

Footprints podcast from Angela Walsh at the end of the Supporting Virtual Communities module

My experience with VLEs prior to this module consisted of a short 2 minute webinar I took part in to test out technology in the organisation I work for about 18 months ago. Before this module I had never used chat rooms, discussion boards or blogs. I was looking forward to the module as we hope to have webinars as a method of delivering training in our organisation.

The module has provided me with valuable insight into the role of e-moderator and also what it's like to be a student attending an online course. The module moves at a fast pace and it is necessary to work as part of a group. To cope with this I made sure that I logged on each day to keep up with what was happening in the discussion forum as this was an area used by our group to arrange meetings and update everyone on items outstanding or completed. This allowed me to reflect (probably not for as long as I would like!) on any decisions that needed to be made and make a contribution. It's really important to do this as things move quite quickly and it's easy to fall behind on what's going on.

As I mentioned earlier I had never used chat rooms, blogs or discussion boards before and I have used a wiki only for the first time in the instructional design module. The technology helped and challenged us. Working as an online group I found that the chat rooms became the area for brainstorming and decision making and linking in on a personal basis with other members of the group. I mentioned that technology challenged us as well and the wiki did that as during the debate we lost the content we had posted to it. However every cloud does have a silver lining and the loss of a wiki led to the introduction of sync.in a tool which allowed us to collaborate and create our debate documents.

My tips for students about to start into this module would be

For online teaching you can never be too specific about anything. Make sure all your guidelines and requirements are clear for your students

For group work make sure that you assign roles and tasks to everyone within the group and encourage everyone to log in everyday to keep up to date

Although we all knew each other prior to this module the on line aspect changes things. It's like going from a familiar campus where you know how where everything is to a brand new campus and you're not sure where things are or how to get access to them. It takes a while to adjust, I found it a lot more difficult than I thought I would and felt I was just getting into the swing of things at the end of the module. So my final tip would be don't panic it will all work out and remember this is exactly what your future student will be feeling when they log in for the first time.

Thanks to Roisin and Kevin for showing us how it should be done and best of luck to you with the module