Learning through On-line Discussion:
what are the opportunities for professional development and what are the characteristics of on-line writing?

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ABSTRACT This article explores the growing interest in the use of asynchronous text-based discussion to support the professional development of teachers and other occupational groups. It describes a post-degree course in which teachers, lecturers and librarians at local schools and colleges used on-line forums to share and reflect on their professional knowledge. The particular focus of the article is on the experiences of forum participants and the opportunities which on-line discussion provides for their professional learning. The discussion in the article is developed around an extract from a forum and focuses on the initiating of on-line discussion, what participants might learn by taking part, and the style of contributions. The article suggests that electronic forums have huge potential for developing professional knowledge in that participants have opportunities to articulate ideas, have access to other information and other viewpoints and can seek clarification from colleagues. However, the process of discussion is not straightforward. Participation cannot be easily structured, contributors may prefer different styles of messages and text-based communication may not be appropriate for some kinds of discussion. On-line discussion is then valuable and complex.

Background
In recent years, there has been growing interest in the idea of using email discussion lists and conferencing software for professional development within both formal and informal learning contexts. Bonamy & Hauglusaine-Charlier (1995), for example, discuss the idea that professional knowledge can be created and assimilated through on-line exchange of, and reflection on, practical and contextualised examples, and several authors review the use of on-line discussion in the specific field of teacher
development (see, for example, Scrimshaw, 1997; Muscella & Di Mauro, 1995; Kent et al, 1995; Davis, 1997; Selinger, 1996; Tsui, 1995).

On-line forums seem to address three key concerns for professional development. The first is the idea that professional development requires peer exchange (rather than top-down transmission) of ideas and information which best takes place within ‘flattened’ organisational hierarchies. The second is that the creation and assimilation of knowledge has become an imperative for many organisations, with the idea that knowledge has become the greatest organisational resource (e.g. Thomas, 1992). The third is the idea that professionals are working in a climate of accelerated change in which they need to access up-to-date knowledge and apply new skills flexibly in changing circumstances (Hargreaves, 1994).

**A Case Study**

This article reports on a case study within the Just in Time Open Learning Project (JITOL) based at the University of Sheffield. (The project web site can be found at http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/jitol/). Project research (for example, Hammond, 1996; Edwards & Hammond, 1998) has confirmed the opportunities which on-line working offers for learners to get to know each other, to articulate ideas through writing, to pick up new ideas though reading messages, to be stimulated by working with other learners, and to explore and develop their own on-line resources. However, it has also confirmed that there are several constraints on participation. These include: lack of time, server unreliability, the difficulty of acquiring sufficient technical skills, physical constraints on writing, reticence in communicating in public, access to technology and, most crucially, organisational or course culture. Unsurprisingly, the willingness of the learner to participate is crucial in determining patterns of participation. For example, communicative learners, meaning those who are active within forums, have a commitment to experiential learning and group learning which enables them to overcome constraints of time and technology.

The particular focus of the article is an on-line forum within a part-time Masters degree course in telematic learning for teachers, lecturers and librarians from local schools, colleges and a local university. There were 24 learners taking the course and discussion took place using different communications programmes.

The exploration of professional practice within on-line forums was central to the course so that through reflection on their own experiences and those of others on the course, learners would be able to plan and carry out action research projects in their own institutions. On-line forums would support a learning cycle, providing opportunities to:

- articulate issues within an on-line forum;
- get access to peer perspectives and up-to-date information;
○ develop a new perspective on an issue;
○ consider, plan and implement an innovation within a teaching and learning context.

**The Research**

This article looks at on-line discussion and considers the initiation of debate, the characterisation of on-line writing and, finally, the idea of knowledge creation within a conference. There have been numerous approaches to researching electronic discussion. Mason (1991) provides an overview and particular examples of approaches include: mapping interconnections between messages (Harasim, 1989); schedules for categorising the functions of different messages (Henri, 1991); and gender analysis of messages (Hodgson & McConnell, 1995). A weakness in some of the case study work is the willingness of researchers to speculate on the intentions and experiences of the participant through analysis of messages rather than through discussion with the participants themselves. In contrast, the work reported here draws on in-depth interviews with course participants, where themes such as the value of on-line discussion, the constraints on participation and the design and experience of taking the course were explored. Stimulated recall was a particularly useful approach in trying to capture learners’ experiences of on-line forums. In particular, respondents were asked to read and comment on how they felt when writing some of the messages they had sent to the forum; how long they had taken in composing their texts and how writing to the forum compared with other contexts in which they wrote. My account of the interviews was later presented at a face-to-face meeting of the whole group for comment and participant confirmation.

In addition to carrying out interviews, my understanding of on-line discussion within the course has drawn on my own participant observation of forums (I was a tutor within five forums at different stages of the course) and content analysis of messages in which conference themes were described and categorised.

**Four Questions about an On-line Discussion**

The value of a case study lies in the light it throws on educational processes through reference to contextualised examples. In this article I want to discuss the nature and value of on-line discussion through reference to an extract from one of the forums within the course. This forum had been set up following a reorganisation of learning sets at a face-to-face meeting. Each new learning set had access to its own Lotus Notes discussion area, which provided an environment for both general discussion and for focused discussion on course readings and colleagues’ writings. This particular
forum ran for 3 months. The major topic for debate was peer assessment (73 messages), but other major topics included: introductory messages (10), a discussion of text and picture (11 messages) and issues from the production of a joint portfolio (5 messages). Here, I look at part of the discussion concerning a comparison between images and text (this is reproduced in the Appendix to the article) with contributions from me, Lesley (a librarian), Juliet (a lecturer at a college of further education) and Greg (another tutor on the course). Both Lesley and Juliet are working towards their MEd degree. The excerpt is a snapshot from a longer discussion in which other members of the forum participated. Those taking part have contributed to many other discussions, using a wide range of writing styles. Messages are reproduced as sent to the original forum.

I will pose four questions about the excerpt in the Appendix to illustrate some of the issues in initiating and sustaining on-line debate:

- How did the discussion in the excerpt get started?
- Is there a preferred style or ‘genre’ of message?
- Are the contributions to the forum best thought of as text or speech?
- What can one learn by taking part in on-line debate?

How did the Discussion Get Started?

This discussion began with the remark “but do you have any thoughts on the limitations of text-based communication in comparison to multimedia?” Although I had the role of tutor, this was an off-the-cuff question, there was nothing programmed into this part of the course which involved a discussion of multimedia and no attempt to direct the discussion either by imposing time deadlines for a response or setting a task around the discussion.

There have been various attempts to describe the initiation and maintenance of on-line debate. For example, Muscella & Di Mauro (1995) suggest that an approach of “oblique assertion”, followed by the citing of personal learning experience and, finally, stating of belief has proved to be an effective way of triggering responses to a message. Others have used the idea of comfort zones to argue that participants need experience of non-controversial debate before embarking on a discussion of contentious issues (e.g. Salmon et al, 1997). In a more general context, Mason & Bacsich (1994) amongst others have described the importance of building on-line discussion into assessment procedures in order to stimulate participation. These are useful insights and indicate the strategies available to participants and moderators within an electronic forum, but equally important is to recognise the serendipitous nature of much debate. Of course, every forum is inevitably structured by their organisers through decisions over who has access, how messages are organised and publicising initial aims. However, there is less opportunity to elicit responses on-line than in a face-to-face
context where, for example, eye contact can frequently evoke a contribution to the discussion and silences are invariably filled. Perhaps a paradox of on-line debate is that its asynchronous nature encourages participation, as there are more opportunities to contribute (you can do it as and when you like), but also discourages participation as this flexibility, combined with a sense of a removed audience, means that message writing can be put off. As one participant to this forum said:

At the face-to-face meetings you are all sitting around and silences don’t work. Someone will always start talking, and someone will say “OK are you chairing this session, let’s get going”. But on-line, that does not work - there is no pressure to take part. On email it is easy to opt out.

The difficulty of structuring debate does have the advantage of openness, giving participants more control over their learning, but it can be difficult to maintain the forum over time. In the extract, both Greg and I asked open-ended questions but we had very little control over who, if anyone, would respond.

Is There a Preferred Style or ‘Genre’ of Message?

In this example there is little convergence in the style of messages. My contributions begin with acknowledging an earlier message and raise the topic of multimedia. In these messages my role as tutor is to be quite cautious in offering a view and raise open-ended questions for others to follow. The style is reasonably informal and contains an awareness of the audience (“good to see you got started with Lotus Notes”, “sorry I mispelt [sic] your name before”). I do offer a comparison of image and text but produce ambiguity by acknowledging that my view is probably a minority one (“I actually like writing but I think that most people will prefer speech”). My own writing draws on past writing experiences, such as contributing to newsletters, but like other writers I use colloquialisms such as “telly” which are more associated with conversation, as well as telegram-style abbreviations (“good to see you”, “btw” [by the way]). These messages were written fairly quickly; I probably just checked them once for meaning and for obvious spelling mistakes (though “mispelt” and “haven’t” slipped through). I remember being interested in the topic and felt fairly confident and relaxed about my role in this forum.

Lesley’s messages are much longer; 254 and 124 words respectively. They carry a strong sense of professional voice; the first paragraph of the first message perhaps reads as something she might write in an essay or presentation to a professional forum. They are strongly “message”-focused rather than “audience”-focused (Tannen, 1985). The first message is written as a reply to my query but it is also for general consumption. This creates difficulties in getting the right pitch.
In this piece I felt I was talking to one person. I was aware that other
people might not understand the jargon but then I could rephrase it if
someone asked, but where do you pitch it? You don’t want to talk down
to someone but you don’t want to lose them either?

Lesley’s messages are well considered and she obviously took care and
attention to the coherence of what she was writing as well as to grammar
and spelling. The topic was one of professional concern to her and it was
because of this that she found the time to reply in such detail.

In contrast, Greg’s message is much shorter (35 words) and is much
less formal in style, signalled by colloquialism (“Yes take the point juliet”) and
by its apparently unedited structure. Greg’s message seems more in the
style of a scripted conversation (scripted as it lacks the “ums”, “ers” and
other conversational fillers) and is abbreviated into a kind of telegramese
(“yes take the point”). What is important to Greg is to contribute and to
signal a presence and this is done, because of both time pressures and
conscious intention, through a spontaneous response. The purpose of his
message is to try to keep the debate alive by seeking clarification or more
information and by taking the responsibility of asking open-ended questions.
However, he does not offer a developed view on the topic himself.

Meanwhile, Juliet describes her message as a hybrid of the formal and
informal. It is casual but influenced by the kind of writing she has done at
work and her background training in word processing. She begins
informally in the first message (“Hi Mick I agree entirely...”) but then moves
to more formal vocabulary (“I agree entirely with your statement”), not the
more informal “I agree with what you were saying”. The next sentence
begins with the more formal passive voice but then uses informal vocabulary
such as “moans and groans”. She recalls feeling relaxed about sending this
message but she was also continually aware that messages might not be read
as she intended.

Nearly all contributions draw on personal experience for agreeing and
disagreeing, and are prefaced with comments such as “from past
experience”, “I actually like writing”, “when I was looking at CMC
(computer-mediated communication) tools”, “I remember things I have read
better”. There is a strong sense of audience involvement here
(notwithstanding earlier comments, this includes Lesley’s messages) and a
desire to make a point but not to offend. As one participant on the forum
put it:

I write about my experience, that’s how I would disagree with someone, I
would speak from the heart, it means saying what you think . You have
to consider their feelings as you can’t see them bristling, so what I put is
fairly mild.

The much-publicised incidences of flaming would more likely be associated
with larger, more anonymous forums, in which members had a weak sense
of audience, rather than smaller groups who meet face-to-face at regular intervals (compare with Perrolle, 1991; Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). Here, the tone of the discussion is cautious and respectful. In part this is because the context is one in which participants are feeling their way but it is also because participants feel this is the most effective way of offering support and maintaining a learning community within the course.

One good reason for being cautious in affirming or disagreeing is that messages are permanently stored and it is not as easy to retract or refine a position as it would be in conversation where we use phrases such as “what I really meant to say was ...” to make an apparently effortless shift in position. Messages lack non-verbal clues and can easily be misinterpreted, e.g. irony can and frequently does sound like sarcasm. In this excerpt writers have used capitals and asterisks for emphasis (“Writing is deemed to be THE important medium”; “the technology required a *very steep* learning curve”) and could no doubt make use of other lexical devices such as emoticons including ‘smileys’ to soften the impact of disagreement. But this can only go so far in clearing ambiguity. In any case, not everyone is comfortable with emoticons; as one of the contributors here said: “I am slowly getting used to them and used one the other day but I do find them rather twee”.

Would participants benefit from adopting a more direct style? There is something much more brusque in Greg’s messages which may provoke a stronger and perhaps more detailed response. One cannot say with any certainty. Greater directness would make it easier to pull out just where agreement ends and disagreement begins but it might also impact on the development of a mutually supportive learning community in which writers express their concern and respect for all contributions. There is also a cultural context too, and participants have noticed a directness in other forums with which they are simply uncomfortable.

In this brief exchange, all contributors stressed that getting a response was more important than the style of the response; as one participant put it: “we can all learn from each other, it doesn’t matter how confident you are in your writing.” And within the course as a whole, contributors felt a great deal of satisfaction whenever they got a response. This led to a multiplier effect: if a message received few replies the discussion would dry up, but if there were many replies, contributors felt not only did these have points to which they could respond, but they also felt a greater willingness to engage in the whole process of on-line debate. However, while the importance of getting any sort of reply was valued, there were different levels of tolerance to accuracy within the group. One of the course members said that in fact she did find grammar (or at least coherence) and spelling were important, while another was far more accepting of departures from conventional rules. (Interestingly, several participants said that their concern for accuracy in their own messages gave them the confidence to participate rather than
inhibited them from doing so.) Some participants spoke in general terms about their problems in finding the time to process very long messages, while others said that there was little value in short, one-line messages and they could be irritated by them.

**Are the Contributions to the Forum Better Thought of as Text or Speech?**

Several course participants have suggested that electronic text is half-way between writing and speech as it carries some of the spontaneity of speech with the coherence and permanence of text. Does speech or text work better as a metaphor for on-line ‘conversation’ and does it matter?

My own view is that messages are best thought of as writing, for the very commonsense reason that contributing is an act of writing and that its main features, including its permanence, the writer’s reconstructed audience, and its purely lexical form, are traditional features of writing (see Table I below). The more traditional view that email messages combine features of speech with writing or appear to be “neither text nor speech” (e.g., Yates, 1993), is justified only by textual analysis rather than a consideration of how the texts were produced and stored.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
<td>Reflective, planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Reconstructed audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>Uninterrupted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loose</td>
<td>Dense/ coherent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meta-linguistic features</td>
<td>Lexical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Real time’</td>
<td>At a distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneditable</td>
<td>‘Plastic’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not physically taxing</td>
<td>Physically taxing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here and now</td>
<td>Mediated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitory</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Writing and text: some of the traditional comparisons (compare with Lunzer, 1979; Brown & Yule, 1983).

As Tannen (1985) points out, it is common to equate speech with impromptu conversation and text with the literary essay, but there are many styles or genres within each form of communication. Electronic discussion is more interactive than many forms of writing, even if interactivity is by no means unique to electronic formats – for example, sharing and directly commenting on texts is central to writers’ workshops and to some
well-established ideas about early literacy (Graves, 1983). The threading of messages within electronic forums encourages questions and responses. For example, Juliet’s second message, in response to Greg, allows her to define which students she had in mind, but this brief misunderstanding also shows that a reader cannot butt in to seek clarification as can often be done in conversation, nor can writers pick up on non-verbal clues in order to tailor their remarks.

The writing metaphor also helps us to understand that contributors might feel constrained by the medium, as even with adequate keyboard skills it takes longer to write than to speak and for many people it is physically more taxing. In addition, many forum members do feel anxiety about expressing their thoughts through writing, especially writing for an audience, particularly if they believe that they will be judged not only on what they say but how they say it. If all this makes writing sound quite unattractive, the other side of the coin is that contributors often value the ‘plasticity’ of the medium, i.e. the way they can reflect on what they have written and reshape their text to get the meaning clear both for themselves and for their audience. In addition, the absence of non-visual clues can actually be an advantage as such clues can distract as well as inform. Finally, the very permanence of writing is what many people value within on-line forums as they are provided with records of other people’s views on which they can reflect.

The writing metaphor, then, works in drawing attention to the features of electronic discussion, but it should not lead us to see on-line debate as a literary/academic genre. Of course, in some contexts discussion might well be literary or academic in style but it does not need to be. On-line writing can take many different forms and, as seen earlier, contributors frequently value a reply and the signalling of presence over any particular style of response.

The exploration of style is important and unless metaphors for writing can be agreed, there is a real danger of mismatch in expectations. In the extract we can see competing styles of communication and, while there is tolerance could this lead to tensions. For example, if we decide on the essay as a metaphor for on-line discussion, we might be expecting fewer contributions but ones which are more considered. Consequently, we might also get irritated with short and apparently flippant one-line comments. If we use the conversation metaphor we would expect frequent messages, short and apparently spontaneous in nature, and we might become irritated by long messages which we have neither the time nor inclination to read. A convenient mid-point is suggested by some writers who saw their messages as “contributions to an informal newsletter”, although as this is a writing rather than a conversational metaphor, it did not appeal to everyone on the course.
Further clarity over metaphors might help those who are reticent to participate; the advice we give is so often “just go for it and send something off” but we can rarely describe what “going for it” means, what types of writing experiences authors draw on or how on-line literacy is acquired. In this case study, some participants said they experienced few worries about posting messages for the first time but others felt a strong anxiety about doing so. In the words of one participant, it was “a step into the unknown” and several described that they needed supportive messages from peers in order to take that step.

What Can One Learn by Taking Part in On-line Debate?

From following the exchanges within the extract, someone with an emerging professional interest in networked learning might learn that:

- there are different views of pedagogy concerning the use of computers in education;
- there are pedagogical issues associated with computer conferencing;
- there are references to WWW resources to investigate (the URLs of two sites are included);
- there are different experiences in comparing multimedia and text.

Some of the abbreviations and terminology may prove difficult, but a participant to the forum would be able to seek clarification from the writers of these messages. In addition, participants would have the opportunity to sharpen their own ideas on the topic through more extended contributions of their own. These are, by any account, important outcomes and help explain the excitement many of us feel for networked learning. However, I will now draw attention to two limitations to this kind of asynchronous discussion.

Firstly, much discussion within electronic forums concerns mediated experiences, that is, it deals with descriptions of events and is one step removed from the events themselves. In the excerpt this was only partially true, in that the shared immediate experience of contributing to the discussion could have informed the content of the discussion itself. But in the main, writers are sharing experiences, not talking about shared experiences. This means, and it is important to highlight this, that taking part in an on-line discussion would not equip anyone to introduce, say, video conferencing within their institution. Other experiences, including hands-on demonstration and practice, would be needed for that. Of course, mediated knowledge is a valuable kind of knowing and one particularly valued in academia, but it is not the only kind of knowledge and not the only route for professional development. There is a strong case for a ‘multi-modal’ approach to professional learning which integrates on-line discussion with face-to-face activity-based learning. On a more theoretical level, the on-line forums need to be seen in the context of a learning cycle in which on-line
debate is used to inform and influence practice. Writers on professional learning (e.g. Schön, 1987; Olson, 1988) have long observed a distinction between theoretical knowledge ('knowing that') and practical knowledge ('knowing how'). One aim of the on-line forum on this course was to support an environment in which both theoretical and practical knowledge could be discussed in order to bring about innovations within teaching and learning – or at least, to have the appropriate knowledge to decide against certain kinds of innovation.

Secondly, the idea of professional development within an on-line learning environment needs to focus on the individual's engagement with the discussion. Engagement may not necessarily mean participation within the debate but it would certainly mean an active attempt by learners to compare and contrast new viewpoints in the light of their existing knowledge and professional experiences. This is a time-consuming and complex process. The implication here is that if on-line discussion is to work as a form of professional development, learners need to be committed and organisations willing to provide time, technical support and other support and to nurture a culture in which continual development is not only expected but valued.

Summary
At the beginning of this article, it was suggested that electronic forums have the potential to support new approaches to professional development in ways which are very appropriate for contemporary working environments. The article has gone on to focus on forums to support teachers and lecturers following a post-degree programme and has argued that on-line discussion can support teacher development, but that we need a sharper awareness of the issues which on-line forums raise. The message for teacher educators is that yes, on-line discussion is a very engaging environment in which learners can share experiences, acquire new information and develop a sense of shared community. Yes, such discussion invites peer exchange in which turn-taking is not rationed and discussion can be unstructured. Yes, there is a particular value in the permanence and public nature of on-line contributions. However, not all types of discussion easily lend themselves to text exchange, contributors may get irritated by the style and tone of some messages and many will find the public nature of forums inhibiting. On-line discussion requires commitment from those taking part and a culture, within a course or an organisation, which nurtures the sharing of information and perspectives.

Undoubtedly, on-line forums will be increasingly common but our enthusiasm for their use needs to be coupled with a consideration of strategies for supporting learners. The search for such strategies poses a dilemma – how do we offer the structure and support for professional
learners without undermining the free-flowing and uncontrolled nature of on-line discussion, which is one of its most attractive features? More research is needed but any solution will begin by addressing the types of discussion which the medium best supports, the obstacles in the way of participation and the opportunities for learning.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank those who contributed to the on-line discussion in picture and text for allowing me to reproduce their messages and for their comments on this article. An earlier version of this article was discussed at the 2nd International Symposium on Networked Learner Support at the University of Sheffield, 23-24 June 1997 and I am grateful for the useful comments made by participants. The research was conducted within the Just in Time Open Learning project (JITOL) at the University of Sheffield, supported by the Higher Education Funding Council.

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References


APPENDIX

Extracts from an On-line Discussion on Multimedia

Mick on 22 October 1996 at 12:00
Good to see you have got started with Lotus Notes, looked interesting the comments from Deakin University, btw do you have any thoughts on the limitations of text based communication in comparison to multimedia?

Lesley on 4 November 1996 at 16:23
Multimedia obviously gives the advantage of combining visual and audio aids as well as plain text. However multimedia over a network requires much higher bandwith and specifications for PCs so might reduce access if the technology isn’t available to distance learners. Multimedia on a CDROM in the post to everyone might be cheaper than downloading from a central service. Personally I feel that it is the interaction between learner and tutor that is important. Some of the computer aided learning packages that have been developed have the problem that they do not allow for this interaction but are too didactic. When I was looking at CMC tools for Module 2 I found the Moos interesting from that point of view, you could show/play clips of material, either text, audio or visual; use a whiteboard to draw diagrams, cut and paste Web pages etc; and carry on a conversation at the same time – either to one individual or to a group. Only problem as far as I could see was that the technology required a *very steep* learning curve in finding out how to navigate through the virtual space both on the part of the tutor and then on the part of the students. Given existing problems with getting to grips with new applications and technical hitches, I am not sure that this could be easily overcome at present but am positive that with the development going on in this area it will not be long before somebody has devised a user friendly interface.  

Lesley
Mick on 18 November 1996 at 15:01

Lesley, sorry I mispelt [sic, Ed.] your name, before, I haven't dipped back into LN as I have been following the email and COW stuff, I was intrigued by your thoughts on multimedia, I agree very often learners are left alone on the machine and it is the interaction between learner and tutor and between learner and learner where it all takes place, still I look forward to full multimedia in conferences like this – would you rather post a video footage of your self or text?

Lesley on 18 November 1996 at 15:28

Text generally. I remember things I have read better than what I have heard. Having said that the two combined are even more effective. My main concern with using video via telematics is the access to the technology - video over the network requires a high level of bandwidth to get any quality of picture. Do prospective students on telematics courses have the necessary hardware and access over phone lines. With people being used to television, video conferencing generally compares badly unless of a high quality and can detract from concentrating on the message. Clive Cochrane from Queen’s University Belfast has written quite extensively about this. One of his papers is available on the 1st International Symposium on Networked Learner Support WWW page.

http://panizzi.shef.ac.uk/ nls_symp/ cochrane.html

Lesley

Mick on 20 November 1996 at 12:47

Lesley I have responded to your message as a new thread in case anyone wants to join in, my feeling is that in the future don't know when, we will send video clips all the time and people will look back at text based email as the days of the wireless before telly - I actually like the radio but that is another point. The key point for me is that no-one can write as quickly as they can speak, I actually like writing but I think that most people will prefer speech. Anyway I throw it out for discussion.

Juliet on 20 November 1996 at 20:13

Hi Mick I agree entirely with your statement. From past experience with students verbal discussion, once started, was no problem but as soon as pen and paper was introduced, moans and groans were evident.
Greg on 24 November 1996 at 19:30

Yes take the point juliet. ... but different medi can be used for different purposes. Writing is deemed to be THE important medium in Universities ... how important is it for your students to be able to write?

Greg

Juliet on 2 December 1996 at 21:47

Writing is important for the students I am currently working with in SME’s [small- and medium-sized enterprises, Ed.]. I was referring to my experiences with students in the past who had just left school and college I felt was perhaps a second or even third option. Having a job and earning money is really what the majority of young people wanted. Since gaining qualifications could not guarantee a job it was a difficult task trying to motivate these young people who were understandably disillusioned with their lot.