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Abstract

**Communication, Collaboration and Controversy Building
in Digital Learning Networks**

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Use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education has long passed the stage of merely facilitating better presentations or storing lessons or course materials for easier access and on-demand review. Analysis of reports in compiled editions of teaching strategies of most wired campuses shows that communication, collaboration and controversy building are among the most professed reasons for adopting ICT in teaching. Communication means interactions between faculty and students, between faculty and colleagues, and between classmates. Collaboration is learning in teams, or learning alongside peers. Controversy building rests on providing accesses to alternative viewpoints and advocating competing views. These strategies are seen in line with the guiding principle of engaging students in constructing and integrating knowledge themselves so as to deepen their conceptual understanding. We begin with describing an implementation of these strategies with tools provided in an integrated

digital learning environment. Some management efforts spent with the strategies are identified. They are spent to deal with problems such as clarifying misconception spread by peer learning, and discouraging 'cut and paste' postings in discussion forum. In retrospect, many of the problems encountered in the strategies stem from the weakness in the existing underlying culture in which most of the students still expect to be taught or told how to learn and do not see the value of knowledge sharing. To help build the new culture of learning, we require new assessment criteria. The new culture should also recognize the different starting levels of students and assessment criteria need to reflect this. Making these new assessment criteria accepted, and correctly responded to, by students therefore present a big challenge. Existing tools are reexamined with a discussion of possible extension in supporting the new culture. It is followed by some discussions and a conclusion that it takes more than technological advancement to cultivate the new culture.

Keywords: Communication, Collaboration, Controversy, Learning Strategies, Evaluation & Assessment