie, 1988). The reason for this is to be found in modern society's increased mobility that has widened distances, consequently changing the nature of human relationships. People have thus begun to rely on the immense power of communications technology to virtually reduce these distances, and meet from all corners of the world on the Internet, regardless of limits of space and time.

However, the Dictionary of Sociology also states that 'community' should be considered as a social network of relationships, friends, colleagues, neighbours and family, within a specific geographical location, and it is this definition that provides insight into the meaning of

‘online community’, and the characteristics that it shares with its more traditional counterpart.

By further examining the literature, Preece describes an online community as ‘a group of people who come together for a purpose online and who are governed by norms and policies’ (Preece, 2000). Wellman and Gulia, state that ‘virtual communities are groups of people who communicate with one another electronically about a common interest, even though they’ve never met in person and may reside far apart. Virtual communities can take the form of e-mail distribution lists, chat rooms, instant messaging groups, and cell phone communities’ (Wellman and Gulia, 1999, p.8). In his seminal work on virtual communities³, Rheingold affirms that ‘in cyberspace, we chat and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, perform acts of commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games and metagames, flirt...we do everything people do when people get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind ... our identities commingle and interact electronically, independent of local time or location’ (Rheingold, 1994, p.58). An interesting point of view that taps into the concept of online community and that considers the role of technology in community formation is the one given by Jones. He states that online communities are “incontrovertibly social spaces in which people still meet face-to-face, but under new definitions of both ‘meet’ and ‘face’ ” (Jones as quoted in Rheingold, 2000, p.349).

From this growing body of research, it follows that it is no longer useful to think of community as a physical grouping of people, but it is more appropriate to think of community as a network of interpersonal ties that provide support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity (Rheingold, 1994; Wellman, 2001). An online community is not

³ The WELL: Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link is an early online community developed in the San Francisco Bay area in 1985. Rheingold was the first to explore its potential.

simply an 'entity' or a 'place', but it is a process that develops over time and involves a complex network of social relationships with identifiable discourse behaviours that are formed within the 'infrastructure' of CMC.

Technology and its power to enable and affect communication processes is, for the most part, responsible for the re-definition of community. The software that is available today greatly supports interaction and provides a collection of programs and systems that online community members can use in order to compensate for the lack of physical presence in the attempt to improve the overall quality of the *human-computer* interface. Furthermore, good software design has been proven to be highly effective in supporting learning processes and skill retention within community boundaries.

Human interaction and software are closely related and compensate each other, but because 'community' is a process, it is essential to place the emphasis on social interaction, which has the distinct role of counterbalancing the often overwhelming presence of the technology involved in any Internet-based research.

Attempts to define the concept of an online community necessarily lead to the identification of its salient characteristics. Preece provides the following list of attributes that can be considered as criteria for community identification (Preece, 2000, p.13):

1. members have a shared goal, interest, need, or activity that provide the primary reason for belonging to the community.
2. members engage in repeated, active participation; often, intense interactions, strong emotional ties, and shared activities occur among participants.
3. members have access to shared resources, and policies determine the access to those resources.
4. reciprocity of information, support, and services among members are important.

5. there is a shared context of social conventions, language, and protocols.

Herring provides the following descriptive criteria that can be useful in breaking down the concept of community in component behaviours to be objectively observed and assessed (Herring in Barab et al, 2006, p.20):

1. active, self-sustaining participation; core of regular participants;
2. shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values;
3. solidarity, support, reciprocity;
4. means of conflict resolution;
5. self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups;
6. emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, rituals.

Nevertheless, not all of the above characteristics can be applied as potential indicators of online communities. Some features occur rarely and some do not occur at all, and considering that online communities are proliferating in every field and at an incredible speed on the Internet, their presence or their absence is due to the nature of the community itself.

Perhaps, the most useful criteria framework that is general enough, yet comprehensive of all the necessary elements to include many types of communities is Preece's Online Community Framework (OCF). It consists of four main components as shown in Figure 1 below:

People	Software
Purposes	
Policies	

Figure 1 Key Components and Factors at the basis of the OCF

Preece explains each component as follows: (Preece, 2000, pp.9-10):

1. People = interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles, such as leading or moderating.
2. A shared purpose = an interest, a need for information exchange, or a service that provide a reason for the community.
3. Policies = in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules and laws that guide people’s interactions.
4. Computer systems = support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness.

Preece further states that the whole of human activity is structured along three of these four key components, namely: people, purposes and policies, and the fourth, namely the software, shapes the human experience. The OCF further expands the main constituent parts into sub-constituents, which contain: a set of entities (e.g., people, individuals and actions); the main relations between them (e.g., share, constitute, influence); and attributes (e.g., name, role, goal) of both entities and relations. A graphic representation of the community as developed by Preece is shown in Figure 2 (De Souza and Preece, 2004, p.8).

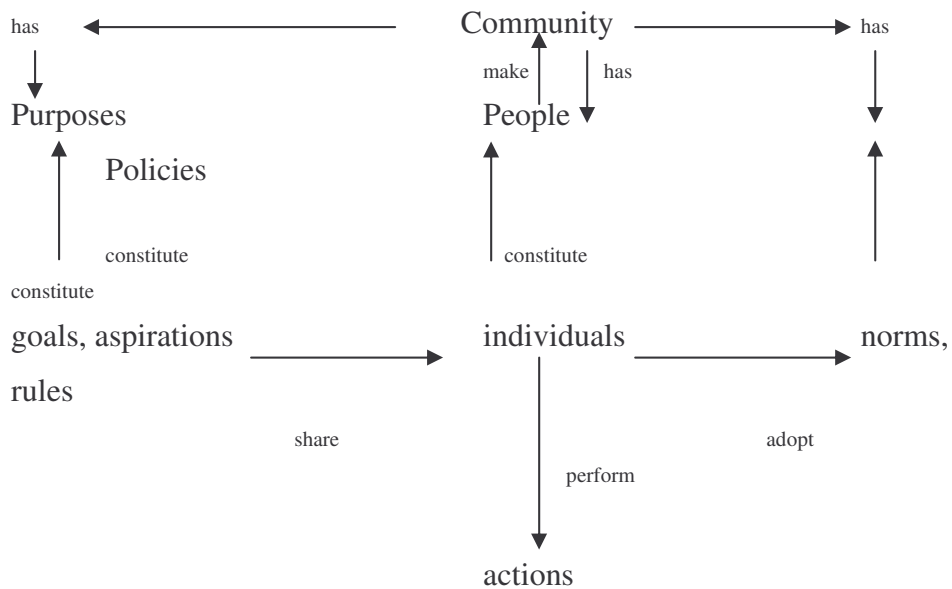


Figure 2 The Community Constituent of the OCF (adapted from: De Souza and Preece, 2004, p. 8)

2.2 The Controversial Aspects of Online Community

Online communities as physical communities do not always function well, nor do they produce positive attitudes from everyone. There are many unanswered questions that challenge community advocates who resent the implication that not all communities are good. Among reports of successful virtual communities available on the Internet, there are also reports of great disappointment, of short-lived communities who fizzled out soon after their establishment, of communities whose members never connected to build the community spirit, of communities with no rules and norms of behaviour, etc. The reason for these sad stories is that people join communities to satisfy certain needs: to find friends, to find comfort, to share opinions, to obtain education and skills training, etc., and it is therefore impossible to meet everyone's expectations. It is not a simple task to make the community always 'work' and 'function' as a unified whole. There are special roles that develop and that need recognition, the facilitation needs to be skilled and the purpose clearly indicated. Furthermore, to add to the difficulty of 'virtual reality', critics worry that life on the Net can never be meaningful or complete, as it will eventually lead people away from interpersonal interaction and from contact with 'real life'. Consequently, according to the degree of satisfaction, people who decide to join will either return to the community, or become 'lurkers' or 'drop-outs'.

2.3 Community Types

There are many types of online communities belonging to different domains: health, commerce, entertainment, education, etc. They can take the form of e-mail distribution lists, chat rooms, instant messaging groups, and cell phone communities. They may or may not have activities as part of the interactional processes, or be structured around a goal or a timeline. Their purpose can be more informal such as 'finding friends online', or sharing ideas about photography, or about

teaching practices, and so on. Conversely, they may be completely scheduled within a rigid time period and with specific tasks and topics to work on collaboratively.

Operationally, they all serve different purposes, but share the most important one, that of information exchange and communication. However, research suggests that if online communities were solely a means of information exchange, they would only be static and indifferent environments. On the contrary, even when online communities are not designed to be collaborative and supportive, they often are. As human beings, online members also seek companionship, social support and a sense of belonging.

It is not within the scope of this research to list or examine the myriad of communities that are present on the Internet today, but in order to facilitate the understanding of the type of communities involved in this research study, the table provided below summarizes some of the most common community ‘genres’ and their basic characteristics.

Community genre	Software characteristics and synchronicity of communication
Web-embedded communities, closely associated with the site purpose (photography, teacher resource sites);	Web pages, with asynchronous and synchronous software (forums, chats);
Special purpose communities: health, commerce, education, not necessarily linked to a specific web site, but owned by individuals or large companies or institutions;	Web pages, with asynchronous and synchronous software (conferencing systems, forums, chats);
Listserver communities;	Asynchronous: email-based communication; communication one-to-all, no reply to single messages, no threading;
UseNet-based communities;	Asynchronous: email communication, no control (any one can leave a message; communities classified hierarchically under different topic headings);
Discussion-based communities with bulletin board software system;	Asynchronous: messages are threaded by topic, private mailing is possible;
Chat-based communities;	Synchronous: rapid exchange of comments, control over number of participants.
MUDs, MOOs;	Synchronous text with graphical

	environment, avatars (MUD) and object-oriented (MOO); participants engage in fantasy games with others or interact in a metaphoric community;
Communities functioning in Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN).	Custom-built software environments that support synchronous and asynchronous communication (First Class).

Table 2 Community Types (adapted from Preece, Online communities, 2001)

Virtual communities overcome the constraints of time and place that limit meetings of traditional face-to-face groups, and always have someone online with similar interests to talk to or to exchange ideas, 24 hours a day. Generally speaking, most online communities are free of charge, because connectivity does not usually require huge investments of time, money, or energy. However, most educational communities charge a fee for tuition, as they usually provide online services such as courses or seminars and conferences that have their own management costs.

3. TWO SAMPLES OF PROFESSIONAL ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

'We have been long expecting that you would tell us about the...life of your citizens....What is the nature of this community?...for we are of the opinion that the right or wrong management of such matters will have a great or paramount influence on the state for good or for evil'.

Plato, Republic (360 BC)

The Internet and its online communities offer new learning opportunities for many who cannot attend full-time, residential training courses or higher education courses. Students and professionals in all fields can work together, 'anytime, anywhere', exchanging information, resources, expertise and updating their skills without leaving their homes or their jobs.

Naturally, there are pitfalls. There is no physical contact, the regular 'buzz' of the face-to-face learning environment is reduced to the minimum or radically transformed, and the activity is prevalently carried out alone in front of a computer screen. Nevertheless, online communities can add motivation and group spirit to web-based delivery of education, and by adding efficient instructional design and skilful moderators, communities can become attractive places for significant learning experiences (Salmon, 2000).

3.1 Computer Conferencing

As shown in Table 2 above, software that allows communication among members of a learning community plays an essential role in community formation, and will shape, to some extent, the community's character and identity. The software that hosts the communities provides the structure where member activity unfolds. It determines what the participants can do with the services it offers, and with its commands, menus and messaging systems, and constructs the kind of communication that takes place. For online learning communities, the choice of an

efficient learning network and the quality of its embedded techniques used for community building, namely, reciprocity features, feedback measures, etc., are paramount to the success of the community itself and to the outcome of the educational goal established as its purpose.

Computer conferencing was first implemented in 1970, but was mainly used for intelligence' purposes. Since then, conferencing software packages have become extremely popular especially in educational settings. First Class, from the company SoftArc, Inc., has provisions for both synchronous and asynchronous communication modes, made available in conference or chat areas. All communication occurring via First Class Conferencing is text based. A typical conference site (see Figure 3) is like a folder which is opened by participants and messages about a particular topic or topics are posted. Messages can then be responded to by other participants at some time in the future. Conferencing on First Class is restricted to a conference site, and access is possible with a User ID and Password.

3.2 Course Structure

It is now important to give a detailed account of the course and its underlying methodological principles. Understanding the general framework of the course also facilitates the understanding of the discourse behaviours that emerge as a consequence of the tasks that participants are asked to carry out and the interactional processes occurring within the First Class environment. As mentioned in the introduction, the two chosen communities in this study can be defined as 'professional learning communities', due to the specific purpose that is at the basis of their journey towards community formation.

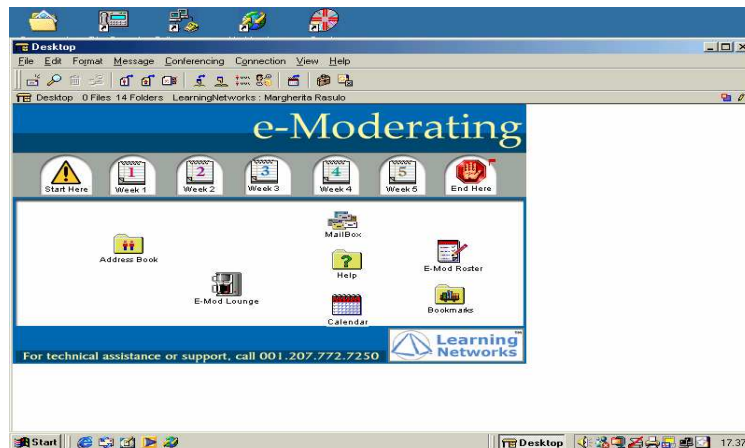


Figure 3 E-Moderating Course Home Page

The E-Moderating Course is a five-week online training course for future e-facilitators, moderators, teachers or trainers. The course is opened to a maximum of 15 people from all corners of the earth, and it is repeated at least twice a year depending on the demand. It is facilitated by an e-convener, an expert e-moderator who establishes a relationship with all the participants and presents the e-tivities that need to be accomplished during the week, offering guidance and support. This course offers the experience of learning online with others, and the possibility of exploring the newest usable and applied ideas about e-moderation. The commitment involved working at least 5 hours a week for 5 weeks. The course encourages the participants to reflect on their ideas about e-moderating and those of others as they go about their usual every day work. Each course is divided up into 5 sessions, each session relating to one stage in the five-stage model developed by Dr. Gilly Salmon, an expert in the field of e-learning.

The research corpus of this study consists of the messages from two e-moderating courses with the characteristics described above. The common denominator of both communities is the nature of the participants themselves: they are all professional educators in all fields of

work who are re-qualifying as e-moderators in order to include an e-learning component as part of their training or teaching methodology.

The five-stage framework model shown below is structured to ‘scaffold’ a successful development process for learning online as it ‘provides an example of how participants can benefit from increasing skill and comfort in working, networking and learning online, and what e-moderators need to do at each stage to help them to achieve this success’ (Salmon 2002, p.10).

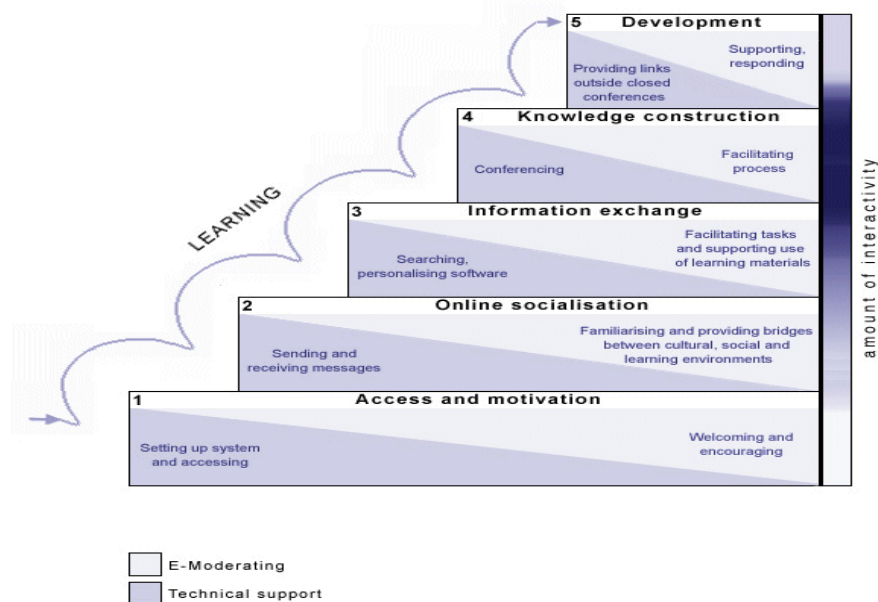


Figure 4 Gilly Salmon's '5-step Model'

The learners work through each step (bottom left of each step), acquiring new skills, while the e-moderator activates strategies to generate their participation by gradually building on their response (right top of each step). In Stage One, the participants familiarize themselves with the technology and simply introduce themselves. Stage Two is the socialization stage, in which participants post messages revealing a little about themselves, and how they feel about what they are doing. Stages Three and Four allow the participants to work with learning materials and

construct knowledge. These stages act as stepping stones towards the final meta-cognitive Stage Five, in which the participants become more ‘autonomous’ and develop the ability to reflect on their learning experience and evaluate its impact.

The courses are run in partnerships with other institutions and the ones in this study were managed by **Learning Networks (USA)**⁴ on First Class Conferencing System.

3.3 Netiquette

Participating in a community also means respecting norms and values that are established by the community within its boundaries, but there are external special codes such as the Internet Code of Practice, which can facilitate communication and limit conflict occurrence. One of the most well-known is the Netiquette Code. Below is an example of a code list developed by the Open University for its First Class users.

Principles of netiquette

The principles of good communication in a computer conference are basically very similar to those in normal conversation and are largely common sense, but, because of the limitations of the medium (and with them the hazard of ‘flaming’), more care and attention is needed than in face-to-face discussion. The main principle is the intention to come to a shared understanding, which means trying to understand other people’s views, rather than simply expressing yourself, or worse, trying to impose your views on others. Below is a list of the most common practices for successful online communication.

1. *thank, acknowledge and support people freely:*
 - if you don’t receive an acknowledgement of a message, you may feel ignored, even when others have appreciated your contribution

CAUTION: before acknowledging, check that there aren’t already several similar messages!

2. *acknowledge before differing.*
 - before you disagree with someone, start by briefly re-stating what the other person has said in your own words so that he/she knows that you are trying to understand rather than criticize
3. *speak from your own perspective.*

⁴ Learning Networks USA: A computer company that develops learning software for online learning communities. The company leads joint training ventures with most US and UK based Universities.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if no perspective is given, a statement may seem dogmatic or moralistic • if something is put as an absolute, there is no room for anyone else's perspective <p>4. <i>avoid 'flaming spirals'</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's easy to respond quickly to soothing that makes you angry: before you write your response, think about what you're saying, possibly re-word your message and reflect on the content (if it's going to offend someone who can't defend himself/herself as easily in ordinary circumstances) <p>5. <i>on emotions in messages</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emotions can be easily misunderstood so use the conventions offered in online communication: the emoticons or smileys : -)) : - (• WRITING IN CAPITAL LETTERS COMES OFF AS SHOUTING!! <p>6. <i>quote other messages when replying to them</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a busy conference or forum, it can be time-consuming to find the original message in order to keep the thread going <p>7. <i>effective messages</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keep messages short, write concisely and try to avoid messages longer than one screen • all messages have a subject line: indicate the contents of the message and make sure it is clear • make sure your reply is consistent with the subject line; if not, start a new thread • start a new thread only if your message cannot be inserted in a previous thread <p><i>(adapted from: The Open University Computer Mediated Conferencing checklist, TESOL assignment booklet)</i></p>

Table 3 Netiquette Principles

4. ONLINE DISCOURSE

'There is no doubt whatever about the influence of architecture and structure upon human character and action. We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us'.

Winston Churchill (as quoted in Preece, 2000, p.1)

4.1 Characteristics of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) and Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD)

Each new communication technology changes the way we think and speak, and with the advent of the Internet, concepts such as space and time, for example, are conceived differently in our minds. Technologies that comprise the Internet are HTML, email, discussion boards, instant messaging, online video conferencing, blogs, wikis, conferencing systems, and so on. Each of them enables online communication and has its own set of characteristics, rules and features that have redefined the ways of knowing the world around us.

The communication 'that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers' is known as Computer Mediated Communication (Herring, 1996, p.1). Herring identifies three main characteristics of CMC. The first is that CMC is mainly typed, and has unique features of its own, including different styles and genres, that are either determined by the multitude of its structural forms, chat modes, forums, email, and others, or by a communicative purpose. The second important feature is that interaction occurs without extra-linguistic cues, and the third is that it promotes the phenomenon of community formation. CMC may be synchronous, such as real-time chat, or instant messaging, or asynchronous, such as a listserver, a bulletin board or a conferencing system. It may be text-only, or provide facilities for displaying images, animations, hyperlinks, and other multimedia.

As this study analyzes the 'discourse' that is generated by online participants through the use of a software system called 'computer conferencing', it is methodologically more appropriate to discuss the

characteristics of 'Computer Mediated Discourse' (CMD). Herring explains that the realm of CMD 'is a specialization within the broader interdisciplinary study of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), distinguished by its focus on *language and language use* in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus' (Herring, 2001, p.612). The focus on the term 'discourse' is significant, as it places emphasis on the interpretation of *language in action*, on its *use and users*, on the interpersonal relationship that is established, and on the levels of meaning that are generated, rather than on the medium through which communication is possible. Furthermore, by highlighting this concept, the observation of all linguistic phenomena occurring within the two communities is guided by the three main dimensions of discourse as defined by Van Dijk. He states that discourse is 'language (in) use, the communication of beliefs (cognition), and interaction in social situations', as it involves the essential concepts of 'who uses language, how, why and when' it is used (Van Dijk, 1999, p.2).

An important observation made by a number of researchers is that CMD has redefined the characteristics of oral and written speech by incorporating both modes onto online discourse, and its written interaction is often described as 'written talk'. Collot and Belmore use the term 'electronic language' to refer to this new variety of English (Collot and Belmore, 1996). Yates argues that oral and written speech influenced and continue to influence online discourse, its form and structure, but what has emerged is a completely new form, a hybrid register as required by Cyberspace, which merges both spoken and written speech, but which also suggests to look beyond the oral-writing dichotomy to produce a genre that is historically unique (Yates, 1996).

What exactly are the characteristics that CMD shares with spoken and written discourse? Schank answers this question by stating that Net communication is quite like conversation, in that 'messages on the Net

tend to be informal, to be phrased in conversational form, and can engender a great deal of direct and dyadic interchange'. However, when asked whether Net communication is like writing, Schank answered, 'absolutely, messages are written instead of spoken' (Schank, 1993). In sharing the same view, researchers Mann and Stewart state that the 'electronic word' is typed and therefore like writing, but contains exchanges which are often rapid and informal just like speech (Mann and Stewart, 2000 p.183).

Hence, whether CMD is considered a form of writing that often reads as if it were being spoken, or talking in writing, the blurriness of the two modes as they merge into a new one is obvious, and suggests that researchers should explore its potential by establishing the unique qualities that characterize it.

Both online and face-to-face communication consists in a series of speech events, in which meaning is conveyed through 'doing things' with language (Austin, 1962), albeit in entirely different environments. The unique 'speech events' constituting online communication are manifested in 'discourse behaviours' (Herring, 2006), expressed by what is considered the equivalent of body language, prosodic features and social conventions of spoken and written discourse.

The messages analyzed in this research study are asynchronous and therefore text-based, generated within a conferencing system known as First Class (Chapter Three). They are both dialogic, as they embody characteristics of conversational speech, and monologic, as they share some characteristics of written speech. They are usually premeditated, but they can also be quick and spontaneous, thus exhibiting recognizable features of when and how the messages were composed. The messages can be read and the response can be attended to at one's convenience, and their understanding relies on situational context. Computer conferencing messages, as explained by Yates, 'are stored centrally in a database and accessed by users there. Messages from earlier in the

interaction are readily viewable and whole conference discussions can be downloaded at will' (Yates, 1996, p.30). Community formation is highly dependent on this type of online communication as it is organized in 'discursive threads', from which coherence and cohesion of meaning are derived. Discursive threads also encourage the feeling of community as they are proof of reciprocity interests and online personalities, as the discussion progressively unfolds before the participants' eyes.

CMD in all of its forms, whether synchronous or asynchronous, is free from physical context, and conveys messages that are visually presented through textual representation of auditory information such as prosody, laughter and other sounds. The language that is displayed contains non-standard features, such as unconventional use of grammar, orthography, punctuation and capitalization, deletion of pronouns, determiners, and auxiliaries. Language is often abbreviated and typos are usually not corrected. Thus, it follows that CMD requires a new analytical and interpretative approach to the understanding of human interaction.

4.2 Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)

Herring describes CMDA, a term first coined in 1995 (Herring, 2001), as an approach to researching online interactive behaviour, which integrates methods from various language-focused disciplines such as linguistics, communication, and rhetoric, and provides insight into both linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena. According to Herring, the main theoretical assumptions of CMDA are those of linguistic discourse analysis. The first two are:

1. discourse exhibits recurrent patterns;
2. discourse involves speaker choices.

The third assumption is formulated by considering the specific nature of online discourse:

3. CMD is shaped, to a certain extent, by the technology that drives it (Chapter Four).

It is important to establish from the onset that ‘CMDA as an approach to researching online behaviour provides a methodological toolkit and a set of theoretical lenses through which to make observations and interpret the results of empirical analysis’ (Herring, 2006). Herring further states that CMDA, ‘may be supplemented by surveys, interview, ethnographic observation or other methods; it may involve qualitative or quantitative analysis; but what defines CMDA at its core is the analysis of logs of verbal interaction (characters, words, utterances, messages, exchange, threads, archives, etc.). In the broadest sense, any analysis of online behaviour that is grounded in empirical, textual observations is computer-mediated discourse analysis’ (Herring, 2006).

Behaviour through language and language use is the view that has been adopted by the present research study for the purpose of establishing how the process of community develops in time, and to what extent this is visible in the discourse behaviours of the participants. The analysis and interpretation of the corpus was conducted by using the methodological paradigms of Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis, integrating the approaches of Conversation Analysis, the Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle and Politeness Strategies (Chapter Eight). These paradigms were applied to the four domains of language: structure, meaning, interaction and social behaviour, and to the fifth domain of CMDA, namely participation patterns. Each domain was then broken down into observable behaviours and studied through the lens of the most appropriate approach (see Table 17).

Content analysis was used for coding and counting purposes to explore community convergence through time by considering the frequency of first and third personal pronoun use, ‘I-words’ and ‘We-words’. However, as Preece rightfully argues, Content Analysis can only ‘provide information about the makeup of messages; it does not attempt

to interpret deeper meaning or intent, and pays little or no attention to the context of messages. Consequently, the value of this technique in online community research is limited' (Preece, 2000, p.336).

Discourse analysis and the paradigms that comprise it were used to supplement the interpretation of the messages, going beyond the frequency of certain linguistic aspects. The focus was on the 'meaning and intent' (Preece, 2000, p.338) of the message that provided insight into the personal and social life of the community members.

4.3 The Nature of the Message

Online discussions within any form are complex to describe due to the intricate nature of CMC. To begin with, online discussions are not linear as those occurring face-to-face, but are networked, meaning that many people receive the message simultaneously, while probably replying to another and so on. In other words, there are many moves at one time, which cause the message to branch out into different directions according to the content of the next participant's message. Schank's description of this kind of communication style is "taking part in a 'multilogue' rather than in a 'dialogue' ", because it is quite possible for it to reach an extremely large number of participants (Schank, 1993).

One way of controlling this ongoing communication is given by the software system. Conferencing software sorts out the messages into folders, corresponding to the thread and to individual mailboxes for private exchanges. There could be, of course, different folders for different threads that can go on simultaneously. This is extremely important, as hundreds of messages can be generated in a single thread 24 hours a day. The different folders allow the user to keep track of the thread and respond accordingly, regardless of the time of posting. To exemplify the many turn-taking exchanges that a single message can generate, the diagram below shows one of the possible ramifications.

1. opening conventions: 'hi, participant....';
 - a. reference to other PP by using their names and frequent use of 'you';
 2. link to previous discourse: (establish common ground) 'I think what you say is important...'; short summaries of previous messages to which they are responding, (concerns structures);
 3. contextual message: new information
 4. link to following discourse: allocating the turn to a next speaker
- (adapted from Herring, S. 1996, p.84)

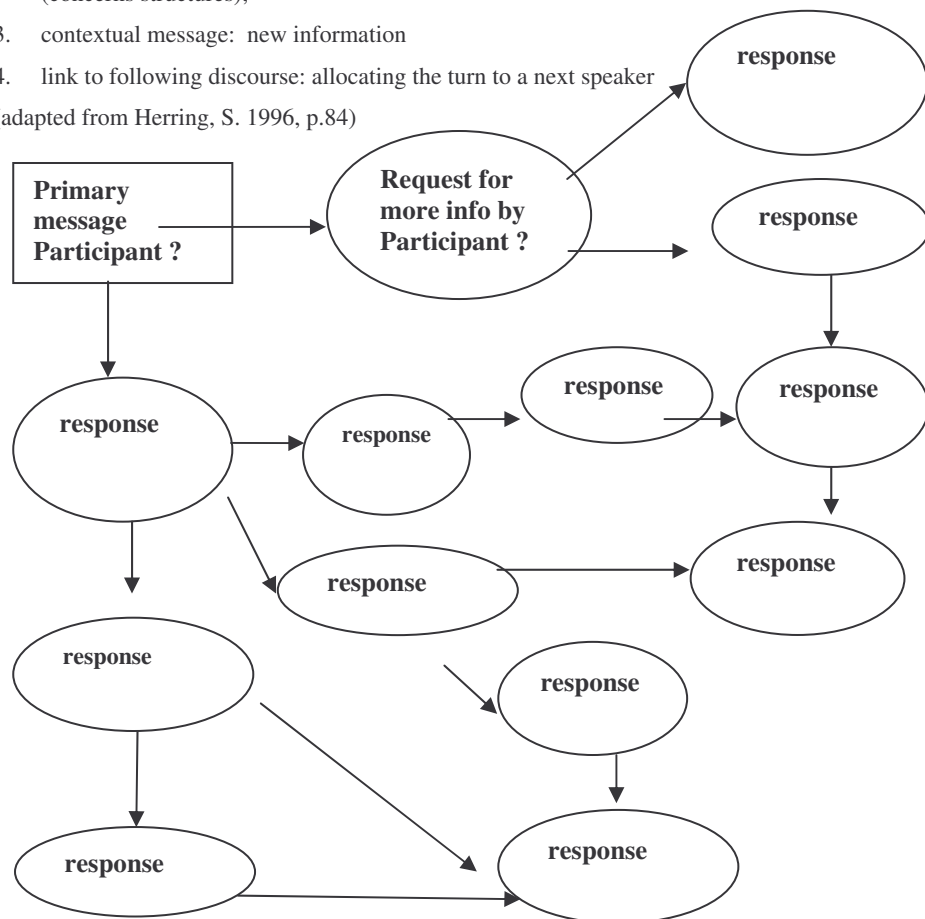


Figure 5 Message Schemata

This diagram also shows that exchanges contain the essential theme, called the participatory theme (Herring, 1996, pp.81-106), which branches out into requests, clarifications, acknowledgments, etc., in many different directions.

5. LINGUISTIC DATA ANALYSIS

‘Because we cannot see one another in cyberspace, gender, age, national origin, and physical appearance are not apparent unless a person wants to make such characteristics public. People (are treated)...as thinkers and transmitters of ideas and feeling beings, not carnal vessels with a certain appearance and way of walking and talking (not walking and not talking)’.

Rheingold, H., *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, 1993

5.1 Corpus Analysis: A Comparative Approach

As mentioned in Chapter Four, CMDA combines both quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation, as it conducts a general language-focused content analysis and discourse analysis, dealing with phenomena of interest that are both structural and semantic in nature. Nevertheless, qualitative means are considered more appropriate when dealing with the interpretation of social processes, because they integrate various theoretical and methodological concepts, as well as present the researcher’s reflections on the study as part of the process of knowledge production. In this study, the quantitative approach was employed to count the structural items of personal pronoun use and the range of specific vocabulary indicating ‘community formation’ over time. The qualitative approach, on the other hand, was employed to analyze and interpret all other social processes signifying participant online behaviour.

The very nature of this research called for the application of a ‘comparative approach’ to the analysis of the corpus. According to Etzioni and Dubow, this means ‘the breaking up and abstraction of data in terms or units which, in themselves, are not encountered, but are the concepts and tools of the analyst. These concepts serve comparative analysis only when they focus attention on similarities and differences of at least two entities’ (Etzioni – Dubow, 1970, p.8). In order to identify

these similarities and differences, general concepts were formulated from the corpus and subsequently grouped into categories as follows:

- participation rates;
- evidence of community formation over time;
- social phenomena identified within discourse behaviours;
- individual participant role-taking.

Based on the categories above, Table 4 describes the criteria that were devised in order to operate an initial selection of the data to be used for sampling purposes.

Technique	Description
By time (increase or decrease in time);	All messages in a particular day/week/month; rich in context; necessary for longitudinal analysis; enables analysis of community involvement over time;
By phenomenon: instances of joking, conflict negotiation, etc.;	Enables in-depth analysis of the phenomenon;
By individual: all messages posted by an individual participant.	Enables comparison across individuals or groups; reveals roles within the group.

Table 4 CMDA Data Sampling Techniques

5.2 Creating a Corpus of CMC interactions

Researchers are well aware of the fact that it is not always possible to analyze the entire available corpus, especially when dealing with large amounts of CMDA textual data in the form of online interactions. Nevertheless, as was the case in this study, a decision had to be made in terms of the amount of data to analyze that would produce findings as close as possible to the sampling criteria and to the research questions.

However, there is no simple solution to this problem. Herring explains that ‘the data should be sufficient to address the research question, and what counts as a sufficient amount of data will depend, on

the frequency of occurrence of the analytical phenomenon in the data sample, the number of coding categories employed to describe the phenomenon, and the number of external factors that are allowed to vary” (Herring in Barab et al, 2006).

Given that partial or random sampling procedures were thought to raise possible methodological problems, a corpus of full conferencing interactions was created in order to avoid loss of context and consequently, arbitrary interpretation of the occurring linguistic phenomena. This led to the identification of key concepts and the creation of categories matching the queries posed by the research questions. It must be mentioned, however, that the amount of data was manageable both in scope and size, as the lifespan of these communities was a relatively short five weeks. Nonetheless, a totality of 1824 messages were analyzed and the process undertaken for their classification and interpretation is explained in the following sections.

5.3 Participation Data Sets

The data sets that comprise the two online communities are essentially of one type: the analysis of postings from the conference environments during a lapse of time of 5 weeks. A total of 1824 messages were posted distributed between the two communities as follows:

- 1194 messages were posted to the Australian Community conference from the period May 2004 - June 2004;
- 630 messages were posted to the International Community conference from the period October 2002 – November 2002.

A number of operations were applied in managing the totality of messages. First of all, it was necessary to learn who the messages were from and with what frequency they were posted. Subsequently messages were:

1. counted by week (counted by large group participation and small group participation);
2. counted by individual participant and e-moderator;
3. transformed into percentages;
4. classified according to the 'most frequent' to the 'least frequent' participant.

There were 12 participants in the Australian community. Out of the 1194 statements posted to the community conference system, the moderator posted 176 statements, representing 17.3 % of the totality, and the balance was composed of responses posted by all the participants.

In the International Community, composed of 13 participants, 630 statements were posted. In the same time frame, the moderator of this community posted 171 statements, representing 23.7% of the totality, and the balance was represented by the statements exchanged among the participants themselves.

Similar group size and purpose were two features that were shared by both communities. However, two significant variables were also considered in the interpretation of the findings. The first was in the number of messages posted. Significantly more messages were posted by the Australian Community in the same time span of 5 weeks compared to the International Community, which posted nearly 50% fewer messages. This second variable was the result of the high frequency of posting of the e-moderator in the International Community, which was definitely more 'intrusive' compared to the Australian Community, so much so that the e-moderator can be considered as the actual 'dominant' participant. In order to avoid moderator-dominance, a moderation policy is always recommended, and the one followed by the e-moderators in both communities was established by their specific purpose, which was to teach e-moderating skills, as well as by the more general purpose of all learning communities, which is, to ensure that participants stay on task and encourage support and interaction.

Nevertheless, moderation techniques are expected to vary from community to community, and are influenced by what the participants themselves expect from their e-moderator.

It is important to affirm that the variables discussed above did not significantly affect the validity of the data sets, as the focus was on the processes involving linguistic behaviour identified within the messages rather than on the mere number of postings. Furthermore, the very nature of the different participation rates informs the study in terms of the identification of communication styles and role taking. For the sake of clarity, pie charts were prepared to illustrate the percentages calculated from participation behaviours. Such data sets provide insight into the linguistic aspects of the postings in relation to the most and least active participant, and to the extent to which they committed themselves to the life of their community and the perception of themselves in the process of doing so.

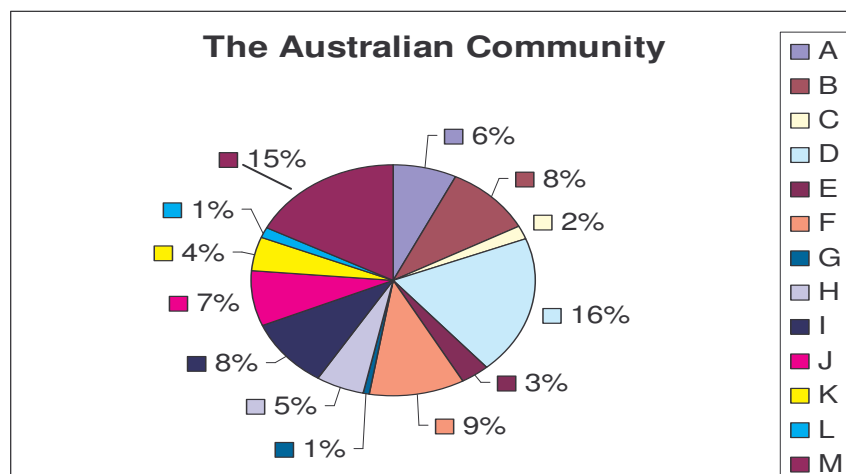


Table 5 The Australian Community Participation Percentages (approximate figures)

The Australian Community clearly shows that Participant D is the dominant participant with 16,4 % of total postings, followed by Participant F with 9,0 % of total postings. The participation percentage of

the e-moderator is also quite high compared to the other participants, totalling 14,7% of all the postings. The remaining postings are quite evenly distributed among the other participants, with the lowest peak from Participant L with 1,3% of messages.

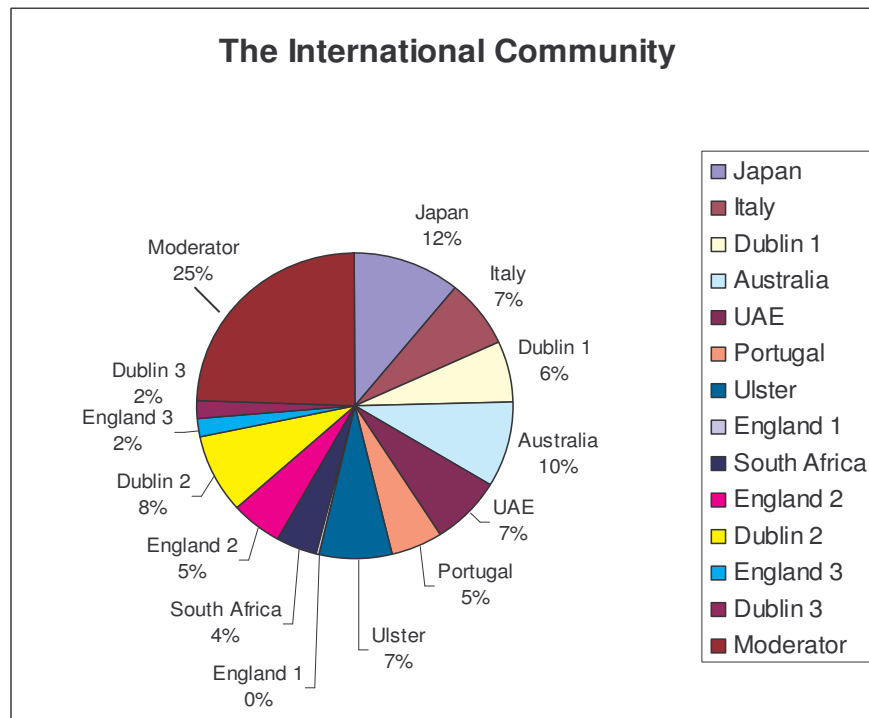


Table 6 The International Community Participation Percentages (approximate figures)

The calculations from the International Community show that Participant Japan totals 10.79% of the postings, followed by Participants Australia and Dublin 2 as the most dominant. The rest of the percentages are evenly distributed among other participants, with the lowest peak of 0,32% from 2 dropout participants, England 3 and Dublin 3. The highest percentage of postings comes from the e-moderator with a total of 23,7%.

5.4 Cooperation in Breakout Groups

Computer-mediated communication systems are believed to have powerful effects on social relationships. Many believe that this new form of communication network facilitates greater collaboration even from the

shyest member of a group. However, maintaining cooperative relationships can be quite difficult, especially if the group is large and anonymous. Ostrom states that one of the most important features of successful communities is that they have clearly defined boundaries (Ostrom, 1990, p.91). That is why some computer conferencing software systems make use of small breakout groups when the activities require group cooperation in carrying out a task. In addition to the 'privacy' and the emotional climate of trust and acceptance that small group work offers, the other positive feature is the goal-oriented interaction, which further increases a sense of accomplishment and success.

The reverse, of course, can also occur and would probably produce feelings of fear, dissatisfaction, sense of loss, which may lead to silence or participant dropout. The data sets collected from the small group activity of the Communities in Week Three, mainly in the form of participation percentages, indicate that not all participants actually favoured this modality and some were unsure of what the task required. The percentages from Tables 7 and 8 illustrate that the International Community members favoured the group activity more than the Australian Community members, and a possible explanation for this could be the reduced presence of the e-moderator in the International Community, which was at times considered 'intrusive'. On the contrary, the e-moderator facilitating the Australian Community was considered to be 'absent' by some participants who would have appreciated a more incisive presence, as stated in this message:

'I wish the e-moderator of this online course had given us clear ground rules for how we should communicate with each other. It would have saved me such a lot of time, particularly at such a busy time of the year.'
... Kim's footprints summary of the difficulties many of us were having. It really did help me to normalise my difficulties, which Moderator certainly did, **but it seemed to mean more when other course participants made the same point.**
Thank you to all.

Activity Types

Week 1 Main Activity: Socialization + reflection Week 2 Main Activity: information exchange Week 3 Main Activity: knowledge construction	Week 4 Main Activity: professional development Week 5: Closing Main Activity: professional development
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Participant	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Red group	Blue group	TOTAL	%	Position
A	11	11	18	18	9	-	10	77	6.4	6
B	20	19	25	10	11	-	16	101	8.4	3
C	7	3	9	0	0	-	3	22	1.8	10
D	40	60	20	31	35	11	-	197	16.4	1
E	9	9	6	5	4	-	1	34	2.8	9
F	15	33	18	22	19	-	11	108	9.0	2
G	6	0	0	0	-	0	0	6	0.5	12
H	6	15	17	15	0	-	4	57	4.7	7
I	19	39	15	9	6	10	0	98	8.2	4
J	7	25	16	12	13	7	-	80	6.7	5
K	11	11	4	4	16	0	0	46	3.8	8
L	7	4	0	0	5	0	0	16	1.3	11
Activity count	157	279	168	147	147	22	48	1018	-	-
MODE RATOR	10/12/34 (56)	48	28	21	23	0	0	176	14.7	-
100 – 197 (frequent) dominant participant stable		77 – 98 (regular) selective participant		34 – 57 (irregular) returning participant		6 – 22 (minimum) drop-out/ lurker				

Table 7 Message Count from the Australian Community

Participant	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Red group	Blue group	TOTAL	%	Position
Japan	19	13	9	3	5	-	19	68	10.79	1
Italy	9	6	11	4	6	19	-	45	7.14	4
Dublin 1	6	7	9	1	6	-	10	38	6.19	6
Australia	14	9	14	4	8	17	-	56	8.89	2
UAE	10	5	8	4	0	17	-	44	6.98	5
Portugal	7	3	5	3	0	15	-	33	5.24	8
Ulster	8	4	11	1	6	15	-	45	7.14	4
England 1	1	3	0	0	0	-	1	5	0.79	10
South Africa	5	7	4	0	5	-	11	32	5.08	9
England 2	3	0	10	2	7	15	-	37	5.87	7
Dublin 2	0	8	6	10	6	-	21	51	8.09	3
England 3	2	1	0	0	0	-	-	3	0.32	11
Dublin 3	2	0	0	0	0	-	-	2	0.32	11
Activity count	86	66	87	32	49	98	62	459	-	-
Moderator	44	14	41	20	23	6	3	171	23.7	-
Total	130	80	128	52	72	104	65	630	-	-

51-68 (frequent) Dominant participant stable	37-45 (regular) selective participant	32-33 (irregular) returning participant	2-5 (minimum-none) drop-outs/ lurker
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Table 8 Message Count from the International Community

5.5 Role Definition

Participation is at the core of online communities and participation percentages do more than just reveal how many messages individual participants have posted; they also help to establish the role type of the participants. Tables 9 and 10 show the total number of messages posted by each participant, the corresponding percentage rate, the degree of personal involvement and the role type. On a continuum of participation frequency, ranging from the least active participant to the most active participant, the main types are classified as follows: lurker, dropout, returning, selective, stable and dominant.

Participant	TOTAL	%	Position	Personal Engagement (minimum, regular, frequent)	Role
A	77	6.4	6	Irregular	Selective
B	101	8.4	3	Frequent	Stable
C	22	1.8	10	Minimum	Lurker
D	197	16.4	1	Frequent	Dominant
E	34	2.8	9	Irregular	Returning
F	108	9.0	2	Frequent	Stable
G	6	0.5	12	Minimum	Drop-Out
H	57	4.7	7	Irregular	Returning
I	98	8.2	4	Irregular	Selective
J	80	6.7	5	Irregular	Selective
K	46	3.8	8	Irregular	Returning
L	16	1.3	11	Minimum	Lurker
E- MOD	176	14.7			

Table 9 The Australian Community Role Definition

Participant	TOTAL	%	Position	Personal Engagement (minimum, regular, frequent)	Role
Japan	68	10.79	1	Frequent	Dominant
Italy	45	7.14	4	Regular	Selective
Dublin 1	38	6.19	6	Regular	Selective
Australia	56	8.89	2	Frequent	Stable
UAE	44	6.98	5	Regular	Selective
Portugal	33	5.24	8	Irregular	Returning
Ulster	45	7.14	4	Regular	Selective
England 1	5	0.79	10	Minimum	Lurker
South Africa	32	5.08	9	Irregular	Returning
England 2	37	5.87	7	Regular	Selective
Dublin 2	51	8.09	3	Frequent	Stable
England 3	3	0.32	11	None	Drop-Out
Dublin 3	2	0.32	11	None	Drop-Out
MODERATOR	171	23.7			

Table 10 The International Community Role Definition

Table 11 indicates how the role types described above can also be classified according to personality types, indicating that communication style influences online interaction, just as it would normally do in a face-to-face situation. A complete study of online personality types has been conducted by Dr. R. C. Schank, Director of the Institute for Learning Sciences at North Western University.

<i>Participation engagement</i>	<i>Posting activity</i>	<i>Online role of participant</i> →	<i>Personality type</i>
Complete responders	Frequent	Dominant Stable	The divers The explorers
Unit / item responders	Regular	Selective	The questioners The little brothers
Unit / item responders	Irregular	Returning	
Non responders	Minimum/none	Drop out Lurker	The questioners The little brothers

Table11 Personality Types

Schank describes the dominant/stable participants as those who ‘dive’ into the learning task and are usually the first to explore the virtual environment. They are also called the ‘divers’ or the ‘explorers’. The participants who are regular posters, also called ‘selective’ participants, prefer to respond only to those messages that are meaningful to them. They do not follow up on every bit of ‘chit-chat’ that participants normally engage in while discussing the more ‘serious’ messages. Schank calls them ‘the questioners’ or the ‘little brothers’, because they usually like to be led up to the point where they are obliged to do something. Schank has also observed silent learners, those who are more commonly known as the ‘lurkers’, and they also fall into the category of ‘the questioners’ or ‘the little brothers’. They are described as participants who have nothing to say or are unwilling to interact with others, but Schank feels that they, too, might be waiting for someone to lead them until they feel self-confident enough to participate. Some,

however, never reach the point of autonomy, as in the case of this participant who dropped out of the International Community.

Hi everyone, looks like **I'm a Bluey** and last to log on. I am full of admiration for those who are not computer literate, can't type or whose first language is not English. Makes **my indolence** look even worse... I'm still **not quite confident** about who the recipient(s) of my messages are. **I'm hope Moderator will put me right.**

5.5.1 Online Personae and Styles of Communication

Participants in closed textual conferencing do more than just play a role while they communicate and form relationships. When working online, they adopt what is known as an 'online personae', a new identity taking life in a new environment, and who is about to explore the undiscovered territory of self-disclosure. In discussing the motivation behind the creation of an online identity, Sherry Turkle states that when online, people "sense the possibilities for self-discovery, even self-transformation" (Turkle, 1995, p.260), due to the fact that 'open communication encourages an attitude of respect for the many within us and the many within others' (Turkle, 1995, p.261). Participants leave an impression of who they are as individuals, by what they say, and how they say it, and who they wish to be online. Self-disclosure on this medium of communication is truly powerful, although it does take longer to accomplish compared to face-to-face settings.

Social presence theory provides the background for examining the behaviour of online personae. In her seminal study on virtual communities and interpersonal communication, Dr. J. Preece explains that 'social presence depends not only on the words people speak but also on verbal and nonverbal cues, body language and context' (Preece, 2000, p.150). Physical appearance, race, age and gender are social markers that have an enormous impact on the impression that we make on others. If, on one hand, there is a reduction of such social cues within a computer conferencing system, on the other, communication is greatly favoured by this medium, as it conveys cues that involve the senses. Voice and video

support, for example, are expedients that can help deal with the absence of physical cues, but they require high bandwidth, and are typical features of synchronous communication. For low-tech computer mediated conferencing systems, some software developers have tried to solve the problem by offering participants the possibility of adding icons, photographs, and avatars in order to increase their social presence.

Raising participant awareness on the impediments caused by the lack of visual clues, as well as on the writing style to adopt online, can represent alternative solutions to the same problem. As regards writing styles, J. Preece refers to the use of ‘linguistic softeners’ to avoid any offensive language that can cause destructive conflict among the participants (Preece, 2000, p.153). Hedging, which is a widely used technique in face-to-face situations, greatly softens language in the online environment. Expressions such as “I don’t mean to intrude, but...” “I’m not sure whether this is true...” “I hope you don’t mind my...” are very commonly found in online conversation.

5.5.2 From Dominant Participants to Lurkers

The purpose of a community is sociologically important in defining roles and behaviours, which directly or indirectly influence the decisions of the community and give it its unique character. Personality traits such as extroversion or introversion, assertiveness, dominance, and shyness, influence feedback from other community participants and generally cause variation in conversational style. The more imposing style, known as the ‘high involvement style’, finds its equal in the dominant participant, while the non-imposing style, called the ‘high considerateness style’ (Yule, 1996, p.76), is characteristic of the participant known as the ‘reflector’.

It follows that the dominant ‘star’ participants, who are always involved in a turn sequence, normally leave an impression in terms of the advice they give out to others, the information they share and the

language they use. However, ‘lurkers’ are also thought to impact the communities they are in by provoking mixed feelings among the other members. Participants usually react negatively to lurkers by posting judgemental messages, or they may choose to ignore them completely. However, some participants try to follow what netiquette and community protocol recommends, and that is urging the ‘shy’ or ‘fearful’ lurker to take a more active part in community life.

5.5.3 Participant D – the dominant participant of the Australian Community

The text produced by Participant D and submitted to LIWC software is 16,928 words in length, corresponding to 16,4% of the total participation rates of the community, followed only by the Moderator with 14,7%. Participant D is undoubtedly the ‘dominant’ participant, described as a very active member of the community, who usually answers all message posted by other members of the community. Participant D’s messages are usually the longest in the community, even when he/she is not directly involved in writing a task. This is true especially from the end of Week Two onwards, when the socialization process is over and knowledge-sharing tasks are the subject of the discussion.

LIWC software also produced data conveying information about specific language dimensions, with an emphasis on the use of first person pronouns and social reference words that show convergence or divergence towards community belongingness. The figures from these two dimensions are compared to the standard occurrence of such features in two main text types, the personal and the formal. The texts produced by the participants in CMD are hybrid texts, as they share features of both text types.

LIWC dimension	Your data	Personal texts	Formal texts
Self-references (I, me, my)	5.16	11.4	4.2
Social words	7.86	9.5	8.0

Table 12 Participant D Word Count

There is undoubtedly a focus on “social ” words rather than on ‘I’ words in the text that is produced by Participant D. Indeed, the general impression that one gets by analyzing the messages is that of a person who is generally respectful of others, helpful and humorous, even when posting ‘serious’ or more formal input. The message scheme that the participant replicates throughout the conferences is:

- acknowledging before contributing;
- stating the name of the addressee;
- opening the message with ‘hello’ or ‘hi’;
- closing the message with salutations such as ‘regards’, ‘cheers’, ‘thanks’, or ‘giddy’.

From the very beginning of community life, Participant D adopts a very **open and supportive** nature in the interaction with the other members, revealing the willingness to be ‘group-friendly’.

<p><u>Re: A long trip to anticipated success</u></p> <p>Hi Participant J I was interested in your comments on arriving. I react to new situations by dropping my bags, not unpacking but going for a look around, which explains why I needed to get on to the course in a rush. ... I'm moving to reflection on how we are all different, but welcome Participant J Regards Participant D</p>
<p><u>Re: Last but not least hopefully!</u></p> <p>Hi Participant C, nice to get in touch. Welcome and all that. I guess your frustrations could have been anyone's, and even a percentage of what will be our online students...Enjoy the course, it is learn the technology as you go, regards Participant D</p>
<p><u>Re: At the end of another week, our learning continues</u></p> <p>Hi Participant J, I think weaving is like learning to ride a bike, it takes a while. The social side has definitely seemed to pick up, but the group speed through</p>

the course has slowed down, and **we seem a bit out of step at the finish, don't we?**

But it feels ok, I wonder what the next week will be like?

The message below reveals that the participant is aware of the **concept of 'style'** in an online environment and shares his/her thoughts conveying a sense of 'focus' and determination.

early reflections –

Hmm. **My learning style is a mixed bag.** My Myer-Briggs Type Indicator is ENTJ from memory, which is not exactly what people guess. I apparently plan to take risks and smell the roses. **I have very definite preferences, am a social animal and enjoy teamwork,** but have done a lot of individual research for books and degrees. I don't like cram courses like many MBAs, and I think I value useful and practical information (pragmatist) but I use all four Honey Mumford styles. Wonderfully complicated, aren't we.

Another characteristic of this 'dominant' participant is the willingness or even the necessity to share personal narrative, in terms of biographical information and knowledge of the world.

Re: I finally made it

Hi Participant L, I had not imagined that we would have a mushroom farmer in the group. But I imagine it done in tunnels and caves, where do the fantastic people come from?

I am besotted by views, I guess because **I spend some time writing books,** and a view of some sort definitely helps me enjoy the day when I am without people.

Welcome, I think the people on this journey are a big part of our learning and I am glad to have you on board.

Regards Participant D

Re: Monday afternoon –

Hi Participant F, I liked your inversion of housekeeping and work. **I generally like gum trees overhead,** although I once heard a branch crack overhead, which is a chilling sound. I zigged and the branch zagged, so I lived to tell the tale.

My ideal home office is separate to the living quarters, but this house has a nice study definitely attached.

Regards Participant D

Re: Monday and the World is wonderful

<p>Hi Participant J glad you are keeping busy with a four year old, our grandchild Emily is that age and a delight cheers Participant D</p>
<p>Re: Icebreaker (Getting acquainted) Hi</p> <p>My name is Participant D. I am interested in cultural tourism, creative writing and theology, and have just finished a book on Pilgrimage Down Under. I will bring a manuscript of the new book to the party. My teaching areas are generally management and education. Save some red wine for me. Regards Participant D</p>
<p>Timely thoughts - The first thought I have is that this is not exactly my own time, it is a shared time and being part of a learning community. So when I need to meet my own needs to 'progress' (I have a strong work ethic/need to achieve) there is at least a partial conflict with my teaching/mother hen ethic. I don't have a personal answer yet, but as it is an issue I will at least follow the minimum, ie log in three times, and get a feel for what works. So my advice is still being formed.</p>

With the use of an evident sense of humour, the Participant is very able in using ‘hedging’, in both acknowledging the opinions of others as well as expressing personal differences of opinion.

<p>Re: time management – Hi Participant L, enjoying your thoughts about individual differences. I also know you are right about the advantages of online flexibility, but I value being a learning community, which has some implications about pace and keeping together. I expect we will return to this over the course. cheers Participant D</p>
<p>Re: online commitment - Hi Participant B, I see your point. The big rush in one hit is a no no. cheers Participant D</p>
<p>Re: Time and Management - Gee Participant F, this sounds very profound, like some enlightenment from on high. I like your advice. I wish I had said it. Cheers Participant D</p>
<p>Re: Managing Time ... As your time and motion consultant I reckon you need to find a long fingernail keyboard, or we can together patent the idea and figure out how to make our fortune. Life is so easy being a bloke with a set of clippers. Cheers Participant D</p>

The Participant’s messages convey a feeling of ‘reality’, in which ‘real’ personalities are engaged in sharing bits of information outside of

course-related content. Jargon words are also interspersed to add to the feeling of 'belonging' to the same cultural group.

<p>Touring by bike</p> <p>Hi does anyone know any thing about mountain bikes and hybrid bikes for going on holiday touring? We have done a few day trips on weekends and are riding most days but we know almost nothing! Help! We are going off road touring this time next year, doing our camino (pilgrimage) from St Jean France to Santiago Spain. In the middle ages up to 2 million a year went the 800 kilometres. We are going by bike (cos it is still recognised as a pilgrimage, but is a month quicker). next month we are doing part of the Mawson Trail around Wilpena Pound and Blinman.</p>
<p>Re: Travel tips</p> <p>Hi Participant F I love the idea of camping, I love to wake up near the water and go fishing. I also like to travel this brown land. I have a travel book on the go at the moment. I take it a car is involved? Water is essential, keeping warm and comfortable and insect free at night is essential. ...Who has any different preferences? I bet everyone does it differently? Cheers Participant D</p>
<p><u>Why do people look around before joining a group?</u></p> <p>Participant I has started us with a good question. Why do people look around before joining a group? I remember the old footy teams of primary school days, we played in harveys paddock. ... How can we best start a discussion thread? Share your secrets. Cheers Participant D</p>
<p>Re: Room with a view</p> <p>Hi Participant B, a creek view is nice, I guess you have kookaburras at Magill. We had some when we were in the bush, they would sit on my shoulder if I was raking up or otherwise helping feed them. I miss them. Does your creek run most of the winter? Regards Participant D</p>

The messages below are written by the same participant, but they are analyzed according to the principles of Politeness and the Speech Act Theory for the purpose of focusing on the fact that online speakers, just as face-to-face speakers, do not simply say things, but they perform socially relevant acts, such as command, promise, insult, apologize,

request, etc. (Austin, 1956). This means that the language they choose to use gives them the enormous power to effect the environment in which they work, live and socialize. In analyzing the messages of individual participants, it is possible to study the effects of certain utterances and the type of force they carry. The most common and recurrent types of utterances are 'representatives' (what the speaker believes to be the case or not, statements of fact, assertions, conclusions, descriptions), 'expressives' (states what the speaker feels, psychological states of pleasure, pain, likes, dislikes, joy, sorrow), and 'commissives' (states what the speaker is intending to do).

It is also possible to detect the participant's awareness of how important it is to use politeness strategies online. Brown and Levinson's (B&L) model is based on Politeness as a function of a speaker's desire to give or receive respect ("positive face") or to avoid imposition (on oneself or another, "negative face"). The strategies used in conversation are ranked according to their ability to "threaten" the face "wants" of the other. The categories include *bald on record* (direct comments, with no attention paid to the wants or needs of the hearer), *positive politeness* (statements showing respect for the hearer), *negative politeness* (statements designed to diminish the imposition on the hearer), *off-record* (very indirect statements of want) and *withholding the face-threatening act (FTA)* (silence on the matter, hoping the hearer will understand the speaker's wants without a verbal stimulus) (Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, 1987).

The conversational style of Participant D is characterized mainly by positive politeness, partly due to the benevolent nature of the community, where flaming is rarely a problem and where the participants are naturally inclined to participate because they share the same purpose and have the same goal to achieve.

MESSAGE TYPE	ANALYSIS
<p><u>I will regret saying this, but I think I'm getting it</u></p> <p>Hi All, So as the sun sinks slowly into the west, on a Friday night, ...The rush is off. I have dawdled to smell the roses our class has put on display, and I am feeling warm towards our little band of brothers and sisters. It seems I need to work on a softer, much shorter 'semi-tough love', and summarising summaries etc. But I feel I have come a fair journey. Deep down of course, I know the atimod course has built up our competencies and social interaction, and will doubtless ramp up the next step for next week, but for now I am content. ...Goodnight, in the immortal words of Participant E "I love Youse all" Participant D</p>	<p>Representatives:, It seems I need to work; But I feel I have come a fair journey, I know that;</p> <p>Expressives: I am content; I am feeling warm; I love youse all</p>
<p>Hi Participant A, loved your post. I think having the e-moderator as only semi-expert in subject, but expert facilitator is both liberating and a bit threatening, ... but I agree it is learning, and good learning. Cheers Participant D</p>	<p>Representatives: I think having; I agree it is;</p>
<p>Much of my final reflection is centred on what I have gained in a learning community. People, virtual friends really, fellow pilgrims along the e-learning road. I learnt we can make the transition from new to confident through a simple but-good-enough technology...I learnt to let things muddle along (this is not my preferred plan), sometimes a dozen blowflies with lots of chaotic plans defeat a dozen bees working it out to a scientific method... So I'm a fan, I learnt from my favoured methods and least favourite. So I'll always remember the class of May/June 2005. Thanks to all. Participant D</p>	<p>Representatives: what I have gained; So I'm a fan, I learnt; Expressive/Commissive: So I'll always remember;</p>
<p>Yes it is great to be finished. I now feel expansive, the pleasure of finishing takes over. Have you tried the new Dove dark chocolate? But I think I absolutely love Haighs</p>	<p>Expressives: is great to be finished; feel expansive;</p>
<p><u>Re: I,m late, I'm late for a very important date.</u></p>	<p>Directive with a perlocutionary effect;</p>

Hi Participant J it would be nice to catch up. Cheers Participant D	
Au Revoir I really enjoyed this journey. Not being f2f was fascinating. From the help and hints and humour I have constructed a virtual personality and face for all of you. It has been intense , but Gilly and Moderator 1, and class, I always felt supported. I feel you have matched , even exceeded, my expectations, this is a great course with great people, thanks. Love you all, Participant D	Representatives/Expressives I really enjoyed; I have constructed; It has been intense; I always felt supported; I feel you have matched;
Re: the short , short , short version Hi Participant I... Of course I am a fan. I did not like it, I loved it. Enjoy the weekend , Participant D.	Expressives: I did not like it, I loved it; Directives: Enjoy the weekend;
<u>Re: 3 weeks in: How does my garden grow? -</u> Hi Moderator 1, ... I felt three threads would be much simpler, ... I also agree it is mostly level three, ... I would normally, in say business, have... but here I see competency It would be good to ... No doubt positive and negative feedback would prompt ...So I need to think more about use and storage of the data. Cheers Participant D	Representatives/expressives: I felt; I also agree ; I would normally...have; here I see competency; It would be good to; No doubt positive and negative feedback would prompt; so I need to think more;

5.5.4 Cultural diversity: Participant Japan from the International Community

The ‘global’ aspect of the Internet has had an impact on the attention that is being paid to cultural diversity within international communities. The researcher’s perspective should be focused on the way meaning is constructed by speakers from different cultures and how they affect the workings of online communities. This is accomplished by studying the differences in expectations based on cultural diversity, which involves a re-interpretation of social processes and discourse behaviours.

The participant from Japan was identified as the ‘dominant’ participant because of the extraordinary number of messages posted to the community conference, but also because of the striking quality of the

message content, able to convey cultural nuances, interesting descriptions of customs, beliefs and educational practices. The participant works harder than most others in the community in order to be as clear and as accurate as possible in the use of language, which is the participant's main preoccupation.

The table below shows the results of the LIWC analysis for an initial diagnosis of the overall 'voice' of the participant.

LIWC dimension	Your data	Personal texts	Formal texts
Self-references (I, me, my)	6.58	11.4	4.2
Social words	8.28	9.5	8.0

Table 13 Participant Japan Word Count

The text submitted to LIWC software is 6885 words in length, corresponding to 10.79% of the total participation rates of the community. The only participant who wrote more messages than the dominant participant is the Moderator, with 23.7 % of the total messages posted to the community.

A quick comparative analysis of the dominant participants from both communities shows a slightly marked preference for the social sphere on behalf of Participant Japan. Characterizing the messages of this participant is the formality of register, especially in the first week of activity. As the participant becomes familiar with other community members, and as she/he finds a personal 'voice', the messages become more humorous, but retain the overall formality of discourse. It is evident that, although the participant claims to be quite familiar with online messaging writing styles, the following 'letter format' is maintained throughout the first two weeks of discussion.

- Greeting: 'This is (name) from Tokyo Japan' ('Hi' and 'Hello' appear only at the end of Week Two);
- Message body;

- Closing remark and Salutation: ‘I am very pleased to work with you’, or ‘sorry for my English’ + (name). The signature sometimes contain the title ‘Participant D, other times they are signed with an M, which is the participant’s first name initial, and sometimes both are included in the same message.

<p>E-tivity week 1 My name is and I am saying hello from Tokyo, Japan ;)) I am a researcher and a coordinator of Distance Learning Office at Tamagawa Gakuen, a K-12 school in Tokyo... English is not my mother tongue and writing a message takes me for long time and makes me hungry and thirsty. I appreciate your great patience. Anyway, I am very excited to work with you! Participant Japan</p>
<p>Subject: reflections fromon busy startup. To: S1 Reflections e-tivity week 1 This is M I will go on a trip with my 10 colleagues in my department whole this weekend and I am wrapping up what I did on Session 1.... I am very much excited to work with other e-mates! Participant Japan</p>
<p>E-tivity week 2 Hi All, This is M. again from Tokyo. Please allow me to post often at this early stage. I would like to reply to a simple question section. I am not a tech person, but I have been using FirstClass for more than ten years. And I am quite sure that as the week goes by, I won't be able to contribute at all to discussions of the more complicated issues. M.</p>

The above messages also reveal how the participant initiates utterances with expressions of appreciation or deference towards what is thought as the linguistically dominant culture. There is a mix of different speech acts:

Please allow me to post (**directive**); I would like to reply (**representative**); I am not a tech person, but I have been (**representative**); and I am quite sure (**representative**); I am very much

excited (**expressive**); I won't be able to (**commissive**); I will go on a trip (**commissive**);

There is also an attempt to 'sound' closer to the other 'mates' in the community with the participant's use of the expression: '**I am wrapping up what I did on Session 1**'. Indeed, as the participant gradually gains control of the fear of 'losing face', there is evidence of message quoting, which is indicative of the participant's move towards full interaction with others.

From: M.
Subject: Re(2): Footprints activity - reflection
To: Blue Group week 3

KL writes:

I thought that we have all engaged well in the activities. ... and I have enjoyed ready about everybody's experience with on-line learning and their backgrounds. ... Sometimes it is more difficult to participate when you are unsure who you are participating with...

Hi K,

I agree with you that feeling comfortable and safe on online environment is crucial at the very start. I am hoping online exchanges bring us a new horizon, which should be organized in a specially manner of communication

One of the most striking characteristics of this participant's messages is the constant drive towards group convergence. In discussing personality styles with the other members, the participant makes an effort to acknowledge, contribute an opinion, ask for feedback and encourage collaboration.

Hi everyone,

...

I really enjoyed reading Susan's portrait of Alison! **I wonder if** there survives such a character like her even in a classroom situation.

I remembered an educational/psychological analysis how the character of the teacher affects class, tyranny type, democrat and half and half. **Maybe we can find** the best mix of those traits.

I like Kim's metaphor because it makes students feel safe and relieved. I also pick up another metaphor, which I sometimes use.

Bye everyone,

.....
Shall we create an inspiring and cooperative atmosphere and shape up a joyful journey together.

Bon voyage!

In this next message, the participant shares the strong and pervasive feeling of gratefulness with other members of the community. The participant is one of the few who actually undergoes character development during the course, and is also one of the few who is able to establish a relationship with some members of the community, especially with one particular member whose initials are MC, identified as Dublin 3. Participant Japan adds the suffix 'san' to the member's name, which is an 'honourable' title in Japanese in sign of respect for the other person.

(from Japan)

Hi all,

I am glad to know that you sense something in my posting, K. and M. **You made me feel worthwhile** to attend as an international participant.

I am sincerely grateful to all for making this learning experience rewarded. Especially I enjoyed the interaction part.
Let me quote M.'s sentences from her message in group conference.

'M.C. writes':

It has taken me a couple of days to respond to your message regarding Linux as an example of networking because I had to do a bit of finding out about the topic :-). I have now learned a few things about networking...

(from Japan)

Above all things, I find someone reliable on the other side of the computer screen. This is the most important fact to me.

Thanks, **M.-san!!**

M.

One of the most evident markers of cultural diversity that will be discussed in this section are the anecdotes that this participant uses to describe Japanese culture. In the messages that follow, the participant shares information about Japan and gives the newfound online friend some teaching advice. There are endearing expressions of solidarity such

as 'My cute Gen...', as well as metaphorical anecdotes about reincarnation, nature and Italians. The participant is fascinated by other cultures, and as the contributions continue, he/she will be asking more questions about the countries where the others are from. The participant's use of tag questions, emoticons and punctuation marks serve the purpose of monitoring the conversation, and add to an acquired feeling of confidence in making a contribution.

Subject: Re: To: E-itivity 4.1 10/02 Hi M-san, Your activity sounds fun to do! Your plan is well organized, isn't it! ... I am wondering if you might be interested in adding some spice: ...visual aids and contacts between German living in Germany. I imagine they are willing to share their custom with your students. Our 6th grade students learn an old capital "Kamakura" in history class for three stages...My elementary school days were quiet and peaceful without computer network...;-)) M.
Hi M and K, Barbara succeeds in explaining the intangible idea in scientific visible value. As a Japanese, some New Age ideas including reincarnation sound natural. This story has been shared by many families. I was taught that when eating rice, imagine threads of sunshine, blessings of rain and perspiration of farmers, appreciate their efforts and not waste them: God is everywhere around us even in a grain of rice. I am not a nationalist nor patriot, but proud of being a Japanese. Lately, I heard a very interesting story about a network of trees from that kind of source. One famous tree doctor was once asked how one can be a good doctor. He is a highly respected professional tree doctor not a New Age Guru, but his answer is fascinated! "Any tree is fine. If you love and care one tree very much, that one will broadcast what you have done for it to all the trees throughout Japan in a second. Wherever you are, you will be highly welcome by trees." Trees seem to have more sophisticated network than ours for ages! Having this story, I speak to trees more often. ;)) M.
My cute Gen is now traveling in China and I did not receive his response to K, yet. Sorry! I recalled my visit to Italy in 1998 and my impression was Italian, Italian, and Italian! I mean language. They talked like singing merrily and loudly. You can experience it in any park/square where so many Italians get together until very late. The meaning of "piazza" which is the place people gather made sense to me. M.

This next sequence of messages is an exchange of information about different countries. The Japanese participant has actually been successful in involving some members of the community, particularly **Participant Ireland 1**, in talking about Ireland. Participant Japan is especially interested in finding out whether nature is at all associated with national character, as it is in Japan (see the participant's previous 'tree' story). Moreover, the participant is also very able in using politeness strategies, especially when she/he realizes that the questions might sound unusual to some of the other members.

<p>(From Dublin 1)</p> <p>My thoughts would be that through this type of course, you get to meet and connect with individuals who are geographically seperated from each other! This can provide some valuable insights into learning from other countries and cultures which is not always available first hand in f2f learning. The level of socialisation in this course, depends on the willingness of each participant, to participate, and willingness to become friends of sorts!!</p> <p>(Response from Japan) Hi J.</p> <p>We all love traveling and let me also ask you from the topic. How does the nature impact on your culture and national identity? How would you describe? Or are there anything else other than nature you can identify with the national characters? I am curious about your indepth observation of the country. It will be of some help to visit each other!</p> <p>K, I will talk with my little Gen about our individual trips to Italy so please wait for our reply for some time! M.</p> <p>(Reply from Dublin 1) Hi M.,</p> <p>I'm not exactly sure what you mean when you ask about the nature in reference to the characters of each country?? Ireland is known as the land with 40</p>	<p>Nature: an element which is held in high regard by the Japanese;</p> <p>Expresses deep interest in cultures obviously different from hers/his;</p>
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shades of green, so called because of the amount of fields and farm lands one sees whilst travelling through! Although like most developing countries these fields are being replaced slowly but surely by houses, car parks and shops! A shame, but sometimes a necessity!

Hope this is of some interest to you!

J.

(From Japan)

Hi J.,

I really appreciate you time to respond to my vague question! Thank you very much.

Yes, your comments are exactly what I wanted to know! Actually I was considering to visit Ireland last summer and if I knew this beautiful phrase I could visit you.

When you have some time later, please let me know your people. **I am wondering** if they are person of few words and work hard because of geographically isolated and north position .

Let me introduce Japanese in general and tell you my impression on Finnish.

With scarce natural resource and small residential area, Japanese is under pressures to survive. Personal space is quite narrow and try to find the way to live in harmony. We are mentally wet type. We have beautiful four seasons, which they say we live long. Unfortunately I don't know why.

Another characteristics are quiet, conformity, elaborated, miniaturized and organized.

I like Finnish people because they are honest. I never felt deceived. They look shy, but friendly: they understand country's geographical position and try to become a respected member in EU. They love the nature and they find peace and happiness even in the long and cold winter.

I reinforced my aspiration by my sentences: I want to go back to Finland again!

(From Dublin 1)

M Writes:

'When you have some time later, please let me know your people. I am wondering if they are person of few words and work hard because of geographically isolated and north position.'

Saving negative face is realized through the use of 'I really appreciate...my vague question...';

<p>Hi M., good to hear that some of my comments were of interest to you! In general the people in Ireland work hard...</p> <p>I'm concious of overloading the message boards with stories of Ireland, so M. if you would like to knwo any more feel free to email me!</p> <p>J.</p>	
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In a comparative analysis which takes into consideration aspects of intercultural communication, albeit occurring in an online scenario, the assumption that 'what is meant is what is said' is not always true. Strategies that compensate for prosodic and paralinguistic features online are often misunderstood by different cultures and situations of conflict may arise. The sequence of messages that follow contains numerous examples of diverse speech acts, hedging and politeness strategies, which are used by the participant and the moderator in the attempt to clarify events in an unfortunate exchange, caused by what is perceived to be the language barrier. The three parties involved are: Participant Australia, Participant Japan and the Moderator.

<p>Kim Popowski writes: <i>I am a bit different from you Masako, you don't <u>"care much about making mistakes and, personally,don't mind taking risks and have nothing to lose"</u></i> <i>I am a bit nervous when I have to put anything up, is the spelling OK, am I using slang and some people wont be able to understand what I have written, what if I am on the wrong track . Although each time I login it is getting easier and easier regards</i> K.</p>	<p>Loaded message: shows the Australian participant's resentment by using direct quotes from the message written by the Japanese participant;</p>
<p>(response from Japan) Hi Kim, <u>I am sorry if I made you feel bad</u> because of my behavior and attitude. <u>I don't mean to compete</u>/dispute with someone. I just want to feel I am doing my best. <u>I trust in Val who will guide me to the right direction if I am wrong.</u></p>	<p>Direct answer from the 'offender'. Uses expressives to give sincere apology; makes a declarative request through an indirect speech act; ends message with commissive;</p>

<p><u>I will be more sensitive and careful.</u></p> <p>From: M. K. Subject: Re(3): To: S1 Reflections 10/02</p> <p>Val Robertson writes: Hi Masako I think that Kim was trying to explain her approach to learning which is different from yours. <u>I certainly didn't pick up the feeling</u> that you had upset her. <u>I think we should celebrate the differences</u>, it makes for a <u>rich mixture</u> in the <u>group</u>. Cheers Val</p>	<p>Moderator uses politeness strategies: saving negative face is realized through the use of '<u>I certainly didn't pick up the feeling</u>'; <u>I think we should celebrate the differences</u>;</p>
<p>Thanks Val,</p> <p><u>Of course I didn't mean to disagree with Kim's note. I respect her way.</u></p> <p><u>I just wondered how I could respond</u> in a polite and proper way. <u>I wanted to apologize if I behaved badly</u> though I didn't mean to.</p> <p><u>Oh, no</u>, this is a kind of misunderstanding because of my lack of language skills..</p> <p><u>Sorry if</u> I might hurt someone' feeling and <u>THANK YOU!!</u></p> <p>Masako</p>	<p>Politeness strategy: negative face saving;</p> <p>Indirect speech act: request through a declarative; hedging;</p> <p>Emotional content: expressives;</p>
<p>From: M. K. Subject: Re(5): To: S1 Reflections 10/02</p> <p>Moderator writes: M. your language skills are great and there are no problems. <u>It just shows how thoughtful you need to be about communicating online</u> V.</p>	<p>Moderator uses politeness strategies to save negative face and 'teach' a small lesson;</p>
<p>(from Participant Japan)</p> <p>You're right. I found that sometimes facial expressions and tones work. <u>I didn't understand</u> what Kim tried to express and I thought it was better to say that I had no intention to bother others.</p> <p>I really appreciate this opportunity. Kim, <u>I sincerely hope</u> I don't hurt your feelings. M.</p>	<p>Expressives in negative face-saving strategy towards the Australian participant;</p>

Unfortunately, the participant from Australia does not openly accept nor acknowledge the Japanese apology, and the incident is set aside.

Intercultural differences however, do not always lead to such negative outcomes, but misunderstanding can also lead to humorous incidents, as demonstrated by the exchange of messages below. The effect shows how unusual linguistic expedients can take on an unconventional interpretation from someone of a different culture. The participant from Japan reacts to the incident by using numerous speech acts: representatives, commissive and expressives in one message.

From Japan

K.L. writes:

A great learning experience that I have had so far was when Masako mistook #\$%^& written in one of the activities, for someone having keyboard problems not a swear word as most of us did.*

K, I notice you are very considerate to think of me ex. a grain of salt in every context.

I deeply appreciate and **I promise to ask you** if I have any questions.

I imagine your students are very comfortable in your class.

I am glad to learn my comment had such a big impact on you. **Ahaha.**

OK, **I will keep creating a buzz**, which **I hope is relevant** to an issue and **could be a topic of debate.**

M.

The language factor is predominant in the next two messages where the participant struggles with idioms that are not part of his/her familiar world. There are examples of indirect speech acts used when requesting clarifications through directives, that typically end with the use of an expressive.

Hi S,

I read your mail imagining you have struggled with Japanese girls...

...**I wonder if I can understand your mail correctly**, but from my experience of very dark 365 days at Chicago, it was hard to change one's attitude.

I totally agree that one should have basic language skills to think in abstract but

in your students' case, culture and habit might impede him/her to do so in a short term.

I remember the saying that you can bring your horse to a well, but can't force it to drink.

...

I think letting them to drink is another big task and it is their responsibility to integrate all the activities Only they can do it.

I also feel "A ha! experience" occurs when their brains are filled with information, motivation (similar to Helen Keller's case?)

Sorry if I flew away from S.'s argument.

M.

Subject: Harvest time
To: S4 Reflections 10/02

Each week I sow seeds which are what I heard and learned.

I saw some stopped growing in a different environment, some grew healthily and some seemed eaten up by birds....

How nice to participate gardening together with reliable people!!

M.

5.5.5 The Weakest Links: Reflectors or Convinced Lurkers?

The term '*lurker*' always evokes negative connotations among net citizens. The most common definition of a lurker is someone who does not 'speak', but likes to look around the goings on of the community without participating. Knowing that there is a lurker in the community can also be annoying, as they are often considered as freeloaders, spies, observers who do nothing but judge others. Indeed, Preece states that lurking is sometimes seen as 'sufficiently threatening to the well-being of the community' (Preece, 2000, p.889).

However, there is more to the word 'lurker' than just its conventional meaning. Behind the word there are people who like to silently evaluate the nature and the general attitude of the community before participating. These are 'the little brothers' that Schank describes as people who obviously don't feel at ease at the very beginning and who like to reflect before venturing in.

Preece provides an interesting account of reasons given by lurkers for not posting and for their silent participation. They include:

- unclear community purpose;
- personal factors;
- lapse of time in posting;
- privacy and safety;
- unfriendly interaction mechanisms;
- poor community responsiveness.

(adapted from J. Preece, 2000, p.91)

In this study, the reason for ‘lurking’ given by the very few ‘silent’ participants was the difficulty in realizing the purpose of the community, as well as family problems, expressed in terms of not being able to find the necessary time to devote to community life.

The participants were selected according to the lowest percentage of messages posted to the their community, hence, registering poor community attendance. Table 14 below summarizes the results from the LIWC analysis of the weakest participants, Participant England 3 from the Australian Community, and Participant G from the International Community. The computer results registered a higher percentage of ‘I’ words for Participant G, while Participant England 3 registered a higher percentage in the use of social words. Notwithstanding the interest in their own well-being within the community, the same percentages registered in the social category indicate that both participants started out with the intention of contributing to community life and to a community-oriented discourse behaviour. As interesting as LIWC results are, they do not yield any information as to the reasons *why* the participants never really took part in the interactions of the community. Human coding of messages and their analysis and interpretation provide further insight into this phenomenon.

Participant England 3

LIWC dimension	Your data	Personal texts	Formal texts
Self-references (I, me, my)	3.04	11.4	4.2
Social words	8.56	9.5	8.0

Participant G

LIWC dimension	Your data	Personal texts	Formal texts
Self-references (I, me, my)	7.37	11.4	4.2
Social words	6.91	9.5	8.0

Table 14 The Weaker Participants

Time is an issue with both participants. They seem to find it difficult to keep up with their weekly activities, although they continue to express the need to be part of the ‘community’. Nevertheless, they also affirm that it is safer to ‘watch and see’, before actually taking part in the discussion.

reflections - Participant G - Fri, 13 May 2005, 02:48 📧
given that i was a later starter - it can be a bit overwhelming with all the 'traffic' for you to review. i will spend a bit more time going back over others' responses.
the first week has helped to prepare me to get into the 'guts' of the learning and to want to learn as a part of a community.
My motivation and yours - Participant G - Tue, 17 May 2005, 08:39 📧
I feel like the late arrival at the party and everyone has already (drunk!) too much. I can identify with a number of the threads here about motivaions: I also want to experience what it's like to be an e-learner, as I'm project managing some program development at the moment and some of it is planned to be on-line. I therefore want to see what works and what is hard, how the dialogue is different from face to face etc, and learn the techniques ...
Re: First Timer - Participant G - Fri, 13 May 2005, 02:05 📧
the only problem that i am having the menu feature is when you go out and come backin know where you are up to - am i missing something?
From: England 3
Subject: Late On Monday night
To: E-tivity 1.1 10/02

Hi everyone,
I am late starting the course because I just returned from China (visiting educational institutions). So this is my first chance to find my way around and start the activities...
 J.

From: **England 3**
 Subject: My answers
 To: E-tivity 1.5 10/02
 (message1)
I found it difficult to find some of the answers and was grateful to those of you who have. But I certainly learnt a lot about the First Class LMS!!!
 (message 2)
... I found it difficult to find some of the answers
 (message 39)
... I am having some porblems navigating-

Information sharing is still very much part of the needs of these weaker participants and they do not shy away from it.

hi all!!! - Participant G - Tue, 10 May 2005, 03:15 🍷

Its Participant G **here from SA**. the world of e-moderating is a new and fascinating one for me. really keen to learn and apply to a range of projects on the go! **i live in the adelaide hills with my wife, 2 kids & pet budgy 'charlie' + numerous chooks** (unnamed).

view from my office - Participant G - Tue, 10 May 2005, 05:06 🍷

my office is in the old executor trust bldg - heritage listed - it looks like an old bank office. i look out over james place which is always filled with all sorts of people and noises.
 Participant B - its been incredibly try! - they reckon that there is a good chance that we will be affected by el-nino this year.

From Participant England 3
I am in my study at home. My family is watching TV and all is quite. The evening is warm and you can tell summer is just around the corner
 J.

The strong motivational drive of both Participant G and Participant England 3 is not only expressed by their needs, but also by their positive opinion of the course. However, by Week Three both participants had dropped out of the course. There is no clear or evident explanation for this behaviour, nor do their messages reveal any serious difficulties that would not have allowed them to continue on with the

course. Wanting to be ‘part of the group’ is still very much part of their discourse.

<p>what i like - Participant G - Fri, 13 May 2005, 02:16 🍷</p> <p>i like the bitable chunks - the way the program enables you to ease your way in - both in terms of content & getting to know the group. i reckon a bit more instruction on how to get in to program and to orient people to system - especially for new users would be a good thing.</p>
<p>effective leadership - Participant G - Fri, 13 May 2005, 02:23 🍷</p> <p>i spend a lot of my consulting time in working with organisations around the issues of effective leadership. can you give us a few ideas as to the attributes that an effective leader possesses. looking forward to reading your responses. Participant G</p>
<p>To: Participant England 3 Hi Everyone ...I will try to catch up today and tomorrow. I have read all you postings . Knowing that we all have the same common goal is an immediate bond within the group.</p>
<p><u>reflections</u> - Participant G - Fri, 13 May 2005, 02:48 🍷</p> <p>the first week has helped to prepare me to get into the 'guts' of the learning and to want to learn as a part of a community.</p>

One of the most interesting findings from this study was that ‘lurkers’ can become quite acquainted with the community’s discussion, but never really identify a purpose to justify their presence or establish an online personae as with the other participants.

5.6 The Multiple Roles of the ‘E-moderator’

Dr. Gilly Salmon, an expert in the field of online education and training, explains that an e-moderator “is the person responding to and building on the contributions to an online conference...and...should prompt, encourage and enable...openness, while acknowledging the personal experience” (Salmon, 2001, p.45). These e-experts, she argues, act as “companions in the democratic online learning process...and have the “ability to visualize others in their situations” (Salmon, 2002, p.6). It is easy to imagine that e-moderating is not an improvised job, but one that requires a good dose of sensitivity and proper skills training.

The participants' sense of community is enhanced by the skilful role of the e-moderator, especially if one considers that before becoming a member of the community, each participant is an individual with individual needs. Indeed, as Preece states, 'moderators and mediators help govern communities' (Preece, 2000, p.83). It is the e-moderators task to encourage group identity and strength from the very beginning, and avoid moderator-dependent behaviours that will inevitably impede community formation.

Hence, the skilful e-moderator should be able to use the technology as a mediating force in order to apply a combination of principles and techniques derived from sound educational theory and human psychology when carrying out tasks, such as those carried out by the participants in this study.

The data sets shown below in Table 15 are the result of the Word Count analysis of moderator messages. Both community moderators were examined and a comparative study of their communication styles was conducted. For this purpose, a table was prepared in order to facilitate the examination of the results vis-à-vis. The first column shows the LIWC category; the second column presents data from the Australian moderator; the third presents data from the International Moderator; the final column reports the standard percentages normally recorded from a formal text type. As we are within the realm of a training course, a certain degree of formality of register, in terms of avoidance of incidents of flaming, and an acceptable adherence to correct use of syntax, is given by the nature of the professional community. However, the level of informality, which also characterizes the register throughout the conferencing period, is given by the nature of the online communication medium of CMC, with its own netiquette rules on formality and informality of discourse as explained in Chapter Four.

LIWC dimension	Data from Australian community Moderator 1 1240 total word count (176 messages out of 1194)	Data from International community Moderator 2 1693 total word count (171 messages out of 630)	Standard percentage
Self-references (I, me, my)	2.90	4.19	4.2
Social words	9.92	11.16	8.0
Positive emotions	4.60	5.14	2.6
Negative emotions	0.65	0.47	1.6
Overall cognitive words	8.71	9.51	5.4

Table 15 Moderator Postings

The percentages in each category are slightly higher with reference to the International Community Moderator mainly due to the total number of messages posted, with the exception of the ‘self-reference category’. It is significant to notice, however, that while the International Moderator’s total word count increases by 453 words, which corresponds to 26.7% of the total word count, the percentage of self-reference words is increased by 100%. The personality style of the International moderator is, indeed, more communicative in the sense that the presence is felt throughout the course, mainly to encourage participant contribution, which was obviously less intense than in the Australian Community.

The examples of the messages below represent features of moderator discourse, exemplifying the qualities, the skills, and the rules for good moderation.

Ability	Characteristics
Understanding of online process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides focus • Intervenes • Builds online trust and propose • Controls group • Intervenes strategically • Encourages ‘sense of community’ • Adds own contributions • Writes concise, personable and energizing messages • Engages people by encouraging contributions • Triggers debates

Examples
<p>Hi ----- Well done for being first and a very warm welcome to the course. Thank you for your interesting e mail, I'm sure the rest of the group will join before too long.</p> <p>Best wishes (IC)</p>
<p>Teresa Gomes writes: , it seems indeed very important. How can I be a good e-moderator if I have never experienced being a learner in such a new context.</p> <p>Hi Teresa you're right you need the experience of being a participant on a course. I was a participant on one of the first courses and it really made me realise that there are lots of skills needed in order to be a convenor of an online group.</p> <p>Does anyone want to suggest what these might be based on week one of the course. (IC)</p>
<p>Thank you and well done blue and red groups for your thoughtful and interesting footprints. I think it would be useful to reflect on how you arrived at a group decision, eg was there a given leader, did a leader emerge etc. It could provide useful insights into online working. (AC)</p>
<p>The first week reflections contained quite a bit of frustration, with the speed of learning and the time online. Participant C came very late to the conference with "Still feeling quite frustrated and behind the eight ball being more than a week behind everyone. " illustrating the importance of staying with the group. " I don't feel like I've connected with anyone really." Participant A was also late to start ... Participant K ... Participant F liked "The methodology used to ease participants into this online course suited my style of learning. (AC)</p>
<p>(to participant G) You are actually 2 weeks behind everyone, and unless you move quickly over the next few days I am not sure that this is a valuable experience for you, as you will have very little interaction online in these postings. (AC)</p>
<p>you might like to come back to this reflection at the end of this week, when you have read the contributions from the other participants, and ask yourself what you have learnt, what you would do differently next week? (AC)</p>
<p>Thanks Participant I. What do the others think of this strategy? Would it be one that appeals to you? If you were Andy what do you think your reaction would be? (AC)</p>

Online communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polite • Confident • Respectful • Able to diversify • Values cultural sensitivity
Examples	
<p>Participant Japan: ‘My difficult part is always writing messages in English... I regard struggling with English as a challenge to broaden my views and way of thinking.’</p>	
<p>Moderator: M., your English is wonderful, much better than that of some English people !! (IC)</p>	
<p>M. K. writes: For this course, my expectations are to know how the real learning takes place online through communications/collaborations/reflection M., I'm sure you will have these expectations realised. I hope you will visit the course often in order to share your experiences and thoughts re these points with others in the group. (IC)</p>	
<p>Hi, well done for completing this section, of course you would all expect to find much the same answers. Have you noticed how you're all already helping and interacting with other? (IC)</p>	
<p>Here is a way of weaving Use the Conferencing, Summarise Selected Messages to collate all the messages, then copy and paste into a new message and delete the ones you don't want. Hope this helps V. (IC)</p>	
<p>M., many thanks for responding to M.'s e-tivity. To answer your question yes it's great to respond to each others e-tivities and very supportive. It's a good learning process for everyone and enables you to learn from each other. (IC)</p>	
<p>Hi you've all given thought to your development plans and have arrived at activities that you feel will be of personal benefit, this is great. However I suggest that the " best laid plans can all go awry " if you do not tell someone else about your plan and agree with them that they will check up on you. Could I suggest that you ask someone else in the group to be your " buddy " and agree to check up on each other after X amount of time to see if the objectives havw been achieved. (AC)</p>	
<p>(moderator) I came to Australia 20 years ago from the UK, and I have no idea what a crow eater is. Can you tell me? (AC)</p>	

Personal characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determined and motivated • Establishes online identity as e-moderator • Shows sensitivity • Shows positive attitude towards online learning
Examples	
<p>! J. it's good that the reasoning is questioned as that is healthy, however we all have to bear in mind that people work at different speeds and have different needs, a fact that I think you've acknowledged here.</p> <p>M. this is a sensitive approach and would, I'm sure , encourage the person to continue. (IC)</p>	
<p>K., I'm sure, like me, that you're amazed about just how much information has been exchanged. I think you should have a group " pat on the back " and a very well done. (IC)</p>	
<p>thanks for your reflection Participant D, I feel that there has been a lot of learning this week, especially working in a less structured environment. I have responded to your etivity with some feedback on it, rather that participation in it. Hopefully others will participate, (AC)</p>	
<p>No i did not mean them to participate, I meant that you gave each other feedback, but some people did respond to the etivity as participants, and I thought thto you too, given the nature of your etivity. (AC)</p>	
<p>I admire your discipline and motivation here, you have been most diligent in participating and being connected, thanks. (IC)</p>	

The similarities encountered in the behaviours of the moderators from both communities in terms of communications skills and characteristics, establish that an e-moderator with a community-nurturing attitude should:

- a. Use reference words linked to the 'sense of community' rather than to self or individual concerns, hence attempting to connect socially with others;
- b. Adopt an overall positive attitude and try to guide the other members in doing the same, in order to preserve that friendly and respectful nature of community online discourse;
- c. Use cognitive words that reflect how much he/she is actively thinking about what to write and how to write it in order to get others involved in the learning process. Examples include: think, wonder, learn, review, reflection, focus, practice, improve, summarize, insight, feedback, clarify, skills, thoughtful and interesting,

6. OPERATIONALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

6.1 Discourse Behaviours and Analytical Methods

The main research question guiding this investigation is the notion of what constitutes an online ‘community’ and the identification of those discourse behaviours and issues that demonstrate evidence of community formation.

The starting point for the selection of significant phenomena from the messages was to choose concepts of widespread interest in CMC from existing literature. Discourse behaviours that characterized each phenomenon were subsequently identified and linked to the issues related to the research questions. However, although the literature provides well-established criteria sets of discourse behaviours (Barab et al, 2006; Paolillo, 2001), specifically dealing with the description of virtual community discourse, it is not always possible to apply them to all communities without a minimum process of adaptation.

The original criteria sets from the literature on virtual community were classified as: participation, shared history, solidarity, criticism, self-awareness, and emergence of roles (Herring, p.22)⁵. The process of re-adjustment is shown in Table 16, in which the original criteria sets are grouped into three main categories that are structural and semantic in nature:

- 1) language structure;
- 2) social behaviour;
- 3) interaction and participation.

⁵ All references to Herring, S. without a year of publication are found in: *Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis: An Approach to Researching Online Behaviour*, to appear in Barab, S.A., Kling, R., and Gray, J.H. (Eds.), *Designing for Virtual Communities in the Service of Learning* (pp.338-376), New York: Cambridge University Press (in press). Retrieved from: <http://ella.slis.indiana.edu~herring/cmda.pdf>.

These domains include sub-sets of linguistic phenomena that were subsequently broken down into categories of behaviours, observed and objectively analyzable through the use of a variety of methods. As suggested by Herring, 'most CMDA research does not take as its point of departure a paradigm, but rather observations about online behaviour as manifested through discourse. That is, rather than starting off with the intention of using conversational analysis (for example) to investigate some aspect of CMC and then selecting a behaviour to focus on, a researcher is more likely to become interested in studying patterns of message exchange (for example), and then select conversational analysis as a useful methodological tool' (Herring, p.23).

For a successful identification of a code list, there is a distinction to be made between 'structural' and 'semantic' phenomena. In relation to CMC, the former include those elements that are objectively identifiable, as they can be coded and counted according to a set of codes. Semantic coding of social CMC phenomena, however, is best conducted through human means and it makes use of the Speech Act Theory, Politeness and Conversational Analysis. The process of examining and interpreting such phenomena, obviously includes a subjective element, and can lead to the loss of 'empirical rigor' (Herring, 1996). However, Herring suggests a useful method of maintaining the 'empirical rigor', by 'operationalizing' the key concepts pertaining to social phenomena and assigning appropriate codes (Herring, 1996). Table 17 shows the process of drawing the key concepts from structural and social phenomena and assigning the appropriate method of analysis.

Table 16 Coding Categories of Discourse Behaviours Hypothesized to Indicate Virtual Communities

Language Structure	Phenomena Type	Subcategories
	pronouns	pronouns and specific community reference words;
I Structure	grammar /syntax:	omission of function words; fewer subordinate clauses;
	typography:	punctuation (omission, use of); capitalization;
	orthography (unconventional use)	abbreviations; contractions; (mis)spelling; typos;
	compensatory strategies	emoticons;
	questions	question tags and wh-questions;
	verbs	use of specific verb tenses;
	subject lines	topic setting
II Social Behaviour		
I N F O R M A T I O N A L	linguistic variation/use;	1. markers of individual differences and commonalities: word choice; word formatives, jargon; narrower choice of vocabulary; 2. provide global knowledge and solutions; express ideas and opinions; share personal narrative; share biographical information; discuss cultural diversity.
	information exchanges	
I N T E R P E R S O N A L	interpersonal discourse behaviours	1. agree, disagree, counterpoint; acknowledge, thank; ask for information invite feedback; offer advice, sympathize; delegate work to the group; volunteer; joke, tease, apologize; negotiate conflict; 2. express social behaviour; 3. support/solidarity; 4. express norms and values.
	establishing online identity	1 self- representation; 2. face-management; 3. community-group representation.

III Interaction and Participation		
I N T E R A C T I O N A L	turn sequences	1. turn taking; 2. cross-turn coherence;
	concerns structures	3. linking/quoting.
	participation	1. no. of messages engagement: minimum, regular, frequent; 2. typology of roles; 3. reciprocity (interactive patterns and styles); 4. message and thread length.

Language Domains	Phenomena Type	Analytical Methods
I Structure		
	Typography	Corpus Linguistics Text Analysis
	Orthography	
	Compensatory Strategies	
	Grammar /Syntax	
	Textual Structure	
II Social Behaviour:		
	Linguistic Variation/Use	Semantics Pragmatics (Speech Act Theory, Politeness Strategies);
	Information Exchanges	
	Interpersonal Discourse	
	Establishing Online Identity	
III Interaction and Participation		
	Turn Sequences	Conversational Analysis
	Concerns structures	
	Participation	Descriptive Statistics

Table 17 Analytical Methods

7. ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURE: THE LINGUISTIC INQUIRY WORD COUNT (LIWC)

7.1 Pronoun Use and Community References

The linguistic analysis of discourse behaviours begins with the subcategory of **personal pronoun use** and **social reference words**. In addition to demonstrating *individual* versus *group* identity, pronouns and social words are thought to be indicative of people's level of focus or involvement with others (Pennabaker et al., 2003).

The analysis employed two categories provided by a linguistic inquiry word frequency tool invented by Pennebaker, Francis, and Booth (2001) called LIWC2001⁶. The tool basically analyzes psychological and sociological profiles of individuals and groups from a given corpus. The authors of this tool explain that “the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count technique analyzes text files on a word-by-word basis by comparing each word in a given file to words in an internal dictionary representing a variety of different psychological or linguistic dimensions. The categories include basic linguistic measures such as frequency of nouns, pronouns, and articles as well as more complex ones that tap into psychological processes, such as linguistic measures of anxiety and sadness. In this way, LIWC provides a fairly straightforward index of how individuals use language, in a way that may serve as a marker of a wide variety of individual differences and commonalities, including demographics and personality” (Pennebaker et al, 2001).

The data set submitted to LIWC analysis from this study includes all the messages posted by the International Community from October 2002 to November 2002, and from the Australian Community from May 2005 to June 2005. For the purpose of looking at community formation over

⁶ LIWC2001 applications are designed to analyze written text on a word by word basis, calculate the percentage words in the text that match each of up to 82 language dimensions, and generate output as a tab-delimited text file that can be directly read into applications programs, such as Word, Excel, etc.

time, the analysis employed only two of the LIWC categories which yielded specific information about the use of first person singular ‘I’ words, and first person plural ‘We’ words, as well as specific lexis referring to the concept of community, and labelled as follows in the internal dictionary:

- community;
- other references to group;
- social;
- friends;
- humans.

The feature reported the existence of both singular and collective pronoun use throughout the 5-week period. Both communities as a whole showed significant convergence in their use of ‘I’ words over time, evidenced by the higher percentage of these words compared to the use of ‘We’ words, which, in the presence of a higher percentage rate, would normally indicate community identification. Nevertheless, the analysis of the messages through human coding showed that during the first week of community life, and with a lower percentage throughout the five weeks, the participants were constantly preoccupied with their individual performance in the community. This does not exclude involvement in community life, nor does it effect their drive towards community formation. Indeed, results show parallel and consistent use of specific words pertaining to social processes of community formation, often referred to as the process of **‘overlexicalization’**, which indicates the prominence of a concept in each community’s belief system (Halliday, 1978). The recurrent words range from the direct use of the word **‘community’** and **‘community of practice’**, to the use of **‘group’**, **‘friends’**, **‘colleagues’**, **‘netmates’**, **‘mates’**, and jargon words such as **‘chooks’**. In analyzing the output data, it can be noticed that, compared to each community’s total word count, the percentage frequency rate of

these words is very high, and it increases when the percentage of ‘We’ words is added to the percentage of total reference words. The significant result is the high percentage of lexical processes that clearly demonstrate the group’s convergence towards community formation and interests. The trend is visible in Table 18, which shows that subject pronouns are not necessarily the only indication of the participants’ move towards group identity and involvement, even in the presence of the high frequency use of ‘I’ words.

In addition, subject pronouns in the messages are often deleted, although the phenomenon is not as frequent for asynchronous communication as it is for synchronous communication, where this deletion is largely caused by the strong drive towards abbreviation and brevity. The omission of subject pronouns and auxiliaries as well as orthographic reduction, are associated with phonological reduction and ellipsis in rapid, informal speech in non-virtual modes, which further lend an air of spontaneous orality to online communication exchanges.

Notwithstanding, the obvious urgency of wanting to create a community of practice, as stated by many of the participants themselves, there is no denying that the medium of communication is always a reminder that working individually and in isolation place personal needs in the forefront.

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY				INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY			
total word count	I words	We words	community references	total word count	I words	We words	community references
92,831	30%	8%	40%	189,495	26%	10%	65%
			8%				10%
Total references to social processes and evidence of community formation			48%	Total references to social processes and evidence of community formation			75%

Table 18 Evidence of Community Formation

7.2 Grammar and Syntax: Omission of Function Words

As summarized in Table 16, through the unconventional use of grammar and syntax, it is possible to explore the issues of personal expressivity and communication style within community grounds. The communities in this study exhibit a substantial use of **syntactic variability** in their messages, grouped under the two most frequently occurring broad categories of *deletion* and *sequencing*.

Deletion occurs when parts of construction are completely left out, as in the case of **ellipsis**. A truncated second sentence relies for its interpretation on the implication that some words from a preceding sentence are relied on to complete the meaning. It is important to mention that the two constructions that permit deletion, nominalization and the passive voice are not used as they are prominent in varieties of language that practice an ideology of impersonality such as in academic and scientific writing.

As concerns **sequencing**, there are rhetorical phenomena of syntactic reordering such as inserting phrases in parentheses and sequence interruption thorough the use of typography, orthography and compensatory strategies to mimic speech. These devices are all mainly used to attract attention, and are especially amplified in an environment characterized by the lack of physical clues.

As mentioned above, syntactic variation is greatly used by the participants, but the presence of noticeably ‘incorrect’ sentences is reduced. The major explanation for this is the professional nature of the community.

Examples from the Australian Community

My view is not too great: <u>a red brick wall - but hey!</u> I can see daylight!	Punctuation marks: typical feature of spoken language that interrupts the sequencing of the sentences;
Hi Participant H, I'm with you, <u>funny isnt always easy, all the best</u>	Lack of clear sentence boundaries;
face to face experience is a big help , think Participant H asked the questiion about how do we factor in <u>the non verbal , having trouble with that one, am trying your idead of visualising</u> , still doesnt give me all the facial expressions that you get in a direct group. Hvae <u>to work on this</u>	Frequent omission of subject pronoun 'I'; lack of clear sentence boundaries; misspelling;
Anyway, would suggest that 17 is way over the top. <u>Would be very difficult</u> to keep up with the replies, and threads,etc.	Omission of pronouns 'I' and 'it';
Hi Participant H, love the comment about the time, <u>agree, its taken</u> more than I thought it would, and patience, yes, AND GIVE IT TO ME NOW!!!!	Omission of 'I'; lack of clear sentence boundaries;
<u>can i phone anyone , need help????</u> now ok, thanks Moderator 1, have got to the end of week 1 , you beaut	Unclear sentence boundaries.

Examples from the International Community

WOW! This is pretty impressive there is an amazing amount of help available to us all , <u>wont</u> go though the <u>smae</u> answers you have all contributed, would only be repeating what you have all said, great to have this available especially for people like me!	Omission of punctuation; omission of function words; misspellings; run-on sentence;
I agree Mary,time consuming and looking for a 'search' box.	Omission of function words clearly made visible by the use of ellipsis points;
Have read the various contributions, some of you really good - take a bow:-) now here is my 2nd attempt	Omission of function words; sentence fragments; emoticon interrupts sentence sequencing;
The sun has appeared (in Ireland in November!) over the three photocopier <u>Hope this is OK, not sure who the recipient of this.</u>	Omission of function words; unclear fragmented sentence;
Hi Susan, no rules as I've never been asked this beforewe'll make up our own as we go.	Omission of function words;
Thanks Mary for that wonderful, inspiring feedback..I will get back to you tomorrow as I have had a hard day at work.....trying to get some sense out of students who are wilting through hunger...it's Ramadan so they come to college tired and hungry...	Omission of function words; ellipsis; run-on sentence.

7.3 Typography – Orthography – Emoticons

As the work of Gumpertz makes clear, speakers use paralinguistic and prosodic features in spoken interactions to establish a relationship between ideas, and to show their attitude toward what they say. Participants involved in the interactions automatically process these signals, as they produce a metamessage about how the content of the words spoken is to be intended. Participants also have expectations about

how paralinguistic and prosodic features can be substituted in order to compensate for expressions of sarcasm, humour, sadness, or so many other impressions of feelings that are conveyed by the tone of voice, pacing, pitch, loudness and pauses.

However, strategies that can compensate for such cues do exist, and participants are well-aware of their important function, so much so that they are very creative in the way they produce language and in the way they play with it by incorporating a unique blend of typography, orthography and emoticons resulting in a hybrid communicative style that one might call 'written-conversation'. The next section looks at the most common examples found in the messages selected from both communities.

7.3.1 Typography: Capitalization and Punctuation

Efficiency of time and effort is the main reason why the participants do not use these features in a conventional way. As messages are also thought to be expressions of how the participant 'feels' about his/her involvement in the topic at the moment of writing, 'wasting time' by bothering with the capitalization key means subtracting emphasis from the focus of the message itself. Furthermore, as many participants admitted to being busy working at the moment of responding to the posts, the use of all lower case is a way of economizing on time 'usurped' in the workplace.

Orthography is also used unconventionally by the participants, and is expressed through abbreviations, contractions, (mis)spellings, and typos. The issues explored in this category are:

- a) efficiency of time and effort;
- b) personal expression and style;
- c) features of prosody and laughter.

Paralinguistic and prosodic cues are a set of orthographic strategies designed to compensate for the lack of intonation and paralinguistic cues

that interactive written discourse imposes on its users. An innovative set of linguistic devices has evolved that function to create the effects of voice, gesture and tone through the creative use of capitalization, spelling and punctuation. Punctuation is also used to create the effects of spoken delivery. Thus, periods and hyphens are employed to create pauses and to indicate tempo. Other non-standard forms of orthography are endemic in asynchronous communication. For example, lack of capitalization is sometimes used for proper nouns for the first person 'I', or at the start of a sentence, and it is used to express emphasis.

Colloquial verbalizations and non-standard spellings appear to be self-consciously selected in preference to 'standard' linguistic expressions. The urgency behind misspellings is again attributed to the fact that many of the participants wrote their messages from their workstations and were pressed for time. Phrases like '**I need to catch up**', '**I'm sorry I'm late**', or '**I'm going on a trip, so I won't be able to post**', are quite common and are indicative of the crucial role time plays in the virtual life of the community members.

Compensatory strategies refer to the use of emoticons which signify facial expressions, physical actions, and other features of orality.

The messages below have been selected from both communities and are analyzed by taking into consideration the features mentioned above.

TYPOGRAPHY OTHROGRAHY EMOTICONS	MESSAGES	CATEGORY
THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY		
<u>cant get in</u> - Participant I	can i phone anyone , need help???? now ok, thanks Moderator 1, have got to the end of week 1 , you beaut,	Clear features of spoken sentences: use of multiple question marks; unfinished sentences; unclear sentence boundaries;
<u>Re: Lucky last!</u> - Participant B	I've been waiting for you Participant A - I was about to call and chase you down! Good to see that you are here now - I am sure you will get through the activities of the first week in no time :-)	Compensatory strategy: facial expression;
<u>Re: Your Lost Class mate arrives-</u> <u>Participant E</u> Part. D	Giddy Participant E, welcome I'll enjoy catching up Participant D	Special spelling of 'culturally- specific' word;
<u>What it was like for me to get in</u> - Participant B	Please call me Participant B (which is pronounced Dee-ar-na if we ever do any voice communications) Looking forward to meeting the rest of the group. Participant B	Prosodic feature: sounding out the name to give others idea of how to pronounce it;
<u>Summary of Forum Postings</u> - Moderator 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> e-motivation, posted by: Participant A at Tue, 17 May 2005, 19:38 <p>I LOVE online! In my role I work with a large number of academics seeking to deliver their courses flexibly to a diverse and geographically dispersed student base.</p>	Use of capital letters to emphasize importance of word; gives out expression;

<u>view from my office</u> - Participant G	my office is in the old executor trust bldg - heritage listed - it looks like an old bank office. i look out over james place which is always filled with all sorts of people and noises.	Did not apply spell check;
<u>Re: Getting acquainted with me!</u> - Moderator 1	thanks Participant H, yes I think that it is a big learning, that humour is such a difficult thing to do online, and often such a big part of the classroom f2f experience. How do you think we can manage it? ;-) Moderator 1	Emoticon for prosodic expression: highlights the friendly tone of the topic;
<u>Right now</u> - Participant K	Right now I am sitting in my group office at work on the 1st floor and I'm WAY too cold (as usual) - I hate airconditioning	Capital letters to convey intensity of adjective cold ; use of parentheses = an aside from the author of post; commenting on own message;
<u>Re: I am Thirsty</u> - Participant D	Participant L, the Adelaide paper today reckons blokes are allowed 10 standard 100 mil drinks of red a week. Do you think it is a misprint? Does it only apply in Adelaide, and do you want to run a more generous test program for Sydney? Regards Participant D	Text has been highlighted in colour;
<u>Re: Travel tips</u> - Participant K	NOooooo! I am going to grampians in winter!!! I know it will be freezing.	Feature of spoken language: sounding out the word no in sign of disagreement; followed by exclamation points;
<u>Re: The Queens English</u>	Is the queen really english???? or is that just a rumour started by the French??? Cant help you with the spell cheecccckkkk???	Humour shown by misuse of punctuation and the duplication of letters in the word spell check ;
<u>Andy mark 2</u> - Participant I	Alabama?? not a problem, have 2 of my brood overseas , Uk and USA, always manage to phone them in "daylight", (although they dont always get it right phoning home, but thats what parents are for??) Back to Andy,. the first thing would be to let him talk and see if it is just him being a ##### or does he have a real issue	Question marks used as monitoring feature to move into the focus of the message; misuse of contractions; pound key as euphemism for a curse word;
<u>Re: Collabrative Summary</u> - Participant H	Moderator 1 - Given the new experience for me (and I suppose others) of e-learning, guidance needs to be improved.	Use of parentheses= personal asides within a message which indicate a reflection process;

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY		
From: Dublin 1	Might think about a sun holiday for christmas!! :)	Emoticon for prosodic expression: highlights the friendly tone of the topic;
From: Portugal	I'm soooooo glad Susan	Typography: feature of spoken language: sounding out the word 'SO';
From: England 2	Bless them! I bet you really do sometimes!!! Sooooo true as you would say! Having said that, I can really understand how the 5 stage model can be applied in Further/ Higher Education courses.....anyway, here goes.....I would really appreciate your comments.....am I trying to achieve the impossible or am I being too ambitious?	Typography: features of spoken language; diversifying punctuation marks (?, !,);
From: South Africa	Sorry I am late joinin the group, I will try to catch up today and tomorrow. I have read all you postings <i>Blue group feels making postings compulsory was very useful. For many if us it broke the ice and got us comfortable in what was perhaps a foreign environment. We all enjoyed reading and learning about each other and appreciated the honesty of the group when writing this material. Knowing that we all have the same common goal is an immediate bond within the group.</i>	Use of alternate script: block letters and italics; the latter represents the 'task' message;
From: Japan	Thank you very much!! Arigatou gozaimashita! m(_ _)m <--I am bowing my thanks. I don't like gambling at all, but there are no way out if you were here... o@(; _ _)@o	Visual cue of 'bowing' by using scripted symbols;
From: Japan	Where are you going Masako? (just being nosy!!) wherever it is have a great time.	Aside;

From: Ulster From: Japan	This has taken a long time to create and it probably doesn't show! Don't worry Maggie, I believe you, this task is a challenge!!!	Typography: difference of font indicates 1. initiation; 2. response
From: Japan	F - Feelings of belonging I - Initial fear R - Reply to messages promptly S - Set time limits T - Take time to welcome each student C - Collaborate with others L - Let students adapt to environment A - Anticipate problems S - Summarise messages S - STAY SANE!! G - Gear up for group assignments R - Reassure, reassure, reassure O - Obey netiquette and ground rules U - Understand and empathise P - Pace the course fairly	Layout: summarizing technique to simplify task and facilitate community understanding;
Japan	Val I think this is far to long, do you? Perhaps I could have kept the quotes from the postings briefer and I really would have liked to include more postings so as not to leave anybody out, but then this would have got <u>bigger and bigger and bigger.</u>	Typography.

7.4 Wh-questions and Tags

The use of questions and tags in communication reveal aspects of attitude and expectations on both sides of exchange continuum, and can therefore contribute to the formation of the concept of community among the participants. Questions can express negative, neutral or positive polarity, depending on the question type and formulation of language. That is why questions are illocutionary speech acts, as they carry illocutionary force, as well as an element of doubt built in. In the examples selected for analysis from the communities, participants ask three types of questions:

1. yes-no questions: neutral polarity that leaves an open answer;
2. tag questions: extension of yes/no conveying negative or positive orientation;
3. wh-questions: information seeking questions which are realized by wh-words;
4. alternative questions: start out with an offer, and the answer is a prospected answer ('Would you like chocolate or vanilla?');
5. exclamatory questions: not really followed by a conventional answer ('Hasn't he gotten taller?').

Questions tend to increase or decrease over time and each of these occurrences has a meaning. If the questioning increases over time, there is evidence of convergence toward mutual group involvement. The data reported below suggest that both communities reported an increasing use of wh-questions throughout the time period. The questions were coded according to four broad categories of content type: 1. discussion starters (elicitations); 2. requests for clarification (directives); 3. requests for information; 4. knowledge sharing / self reflection questions. Judging by the number of questions posed, Week Three was the turning point for both communities and the questions reveal that, as their community life progressed, the participants spent less time engaged in descriptions of themselves, and more time engaged in showing interest in one another.

However, by looking at the question chart, there is a stark difference between the communities. The Australian Community's discourse style reveals a marked use of questions spread throughout the entire five weeks. One of the reasons for this behaviour could be found in the fact that participants shared the same cultural background and felt safer to venture out in the use of conducive language, which was not always neutral. One other reason was the behaviour of the e-moderator, who 'leaves' the communication and problem solving incidents mainly up to the participants, resisting the urge to jump in to help. This is what the moderator from the International Community usually does, with the

result of indirectly reducing problem solving interaction that usually involves questioning techniques.

Question type	SAMPLE MESSAGES	
	The Australian Community	The International Community
	<p>WEEK 1: participants' doubts are embedded in their questioning technique; questions are mainly of the Yes/No type.</p>	
Discussion starters/requests for clarification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are these very useful tips available anywhere??? • do you make your presence felt and get the ball rolling with just the right word at just the right time without coming on as too patronizing? Am I rushing ahead of myself? • Hi all, So what went wrong, or is it OK? • It gets complicated quickly, doesn't it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am not sure if it's OK to write my answers like this below or should I respond to J. pretending as if I am a lurker or browser? • Do we need to meet in the lounge or just put our ideas down in this forum group and someone brings it together and we keep communicating that way till we agree??? • do we know which group we are in?
	<p>WEEK 2: the participants' questions are becoming more focused on the role that they are about to play both in the community and in the future. Most questions are of the WH- type or of the alternative type.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting comment about speaking to yourself - reflection is an internal dialogue isn't it? • However that may mean that you temper your original thoughts with concern for others or political correctness or laziness??? Participant H • I wonder what that means for our students online, when we put so much information online? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you go about easing your face-to-face participants into an online environment? • Does the role of the e-moderator get easier as the course progresses, or is it like this all the time???
	<p>WEEK 3: the use of specific terminology pertaining to the course is evidence of 'on task' involvement.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does interactivity mean and what does collaboration mean? • So is collaboration more about the overarching results of interactivity? • When you say 'focussed debate' are you meaning not online? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being as a student, I feel that metaphor goes perfectly. Now V., how true is to you from an e-moderator perspective? • Should this activity go like this? • V. I think this is far to long, do you? Perhaps I could have kept the quotes from the postings briefer?

	WEEK 4: mix of all types of questions: group involvement is high.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this now make us a Community of Practice or Knowledge ? • Why is it So??? Have we found the time zones too hard??/or replying to message after message too much??? • Not sure what you mean Participant I?? Who is behind and what are we really trying to achieve here? • thanks Participant F, a succinct summary. Just one thought - you wrote in the passive voice, which I thought was an interesting choice. Did you conciously choose it? • Do you mean group collaboration in general - or online group collaboration? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did we probe and did we collaborate? • How did it feel to be involved in group work last week and what skills did you wish you had, or were glad that you had? • So now the question is, what can we learn from this? What impact do these motivations have on our behaviour as learners?
Information Request / Offer	WEEK 1 : questions are focused on 'achievement'; variety of question types are used.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you any ideas of what has worked for you? • Can you identify how you might use them in your practice? • ...after you have experienced the online interactions, and consider you insights again? • Start formulating my list of do's and dont's perhaps? • what you would do differently next week? • Do we need an e-cronym for them (eg,e-dents)??? • Sunny SA was beautiful over the weekend, but could you post us some rain Participant E? How are we going to manage the post course drinks? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is 'you'? Do we all write the 50 words or do we need to elect a group secretary to pool all reflections together?!!!! • Hi! It is a great pleasure to be your e-mate. Your voice is not yet heard. So far, so good?
	WEEK 2: information sharing is prominent in these messages.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hi Moderator 1, did you really mean for others to "Participate" in the activity?? From my reading of the instructions, others are asked to comment on the structure of the activity not actually to do it??? Cheers • So now the question is, what can we learn from this? What impact do these motivations have on our behaviour as learners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the way: could someone tell me where to find those net smiles to paste when we send messages? • Shame about the Chat room, but perhaps we can try again next week?

	<p>WEEK 3: very prolific week; variety of questions types; participants are asking about: benefiting, managing learning, what they have learnt in order to share it collectively; group identity and individual needs are evident; personal views are embedded in their questioning techniques; participants are encouraging one another.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how i can benefit from the learning by applying it within my consulting work? Re learning process – what is the content like? – is it interesting, academic, practical etc. Will i be able to take / fit it all in? Whats the background of my fellow participants, e-convenor – what can i learn from them and what can i share (ie gain value & give value)? • Perhaps others have some advice for you? What have you learnt so far that might help Participant L? • thanks Participant H, yes I think that it is a big learning, that humour is such a difficult thing to do online, and often such a big part of the classroom f2f experience. How do you think we can manage it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my attempt, I would like to discuss how to keep networking active. Assume this group members are willing to network on enhancing e-moderating skills. Right? • Could you please elaborate how does this ‘vibe’ and ‘feeling’ in your f2f class helps helps you facilitate? • How does the idea of blended learning fit with the idea of online learning?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would emoticons help? Or any visual cues? Participant K mentioned missing the “vibe” of a f2f group • Doesn’t this “vibe” help you facilitate? And how do we get those good emotions going online? • E learning can give the impression of people learning from a screen!!!! Again , its all about balance, any other comments??? • Do we need to set a minimum participation rate in the strictly non-technical/science subjects (such as e moderating) much as we may not offer a certificate to a f2f student who didn’t participate in class??? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who said e-communication was emotion-less? • What have been your experiences in on-line learning if any? Can you reply to this message with brief details about your past experiences.

	<p>WEEK 4: variety of question types; also a prolific week, as the participants are well into the course; questions probe into opinion sharing.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that the ‘spice and excitement’ of a synchronous event assists online collaboration in the long term? How and why does it change people? • It would also depend on how the emoderator chooses to get the group to work: would everyone have a role, take a turn at doing a task, have outcomes the group needs to achieve within a set time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we aware of the cultural differences when attending the online networking or online discussion? List them up if any and figure out the reactions? • Those smiley faces, and other typographical devices ;-) are usefull? Or should we be open with our feelings and say that we are frustrated, or happy, or whatever? • how important are the tools that we use, to that process? • Maybe you could see what you think and post under that?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We haven’t talked much about the roles that members of a group may take on – although there has been discussion about behaviour guidelines etc. Do you think the two are necessarily the same? • Can we try setting up the question as a separate thread, so that all replies on that q are in the same spot?? Any other “talk “ can be under defferent headings , so as to distinguish between general chit chat and the task at hand??? • What do you think? Could be the way forward? • “I see that if people fall to far behind, it is twice as hard to catch up, so, Participant J, Participant K and Participant D, the “A” team, comments??? • Could I throw in my 5 cents worth? • does thaat draw on different ways and forms of collaboration? Will the team work be different in different media? • What do others think? Does this type of quantitative assessment help? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not think I would confront lurkers at this early stage since everyone learns at a differnt rate – maybe during the second week?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you aim to pace yourself, say by aiming to apply a maximum of one strategy, or one action, and thus only have one output to be evaluated per person per posting? • Rotation for summarising ensures everyone has a turn and could it be used as an assessment tool perhaps? • Question.. if a student hadn't contributed for 4 days???? 	
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Knowledge-sharing / Self-reflection	WEEKS 1, 2, 3 : both Yes/No questions and WH- questions are used to start a reflection process which intensifies in time.	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have I found difficult? Talking to myself - but it's preparing me for next week. 	Is "personal stuff" online- wasting time?
	WEEK 2	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well I finally made it. It was a big ask last week (as will be week 3 - will my family ever forgive me for disappearing every evening???) • What this is going to give me in the end is still unclear to me, does anyone else feel the way I do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • am I trying to achieve the impossible or am I being too ambitious? • Isn't this the dilemma we have designing all language-learning activities?!
	WEEK 3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hi Participant J, Have no idea why I picked the "Reds", danger,?? fire,??? red flag at the bull??? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PS Is there such a thing as an e-aura? • Are there any interesting topics left uncovered? - how we can activate this network onwards?? 	

WEEKS 4 and 5: the questions contain many punctuation marks that mimic prosodic cues; some questions do not start with conventional question words, and this indicates that participants have achieved confidence and familiarity with the medium.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • but what do others do when they log in??? I tend to log in, do some work and then go out, do others log in and just leave the program running in the background ????, When I see the icons, I sort of assume that I will meet someone, some where..... comments,,,,, from anyone!!!!, are you out there????, any where??? Is this real???? • I wonder if the experience of feeling frustrated (and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is e-moderating going to really help my teaching career? Will these skills make a difference in my workplace? How do you feel, netmates? Do you share the same doubts?

	unsupported) will help in the learning cycle? What support did you feel you wanted? or needed? and what is different in an online group collaboration that needs more structure than a f2f collaboration?	
	WEEK 5	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we provide structured activities to ensure these essential elements of group collaboration are instituted in their learning groups? • Evaluation might be hard as it would appear to be based on just your impressions of each student. This could lead to disputes??? They may have thought that they were displaying "critical thinking " etc, but not the way you had in mind??/ • Three weeks in: How does my garden grow? (in topic) • Farewell everyone. I'm not sure I was ever here! Was I? Can someone tell me? • See you Participant H. I don't think we ever spoke to each other. Sad isn't it? • well done Participant I! Thanks for providing us with some comic relief!! How can I contact you on skype? • How will the outcome affect my work in the future? 	Now for the time-constraint people, socialization is not necessary? Each contribution and profile are enough to work together?

Table 19 Analysis of Questions

Significant data from the analysis of question types indicate the progressive development of community formation, as participants draw on each other for information, support, solidarity and knowledge.

7.5 Analysis of Subject Lines

The drive towards community formation is also evident in the subject lines of the messages, and within the five-week time frame the impersonal titles of the subject lines of the first week, become

progressively more involving. The examples of subject lines selected from both communities provide ample evidence of week-by-week behavioural patterns of the participants' move towards full participation and community convergence.

The subject lines that follow were grouped by weekly postings for each community with a summary of the topics at the beginning of each week. A commentary was added in the right-hand column of Tables 20 and 21.

Subject Titles	Analysis
Week 1 introductions: personal needs, course anxiety, future events.	
Last by not least!	<i>Words indicating mixed feelings at starting point of the journey.</i>
Your lost class mate arrives	
Late arrival not!	
hi all!!!!	
I'm excited	
cant get in	
A long trip to anticipated success	
Arriving	
Participant C's reflections	
Late Reflections	
Reflections From WA	
Answer to Moderator 1	
Phew!	
Week 1 activities: catching up, showing commitment to community spirit.	
	Catching up About me I made it Unique During the first week the participants express personal needs; they are concerned about is group development and purpose.
Summary of etivity 1.1 motivation	
What are our motivations?	
Old dog – new tricks	
Motivation and time management	
Participant D and motivation	
All about me	
I finally made it	
View from my office	
I think i've figured it out	
What i like	
First timer	
I am unique	
How do you get into system?????	

Week 2 reflections	
Are they there yet?there yet?
Reflections from the Rain soaked west	Reflections
At the end of another week, our learning continues	Thoughts
I will regret saying this, but I think I'm getting it	I'm getting it
And another Friday comes around	Continues
First thought	Another
Re: using summaries	
Week 2 activities: showing commitment to community spirit and confidence.	
Still trying to catch up	<i>The online life of the community is beginning to develop. The participants are expressing group needs.</i>
Time does not wait for me	
For things to change, first I must change (anon-mouse)	
Online commitment	
Time management	
Happiness- sharing – consideration – empathy- communication	
Why we need to be gentle	
Week 3 activities: sharing experiences, creating feeling of 'togetherness'.	
F2f online	<i>Week 3 activities reveal that the participants express the necessity to 'draw together' their experiences by sharing opinions.</i>
Taking time to think	
Transition	
Face to online learning	
The brave new world	
Developing group projects	
What a wicked web we weave	
Talking with your fingers	
collaboration	
collaboration not competition	
Learning community discussion	
Community of learning	
A place to share developing group artefacts	
Establishing group guidelines	
Working together	
3 weeks in: how does my garden grow?	
Week 4 and Week 5 activities: shaping future developments, planning their next steps.	
Independent learners	<i>The main discussions are centred around:</i>
Up front skills	
Just do it!	
Gaining commitment to the ways	
Diversity as strength	
Understanding the Journey ahead	
My development participant's development Plan	
	<i>Success, independence, commitment, ahead, diversity, strength, development, plan.</i>
	<i>They are making plans as nearing the end of the course.</i>

Table 20 Subject Analysis from the Australian Community

Topics from International community	Topic Analysis
Week 1: catching up, showing commitment to community spirit.	
	<i>Titles suggest distance in terms of full participation; the participants limit the topic line to the name of the activity.</i>
Masako's answer	
Help	
My online Experiences	
My experience and expectations	
my experience	
Experience and Expectations	
Masako's experience and expectations	
Week 2: showing commitment to community spirit and confidence.	
	<i>Topics are centred around the activity type.</i>
E-tivity 1.1 10/02	
A Rainy Day	
A rainy, late hello	
First message	
v Last to join	
Sending a message to a conference	
What I can see	
Late On Monday night	
My experiences	
Help Menu	
Week 3: sharing experiences, creating feeling of 'togetherness'.	
enticement	<i>The participants' confidence is gradually increasing and demonstrated by the use of punctuation marks and some slang words.</i>
Task 1	
opening ceremony	
my first message	
Opening Messages	
Interesting	
Socialisation	
weaving	
Encouraging Responses - Weaving	
Have I weaved something?	
Better late than never?!!!	
it ain't easy	
Attempt at summarising the Time Factor	
Summarising	
double oops	
Encouraging responses	
what we learned from Andy's case	
My attempt	
Weeks 4 and 5: shaping future developments, planning their next steps.	
My E-tivity - will it work?	<i>Names of activities and names of participants appear well into the fourth week;</i>
Who exactly are the "players"	
Re: designing e-tivities	
maggie's e-tivity	
Teresa and Maggie	

My etivity - rough attempt!	
Week 5	
needs analysis	<i>Participants focus on the processes of planning for the future; other topics do not regard the learning task as participants gradually become accustomed to communication through the CMC medium;</i>
cry for help!	
Underlying message	
Participant Needs	
Planning for development!	
5.2 development	
A question	
A suggestion	
Managing the conference	
a good facilitator	
Further Development	
expectations	
how slack of me.	
Subject Line	
Many thanks!	
a heartfelt thanks to all	
reflections	
Wk 3 Footprint Task - Final Call	
a correction	
Networking - Mary's Summary & Conclusion	
Networking - New Topic Task	
activity 3.2	
footprint Task - Summary	
Auras	
Group Agreement Difficult!!	
Socialisation!	
Do we all agree with this staement?	
keep going ahead	
Footprints	
Smart Objectives for Networking	
Smart objective	
Footprints week 3	
Viewing messages for Mabel	
: An interesting thought	
Opening a new topic	
Information Exchange	
Remeber the footprints activity	
favourite travel destination	
Checking in	
OOps sorry no subject heading	
Emotion-less communiation	
it ain't easy	

Table 21 Subject Analysis from the International Community

8. ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL PROCESSES AND BEHAVIOURS

8.1 The Cooperative Principle, The Speech Act Theory, and Politeness Strategies

In any research involving discourse analysis, aspects of the communicative event need to be taken into account and this means considering that ‘people use language in order to communicate ideas or beliefs (or to express emotion), and they do so as part of more complex social events...’ (Van Dijk, 1999, p.2). The LIWC2001 software previously used is capable of capturing many aspects of an individual's writing style, but only those that can be explored through the frequency of particular lexical items or groups of words. A discourse analyst goes beyond that, and develops a multidisciplinary approach in order to capture those social processes that would otherwise go unnoticed. Gunther Kress affirms that ‘a linguistic form considered in isolation has no specifically determinate meaning as such, nor does it possess any ideological significance or function’ (Kress in Van Dijk, p.30). Categories such as "giving feedback on an idea", “apologizing”, “negotiating conflict”, “supporting”, “friendship building”, etc. could not possibly be captured through analysis of single words, but are an important index of involvement with others.

In this study, a classification category was determined based on the holistic analysis of messages, which meant looking at their overall content and intent. A Grounded Theory-inspired methodology⁷ (Strauss

⁷ Grounded Theory Methodology: The phrase "grounded theory", developed by refers to theory that is developed inductively from a corpus of data. The basic idea of the grounded theory approach is to read (and re-read) a textual database (such as a corpus of field notes) and "discover" or label variables (called categories, concepts and properties) and their interrelationships. Of course, the data do not have to be literally textual -- they could be observations of behaviour, such as interactions and events in a restaurant. Often they are in the form of field notes, which are like diary entries. Maintaining an inventory of codes with their descriptions (i.e., creating a codebook) is also part of the grounded-theory approach.

& Corbin, 1994) was implemented, in which codes were inductively and iteratively derived from the study of the phenomenon. Strauss and Corbin affirm that paying attention to processes is vital, and they recommend describing and coding everything that is dynamic - changing, moving, or occurring over time - in the research setting.

A code list was developed to capture the ways in which participants express ideas, give feedback to peers, and present themselves online. Codes were applied to an entire message, and more than one code was in some cases assigned to a single message. The codes fall into three general categories or domains within the broader area of Social Practice: (1) the informational - meaning that the utterance conveys general or personal information pertaining to life and character as well as an idea or an opinion; (2) the interpersonal – meaning that the contribution conveys attributes of both individual and community discourse behaviours among the participants; and (3) the interactional - meaning that the utterance is a response to the contribution of other participants.

<p>Informational: markers of individual differences and commonalities; word choice; ideas and opinions; personal narratives; biographical information; culture.</p>
<p>Interpersonal: expressions of social discourse behaviours of support, solidarity, negotiation of conflict; self-representation; face management and group/community representation as signifiers of online identity.</p>
<p>Interactional: turn sequences; concerns structures; participation percentages; number of postings; typology of roles; reciprocity; message length.</p>

Table 22 Domains of Behaviours

Online communities are characterized by behaviours that indicate whether the community is healthy or at least functional. Behaviours can be classified as collaborative or hostile, such as flaming reflecting anger or conflict between participants. They range from socially important activities such as the exchange of pleasantries, and jokes, through active

emotional support, to more explicitly information-oriented exchanges, including announcements, queries and requests for information, and replies to such queries and requests.

But how do online groups become communities? How does their online language provide insight into group identification? What happens when a group of people from different cultures comes together online?

Community development is closely tied to information exchanges in communication, which is generally known as self-disclosure (Preece, 2000, p. 153). Participants in an online environment tend to feel closer to each other as they disclose information about themselves, express their opinions and share their feelings, and they expect their fellow participants to do the same.

Self-disclosure is revealed by a plethora of discourse behaviours that participants exhibit within a time frame (duration), in a particular situation (context) and with hallmarks of their cultural background (culture).

The coding and counting approaches to CMDA do not capture aspects of complex and often ambiguous social processes and relative linguistic phenomena exhibited during an interaction. To a certain extent and in different ways, this is especially true for online communication, as it is obviously true for face-to-face communication. Interaction refers to many different kinds of social encounters and what goes on in online communities can only be fully understood if both qualitative and quantitative approaches are integrated.

Although we are working within the written mode and the samples of data are text-only, CMDA makes use of a multidisciplinary approach to assess behaviour manifested through the hybrid nature of online discourse. In this study, this integrative approach is called 'vertical analysis', as messages are assessed by selecting the most appropriate method that can directly observe and code the textual phenomena that is manifested. The methods that are used to supplement CMDA in this type

of analysis are the Cooperative Principle, the Speech Act Theory, and Politeness Strategies.

The **Cooperative Principle** is one of the useful ‘methodological tools’ employed by CMDA. According to Grice, by adhering to the Cooperative Principle you are required to: make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. There are four **sub-principles called maxims** that represent ‘unstated assumptions we have in conversations’ (Paul Grice in George Yule, 1996). These maxims are: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner and they basically convey the idea that ‘people involved in a conversation will cooperate with each other’ (George Yule, p. 37, 1996).

However, there are some expressions that people use when they are aware that they cannot fully adhere to one or more of these maxims, and these expressions are called **hedges**. Online discourse provides a wealth of examples of such expressions, and the communities in this research study also provide sufficient evidence of hedging, especially in the analysis of individual personalities. The hedges given as examples are indications that the speakers, in their own way and aided by the atmosphere of cooperation, are well aware of the cooperative principle and the maxims that they naturally would like to observe.

An interesting aspect involving the cooperative principles is that it is possible to choose not to adhere to the maxim expectations and give rise to what is known as the **conversational implicatures**. However, in an asynchronous online environment, in which physical clues such as voice, gestures and movement are totally lacking, the participants of the community cannot rely on such features to allow them to mean or infer ‘more than what is said’, therefore evidence of conversational implicatures is rather limited to specific episodes.

The Speech Act Theory is applied in the analysis of utterances that represent actions that are generally called ‘speech acts’. According to

Austin, speech acts can be classified in: locutionary act, which is the basic act of utterance; the illocutionary act, utterances with a purpose or some kind of function in mind; and the perlocutionary act, which has an intended purpose to produce an effect on the interlocutor (Austin, 1956, p.56).

J. Searle further expands on Austin's Speech Act theory and provides a classification of 5 types of general functions performed by speech acts: declarations, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives, all of which characterize online discourse (Searle, 1969).

The third most influential method used in this type of message analysis is **Politeness** strategies. A linguistic interaction is necessarily a social interaction, which involves various factors such as social distance and closeness, and what we say can be interpreted in many ways and have a different impact on our interlocutors depending on the context of situation. Evaluating such an impact is referred to as the study of Politeness, a concept that is described in terms of 'face' or public self-image or polite social behaviour. Politeness is also a way of detecting whether the participants in an interaction are generally aware of the norms and principles that exist in a community, including one that is formed online. The messages in this study were analyzed in order to reveal the extent to which the participants were aware of 'face saving' strategies described in terms of respect or deference for social distance, and friendliness, camaraderie and solidarity for social closeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Hence, politeness theory in this study proved to be an essential framework for the understanding of such social behaviour as conflict negotiation, face management and discourse styles and identity.

8.2 Week-by-Week Data Analysis

Whereas the previous analysis relied on word frequencies and on taxonomies of question types and subject lines to show increasing references to community formation, the analysis of message content looks at how these discussions took shape and this meant 'observing' the

participants' use of language to be able to identify those behaviours that contributed to community formation.

By referring to the criteria of 'time', and by applying the appropriate method of analysis according to the phenomenon displayed by the participants, a comprehensive code list was developed and each message was classified and interpreted accordingly (see Table 16). The messages are reported in shaded blocks and each message is marked at the end with the **IC** (International Community) or **AC** (Australian Community), depending on the participant's community membership.

8.2.1 Week One: Linguistic Variation and Use

Initial activities required in Stage One of Salmon's model is *access and motivation*, and *online socialization* in Stage Two. During these activities participants mainly familiarized themselves with the technology and introduced themselves, by revealing a little about their private or professional life. The category that provided the most evidence of these behaviours is **Linguistic Variation and Use**, which highlighted individual differences and commonalities in the following areas:

- language register and sophistication;
- participant demographics;
- personality;
- location;
- age;
- interests and expectations.

As the participants enter the community in Week One and **present themselves** to the rest of the group, they rely on the language they would normally use in everyday conversation, especially if it is the first time in such an environment. The register used in the following messages is informal, often with fixed or semi-fixed phrases, interspersed with idioms and specific jargon words.

The messages below show some examples of **fixed expressions**.

'I unpacked my bags'.
'I've had this project on the boil'.
'I apparently plan to take risks and smell the roses'
(participants from the AC)

Some participants reveal details of biographical information, what their feelings are at the moment of the first login, while others talk about the weather, as one would when using discussion starters in a face-to-face scenario.

'...this is M. from Japan...'
'Hello group, it's Monday afternoon'.
'Dear All, it's now Sunday afternoon as I sit and do this...'
'Hello All, as I look out of my window I see the last of the Summer's rose...'
'It's about 10:30, on a cold, wet dull morning in Ireland...Winter has definitely set in here!' (participants from the IC)

'...the weather is still beautiful and the birds are still singing'
'...we desperately need some rain in Adelaide...'
(participants from the AC)

The messages below from both communities contain the participants' **expectations, intentions, personal narrative**, as well as other bits of '**information exchange**'. It is a way of showing initial interest in one another and **mutual influence** by expressing their ideas and opinions, through which it is possible to detect convergence towards 'community' goals.

'**I'm here to learn more** and bring back my experience to...(my) group'.
(IC)⁸
'...**this course is for higher education** with a broad cultural backgrounds so that **it shall be more exciting to collaborate**.'
(IC)
'...in an online environment **sharing our thoughts** is the most useful way we learn.'
(IC)
'For this course, **my expectations** are to know how the real learning takes place online through **communications/collaborations/reflections**'. (IC)
'**I will make an attempt** to encourage my own online participants to **communicate** with each other'.

⁸ IC = International Community

(AC)⁹
'...**how I can benefit from** the learning by applying it within my consulting work? What is the content like? Will I be able to take / fit it all in....?'
(AC)

The interesting cultural aspect from the Japanese participant is the difference in register. The formality is mixed with a bit of humour at the end, as the participant mentions 'poor English' as a cause of embarrassment.

'**I would like to try new things** and get inspired by taking this online course...In this regard, I am far behind to learn e-moderating skills for higher education, yet **I would learn many on-the-job practices** from you.' **English is not my mother tongue** and writing a message takes me for a long time and **makes me hungry and thirsty.**' Anyway, I am very excited to work with you! M.'
(IC)

Participant demographics in terms of geographic location, description of the location at the time of speaking, occupational role, and interests are also indications of **mutual acknowledgement** and willingness to become part of a community.

'hello, my name is participant F and I am **a learning consultant with Archer College, located in Adelaide, South Australia.** I entered the course today and I am still exploring the tools....' (AC)

'**it's PG from SA, really keen to learn!**' (AC)
'completed the same online course asand currently doing some modules towards **a masters with the University of Ulster,** I am hoping this course will help with that.'
(IC)

I travelled to Italy this year on Holidays, the biggest draw for us essentially was there were 5 of us (all girls about 22 -24) ..., plus most of us are **teachers / lecturers and had just broke for the summer**
(AC)

The messages below are an example of reciprocity occurring when participants find a common point of interest. Those who share the same background, mark mutual acknowledgement of belonging to a group through **word choice** and use of **jargon**. The naming of the cities

⁹ AC = Australian Community

or areas of the country from which they are writing, are also signifiers of group identification.

'today I am at **Magill** – my window looks out over **Third Creek** (dry as a bone today) end'.
(response)...I guess you have **Kookaburras at Magill...**
(participants from the AC)

'looking forward to meeting the rest of the group....are there any **crow eaters** out there?'
(response) 'What's a **crow eater**?'
(response) 'a **crow eater** is Australian slang for a South Australian'
(AC)
'Mate, do you really fish, I thought I was the only fisherman. I have an old shock and a little tinny on a **mangrove creek...**'
(AC)

'**Gidday** participant E, welcome I'll enjoy catching up.'
'Participant G, Participant I is the name, **Sydney** is the place and I have no view at all...'
'I live in **Perth WA**, have a wife and kids...'
'Hi! It is Monday morning, after Church and Mother's day we went to the **footy** for a win...'
(participants from the AC)

The Japanese participant from the International Community offers an interesting aspect of **participant demographics** when he/she chooses to share facts about **occupation** in great detail.

Nice to talk to you everyone!
My name is MK and I am saying hello from Tokyo, Japan ;)
I am a researcher and a coordinator of Distance Learning Office at Tamagawa Gakuen, a K-12 school in Tokyo.
In 1998, we created an educational network system called "CHaT Net" which is an acronym of "Children Homes and Teachers Network" Its goal is to After four years of experience, the system grows to an invaluable community with 7,600 participants. The system is run by 8 First Class servers.
This is M from Japan.
It is around noon on Saturday and I am in the office. **I work for a comprehensive educational institution.** I can see kindergarten pupils and their parents gathering on the Kindergarten playground and I can hear their voice. **They just finished the last practice for the sports festival scheduled tomorrow which all the K-U students will participate.**
I think my situation is a little bit different from those of yours.
(Japanese participant from the IC)

The self-confident nature of this International participant from Portugal is quite evident as **feelings are shared, opinions stated, and expectations** set from the start.

'Hi, there group! **Here's a new 'late comer'**. I share everybody's fears about getting through the e-tivities of this week. **There's an awful lot of things to read**, do, absorb. Ant the worst is still to come! I still haven't visited the help section!!! But I have seen that some you have done a good job. **I hope I will benefit from what you have already done!**
Hope to hear from you, T. (IC)

This same participant writes about the **surrounding environment**, interjecting other information about lunch, the weather and her/his place of work. The message comes to an end with the use of a commissive utterance, confirming the ease with which the participants interact in the online environment.

'sorry I'm late. **I had technicakl problems logging in** (it's not an excuse), but better late than never! It's luch time (I haven't eaten yet) **and I'm in small office** at the Instituto Nacional de Administracao (the Portuguese civil service school). **The sun is shining outside and I can see oleanders. I will not respond to similar messages because I'm trying to catch up with the rest of the group.** T
(IC)
today is Monday...I have had to take sometime...to collect my 4-year-old **Grandson from Kindergarten...**we will go to the library...beautiful day in Adelaide and the birds are singind...glad to be alive.'
(AC)

Other descriptions of realities are also interspersed with other bits of information, choosing to forefront personal information or details from their own public domain. The language used stimulates **the auditory, the visual and the olfactory senses**.

'It's about 10:30, on a cold, wet dull morning in Ireland! ... Might think about a sun holiday for Christmas!:)

'As I look out of my window I see the **last of the Summer's roses** on the wall of the house opposite. **Dring the Summer, the wall is a blaze of white.** ... I can also see the top of a parking sign ...

'I am in my study at home. My family I watching TV and **all is quite.** The **evening is warm** and you can tell summer is just around the corner. J

'it is Sunday afternoon as I sit and do this. I am in our study at home and out of the window I can **see the remains as to what has been a beautiful day.** My three children are in another room close by and **I can hear that they have the television on and are laughing,** ...

'Its Monday morning, 10:00am, I am working from home for a couple of hours while I am doing this course. The **sun is trying to break through the clouds,** I can see lots of **gum trees, hear birds. The grass is green,** its spring time, my favorite time of the year.

(participants from the IC)

The spice of **cultural differences** that gives the community a unique character also comes from an English-born participant who lives and works in the United Arab Emirates. This is how he/she introduces the workplace and the weather.

'it's 6:15 on Friday evening here in **the UAE.** I can hear the **noises of the air conditioning machine,** trying to distract me without success. The weather has been **hot and a little humid,** although it is certainly cooling down (about 90 degrees now). After an arduous journey to get there (it certainly wasn't First Class travel for me!) I've finally made it and hope to catch up with you all. Bye for now, Susan

(IC)

There are some initial postings of presentation that immediately spark a series of responses about what seems to be a banal topic. In this case it is about mushrooms.

'I am **sitting in an office where mushrooms grow** at the moment.'
(response) ...I too am an author...in regard to mushrooms I entered the program at a very busy time.'
(response) Howdy Participant L, **what sort of mushrooms are you talking about** here?'

(response) I have found a **soulmate...**mushrooms make you smile.'

(participants from the A.C.)

The participant's use of 'soulmate' is clearly different from its literal meaning, but it is an indication of the importance to establish some sort of a relationship.

8.2.2 Weeks One and Two: Information Exchange

Feelings of insecurity about participation and expectations are the focus of the message exchanges in Weeks One and Two. The following participants from both communities ask for help during the very first week, for different reasons and in different ways. The participants generally cannot cope with the 'faceless' medium and the asynchronous mode of communication. The majority of the reasons is imputable to technological difficulties as well as to a form of virtual embarrassment or shyness. The messages are clear indications of personality styles and types that emerge from the very first week, as the participants:

- share their knowledge of the world and provide solutions to problems or inquiries that arise within the community;
- express ideas and opinions;
- share personal narrative, biographical information and cultural anecdotes

These examples are analyzed by using the three methods of analysis reported in Table 17.

<p>'Please call me....! By the way, my name is pronounced.....' (AC)</p> <p>'my first frustration....I want to know participants better.' (AC)</p> <p>'I'd really like someone to respond to one of my messages...my favourite thing...(is) reading people's responses to my posts'. (AC)</p> <p>'...I get a bit 'nervous' before emailing in, checking my spelling, grammar etc.' (AC)</p> <p>'...to be perfectly honest, I am really not sure- after all, what we are doing is leaning to converse online...' (AC)</p> <p>'...I feel rather stupid but I can't find anything about</p>	<p>directive utterance hedge: maxim of relation;</p> <p>commissive utterance;</p> <p>directive utterance;</p> <p>expressive utterance;</p> <p>hedges(clauses): maxim of quality;</p>
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red flags in the help file...can someone tell me how to go about it, please.' (IC)	hedge (clause): maxim of relation;
'by the way, can someone tell me where to find those net smiles to paste when we send messages?' (IC)	hedge: maxim of relation;
'hi guys – so sorry. I'm really the last person!' (AC)	expressive utterance;
'well, I don't know if this will be accepted as an excuse, but I've tried to be the model student with my participation...' (AC)	hedge (clause) : maxim of manner;
'sorry I am late joinin the group, I will try to catch up today and tomorrow. I have read all you postings.' ☺' (AC)	expressive utterance; commissive utterance;
'I'm attempting to find my way around the course at the moment.' (IC)	hedge (clause); representative utterance;
'I'm lost too, what day is it and where is the exit sign????' (IC)	representative/expressive;
'do forgive me but...is 'personal stuff' online – wasting time?' (IC)	hedge (clues); directive;
'well, well, well, it's taken me two hours to get into this &%\$£ conference!!' (IC)	expressive; hedge: symbols substitute adjective.

As the participants are definitely out of **Week One** and well into **Week Two**, the conferencing task that must be accomplished is to *practice exchanging opinions on participant attitudes towards online work*. Compared to the initial activity of exchanging information, mainly relating to their biographical 'self', the acquired familiarity with the medium and with each other affords them the opportunity to exchange opinions, ideas, past experiences, and solutions. The language is still very informal, with a mix of fixed phrases and idioms which creates a convivial environment, quite similar to the more relaxing moments in a face-to-face setting, and makes up for the lack of 'human contact' that is the hallmark of physical presence. The messages demonstrate some of the most common issues.

Time is one of the issues that participants worry about the most.

'My attitude to time management in this course has been to start loose, just mosey along...so I start very non-strict, very unlike you...'

(AC)
 'I like the drift here, Participant D, I like being in middle of the mob, **wait and see** the general flow and then go the opposite way (only kidding).'

(AC)
 'Sitting **an hour or 2** seems long. Perhaps I am oblivious to the time.'

(AC)
 'Aha – **time is of the essence** – sounds good, doesn't it...'

(AC)
 'On chat rooms – didn't work today... **11 am in Adelaide, 11:30 Sydney and 9:30** in Ruth; (didn't work today...')

(AC)

Cultural diversity in **the use of register** is revealed in the Information Exchange activity within the Intercultural Community. The formality of the messages and the use of many **hedges** are a recognizable trait of the participant from Japan, who is also the dominant contributor to community life.

'Hi, M. **I don't answer your question on offline function directly, but** let me show you one possible way to save your time and money.
 ...
Hope this will be of some help. In our FAQ forum, some mails referred to offline issue. **I don't understand** very wee, **but as far as I can say**, in offline mode, all the mails are copied to you mailbox on desktop, which **might start** sending big traffic to FC server. **I never tried before but** I don't get its logic why it works when disconnected.' (participant Japan from the IC)

The following message is the Portuguese participant's point of view. It is characterized by directness and **economy of style**, including a reduced use of hedging devices. This is an example of how the participant provides information regarding past online experiences.

'**I had two previous experiences, both not very interesting** as it was mostly an autonomous course where the tutor guided the participants through **the material made available** and **from time to time would give** some feedback. There was no contact between participants. It was difficult to manage time and keep up with the program. T.'

(IC)

8.2.3 Weeks One and Two: Interpersonal Discourse Behaviours

Messages in Weeks One and Two contain features of Interpersonal Interaction, in which participants provide evidence of community partnerships through support and solidarity, and friendship building behaviours. Measured through Politeness strategies, the messages provide ample testimony of how it is natural for community members to adhere to ‘polite’ expressions, while exchanging information or providing for other community needs. The message focus is the activity of *building and sustaining motivation*. The terminology used is characterized by attempts at preserving positive politeness. The behaviours are indicated in the heading before the message analysis.

Acknowledging

‘I like the way you have structured your thinking, Participant G. I would like to use your process as a framework for myself...’
(AC)

‘Hi Participant H, I think you are **our subject expert**...you sound thoughtful and motivated...cheers’.
(AC)

‘...these are great suggestions, Participant B. It is important to practice what you preach...’
(AC)

‘Participant E, you are enthusiastic, passionate and very knowledgeable about your industry...I can see **that you will provide** every creative avenue to progress...’
(AC)

‘WOW! This is pretty impressive there is **an amazing amount of help available to us all** I won’t go through the same answers you **have all contributed**, I would only be repeating what you have all said, **great to have this** available especially for people like me!’
(IC)

Providing encouragement is also part of ‘supporting’ each other online. The writer of the following message is very careful in doing so, as he/she steps into a face-saving situation responding to a participant’s need to excuse himself/herself for lack of online experience:

Sympathizing

Initial message:

'this is my first on-line course of any kind. Previous experience simply sending 'e'mails or booking tickets on the net. I am hoping to be able to bring 'on line' conferencing to a small national charity of volunteers but just hope my inexperience doesn't hold others back.

Response

'Hello Participant Ireland 1, **just an encouraging word from the oldest of the course!** New definition of WWW first of all – **Where there is a Will there' a Way....and would you believe me if I told you** I once attended a course called 'computing for the Terrified' not many years ago, so please don't feel bad, we are all here to learn (don't know how to do a smiley face for you but I'm sending one anyway! Good luck with the course.

(IC)

Once again, the interesting aspect of support comes from the International Community. The Japanese participant is responding to 'support' messages from a community participant, who also used positive face strategies.

Acknowledging

Initial message from an English native speaker:

'**I admire your ability** to do a course in another language-I certainly could not do so'''' I am having a few problems with the software but I hope all will be okay from now on.'

Response from Japanese participant:

'**thank you very much for your considerate comment!** Getting to know someone like you who **welcome an alien** warmly is really rewarding. I believe languages are windows through another cultures and learning English broaden my perspectives with joy.'

(IC)

Initial message from Japanese participant:

'My difficult part is always writing messages in English. I like it and the problem is spending too much time. I can read books and messages literally, but I need significant time to digest and ferment it meaningful to me. Though it is far easier for me to write than to participate in class and speak out. I regard struggling with English as a challenge to broaden my views and way of thinking.'

Response from English native speaker:

'...**you provide a different perspective for all of us and a very valuable learning experience** about different cultures. It enables us to lean how careful we need to be with our expressions online on order to be fully understood.'

(IC)

Negotiating conflict

During Week Two there are examples of conflict and misunderstandings from both communities, but the most significant exchange sequence is from the International Community .

From Japanese participant:

‘some-mates are nervous technically and I hope everything should be alright soon...as mentioned somewhere, I have been indispensable tool for facilitating communication and learning for my school...My English is not good and this is quite a challenge to me. However, my expectation and excitement to join this course are greater than fear and I want to get to know people with similar purposes all around the world.’

From participant living in Australia:

‘...I think having to do the help activity was great, I am one who never uses the help menu up until now...**I am a bit different from you Masako, you don’t care much about making mistakes and, personally, don’t mind taking risks and have nothing to lose**’...I am a bit nervous when I have to put anything up, is the spelling OK, am I using slang and some people wont be able to understand what I have written, what if I am on the wrong track.’

Response from Japanese Participant:

‘ **I am sorry if I made you feel bad because of my bad behaviour and attitude.** I don’t mean to compete/dispute with someone. I just want to feel I am doing my best. **I trust in Val who will guide me to the right direction if I am wrong.** I will be more sensitive and careful.’

Apologizing

As the participant from Japan does not receive a message back from the person he/she thinks has taken offence from her/his behaviour, the participant attempts another apology.

‘...**I didn’t understand what you tried to express** and I thought it was better to say that I had no intention to bother others (for help)...I really appreciate this opportunity, Participant Australia, **I sincerely hope I don’t hurt your feelings.**’

This aspect is highly significant to the understanding of the dynamics within the International Community, which are defined by a participant of this same community as follows.

‘I feel as if I have fast-forwarded through the **last 7 episodes of a soap opera and I am joining the cast for the new series!** As a linguist, I’m finding the **multi-cultural aspect of the group dynamics really interesting and fun.**’

Teasing

'Hi participant D, some of your messages are highlighted in red, **now, may look good at your end, but fro old blind people like me, blue type under red is not a good combination**, and I'm getting concerned about all the talk on red wine, **does this group have any 'issues' that require the services of AA????**and more to the point, cant we show a balance and give a nice white a go?? See ya in the bar later to discuss this. **Clink, clink'**
(AC)

Conflict management

Week two of the Australian community offers many examples of negotiation of some conflict-embedded issues that are part of what they are asked to do as one of their weekly task. The participants had to write a sample message to involve a 'lurker' participant and comment on the ones written by other participants. Negative face-saving strategies can be detected.

'participant E, nice try but...too many 'teacher' type words...**hows that for a critique???? Your turn now.** Participant I
(AC)

'Participant J, Participant J, Participant J, need to nip this one in the bud, offer to ring him..., don't just give him the option of contacting you, he's already done that. Andy is already 'sharing and participating', according to his perception, words like 'comfort' and 'happy' aren't going t ease his frustrations.
How's that, your turn, give me heaps, Participant I.
(AC)

Agreeing/disagreeing

Week Two also contains messages that demonstrate how the participants become progressively acquainted with each other. This is especially true for the Australian Community. The following turn sequence involves Participant D, Participant I, and Participant F. Their personalities and communication styles are quite evident in their exchange of opinion in which the use of 'hedging' allows them to state their views without any incidents of flaming.

'I think that a direct phone call is most likely to save Andy, but do we want to stay with an online emoderated course and let Andy sink or swim in that environment? **I reckon we want him to swim**, sot be towed to the side of the pool by an instructor, so here goes my tough love.' Part. D
(Follows a 25-line message)

'I see your pointy here part D, and note that you mentioned that a phone call would probably save Andy. **All that you said is fine, however**, I believe that it still would be better to say it 'live'...may be the first time he has ever used this forum, needs some TLC (don't we all)... cheers, Part. I'

'participant D, **your message scared me a little, but** if Andy (who 'sounded' frustrated and angry) your response would be more comforting if it was shorter reflecting the urgency to the issue.
(AC)

8.2.4 Weeks One and Two: Establishing Online Identity

Weeks One and Two present interpersonal discourse behaviours related to the needs of establishing '**individual identity**' within a **community framework**. The messages are categorized as follows:

- establishing an online identity;
- face management/expressing personal needs with assertiveness;
- self-representation using community concerns structures;

The following messages are from the **International Community** conference. For sake of simplicity and clarity of data interpretation, the messages in this sequence are commented in the right column.

<p>From the Portuguese participant: 'I share your concern about being too 'directive': when should one interfere or wait and see, how to 'mingle' with each participants' learning process, management of time, etc. I believe it is probably one of the most difficult things for an e-learning tutor as it challenges our experience of class teaching...</p>	<p>I share, I believe= the participant's confident and direct online personae is also established by the use of frequent 'representatives'.</p>
<p>n. 3 messages from the Japanese participant: ...I mean there must be a way for the light and it's 'good to feel/believe someone with you'. ...as for motivation, yes, I think I am highly motivated...I was at a loss before how to promote asynchronous learning and there were no one with whom I could share my anxiety to proceed distance learning program. I am now with you! The number of the group is quite small, which is cozy to me to work with...I would like to contribute here by sharing my experiences, ask questions and learn a new way of thinking...in return, I wish I could translate what I learn her to K-12 environment....</p>	<p>The 'before and after' references signify the participant's development of identity within the online environment, where working is 'cozy'; references to the 'here' and 'now' foregrounds the participant's concern with the present time.</p>

<p>‘Thanks,</p> <p>Of course I didn’t mean to disagree with K’s note. I respect her way. I just wondered how I could respond in a polite and proper way. I wanted to apologize if I behaved badly though I didn’t mean to. Oh , no, this is a kind of misunderstanding because of my lack of language skills. Sorry if I might hurt someone feeling and THANK YOU!!’</p> <p>‘No morals but our departmental principle, ‘life is a gamble’, ‘work hard, play (or bet) hardest!’ I don’t like gambling at all, but there are no way out if you were here.....0@(;_)@0 Hoping your working environment is healthy.’</p>	<p>Politeness concerns and accuracy in language use are the participant’s recurrent issues.</p>
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Expressing personal needs

<p>From participant Japan ‘could you please explain the meaning of the instruction of this activity, ‘Respond to the messages of the other participants and assume the role of a ‘lurker or browser? Thank you very much in advance</p>	<p>Requests such as this one are very common especially when participants are becoming increasingly aware of the task they need to accomplish.</p>
<p>‘I need visuals to help connect, to build collaboration. I know it’s not everyone’s cup of tea but it helps me.’ Participant UAE</p>	<p>Negative face= expresses opinion by also acknowledging that of the other participants.</p>
<p>From Participant Spain: ‘...I’ve finally made it and hope to catch up with you all...the sun is shining outside and I can see oleanders I will not respond to similar messages because I’m trying to catch up with the rest of the group.’</p>	<p>Direct commissive in expressing what the participant is intending to do.</p>

Self representation using community concerns structures

<p>From moderator of community ‘...I would say participant Japan, you provide a different perspective for all of us ... It enables us to learn how careful we need to be with our expressions online in order to be fully understood. Cheers.’</p> <p>Response from Part. Japan ‘I will try to do my best! For me, sharing what I have been done here is the only way to participate this course. In the meanwhile, it would be great if you all could be familiar with Japanese English!’</p>	<p>The moderator focuses on the value of diversity and on the need to be aware of the difficulty of communicating through the use of a medium. Participant Japan acknowledges the</p>
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Thanks moderator, it's good to have someone support me. I appreciate. It is also amazing there are so many red flags over the weekend! I could start this week with excitement!	support and thanks the community at large.
J. writes: My thoughts would be that through this type of course, you get to meet and connect with individuals who are geographically seperated from each other!	Diversity and community acknowledgement.
M. from Japan: OK, I will keep creating a buzz, which I hope is relevant to an issue and could be a topic of debate.	Commissive in expressing the willingness to participate.

The messages in this next selection are from the **Australian Community** conference.

'...I almost feel blindfolded! I would have liked for us to share and connect more strongly in the introductory week...	The participants in this sequence of messages find their personal way of conveying their diverse styles of learning within the community.
'I have identified a need to prioritize my tasks and to make time for learning,. This is my first time in a VLE and my first time as a participant in training...I am an enthusiastic learner but I am easily distracted by other work and have trouble following... maybe a deadline for some activities could help this?'	
'the methodology used to ease participants into this online course suited my style of learning. It provided me direction to keep me motivated.'	
'Hmm. My style of learning is a mixed bag... I apparently plan to take risks and smell the roses...'	

<p>'hi participant F, the flexibility is the big asset with online, does have other issues like, its just too easy to put off doing things, but, have suggested that we consider a buddy type system to keep one another 'motivated' (dark chocolate and red wine also works!)</p>	<p>This next sequence establishes the presence of the participant in the community using humour. The register is highly colloquial, characterized by features of spoken discourse, such as lack of conventional sentence boundaries, omission of function words.</p>
<p>'quick is sometimes best, trying to o this course plus answer phones etc. you lose the train of thought, log and try and complete the task in ne sitting. And that reminds me, need to ut my fingernails, thanks participant J, and to participant e, always remember that with a paper diary...no need to change the batteries and if it does get wet, you can still read it!!! (well sort o) Paper Rules!!!.'</p>	
<p>Response to message above from other participant: 'come on participant E didn't you read my latest email, electronics are going out, every ones going back to pen and paper!!!???'</p>	

Expressing personal needs

<p>'...I was a bit overwhelmed by what I have messed. So I'm madly reading through all the context and messages and hope to be up to speed by Thursday.'</p>	<p>These messages offer a view of participants' use of expressives in communicating their needs without threatening the face wants of others.</p>
<p>'please accept my apologies...please bear with me while I play catch up..</p>	
<p>'I don't feel like I've connected with anyone really...'</p>	
<p>'...I'd really like someone to respond to 1 of my messages, but I'm not expecting it because no one is going to work backwards.'</p>	

Self representation using community concerns structures

Week Two of the Australian Community is especially rich of examples of community references, where the participants have undertaken the process of community identification. The process is described in the following ways:

- as a metaphorical 'journey', with people who 'come on board' and a participant is a 'mad surfer';
- as a 'brand new group of people' unknown to each other;
- as 'being in the middle of the mob';

- as a skills-learning process for the ‘new millennium’;
- as a learning community with the added value of ‘individual differences’.

‘My favourite thing this week has been reading people’s responses to my posts... a warm welcome and a sense of belonging to a group.’
‘...this group learning is great for building a community.’
‘...our community motto from a long holiday journey is ‘we go forward’ so quitting is not an option.’
‘Hi participant L...welcome, I think the people on this journey are a big part of our learning and I am glad to have you on board.’
‘Hi participant I, are you a mad surfer ...?’
‘Who are we? We are a brand new group of people, unknown to each other, working together with a common interest to attempt a new challenge – eLearning.
What were we doing? Learning new skills for the new millennium –we all started out a little cautious, captured by contributions such as quite painless, overwhelmed, impressed to date, I had no idea what I was doing.....
When does this all occur? This wonderful thing eLearning allows us to plug in and out at our convenience – anytime, as Participant Lcribed by being a latecomer or just diving in head first.
How did we fare with our progress? With really 'readable' chunks of content, over whelmed by all the 'traffic' for you to review, took it at one’s own pace, talking to myself, be in the right headspace, enjoying the experience, frustration, but will emerge a little more connected. Participant F’
‘earning online is problematic! It makes time stand still, is shared with a learning community , suits time constraints, and has to have time made for it.’
‘hanks Participant H, a good summary, and the advantage too of bringing the whole group together, so also a sense of community . Participant B said last week that she still did not have a sense of who everyone was, this posting brings us a ll together, and hopefully that feeling of isolation and sepration from the group is diminishing. Thanks’
‘the first thought I have is that this is not exactly my own time, it is a shared time and being part of a learning community . So when I need to meet my own needs to ‘progress’ ...there is at least a partial conflict with my teaching...ethic.’
‘Hi Participant L, enjoying your thoughts about individual differences . I also know you are right about the advantages of online flexibility, but I value being a learning community which has some implications about pace and keeping together. I expect we will return to this over the course.
‘I like the drift here, Participant D, I like being in the middle of the mob , wait and see the general flow, and then go the opposite way...cheers, participant I’.
‘I have identified a need to prioritize my tasks and to make time for learning,. This is my first time in a VLE and my first time as a participant in training ...I am an enthusiastic learner but I am easily distracted by other work and have trouble following...maybe a deadline for some activities could help this?’

The following messages consider the essential qualities of ‘caring and sharing’ that a participant must possess or acquire as a member of an online community. Summarizing messages is one of the ways of showing concern for the learning processes among the community members (see message by Participant D).

Participant J: ‘...we must take care not to offend others by responses that are not thoughtful or showing empathy or consideration...’
Participant f: ‘I’m trying to be a better ‘wordsmith’ to add some feeling into my writing, so I can relate to the question you posed.’
Participant D: ‘Sharing and caring ‘Why Share?’... I summarised this thread by looking at the extent to which non-competitive emotional responses (sharing, warmth, support, humour, and inclusiveness) were seen in the reflections of week one, in order of posting. Participant D posted early with the promise to others to return and get more interaction. Other ‘touchie feelie’ efforts included claiming to be a ‘social animal’, admitting to being ‘complicated’, and valuing seeing friends’ names. Some self-disclosure on a difficult start and personal traits occurred; Participant I ... spoke of early difficulties, and later interacted saying it was going ‘better’, gave greetings for the weekend, and shared disclosure on a family party; Participant F was next, and ... spoke of how he/she would, in the future, ‘interact’; Participant H was succinct, but almost totally focused on feelings and sharing: ‘I am surprised at the depth of interaction possible through the forum being used - not physical but mental pictures...; Participant J was personally focused, sharing ... emotions, that it was "different"...; Participant B was comfortable in teacher and e-classroom evaluation, but was so frustrated that he/she could say ‘I don’t think I do know who you are’ ...looked for more ‘socialisation’ in the future; Participant J revisited Friday, and enjoyed reading the further responses to the contributions...; Participant G , given a late start, found the interactions... a bit overwhelming but focused on others’ responses...valued the learning community; Participant D entered (again, a promised last time)...spoke of group learning and mutual encouragement...; Participant J replied to Moderator 1 with a new posting, which therefore included us...learning to "listen to other people and learning from their feelings..." Participant L offered personal reflections on finding the technical set up initially daunting... ;

Participant E arrived late...;

Participant K posted: 'My favourite thing this week has been reading people's responses to my posts...;

Participant A posted after most had left... It was useful to learn about my fellow participants and their motivations and now their reflections - I'm always so taken up with the diverse responses to the same environment - human beings are so interesting';

So is online learning still mostly an unfeeling wasteland?

The need for **norms** that govern a community for peace-keeping purposes as well as for task completion is the main object of discussion in this next sequence of messages.

'what about seeing **if we form a team that supports some 'norms' internally rather than have the e-moderator set them?** I would normally bet these would emerge over 5 weeks in any f-2-f group, but we might see how this works. Participant H'

Response to message above:

'Participant H, I agree it is mostly a personal choice, although **as a group we can set up informal 'norms'** which become the local netiquette. Cheers part. D'

'moderator 1, yes, are right, humour can be taken many ways, I'm much more conservative with a face to face class(until I get to know them)... I'm a part time fire fighter, so risks are part of the territory, **much of my weekends are spent with a group who "stir the pot " all the time.** Thats what I like with our group, **we are all learning just where the boundaries really are'.**

The next summarizing activity comes at the end of **Week Two**. The interesting aspect is to see how the group is approaching the end of Week Two with growing awareness as a 'group' or 'community' and the realization of the diversity that distinguishes them all. They seem surprised that this can also occur online.

'...Overall I am **impressed with the diverse range of questions being asked** and the techniques being used to find out what we really want to know. One would say that **diversity must be stemming from the fact that we are on line** and hence our overall information exchanging is not being influenced by idle class room chat that restricts the creative juices, from flowing. The over **teams efforts** have come a long way from the commencement of the course and I congratulate you all. Participant E'

Response to this summary: from participant F:

Your story telling style is wonderful Participant E. You **captured the group** with such grace and warmth. **I am picking up on many skills** and **your style** of narration and thinking is very appealing.

Participant D Reflections:

'...it dawns on me we are all a bit slower this week. The rush is off. I have dawdled to smell the roses our class has put on display, and I am feeling warm towards **our little band of brothers and sisters**...I love youse all.'

8.2.5 Weeks Three and Four: Information Exchange

Weeks Three and Four coincide with **Stages 3 and 4** of Salmon's learning model, which allows the participants to work with learning materials and construct knowledge. The topic of discussion is *traditional teaching vs. online teaching and online collaboration*. Messages from both weeks have been considered together, as part of the same production, as they constitute the stepping-stone activities of **'Information Exchange' and 'Knowledge Construction'**, which trigger off various discourse behaviours and feed into each other as they are part of the same thought processes and interaction patterns that lead towards the final meta-cognitive **Stage 5** called **Development**.

The International Community

As Week Three begins in the **International Community**, expressive utterances characterize the information exchange activity among the participants, as shown in the conference messages listed below. Most exchanges convey feelings of doubt, fear and insecurity, especially evident in the summarizing activity, and which expresses the participants' expectations of working with a seemingly 'e-motionless' medium. The exchange ends with an encouraging comment from the moderator.

Information exchange

So true, **e-communication is not emotion-less** that's for sure. I get a bit "nervous" before emailing in, checking my spelling, grammar etc.

Thank you Kim **for articulating my fears as well.**

Hi, group. Red is my favourite colour so the choice was simple. I hope I have arrived as well. Although I'm not new to this, there's always the chance of making a fool of yourself online. **Who said e-communication was emotion-less?**

I am terrified that you are all flying along without me, at this stage there seems to be so many tasks I have to complete by the end of the week! **Will keep on working,** 'Bye for now.

Val I think this is far too long, do you? Perhaps I could have kept the quotes from the postings briefer and I really would have liked to include more postings so as not to leave anybody out, but then this would have got bigger and bigger and bigger.

In the previous activity I think **I may have summarised instead of weaving. Here now is my summary.**

T. G. writes: after a while we all felt a bit lost: we didn't know which comments answer first.

S. M. writes: The overwhelming feeling we had was one of neglect when no-one responded to our messages

M. K. writes: We four were equally very busy posting and rushing back and forth in a quiet room.

M. O'C. writes: Participants are keen to try new things...even the shy people in the class thought it sounded good and participated actively.

Comment from Moderator:

Well done to every one who participated in this activity. **You have all drawn your own conclusions** and **can now see** how many different people respond to something new, some positive, some not so positive. Most of you at least appeared to have fun with this activity. Great work from you all and thanks for sharing your findings.

Friendship building through cultural diversity

Advice from Japanese student to Participant from Dublin 2

1. Hello M.-san!

Your activity sounds fun to do! Your plan is well organized, isn't it!

I am wondering if you might be interested in adding some spice: visual aids and **contacts between German living in Germany.** I imagine they are willing to share their custom with your students...

"Kamakura" .. They really enjoy the class.

This sounds like a great project. I'm sure you have a lot of background organisational work that makes this successful...

You may put another burden on your students to write Christmas cards in German...

They would only do this if there was a real life reason...for each other, it would be artificial...

My elementary school days were quiet and peaceful without computer network... Oh but isn't life so much more colourful with computers.. ;-)

2.

M. K. writes:

Hi M-san,

Thank you so much for your thoughtful and considerate message and advice!

I deeply appreciate.

Arigato gozaimasu!

I am getting to realize that I didn't understand the purpose of this activity correctly. Mary succeeded in guiding me.

However, **give me one more chance to clarify my initial intention, hoping sharing our practice** would be a compensation, though it is not for this activity's purpose.

Community representation

In Week Three, the word 'community' and similar references to human aggregation, such as 'others', 'group', colleagues increase as shown in these postings.

' Just goes to show that through the geographical seperation and cultural differences we can all learn from each other within this **community!**'

"It is great to see how **the group** are willing to talk about their frustrations on line. It can be very helpful to know that **others** are also feeling nervous

OK so I'll bit the bullet and collate the postings that have been included in week one of the **blue group**.

Here I have taken three different sentences from three recent postings. I understand from the group that people are nervous and unsure when posting to the conference.

My attempt at summarising some of the responses of three characteristics of a good resume.

This task demonstrated that **like all groups, this group** is made up of individuals with all sorts of differing views. It was generally felt that it was nice to get to know a little bit about course **colleagues**, where they live and maybe something about their culture. Humour was considered particularly important but one member pointed out the importance of taking care when being 'humourous' as what is funny in one culture may not be so in another. Remember the maxim, '**When in Rome....**', quoted another. Another queried the need for social information when time is limited and there is so much to learn. In short though, it seems that a short, easy to read narrative, (maybe with a photograph) was welcomed by most of the **group**.

This next sequence is also community-oriented, as the message shows processes of sharing, caring, nurturing within community boundaries. The first person plural pronoun is repeated throughout, strengthened by other 'group' references.

'...in an online environment sharing our thoughts is the most useful **way we learn.**'

'...**we all** benefit because we should also remember E-learning is sharing with **others** and learning from others ideas.'

'Through this E-tivity to write encouraging replies, **we all rethink** the nature of the online learning. Allowing several learning styles, maximizing this media, and respecting different cultural backgrounds would be shared among participants to be connected and motivated'.

The 'self' and 'others'

In the following sequence, concerns structures are geared towards community well-being and learning experiences resulting from collaboration. Expressing strictly personal needs has taken a secondary role in terms of priorities.

'...In a f2f classroom, it's easier to mediate, summarise, intervene, because the threads are fresh in your mind...but trawling back through over two weeks' worth of written material is tough going. **I certainly appreciate that these are skills we need to practise, however painful!**

I have learned a lot this week about sensitive and timely responses, about working questions into responses, about validating comments...

Thanks for reading! Mary

ITs that time of the week again where **I have to sit and think about what I've done this week!** The time seems to be flying by (as its meant to do when you are having fun! :))

this week I have found it useful that everyone seems to be loggin in and posting more, it gives an interesting insight into how other cultures and nationalities learn!

The summarising, **I didnt find particulary useful as it opened to many screens** and took me ages to navigate through copying and pasting what I wanted and closing what I didnt! **Oh well, maybe its just me!!!**

Look forward to seeing everyone next week, enjoy Halloween and have a good weekend - I know its only Thursdy and I'm not having a long weekend, I'm being outsourced to a client tomorrow, so wont be around!

<p>Howdy, this is what I think of this week's effort:</p> <p><u>The most challenging:</u> The activities that required looking back and summarizing or weaving mainly because of the built-in skill of synthesis _ pretty difficult one to master.</p> <p><u>The most useful:</u> Carrying out the activities mentioned above as they are not ancillary skills but of priority importance if an emoderator is to ensure that the participants have been on the right track and are able to see the whole picture at the end of the conference. Just like we would do in a regular classroom at the end of a lesson, unit, module, etc.</p>	
<p>Each week I am learning more and more skills. I like the idea of sharing information and resources, I will be incorporating that into part of my online delivery. Probably set up a folder or link where students can post relevant links and resources to assist other students. I am feeling more confident each week, to the point now where I am currently preparing to run my first online unit as a pilot. Cant wait.</p>	
<p>I have two concerns for the Week 3. My short-term and working memories allocated to English are quite limited so that I have a difficulty to retain who said what and how it affected to a discussion, which makes Week 3 E-tivities challenging to me. In addition, I agree weaving and summarizing are the most important skills for an e-moderator and here I am wondering how I could improve my skills. I know my big obstacle is language, but aren't there any ways to brush up that skills other than reading contributions and appreciation given to them?</p>	
<p>I hope I could weave a discussion by trying to read between lines and messages.</p>	
<p>I dont really understand this etivity, so hopefully when others start posting I can learn specifically what we are meant to be doing, I can understand the sample given in the posting from the Econvenor/Course, and do think its logical, however I am having difficulty in understanding the nature of the topic in regards to the layout</p>	

Intercultural issues

The International Community, presents differences based on cultural schemata. All linguistic phenomena that bear cultural significance need to be examined from a different angle by referring to cultural concepts adapted to fit the reality and conventions of the online environment. The topics of discussion are participant demographics, incidents involving intercultural communication, and curiosity towards cultural diversity.

Well, this week has been a bit of a tester for me, what with exams at college, students organising the	Information Exchange: culture specific
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<p>Bazaar and preparation/new timetable for Ramadan, which starts tomorrow.....but please bear with me, I'll get there. On top of that, have been asked to give a workshop on e-moderating skills! However, I might tactfully delay that until I have learnt a bit more! Although, it is said that as you teach, you learn.</p>	<p>terminology reveals details of participant's location at the time of the online course.</p>
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One of the tasks this week is to define the word 'online facilitator'. This has served the purpose of discussing the cultural issues the participants have had to deal with as educators, probably working with different cultural groups.

<p>'My students have very basic English skills and have been used to a very traditional education. They come to us in awe of this word "independent" which we push down their throats daily. Our mission is to facilitate, go into constructivism and get the students to use higher order thinking skills which they don't possess at the moment. I argue like crazy that the word "facilitate" means to "ease the process" - but if these poor girls do not know the process'</p> <p>Response I read your mail imagining you have struggled with Japanese girls... Any girl is fine and I was very impressed with your attempt to provide an intensive course. I wonder if I can understand your mail correctly, but from my experience of very dark 365 days at Chicago, it was hard to change one's attitude... I remember the saying that you can bring your horse to a well, but can't force it to drink...Only they can do it. I also feel "A ha! experience" occurs when their brains are filled with information, motivation (similar to Helen Killer's case?) Sorry if I flew away from Susan's argument.</p>
<p>There was not one particular contribution that was more helpful to me than any of the others however thanks to M. and her posting regarding the activity that included '%#\$&*@' which to most of us except M. represented some sort of cursing.This really bought my attention to the possible cultural differences of participants in this environment and never to assume too much. Cheers K. L.</p>
<p>We all love traveling and let me also ask you from the topic. How does the nature impact on your culture and national identity? How would you describe? Or are there anything else other than nature you can identify with the national character? I am curious about you indepth observation of the country. It will be of some help to visit eachother!</p>
<p>Kim Lewin: We must read and post messages trying to keep in mind the cultural differences of the group.</p>
<p>Just goes to show that through the geographical seperation and cultural differences we can all learn from each other within this community!</p>

Evidence of knowledge sharing is clearly shown in Week Four where messages often contain aspects of ‘linking’ and ‘quoting’, which are aspects that testify the group’s growing awareness levels and ability to reflect on the entire process. The participants acknowledge each other’s performance, as well as apologize for not being more regular in their contributions. Consistent use of ‘we’ words and references to ‘others’ are shown.

<p>M.R. I love your e-tivity and the quote is great. An excellent opener and starting point. (Do you often play devil's advocate in real life?!) I would love to do this e-tivity. I made a few suggestions below, in Irish green, of course ;-)</p>
<p>Hi (participant’s name)! I also loved the idea of you e-tivity. I wish now I had made mine more accessible and relevant to other course members, as yours is. I've added a few comments in Kelly green while I'm here! You can kill me over coffee on Monday ;-)... Level 4 and 5 of model _ knowledge construction and development _ acquiring knowledge and exploring various responses to the topics presented...</p>
<p>My reflections:</p> <p>This session was all useful and all challenging. We moved away from the pleasant experience of exchanging information to 'learning how to do it.' ... Consequently, our thinking became more informed and quite insightful. The session's e-tivities naturally led to adopt a reflective approach to the responses, approach which ultimately produced a very rewarding and interesting discussion.</p>
<p>A very interesting if frustrating week because of time limitations. I imagine, however, that those course members who were heavily involved in the week must also feel a bit frustrated at the lack of contributions of others (including me).</p> <p>The many useful comments about networking has increased my confidence in the value of on-line conferencing and I am actually looking forward to week 5. Hope everyone is well.</p>
<p>An honest reflection!</p> <p>For me, week 4 was the one where everybody came into their own. We were asked to be creative in designing our own e-tivities, to be constructive in assessing the work of others and to be expressive in discussing the topics of networking and knowledge building...The inevitable delight at encountering lots of little red flags is also part of the learning experience! I take much from this week with me into future activities as an e-moderator.</p>
<p>Each week I sow seeds which are what I heard and learned. I saw some stopped growing in a different environment, some grew healthily and some seemed eaten up by birds.</p>

In week 4, especially in group discussion on networking, the seed in the Blue garden grew very rapidly and greatly and I appreciate beautiful flowers blooming: they have been taken good care of all the dedicated discussion leader and contributors. How nice **to participate gardening together** with reliable people!!
Japan

I enjoyed M's activity and K's because I am still wondering if the weaving and summarizing skills can be developed through practice and how. **Being an international participant**, I am puzzled and interested to learn how these skills are trained. Please be advised. Thanks in advance. Participant Japan

The Australian Community

The issues discussed in the conferencing activity of the International Community, the tasks and the discourse behaviours are very similar to those analyzed in the **Australian Community**. There is evidence of meta-reflection on the learning processes, and the acquired skill of comparing the online and the face-to-face worlds. The exchanges are geared towards community goals as the participants discuss mutual concerns, and messages are enriched with information on 'relationship building', on the pros and cons of online moderating', and on the evaluation of the individually designed e-tivities as part of their course assignment. The consistent use of 'we' words is also evident in their contributions.

'...I can also identify with many of Participant D's points, in particular, enjoying working "with people" and **building relationships with groups**'.

Participant K spoke earlier of feeling impatient with the time lag, and talks here **of the buzz of the classroom which is missing online...** and how do we get those good emotions going online?

Would have to say, that at this stage , its getting in the way... I miss **the reactions** , the **banter in a group**, even when a few are talking at the same time, this can be a lot of fun (sometimes, it can also be a pain in the), I also miss the coffee breaks,(with decent biscuits of course!!) a few hanging a 'round the "billy" ,sometimes this can be where a lot of learning takes place. "live" is like People **learning from people**, where as, E learning can give the impression of people **learning from a screen!!!!** Again , its all about balance, any other comments???

Re: the brave new world - Participant D

Recognising the the **learning power from each other is not 'brand new'**. I think it is closer to my more recent facilitation...Cheers Participant D

Evaluating 'e-tivities'

<p>'Participant A I love this e-tivity - it has the potential to lead to so much practical information about e-moderating. I am sceptical about the length of time for the e-moderator's involvement and think it would be greater than estimated.'</p>
<p>Participant A, well you did eventually post the etivity, and it was worth waiting for. I think that the size fo the groups are good in terms of working online (I think too that in f2f 5 is a good number, reduces the number of free riders but allows enough to provide a varied and diverse content, which helps in creativity).</p>
<p>Participant D, I was drawn to your etivity because it occurs at such a vital stage of the process: right at the beginning! I guess this is the 'make or break' time</p>
<p>Great etivity Participant B, as both Participant E and Participant A say in their responses to it. I too like the use of different media as a spark to the discussion, ...'</p>
<p>DiParticipant FI liked your use of other tools to achieve the required outcomes coupled with your comprehensive back ground summary. Makes the process easy to follow and encourages people to take the step into the unknown</p>
<p>Participant F- what a great way to focus on a specific emoderating skill - by gathering, exchanging and building knowledge resulting in a plan to further develop the identified competency.</p>

As for the International Community, the participants of the Australian Community discuss topics that clearly demonstrate the depth of awareness of the purpose of the community and the way forward. Some of these topics are: independence in learning, skills necessary for online teaching and concern for the community's well-being. The spirit of the activity at this stage of community life is particularly evident in the following exchange between two participants, as they discuss the skills that are necessary to acquire for online collaboration.

<p>Original post: Re: Participant skills - Participant B What do you think of 'trust' as a skill? Or perhaps its being able to trust? I think you need to be in an environment that you can trust to really begin collaborative learning...</p>
<p>Response: Did you move from a 'state of distrust' to one of 'trust' as you moved from individual engagement to collaborative learning?</p>
<p>Re: Independent Learners - Participant D Hi Participant K, welcome back, trust you are better and making up for lost time.</p>

I like the <i>idea</i> of moderated class-paced learning, but I agree some might drop off or just prefer to be self-paced.
Participant A a thoughtful posting rich in content... I especially like the idea of resilience (have you read the ideas on locus of control and tolerance of ambiguity as being key elements in resilience?) and the skill of being able to write what you mean, including feelings, well done.
<p>Re: up front skills - Participant I</p> <p>Hi Participant D, no to most of your questions,..... and you want me to expose all my secrets????</p> <p>...have never used a Chat room , always worried that the blonde that I would be talking to, would turn out to be the "Sargent at arms" of Hells Angels.</p> <p>.... whats a "hot Link???"</p> <p>....."posting", isnt that at Aust Post???</p> <p>.....but yes, have used the internet, for the past 4 yrs or so, can use Word, not able to use Auto Format, and Justifying and all that fancy stuff, have never used excel, publisher ,power point,</p> <p>.... so would consider myself to be very low on the computer totem pole,</p> <p>... and yes, have had to force myself to get through this,</p> <p>so to anyone else who feels that they lack computer skills, hang in there!!!!.</p> <p>.... and Participant D, because dummies like me you can get through this, I feel more confident to recommend it anyone, cause a low skill level is not going to prevent success...</p>
<p>Succeed to Success - Participant J</p> <p>Skills necessary for online learning:-</p> <p>Willingness to learn</p> <p>Positive attitude</p> <p>Communication skills (Dont's just talk, listen too)</p> <p>Interactional skills</p> <p>Understanding</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Open mindedness</p>
<p>Frontline Management Introduction - Participant K</p> <p>Participant A I think that this is excellent. I like the way you have used typography to differentiate between the parts of the introduction, which makes it much easier to read, and thus make sense of.</p> <p>I love the sense of excitement and inclusiveness you have engendered. Great work - it portends a great course.</p> <p>Thanks</p>

Community concerns

Community concerns are the focus of the next exchanges as the participants, with newly-acquired hindsight, look back on the process and evaluate the progress made as a community of individuals who have worked together, developed as a group and moved forward. The use of

specific terms such as ‘realization’, ‘openness’, ‘development’, ‘building on’, or derivations of the same, are evident in all the messages.

The participants are also very aware of the possibility of ‘misunderstandings’ that can occur easily online when one does not feel confident enough to post messages. To this respect, all the participants undertake a self-assessment of the contributions they have or have not made online.

<p>skills are us - Participant A I think this group has been most skillful in acknowledging each other - whether by responding, encouraging or giving feedback - oh the glow of knowing someone has read what i've written and added to it - far out!</p>
<p>The skills I identified are - humour, thoughtfulness, kindness, clarification, constructive criticism, support, bravery (although I think Participant I has plenty of that), awareness (often not visible), creativeness, openness and eventually effective communication. Contributions: I think all these skills contributed to the threads/discussions. Improving success: It was a learning exercise for most to navigate the site and it's contents and maybe that hindered the progression to effective communication (my key to e-moderation), so maybe a pre-requisite of this course is a short course in the atim site/software.</p>
<p>Participant HP Thanks Participant A, a veryinteresting contribution. I have the following list of question types: focus - What are you most concerned about? observation - What did you see? feeling - How do you feel? visioning - how wouldl you like it to be? change - What wouldl you do differently? Personal inventory - What interests you most? personal action - What will you do next? A different take to your list, but combined they become very powerful as a possibel script for emoderation don't you think?</p>
<p>More openness becoming more of ones self - Participant E In this weeks discussions I am already seeing more openness in the threads being posted and everyone is really starting to communicate as they would normally. I am seeing the realisation that thought and time needed to be placed into what we have all started together and that the start of the journey was not so easy we are all becoming more relaxed about it... and I believe we can all move forward and build on what we have learnt todate, with more confidence,</p>
<p>Re: review - Participant D Hi Participant I, ... Your greatest contribution, the energy determination and fun that built our learning community... Cheers Participant D</p>
<p>Hi Participant F, I felt your postings developed, rather than became more</p>

<p>concise, and your real life personality (positive thoughtful encouraging) came into your virtual online persona.</p> <p>And yes, it is the hot buttons that work, after politeness has faded a bit.</p> <p>Cheers Participant D</p>
<p>'...I am concerned that you can't 'lower your voice' , or 'soften your tone' or 'smile' online - which makes it possible for the other person to mistake your intentions (even with the use of emoticons - there is so much room for error, frustration, hurt).</p>
<p>I really think this thread is going somewhere important.</p> <p>... Sometimes in debate I feel the 'motherless child act' of 'I just don't understand, could you explain it to me again' is soft but sharp enough.</p>
<p><u>Encouragement versus criticism</u> - Participant J</p> <p>I will play the devil's advocate here (as usual). Give feedback----we all did that quite well I think and we grew as we did it. Suggest alternatives to those things we did not do well----this is difficult and very easy to take offence when one does not "know" the person giving the "advice". Much easier to give this advice face to face because we can soften what we say---"the written word" can be a harsh medium. Never the less, I have really enjoyed watching the development of the group and ther way in which we have amalgamated---meeting via thread and meeting in the chat room. Even the occasional email has made us feel closer.</p> <p>It will be sad to finish this Course.</p>
<p>Agree! Diplomacy and tact = courtesy?</p>
<p><u>Diversity as a strength</u> - Participant D –</p> <p>Hi All.</p> <p>I am all for diversity and inclusion, access and equity. I mean I am in education for love, not just money, like the rest of us, I suppose</p>
<p><u>I'm a bad eCitizen!</u> - Participant A</p> <p>I've worked my way through the discussions and was horrified to find that my interaction with my fellow elearners was MINIMAL to say the least!</p> <p>Response</p> <p>Participant A, a responsible reflection and reviewing ones own values (whatever they are) is part of our "head vs heart" balance. You're a valuable eCitizen for our learning community by sharing as you have</p>
<p><u>Review</u> - Participant K –</p> <p>I found that for each of my threads I received an average of 3 responses. I never saw any of my threads blossom into discussion, but this may be due to my posts being generally later than the rest of the group. The E-moderator responded to almost all of my posts.</p>
<p><u>Aaaargghhh - I'm running behind again!</u> - Participant A</p> <p>Hope to post my effort tonight - great reading what you guys have done!</p>
<p><u>Blah, Blah, Blah.</u> - Participant H</p> <p>My posting have been mostly responsive in that a thread was generally well underway when I posted due to restriction of participating after BHs. I tried to support others by being concise with either my support for their point or suggestions for improvement. Responses to my postings were generally concise and helpful - so I assume my responses were evoking salient points. Participant HP</p>

<p>Re: Adult learners - Participant H Couple of things. 1. Types of learners - do we need to write e-learning courses for the different types of learners much as we would present differently between a workshop and a lecture format. 2. Do we need to set a minimum participation rate in the strictly non-technical/science subjects (such as e-moderating) much as we may not offer a certificate to a f2f student who didn't participate in class???</p>
<p>"What a wicked web we weave" - Participant J I just wanted to be first this week, so here I go. I strongly believe that the fact that I have had face to face training experience with groups helps me with "online talking". When I am typing a message to be posted, I feel that I am actually speaking to you all---you see, I see you all perfectly. I have formed a visual image of each and everyone of you. Of course you may not actually be the age that I have given you, or look as I have decided you will, but this helps me to "COMMUNICATE" with you as if I am speak9ing within a face to face group...</p>
<p>'Participant J, like Participant I, I like your visualisation of the participants, and talking to them. I also felt that Participant B's metaphor of "talkign with your fingers" was very powerful, and both address in part the need to develop dialogue online. However, Participant H asked how we compensate for lack of visuals in the communication. Do the emoticons help? Those smiley faces, and other typographical devices ;-). Or should we be open with our feelings and say that we are frustrated, or happy, or whatever?'</p>
<p>Re: 3 weeks in: How does my garden grow? - Participant I 'Hi Participant D, would two days be a bit quick???' Also -2, -1 0 etc , thats a bit "out there" for me, relate better to a scale of 1 to 5, or something similair'</p>

The social interaction aspect of the community comes to the forefront especially when participants engage in talk that is not strictly centred on the week's course activity. The topic of the next sequence is 'how to make soup'.

<p>Re: Mulligatawny Soup the E-participating way - Participant J Thanks you Participant A--I don't think we have spoken before, but I appreciate your positive comments. Here is the Recipe:- Mu;igatawny Soup 2 Tablespoons butter or olive oil 2 stalks celery, chopped 1 carrot, peeled and chopped 1 large onion, peeled and chopped ...etc.</p>
<p>Re: Mulligatawny Soup the E-participating way - Participant A 'Participant J what a good idea - using the making of food to get people to</p>

collaborate and share. Do you see this as an online simulation?’
‘Hi Participant J and Moderator 1, yes, I had a question about the "reality" of the soup . May be I took a too simple approach, but I did have a bit of trouble following the instructions.’
‘ Yes the soup is absolutely real .I have cooked it and it is very tasty. An Irish dish. Lots of lovely different vegies---yum yum.’

8.2.6 Week Five: Interpersonal Discourse Behaviours

One very noticeable aspect in this week’s messages is the increase of ‘I’ words. As the participants approach the end of their journey, they need to establish some sort of ‘closure’ for themselves. Therefore, the category of analysis of these posts is ‘**interpersonal discourse behaviours**’. Most messages are a mix of personal reflection, but reference to the concept of ‘community’ is always present. The messages contain:

- words of praise from one participant to another or towards the community at large;
- suggestions for further development;
- quotes to make the journey more memorable;
- personal goodbyes to the moderator;
- culture-specific register;
- some humorous topic lines to highlight ‘dramatic’ ending of community life.

The International Community

Each week I sow seeds which are what I heard and learned Participant

Japan

I saw some stopped growing in a different environment, some grew healthily and some seemed eaten up by birds.

In week 4, especially in group discussion on networking, the seed in the Blue garden grew very rapidly and greatly and I appreciate beautiful flowers blooming: they have been taken good care of all the dedicated discussion leader and contributors. How nice to participate gardening together with reliable people!!

Participant Japan:

I am glad to know that you sense something in my posting, K. and M. You made me feel worthwhile to attend as an international participant.

I am sincerely grateful to all for making this learning experience rewarded.

So, where to go from here? What to add to the development plan?

I think I'll try putting the acquired skills into practice asap. Now that I have a yardstick, I'll attempt to assess my own skills in another context and work from there. At the end of this course, I know where to start.

My expectations and the beginning of the course were to learn as much as possible about on line learning, this is still going to be an ongoing thing for me, although it has been very difficult to participate with limited access, **I have learnt so much from you all**, I would very much like to do more online course but I now know the importance of having access at home to a computer and to be able to log on at different times of the day and night, this is a must to truly participate in any online course, you can't do this of the side of your desk! Its been an experience that I will be building on.

I agree with K. L.'s point of not being able to believe the course is just finished when it feels like its just beginning to take shape and I'm becoming more confident in what I'm supposed to be doing!

I also agree that "we all had a common goal, and all this without leaving the comfort of our PC." I do think this course has introduced us to some old and some new topics and its been interesting!

I can't beleive its time for 'final thoughts' I feel I have only just started this and now we have finished.

Week 5 has putting it all together. Thinking about what has been productive, what worked and what maybe didn't, also what we learnt the most from.

Cheers

Well I feel a bit flat knowing its all coming to an end. :-)

I have thoroughly enjoyed the course and have learnt so much. ;-)

Time flies like a Concord...

During these busy, noisy and lively five weeks, I learned a lot from all the contributions. Especially in Stage 4 and 5, I could sense the vital essence of online learning and my insight is you can reserve what you dedicate.

Finally I could see the whole picture.

I'm already missing red flags when opening computer in the morning.

Thank you very much!!

Arigatou gozaimashita! m(_ _)m <--I am bowing my thanks.

The spirit of the group pushed and pulled the wagon making sure it didn't get stuck in the mud?!!

The Australian Community

<p><u>Reflections as we near a farewell</u> - Participant J I have found this an interesting journey. I have found that my fingernails get in the way far too much, causing misspelt words. I have found the chats with others rewarding... Thank you all for your encouragement.</p>
<p><u>Re: Reflections as we near a farewell</u> - Participant D Hi Participant J, nice to have shared the journey. I see you are an early riser! I believe that the world needs more e-moderators. Well done, Participant D</p>
<p><u>This Course</u> - Participant H This Course - my first serious on-line foray has scared me, frustrated me and finally shown me a new path to knowledge and learning. I've used this style of course in f2f but had ultimate control of the environment. The biggest difference here is that I will have to "feel" the tempo of the group and "clarify" their contributions before I can move on. I feel that I have a little toe hold at Mt. Everest Base Camp and a long way to go. Thanks to All - Participant H</p>
<p><u>Never mind the teaching - feel the learning! apologies to Phil Race</u> - Participant A As I post my final reflection - all I can think of is the title of the book written by Phil Race. This experience has been transformative for me in terms of the learning that has taken place... I feel nostalgic... Thank you one and all.</p>
<p><u>But you can't leave me now, after all we've been through</u> - Participant D Much of my final reflection is centred on what I have gained in a learning community. People, virtual friends really, fellow pilgrims along the e-learning road. I learnt we can make the transition from new to confident through a simple but-good-enough technology.</p>
<p><u>Re:ahhhh...., yes,.... to reflect !!!</u> - Participant K well done Participant I! Thanks for providing us with some comic relief!! How can I contact you on skype? you can search for me under Participant K_goodlet</p>
<p><u>I,m late, I'm late for a very important date.</u> - Participant J Farewell everyone. I'm not sure I was ever here! Was I? Can someone tell me? Fogive me, it is early a.m. 5.43am to be exact. MY conscience would not allow me to sleep. I knew I should finish this. My work is never done. I have enjoyed your Company---everyone. Archer kids, I might drop in and meet you one day soon.</p>
<p><u>Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened - Dr. Seus</u> - Participant A It's been a rollicking 3 weeks - I've enjoyed every minute of it - thank you for your company. My digi-gift - if you've got 10 minutes, watch this – fact merging into future fiction...</p>
<p><u>...and as the sun sinks slowly in the west....</u> - Participant I thanks for the memory..... cheers and blessings, Participant I</p>
<p><u>Good Night My friends we shall meet again</u> - Participant E I probably covered most of my thoughts in my reflections but once again thankyou for being great class mates and helping me through the futureistic journey.</p>

9. FOCUS GROUPS ACTIVITIES

Week Three witnessed an important event in both communities: the creation of focus groups. These are smaller groups involved in activities in which the participants, after having chosen which one to belong to, worked on exchanging information about the ‘meaning of collaboration and networking’. This activity is within Stage 5 of Salmon’s developmental model: Information Exchange to Facilitate Knowledge Construction.

9.1 The Australian Red Group: Interpersonal Discourse Behaviours

This message exchange is a reflection on the entire week. It seems easier for the participant to open up to smaller group work and show mutual interest.

<p><u>Drawing it all together (section 3 of week 3), probing & challenging</u> - participant D Hi all, So what went wrong, or is it OK? Candidly it was all our own work, or perhaps just one or two's work, depending on your view. Why is it so hard to start up, and did the 'need to make progress' through the week act to exclude people? Indeed, is my moving on now, with one eye on the clock, just another example of not waiting long enough to get "buyin". Lets analyse, question (politely) and see what we can learn from the collaboration</p>	<p>Showing convergence; offering feedback</p>
<p><u>Re: coollabutraratinnng, a weave,</u> - Participant J You know what I think Participant D----I think this is a Participant D/Participant I conversation/collaberation, so how about you summarise. I certainly have not felt part of this section at all. Not sure why, but that's it in a nutshell. Perhaps it is just not a good day for me---funerals do that to one don't they?</p>	<p>Counterpointing: face management through expressions of frustration/disappointment.</p>
<p><u>Re: 2 Why do people look around before joining a group?</u> - Participant D Hi Participant I Participant K and anyone out there</p>	<p>Showing group concern: encouraging others to cooperate by setting goals and time frame.</p>

<p>Lets get a forum thread set up with SMART goals these steps are offered as a starter, not the last word. Specific: let us start with how to start a group, what do we know?... Timeframed: lets aim to summarise by say Wednesday at 9pm and move to the next logical direction</p>	
<p><u>coollabutaratinnng , cant type , cant spell</u>, - Participant I However you spell it, it still means getting together on line, not sure how that really works, with different time zones and work loads... Looking at the icons on the left of my screen there are 5 of us logged in at the moment, but I cant "see" anyone??? any comments???</p>	<p>Small group activity highlights the problem of collaboration;</p>
<p><u>Re: Drawing it all together (section 3 of week 3), probing & challenging</u> - Participant J Did we probe and did we collaborate? I think I failed to make the mix (my fault), but you did well Participant D and I thank you for it (and Participant I also).</p>	
<p><u>Re: Drawing it all together (section 3 of week 3), probing & challenging</u> - Participant D Hi Participant J, What we did in the last section was experience the frustration of getting some traction in forming a voluntary online group...And personal stuff is often harder to acknowledge online.</p>	

9.2 The Australian Blue Group

In discussing role-taking and common purpose within the community, this participant is more sceptical about group formation and comes to the following conclusion.

<p><u>Re: A common purpose or a shared outcome</u> - Participant B I suppose our common purpose here is to survive this e-tivity ;-) Each e-tivity in this course has had a statement describing its purpose. In the online collaboration I have been involved with, it has been about getting an assessment task done - so yes a common purpose will help draw people together so they can collaborate. It also depends, I suppose, on if the group is assessed on how effectively they collaborate....</p>

In an interactive exchange of opinions, this next participant expresses the need to feel part of the group and is therefore expressing concern in establishing an online presence.

Re: Learning community discussions - Participant F
Hi Participant C
my biggest challenge has been keeping up with all the threads too, a bit like handling jelly. As soon as reply titles are changed to a thread, I find it more difficult to stay focused. I think we should develop some guidelines about how to respond to a topic. Your reference to "focused debate" do you mean several discussions around a single topic at a time perhaps?

The messages below show the depth of 'group awareness' that the participants have come to acquire while investigating the meaning of community.

Community of learning - Participant A
... Specific roles of group members have not been assigned but are emerging from the interaction of the whole group. Feedback anyone?
In response
Re: Community of learning - Participant B
The roles thing is interesting Participant A...
I know that groups are more likely to 'get on with it' (doing the assessment task) when they have a defined role/responsibility to play in the group. Its like they know how they have to behave within the online environment, as they can work within the boundary of the role...
Perhaps we already know how 'to behave' through our previous e-tivity experiences?

This participant sparks the discussion by focusing on the subject of 'community interactivity', and provides guidance for the rest of the community.

Collaboration versus interactivity - Participant A
What does interactivity mean and what does collaboration mean? Are they necessarily similar or does the one contribute to the other? For instance - would you say interactivity in a communication process is the degree to which each message is related to the previous messages exchanged? If so, there could be four levels of interactivity:
- Non-Interactive - when a message is not related to previous messages (like starting a new thread)
-Reactive - when a message is related to only one immediate previous message
-Interactive - when a message is related to a number of previous messages and to the relationship between them
- and then there's Weaving when you synthesise the knowledge of a number of messages and create a new bit of knowledge

On the other hand - collaboration (where all of the above occur) could lessen the feeling of isolation and contribute to a sense of a learning community. So is collaboration more about the overarching results of interactivity? Keen to hear your thoughts.

Identifying with other members in terms of interacting like a real-life community of people whose purpose is to acquire skills of the trade is the main activity and subject of discussion of this next sequence. The participants question the meaning of 'community' in an attempt to establish purpose and role within the group. This is how they perceive themselves.

Learning community discussions - Participant C

I've been interested to read your discussions, and concerned that in building a **learning community amongst ourselves** that we retain the flexibility of interaction that elearning promises... I think we are **a community of learners** at this stage anyway, as we have insufficient expertise most of us, to yet be a community of practice in emoderating. However with more skills and practice that opportunity exists for the future.

re: Learning community discussions - Participant B

thanks for your post Participant C - your clarification of **the community of practice/community of learners** helped me understand the difference. When you say 'focussed debate' are you meaning not online?

Community of learning - Participant A

Could I throw in my 5 cents worth? I think that we are probably **a community of learners**. I take Participant F's point that we (the group) have **similar backgrounds** but I think the greatest similarity may be the fact that we are all elearners in an emoderating course online...

Re: collaborating online -first thoughts - Participant C

I agree Participant B, collaboration is a team effort and I am a great believer of creating a repository to contain documents. We need to capture summaries of our discussions for others to share. Does this now make us **a Community of Practice or Knowledge ?**

This last message shows how the group slowly acquired enough awareness of what working as an online group actually entails, so much so that the participant questions whether it is a community of practice or knowledge.

This series of exchanges is quite interesting as it poses the question of 'special language' to be used in an online environment linked to the idea of 'immediacy' in communication and notification.

<p><u>Re: Improving participation - email notification</u> - Participant B A question for you Participant F. You mentioned 'perceived urgency' with immediate notification in your post. Why only 'perceived'?</p> <p>Response:</p> <p><u>Re: Improving participation - email notification</u> - Participant F The rate and speed of technology (sms/emails e.g.) tends to attract an immediate response (creating a sense of urgency) unlike 'snail mail' but we can choose to ignore the notifications too.</p> <p><u>Re: Improving participation - email notification</u> - Participant F ... Participant A do you feel they have developed a written language all of their own too - quite an interesting culture has grown from all of this.</p>
--

A very significant thread was generated by this focus group, and many group members agreed on the issue under discussion. They entitled the turn sequence 'establishing group guidelines'. Establishing norms is dictated by the group's concern to limit inappropriate behaviour in mimicking societal rules existing in any face-to-face community.

<p><u>establishing group guidelines</u> - Participant B Participant H wrote about online learning that participants need to be "committed to participating in the thread, relate our experiences - not just our feelings, play devils advocate when required and support feeling, theories and experiences when they 'move' us." One of the ways that this commitment can be developed is by working with the new group to establish a set of guidelines for their behaviour online.</p> <p><u>Re: establishing group guidelines</u> - Participant C Participant B re: establishing group guidelines, May I support this by sharing with you all that I am having difficulty following these discussions... What are your thoughts on obtaining some consensus on our method of responding to a topic? Especially if a summary is expected at the end of all the discussions.</p> <p><u>Working Together</u> - Participant H Collaborate - "to work together and cooperate on a project". I'm not sure I agree with Participant B that we need to be together. We need to be organised, but in e-learning, I think that it primarily means that we need to be committed to participating in the thread..'</p>
--

9.3 The International Red Group: Interpersonal Discourse

Behaviours

Rather than the earlier manifestations of concern that dealt mainly with ‘getting around the system’, the main issue discussed within this focus group activity is ‘knowledge sharing’.

‘**There is one aspect that I'm still quite unclear about**, even after reading the messages. Results are closely linked to '**assessment**'. How does this sticky issue fit in with online networking? Should it be progressive and ongoing (built in the e-tivities) or at the beginning and end of course (before and after evaluation)?’

In this sequence of messages, the group asks for community help and professional advice.

Hi guys. I **need to pick your brains** again. Is moderating an online course, such as this one, different from moderating a forum which is part of a larger course. HEEEEELP!

‘What I would like to know from my group is their opinion on the differences between traditional face to face teaching and online teaching. What is gained and what is lost...’

The topic in this next sequence is ‘networking’, one of the most important skills for a moderator to possess for online teaching.

1.
‘...Teresa's comment brings up 3 key ideas of networking:
"Participants need to be motivated to participate in the net and committed to achieving a result.."
2.
I now feel that:
‘...Networking can develop into a valuable learning opportunity if the majority of participants are willing to share their views.’
3.
Does networking create the potential to learn or build knowledge? How might this happen? Give some examples to support your response.
4.
M. raises some interesting points in regards to networking, she says
Networking
creates potential for learning and encourages knowledge building

5.

T. writes

In order to benefit from the work in a netgroup, one has to:

- *know and use the basic principles of networking;*
- *act in a very structured way.*

6.

In conclusion, you can see from the following comments networking needs to be two way, where participants can give and receive information. The participants needs to be willing to share their experiences and information and if successful networking can increase confidence and efficiency in an online environment.

The following turn sequence is focused on friendship building by straying from the set 'task', as was the case for the Australian Community.

'Hello everyone, Here's a **conundrum** :-) What made you smile today?'

Response

'This, in fact it made me laugh,'

Response

'What a great question T. What made me smile today, thankfully heaps :-)'

Response

How happy I am! Can you hear the music .. to be singing in the rain ...

9.4 The International Blue Group: Interpersonal Discourse

Behaviours

The most significant activity in the interaction of The Blue Group is the exchange between the Japanese participant and participant Dublin 2 who always contribute culture-specific information. Other exchanges are about 'auras', 'socializing', and holidays, which are also 'beyond-task' topics.

I'm into all this spiritual stuff so can I try and explain a little about **auras**?
Have you ever walked into a room and felt uncomfortable or stood next to someone and taken two steps backwards cos you felt they were too close to you?

I would like some information on Italy. It appears many of you have holidayed there (I have too many balls and chains around my legs to travel so far abroad at the moment). Can you tell me what the biggest draw card is for you, and the highlight of your experinces in Italy.

Response

I travelled to Italy this year on Holidays, the biggest draw for us essentially was there were 5 of us (all girls about 22 -24) and wanted somewhere to go relax and get away from the pressures over here, plus most of us are teachers / lecturers and had just broke for the summer! Italy was suggested by a friend of ours, as she had been there the previous summer!

Hi Dublin-san,
Thanks for your reply and interest in the book.
I am sorry I need to have one clarification.
Dr. Hineman distinguishes hackers from crackers and we both agree the latter one should be tackled with.

Hi Dublin-san,
I thank you for what you have been done for us.
You've devoted significant time and effort to fostering our learning.

Hello Japan-san!
It has taken me a couple of days to respond to your message regarding Linux as an example of networking because I had to do a bit of finding out about the topic :-)

Hi Dublin-san and other group members,

'Hi all the Blue group members!
I felt comfortable here and **enjoyed socialization** and discussion a lot.
It just can't be said enough to express my gratitude.
Thanks for brightening my days. Why not making up a business trip to Japan and come to see my school around sakura season!!
I'm gonna miss you.

10. INTERACTIONAL PROCESSES: CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS

'True interactivity is not about clicking on icons or downloading files, it's about encouraging communication'

(Edwin Schlossberg, 2002)

Conversational Analysis studies the nature of turn-taking, how it is organized and how participants accomplish sequencing of talk (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, 1974, p.696). In their online version, features of conversation take on a different form, and the phenomenon of reciprocity of messages is known as 'quoting' and 'linking'.

Unlike spoken conversation, where turn-taking has been found to follow well-established rules, CMC is dependent on completely different criteria. In a single thread, a turn may come between a comment to a particular person and their response, thus creating more than one response to a given message. Usually, one cannot be sure that one's turn, in response to a previous message, arrives to the list or conference right after the original message. For this and for many other reasons, turn taking in asynchronous online communication is said to be mainly defined by the medium itself.

The interactional and communicative processes under investigation in this study are quoting, linking and participation style, and this last feature is defined by the subcategories of

- number of posted messages;
- role-taking and reciprocity;
- message length.

10.1 Online Turn-taking

Online discussions can be far more complex than face-to-face conversations, mainly because in a single thread there may also be various sub-threads that are simultaneously evolving. As Schiffirin states,

'...each utterance in a sequence is shaped by a prior context and provide a context for the next utterance...', making it necessary to anchor moves in a discussion to previous moves (Schiffrin, 1994, p.235). Conferencing software allows you to do this by 'quoting' text from a previous message, so that the receiver can then contextualize a given response. This creates a form of lexical cohesion and provides '...the points of contact with what has gone before ' (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.299). The quoted text is included in alphanumeric signs, also known as chevrons (>...>), and in some conferencing software, it may be displayed in a different colour.

Example:

```
> As you know, clicking on Help gives you three choices,  
>'Content', 'About the Window' and 'About First Class' ...  
> Can someone tell me how to go about it, please.  
>Thank you  
>Joe<
```

In chevron quoting, the text tends to be long, and can include an entire message. For shorter extracts of text, inverted commas are most commonly used, as a particular part of the text can be selected from a previous message and simply copied into the new message.

Teresa's comment brings up 3 key ideas of networking:
"Participants need to be motivated to participate in the net and committed to achieving a result.."
(example: participant from the International community)

As Daly points out, conferencing software, '...by including opportunities for freely quoting earlier text when replying, for editing those quotes, and for inserting replies/responses within the quoted text, also encourage a conversational, turn taking style...' (Daly, 1996). This

ability to quote is what makes it possible for long discussions to be carried out by e-mail and the intertextuality, which is specific to the medium of CMC, influences the way the discussion is carried out – a single move by one participant can respond to different parts of a previous move, or to more than one move at a time, by selecting what he or she is responding to and quoting it in a message.

Receiving multiple answers to a message can occur at different times and can create confusion in the understanding of the thread itself. Hence, **summarizing and weaving** techniques can also be considered as procedures for quoting, mainly because these skills allow the participants to preserve the coherence of the discussion thread and its content. Due to the phenomenon known as ‘netlag’, which is the term that describes the event of reading answers to a message that was written perhaps twenty-four hours before, it is quite easy to miss the core of the original message and drop out of the discussions.

Linking also enables the participants to follow the discussion. It is a way of responding to the previous message by writing **RE** in the subject line. In the absence of physical paralinguistic clues that indicate whether a turn is at its end or not, repeating the subject line at the beginning of each message is one of the rules that govern turn-taking sequences.

Thus, explicitness of connections between contributions provides a measure for the extent of community formation in an online discussion. The use of direct quoting is a sign of the awareness of contributors as a group of listeners interested in the thread.

The following messages are some samples selected from both communities.

Quoting: complete or semi complete messages using chevrons from the IC

Joe Mannion writes: >Help, >

>I feel rather stupid but I can't find anything about red flags in the
>help file. ... Exploring these I
>can find nothing about Red Flags but I know there must be a simple way of
>getting the information.
>Thank you
>Joe
Hi Joe,

I feel exactly the same as you do and spent ages this afternoon trying to figure it out. If you manage to find it would you let me know, I will keep trying and get back to you if I succeed.

Bye,
Mabel

(reiteration of questions within the quote and colour coding)
Hi well done Masaki and Jenny, I have answers similar to yours,
1. What are the red flags for and how can you get rid of them?
red flags show unread mail or mail you have read but would like to "flag" as unread (perhaps important mail to come back to)

2. What do you do when you want to reply to a message in a conference but do not want everyone else, other than the sender, to read it?
Reply to sender, 4th icon from the left, text message at the bottom of the window also tells what each icon does

3. How do you send attachments to messages? Are they a good idea?
Just go to the 6 icon attach file. Not usually a good idea, can clog emails and systems up

Just looking back over the last few weeks and I think you're doing a great job of putting these theories into practice Val!

- Help to decide purpose
V. to M. :It's interesting, isn't it re leader, is one going to emerge?
- Give feedback
V. to K. L. : never mind where it came from it works well
- Respond to questions
when kim asked V. was she right in posting responses: Hi K. yes, you're right, this is where you post your responses to e-tivity 3.2

Quoting lines from previous message

establishing group guidelines - Participant B
Participant H wrote about online learning that participants need to be "committed to participating in the thread, relate our experiences - not just our feelings, play devils advocate when required and support feeling, theories and experiences when they 'move' us."

K. P. writes:
where I am currently preparing to run my first online unit as a pilot. Cant wait.

Hi K. great!!! it will be interesting to know how it goes.

S. M. writes:

On top of that, have been asked to give a workshop on e-moderating skills!
However, I might tactfully delay that until I have learnt a bit more! Although, it is said that as you teach, you learn.

Go For it S., you can do it !!

Linking

Dr. Who - Participant A

Anybody else hanging out for the new Dr. Who series on the ABC?

Re: Dr. Who - Participant J

Not me----who is Dr Who?

Re: Dr. Who - Participant I

Dr Who????, Hi Participant A, have not followed it for many years, but am old enough (probably not wise enough but.....) to remember the very first episode airing on TV, yes, black and white, ...

Re: Dr. Who - Participant F

I am excited about this too, it reminds me of my childhood and growing up with the Doc(s).

Re: Dr. Who - Moderator 1

Hi Participant A, I remember Dr Who from the 60s, ... The new series looks pretty good, I am going to watch it. ...

(original message)

Hi I would like to invite you to be online on Thursday evening at 10-00 pm GMT for a chat. I realise that it will not be convenient for all of you but if it works well we could arrange another chat on a different day and time.

- From: J. C.

Unfortunatly I wont be able to attend that chat time! But good idea!

- Hi,

Sent this message a couple of minutes ago but it didn't appear on the screen, must have clicked the wrong button, sorry.

Will be there,

M.

- V., I'll try to be there.

M.

- Hi V.,

Would love to join you all but that will be 2am Friday morning for me! Maybe next time.

In the meantime, I will post my thoughts about the topic in the Red Group, under CHAT TOPIC

S.

- **J. C. writes:**

Unfortunatly I wont be able to attend that chat time! But good idea!

Hopefully next time, thanks for letting me know.

V.

Summarizing/weaving

<p>Re: coollabutraratinnng, a weave, - Participant D Hi all, especially Participant I, Participant K and Participant J Here is what I think has happened so far. Participant I posted and feels collaborating is the topic. Right on brother... This brought in Participant K who felt 'Guilty as Charged' leaving the course on in the background, not really lurking at all, and wondered how to make the chat room work... Participant J saw the buzz and wondered about who to join? So it looks like starting is a real problem... Maybe we do need something like Participant D's second posting of SMART goals. ...Cheers Participant D</p>
<p>In the previous activity I think I may have summerised instead of weaving. Here now is my summary. T. G. writes: after a while we all felt a bit lost: we didn_t know which comments answer first. S. M. writes: The overwhelming feeling we had was one of neglect when no-one responded to our messages M. K. writes: We four were equally very busy posting and rushing back and forth in a quiet room...</p>

10.2 Participation Network: Message Length and Style

Other physical properties of messaging systems that shape language use include limits on message size, the persistence of the text, the categories of communication commands that the system makes available, and the ease with which a system allows users to incorporate portions of previous messages in their responses.

With respect to the length of communicative acts, brevity manifests itself in speaking turns of very short length, in various forms of abbreviation, and in the use of stored linguistic formulas. Differently from synchronous communication, however, where brevity is also a sign of gaining attention and answering quickly, the messages of asynchronous communication may be of varying lengths. Speakers are not competing for attention as much as they are in synchronous communication.

With respect to abbreviations, language in asynchronous communication is not heavily abbreviated. However, it does present syntactically-reduced forms, the use of acronyms and symbols, the clipping of words, and various other strategies, which function to reduce the time and effort necessary to communicate. Features of abbreviation hasten the speed with which messages can be exchanged, making the pace more like face-to-face conversation.

The selected messages show that length varied on a continuum that stretched from one-word messages to whole narrative exchanges, reaching approximately 400 words.

The length also varied according to topic involvement and task. Generally speaking, shorter messages are signifiers of ‘reluctance to come out in the open’, ‘fastidiousness’, and ‘disinterest’, while particularly longer messages can signify the participant’s attempt to ‘find a personal voice’ and style, or an unconscious attitude of ‘dominating’ others, probably trying to replicate their face-to-face interactions.

domenica 13 ottobre 2002 3.21.19 E-tivity 1.4 10/02 From: Masako Kawatsu Subject: Masako's experience and expectations To: E-tivity 1.4 10/02 Hi everyone, This is Masako from Tokyo. Last November, we created a math digital content on HP for 6th grade students. Its aim is to help students grasp the notion of figures by moving three dimensional graphics as a supplementary material to face-to-face classes and a textbook... For this course, my expectations are to know how the real learning takes place online through communications/collaborations/reflections... I am sorry that I think I haven't distilled the insights enough from the book. This course is for higher education with a broad cultural backgrounds so that it shall be more exciting to collaborate. (268 words)
Bravo! T. (1 word)

Well I feel a bit flat knowing its all coming to an end. :-((14 words)																																																		
<u>Re: participate or perish</u> - Participant I	Amen, sister,	One-word + addressee																																																
<u>Re: view from my office</u> - Participant I	Participant G, Participant I is the name , Sydney is the place, and I have no view at all.	Short, marked sentences; 16words																																																
<u>re: Re: Group size</u> - Participant B	Dear Red Baron, I suppose online collaboration can be both small group work on focussed projects and larger discussions for knowledge construction.	Letter style message addressed to his/her group to show humour; 22 words																																																
<u>Diversity as a strength</u> - Participant D	Hi All. I am all for diversity and inclusion, access and equity. I mean I am in education for love, not just money, like the rest of us, I suppose....., and perhaps this is not the forum (or is it the time frame being so short) to challenge. Participant D	answer to an activity; 337 words																																																
<u>Count the posts</u> - Participant B	I have a quantitative mind so I have created this table (hope it works) enumerating my contributions over the first three weeks, indicating how often I have started a thread, continued the thread, or was the last post in the thread. I have also calculated my percentage of contributions in each week. <table border="1" data-bbox="571 1348 1093 1827"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="6">Week 1</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Total</th> <th>Start</th> <th>Middle</th> <th>Last</th> <th>Total DQ</th> <th>%</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>29</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> <td>4</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>48</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>51</td> <td>2</td> <td>3</td> <td>0</td> <td>5</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>44</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>3</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>43</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>215</td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> <td>4</td> <td>16</td> <td>7.4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Week 1						Total	Start	Middle	Last	Total DQ	%	29	1	2	1	4		48	1	0	1	2		51	2	3	0	5		44	1	1	1	3		43	1	0	1	2		215	6	6	4	16	7.4%	Answer with table; participant takes advantage of communication properties of the computer software; 92words
Week 1																																																		
Total	Start	Middle	Last	Total DQ	%																																													
29	1	2	1	4																																														
48	1	0	1	2																																														
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215	6	6	4	16	7.4%																																													
<u>Re: Blue Summary</u> - Participant F - Participant	1) "Listen" to each other 2) Work "together" on a joint project 3) Be clear about what the project is	List; 24 words																																																

J	4) Co-operate with each other	
<u>Being a better finisher</u> - Participant B - Wed, 1 Jun 2005, 00:33	My development needs: to be a better collaborator – and not just talk about it... Development objective: Strategy: Actions: Evaluation:	Action plan activity; 229 words
Re: Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened - Dr. Seuss -	XXXXXX	Signs in place of words.

11. CONCLUSION

Online Virtual Communities have existed on the Internet for almost a quarter of a century. The Usenet newsgroups that started in 1979 and the WELL, started in 1985, are regarded as the first of these. Today, community sites are one of the fastest growing categories of websites, with thousands of organizations and institutions wishing to tap into their enormous potential for information sharing and social interaction.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the term ‘online community’ has taken on many definitions, but the general consensus seems to agree on the fact that community refers to a group of people ‘with common interests and practices, that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet, through a common location or mechanism’ (Ridings et al., 2002, p.273). It is this definition that is used in the present research study to illustrate *how* a group of people can establish a network of interpersonal ties and exhibit behaviours that have traditionally characterized the presence of community offline.

This final section complements the data analysis already presented in the previous chapters, but with the specific aim of focusing on the research questions that have guided the study. For a clearer understanding of the phenomena under investigation, the coding categories and the corresponding issues of interest are summarized in Table 23.

Table 23 Coding Categories of Discourse Behaviours and Issues Explored

	Language	Phenomena Type	Subcategories	Issues Explored
		Pronouns	pronouns and specific community reference words;	reference to group: in/out group language; emphasis of importance of issue: me or them or us; signifier of sense community or group vs. individual developing over time;
INFORMATIONAL DOMINION	I - Structure	Grammar /Syntax	omission of function words; fewer subordinate clauses;	efficiency of time employed in writing message; personal expression/style; features of hybrid texts: written-to-be-spoken; demonstrate the ability of users to adapt the computer medium to their expressive needs;
		Typography	punctuation (omission, use of) capitalization;	efficiency of time employed in writing message; economy of effort; personal expression/style; features of orality; underscores relevance of message part/s;
		Orthography (Unconventional use)	abbreviations ; contractions ; (mis)spelling ; typos ;	efficiency of time employed in writing message; personal expression/style; unconventional orthography= prosody, laughter;
		Compensatory Strategies	emoticons;	expressivity = facial expression, physical actions =features of orality;
		Questions	question tags and wh-questions;	a way of showing interest in one another; introduce a new topic, start a discussion; prepare ground for answer;
		Verbs	use of specific verb tenses;	convey sense of time within a virtual time scale in which time is overlapped; express specific intentions of speaker (speech acts);
		Subject Lines	topic setting;	relevance of discussion; coherence between postings;

	II - Social behaviour	Linguistic Variation/Use;	markers of individual differences and commonalities; biographical information culture; word choice; jargon;	participant demographics; personality; (presentation upon entrance) cross-cultural diversity (indexed through the use of group-specific abbreviations, jargon, and language routines; choice of language, register and dialect); expressivity; mimic features of orality; sense of belonging to a group defined by language, interest, etc., personal expression/style; mutual acknowledgement of belonging to a group identified by language variety, location, age, sophistication of language level/use, interests (profile);
		Information Exchanges	global knowledge and solutions; ideas and opinions; personal narratives;	a way of showing interest in one another; showing mutual influence; establishing online presence; establishing presence/significance, sense of belonging;
INTERPERSONAL DOMINION		Interpersonal Discourse Behaviours	agree, disagree, counterpoint; acknowledge, thank; ask for information invite feedback; offer advice, sympathize; delegate work to the group; volunteer; joke, tease, apologize; negotiate conflict;	showing divergence or convergence; signifiers of community partnerships; vocation / avocation; friendship building;
			express social behaviour: support/solidarity express norms and values;	measured through verbal humour; measured through speech act analysis focusing on acts of positive politeness; revealed through an examination of netiquette statements and verbal reactions to violations of appropriate conduct;
		Establishing Online Identity	self- representation;	finding a personal voice through message style /formal and informal register, etc. synthesize = need to support group by providing review of group activity using concerns structures: shows relevance of what is said: 'what is important', 'what it boils down to...';

			face-management;	expressions of assertiveness, aggression, politeness, flaming; expressions of humour, disappointment, sarcasm, confusion, feeling of loss and frustration; dominance; expressing personal needs: marked polarity: 'please help', 'I would like'; expressing positive polarity: no question about his position (disagreeing with a positive account is face-threatening); use of moralization (Halliday);
			community-group representation;	expressions of: identification/perception of themselves in relation to other members; motivation, task/purpose straying from task for socialization purposes friendship purposes (engage in small talk);
IINTERACTI ONAL DOMINI ON	III- Inter-acti on and participati on	Turn Sequences Concerns Structures	turn taking cross-turn coherence linking/quoting	wide gaps between messages: unlike spoken conversation with the rule of no gaps - no overlap; degree of willingness to respond actively to group dynamics; effort of being coherent; respecting timing in responding; referring explicitly to the content of a previous message in one's response: mimics <i>initiation-response</i> ; creates the illusion of adjacency because it incorporates and juxtaposes (portions of) 2 turns within a single message creating an idea of an extended conversational exchange. <i>theme and rheme- theme is not from author who is writing but from a previous author (authorship)</i>

		Participation	no. of messages engagement: minimum, regular, frequent	power; influence
			typology of roles	lurker; returning drop-out; stable participant; dominant participant
			reciprocity (interactive patterns and styles) message and thread length	non- reciprocal; reciprocal lists / bullet points / narratives

11.1 Cultural Diversity

The communities in this study present both similarities and differences. The similarities are to be identified in course aspects such as

- group size;
- training purpose;
- presence of an e-moderator;
- topics discussed off-task;
- participant goals and expectations;
- online behaviours and message styles.

The demographic composition of the group, with participants from Australia, England, Ireland, Italy, Japan, and Spain, is the main difference that distinctly characterizes the International Community, and specifically accounts for the display of the culturally different interactional patterns and discourse behaviours. For example, the content of the messages and the use of unfamiliar terminology or graphic conventions, sometimes needed special attention on the part of the moderator, due to the confusion that they generated in the Japanese participant. Similarly, the use of face-management strategies had to be adopted when conflict situations occurred, and the other members of the Community were called upon to offer encouragement and praise in order to sustain the participant's motivational drive. This also explains the stronger presence of the International e-moderator, as shown by the higher percentage rates reported in Chapter Five.

On the other hand, the Japanese participant also stirred interest among the other members of the group, who soon became interested in sharing the curiosity in cross-cultural differences related to aspects such as the weather in other countries, the geographic details, the nature of the inhabitants, and so on.

11.2 Evidence of Community Formation Through Use of Language

Structure

The analysis of structural linguistic data from the corpus of study answered the research questions related to the role of language in supporting the formation of community identity and membership. Community oriented behaviour was mainly evidenced through the use of structural items that represented compensatory strategies for the lack of physical contact, and were therefore substitutes for actions, gestures, expressions and features of orality, which would normally support communication in an offline scenario.

Data show that the use of **pronouns and lexical items that indicate both 'I' words and 'We' words**, were both initially used in equal measure, but 'social' words that indicate assimilation into community membership, increased gradually. The informal register of the postings, with its hybrid nature of 'written-to-be-spoken texts, realized in the **unconventional use of grammar and syntax**, further added to the participants' desire to develop a community-friendly style for all those involved in the communicative event.

The ability of users to adapt to the computer medium in an effort to mimic friendly and personal spoken discourse features, was shown by the extensive use of the **features of typography, orthography and prosody**. These devices were used to attract attention in order to compensate for expressions of sarcasm, sadness, happiness and others, that are normally conveyed by tone of voice, pitch, stress, etc.

Community convergence and concern for the participants' level of 'learning' was also shown by the use of **questions and question tags**, and by the **nature of the subject lines**. Asking questions is evidence of how participants took interest in one another, and it was through questions that participants introduced topics and started discussions for knowledge sharing. The clarity or force of the subject lines, at times interspersed with some humorous characteristics, conveyed the relevance

of discussion and coherence between postings, thus favouring relationships among the members whose shared purpose and intention for the online environment was mostly to discuss the role of e-moderators in educational settings.

11.3 Evidence of Community Formation Through Social Processes

People bring their identities and life experiences to online interactions and this is clearly visible by analyzing the linguistic behaviours within the **Informational, Interpersonal and Interactional** dominions. The data collected from these dominions show that one of the most community-oriented behaviours manifested by participants was the need to **exchange information**. As the literature suggests, in virtual communities what makes access to information so special is the fact that they provide content that is member-generated, shared by relationships with strangers who have established effective ‘weak ties’, and who can provide and request information, express feelings and views, and suggest solutions with a greater amount of freedom than in an offline scenario (Herring, 1996; Wellman et al., 1996). However, as argued below, the kind of information that was actually shared by participants went beyond topic-specific content. Participants often felt the urge to ‘go off task’ to exchange pleasantries, personal narratives, expectations, and geographic information.

The feature of **Linguistic Variation and Use** shows how the participants in both communities enjoyed posting specific jargon words belonging to their cultural background, or created new words by playing with the language. Assimilation to group membership is shown through this kind of behaviour, strengthened by the revelation of personal information and willingness to create an online identity or personae. Also, expressivity through mimicking features of orality helped to create an informal and ‘safe’ atmosphere especially at the beginning of the interactions when most participants were feeling uncomfortable.

The **formation of online personae** through behaviours that exhibit self-expression with an outlook on community concerns, was shown by the way participants used politeness strategies to exchange opinions, ideas, and past experiences, with the added significance of the frequent exchange of biographical information. They also provided knowledge and solutions to problems that ranged from technical difficulties to personal difficulties dealing with the online environment. In doing so, the participants established interest in one another, supporting the sense of belonging that is at the heart of any community, whether online or offline.

Cultural diversity and cultural features were indexed through the use of group-specific jargon or dialect, which was especially evident in the Australian Community, whose members were from the same cultural background (crow-eater, gidday, etc.). However, a more formal register and the use of hedging are recognizable traits of Participant Japan from the International Community. This participant gradually became accustomed to the other members and to the online environment, and this was evidenced by the increase in the use of prosodic features and by the participant's wish to share cross-cultural information. Community support was an essential aspect of this participant's journey towards the formation of an online identity in a culturally unfamiliar environment.

Self-representation and convergence towards **community identity and partnerships** were evidenced by the participants' use of **interpersonal discourse behaviours**. Self representation was evidenced by the participants' use of language resources in a very personal way. Their voice was heard through their message style, register and the use of medium resources, such as synthesizing and quoting, which revealed concern for topic coherence and for a general understanding on the part of all the members of the community. The length of the messages and the participation frequency also revealed their online role. As shown in Chapter Five, some participants replied to all of the postings, while

others preferred to be more selective and replied only when they had to adhere to task requirements. Data show that message style varied according to the topic or to participant role. There is evidence of messages written as bullet points, lists, long narratives, letter style, ranging anywhere between one word and a whole page. These messages show important instances of face-management through interactions involving asserting personality, expressing individual needs, expressing feelings of loss due to the difficulty of the medium or disappointment with the moderating style, and in very few cases, some feelings of aggression or fastidiousness towards another participant's point of view or behaviour.

Community identification resulted from the perception of themselves in relation to other members of the group and the feeling of safety that can be found in numbers. By using Speech Act Analysis and Conversational Analysis, it was evident that the participants from both communities were intent on building interpersonal friendships as well as community partnerships, by **acknowledging, thanking, asking for information, inviting feedback, offering advice, joking, apologizing, negotiating conflict**, which are the same behaviours exhibited by offline community members. They supported each other while they were intent on carrying out their tasks. Community support is the degree to which a person's basic social needs are gratified through interaction with others. Indeed, there is empirical evidence that the Internet, with its searching capabilities and hundreds of community environments, makes it easier to find others in similar situations and get emotional support, social support, a sense of belonging and companionship, knowledge information and instrumental aid related to shared tasks (Hiltz, 1984; Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

Community support in some cases led to the formation of **online friendships**. Generally speaking, although the interactions of both communities indicate that there are no strong relationships developing,

there is evidence of ‘weak ties’ developing during their existence. Weak ties are useful because they are easier to maintain online and ‘they can be important for obtaining information, making new contacts, raising awareness of new ideas, and so on’ (Preece, 2000, p.178). The participant from Japan who started out feeling uneasy, later found support from one of the other participants. This feeling of being together and being a member of a group of friends comes with the notions of being part of a group, spending time together, socializing, and networking. This process was strengthened by the practice of straying from their weekly tasks specifically to reinforce their newly-found friendship.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, online discussions can be very difficult to analyze due to the hybrid nature of the text that is produced and the medium by which it is conveyed. However, with the aid of Conversational Analysis it was possible to identify **interactional exchanges**, such as **turn taking moves** and the kind of group dynamics that are established through them. Unlike spoken conversation where the guiding rule is ‘no gap – no overlap’, in computer conferencing there can be wide gaps between messages. However, thanks to the organization of topics in threads, the posting date, and the sender, it is possible to have a degree of coherence in message exchanges. The participants in both communities used all of the techniques that the medium affords to convey the sense of ‘connectivity’ within community life. They showed evidence of quoting, linking and various message lengths and styles. The practice of providing explicitness of connections between contributions fostered community formation, as it is a sign of concern and awareness of others. Furthermore, by applying the techniques of **linking and quoting**, the participants referred explicitly to the content of a previous message. This practice mimics the *initiation-response* technique in spoken conversation, which creates the illusion of adjacency by incorporating and juxtaposing two turns within a single message, with the effect of creating the idea of an extended conversational exchange. It was indeed

possible to select all the quoted messages referring to a single topic and have the general idea of all the opinions expressed.

Another interesting aspect of quoting messages is that it is generally possible to identify patterns of **theme-rheme** organization, albeit with a different idea of authorship that is normally evidenced in written discourse. In a quoted online message, the known information (the theme) is usually written by the previous author of the message (i.e. the quote), while the new information (the rheme) is offered by the author of the new message. Nevertheless, networking in an online conference becomes easier once these exchange patterns have been understood by all participants.

As mentioned above, participation patterns have been essential in identifying member roles, but have also contributed to the development of cooperation and trust among the participants themselves in both communities. Commitment and responsibility are the two most important conditions for **cooperation and trust** to develop online, as evidenced by the behaviours of the participants who were involved in sharing both personal and professional information. However, as Preece points out, 'trust is somewhat dichotomous: on one hand, people feel freer to disclose personal details; on the other hand, lack of actual contact makes trust online fragile' (Preece, 2000, p.191). In order to understand whether the communities developed a sense of trust, it is essential to understand how it was displayed online. By analyzing the message exchanges and the coding categories that were created, the following behaviours were identified and labelled as trust-building techniques:

- creating shared norms and behaving in a cooperative manner;
- accessing and sharing information;
- relying on a skilful moderating style;
- having expectations met.

11.4 The Effect of Computer Conferencing on Community

Development

As discussed previously in this study, the importance of the right software in the process of community bonding should not be underestimated, although it often remains in the background compared to the more interesting aspects of social networking. However, technology and communication are equally important when it comes to the investigation of the concept of online community.

One of the most convincing reasons for this prominent role is that freedom of expression on the Net and open communication are fostered by personal and networked technologies (Rheingold, 2003). People-oriented software is the foundation of effective computer conferencing and the arguments that support this idea are:

1. the invisibility factor conveyed by the medium allows people to express themselves and give themselves to others;
2. reciprocity measures allow the participants' to give-and-take from an online relationship;
3. collaborative learning approaches are favoured rather than individual learning;
4. emotional support and sociability are also conveyed online in equal measure.

11.5 Final Reflections: Individualism and Communitarianism

Online

Is Community possible to achieve in an online environment? Is it possible to develop community membership and still preserve a personal identity? The evidence presented in this study has shown that community is possible even in groups that have a short lifespan. Participants especially driven by purpose naturally tend to establish community membership and a sense of belonging from the very first exchanges, and

they use various expedients to do so in order to survive in an environment without any physical contact at all.

The seemingly opposite identities enclosed in the strive for self-realization and community membership are reconciled in the egalitarian interaction that occurs online, which is usually quite difficult to achieve offline. This implies that the process of communication, when it occurs online, must be equally distributed among the participants, and that no participant is to be privileged over another; the established netiquette norms state that everyone should be heard and lurkers are to be dealt with; no judgement should be gratuitously passed and tolerance and respect for each other's individuality should be preserved.

The human beings and their personalities, their experiences, their interactions, presented in this study are real, equally belonging to the concrete world as to the virtual world. They are proof that community is possible, that friendship is possible, and that solidarity is possible online. By observing five short weeks of their individual and collective lives, this research study has witnessed their growth process, as they slowly developed from a group of unknown participants to a professional 'community of practice', sharing their lives, unaware of and indifferent to clues of physical traits or notions of social distinction.

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