



Assessed Online Discussion Groups: Making Web 2.0 Work

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Why ?

A VLE is not a filing cabinet!



Communicate!



[Badge JL, Cann AJ, Scott J: e-Learning versus e-Teaching: Seeing the Pedagogic Wood for the Technological Trees. Bioscience Education E-Journal 5 \(2005\)](#)



Web 2.0 ?



- **Web 2.0 is:**

"an architecture of participation"

Tim O'Reilly

It's all about the conversation, stupid.

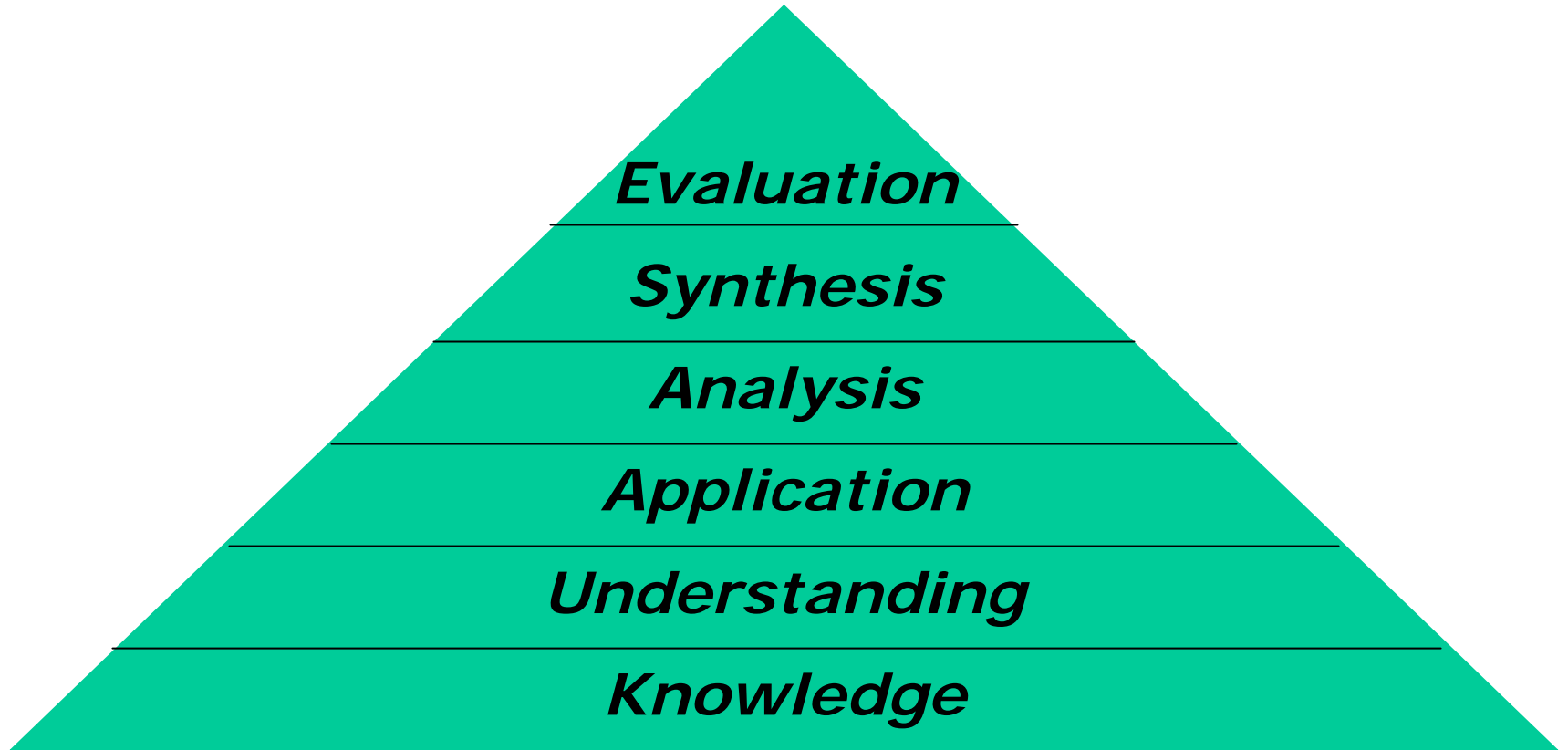


Why ?

- **Discussion promotes reflection**
- **Deep versus superficial learning**
- **Reflection encourages higher level learning competencies and inclusivity (ownership of learning).**



Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives *Benjamin Bloom, 1956:*





[Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox](#), October 9, 2006:

Participation Inequality: Encouraging More Users to Contribute

- **90% of users are lurkers**
- **9% of users contribute from time to time**
- **1% of users participate a lot and account for most contributions**
- **Blogs have even worse participation inequality, more like 95-5-0.1**

How to Overcome Participation Inequality:

You can't.

http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation_inequality.html



The Model

- **Students were divided into groups of 8-15, believed to be the optimum size to facilitate online discussions.**
- **Contributions to the discussion boards were explicitly linked to assessment, in this case contributing to 15% of the total module marks.**



Explicit Assessment Criteria

- ***Each week there will be a discussion board about the topics presented in lectures that week. Each discussion board will be open for contributions for two weeks, then close. To earn the marks, you are expected to make at least two contributions to each discussion board, i.e. two contributions per week. Of course, you can contribute as much as you want to each board, but you need to make a minimum of two contributions to earn the marks each week. An acceptable contribution is:***
- ***Any original comment or discussion on the topics covered in the relevant lectures.***
- ***A simple question in itself will not be regarded as an acceptable contribution, but a complete (and correct) answer to someone else's question is an acceptable contribution.***
- ***Feel free to cite a relevant publication from WoK or PubMed, a book from the Library or a web page, but a citation or a url alone will not be regarded as an acceptable contribution unless you also describe in sufficient detail the content of the work and why it is relevant to this discussion.***
- ***Any other original, non-plagiarised contribution relevant to the topics under discussion.***

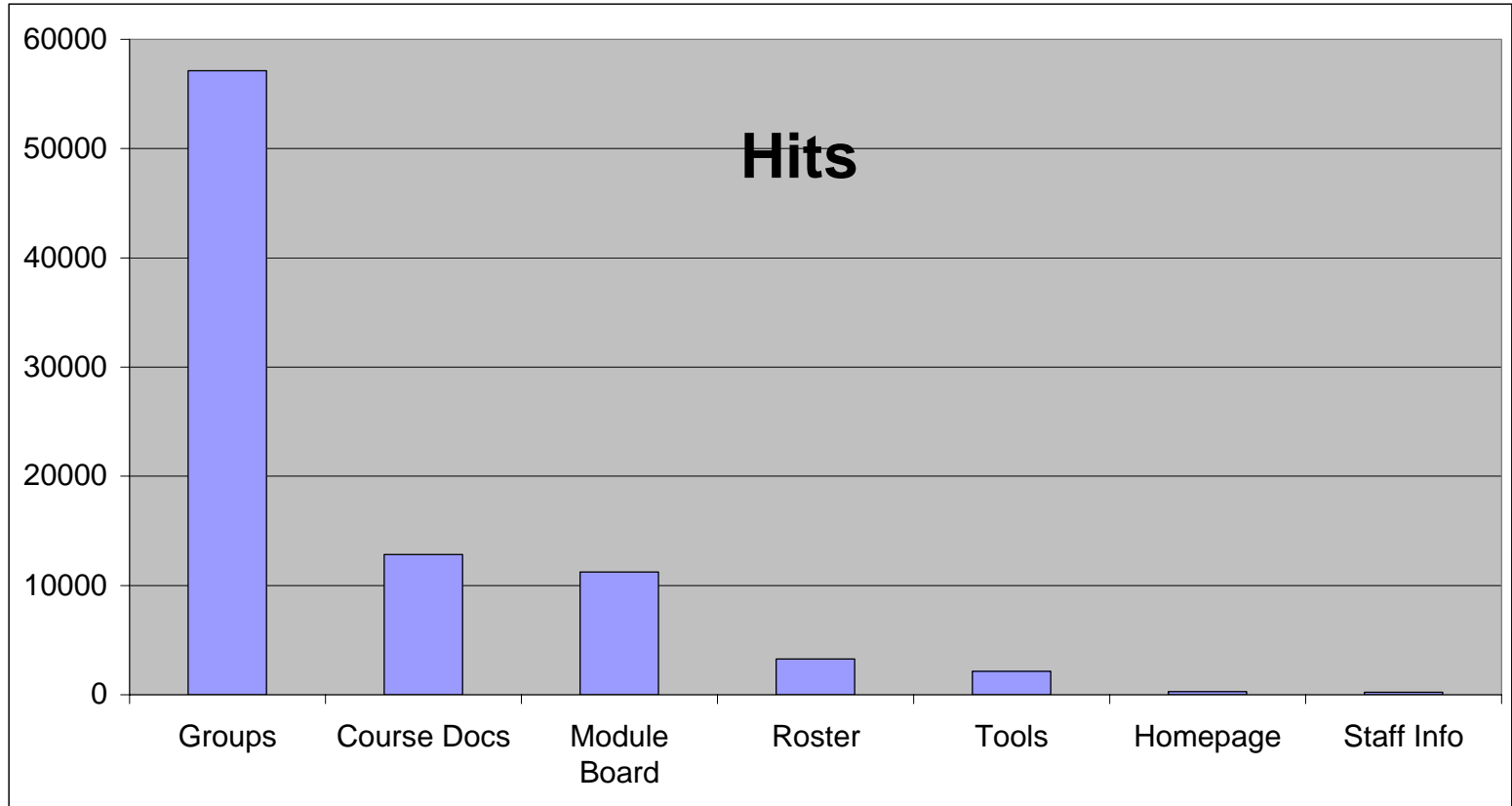


How?

- **Prior to any discussions, the entire class engaged in an online E-tivity, an icebreaker to promote group cohesion, in this case, construction of a homepage on the VLE to introduce themselves to other module participants (Salmon, G. (2002) E-tivities: The key to active online learning. Kogan Page).**
- **To accommodate the new form of assessment, the previous in course essay was dropped in favour of three one hour essays written under exam conditions and submitted electronically via the VLE.**



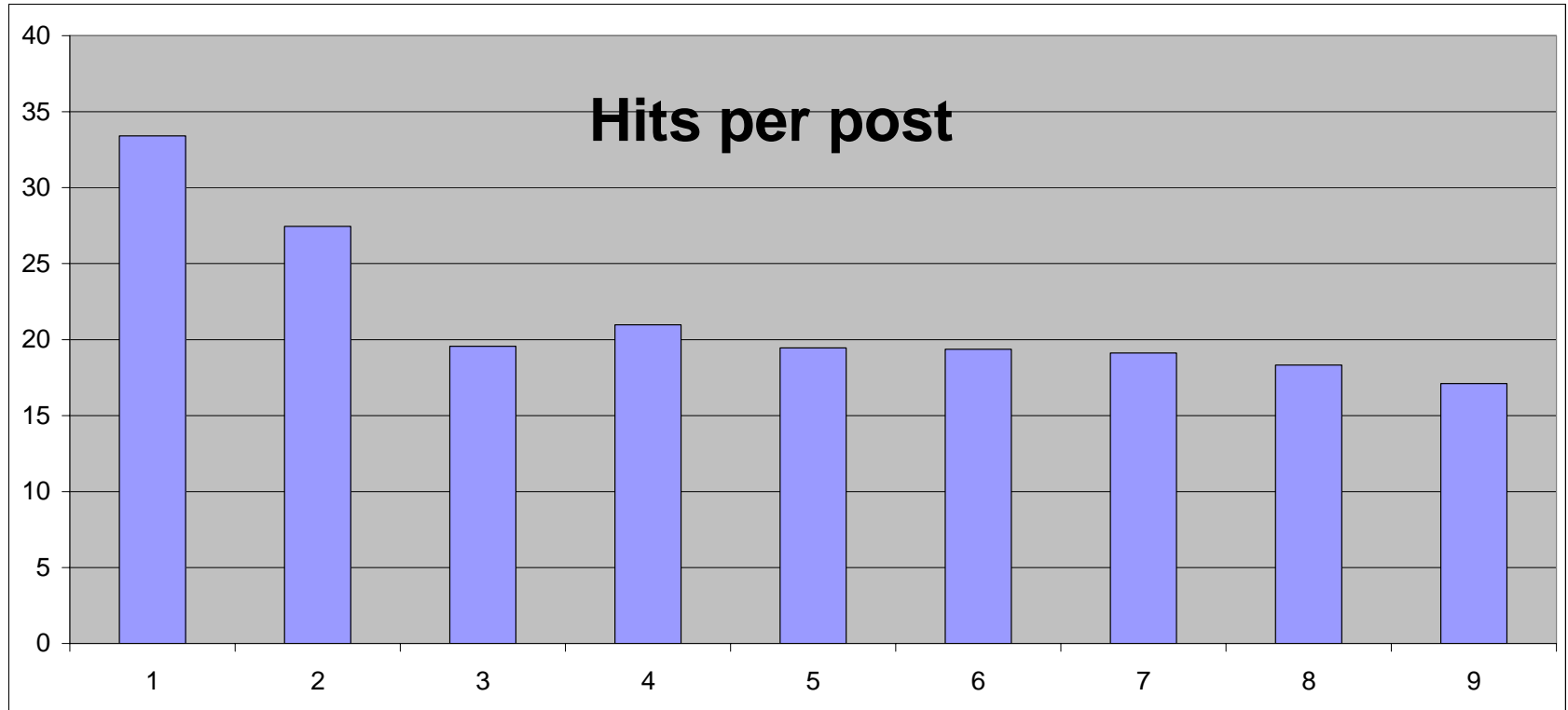
Outcome 1



- **Discussion boards got their attention:**
 - **87,000 hits in 10 week period, an average of 256 per student per week**
 - **66% of total module hits**



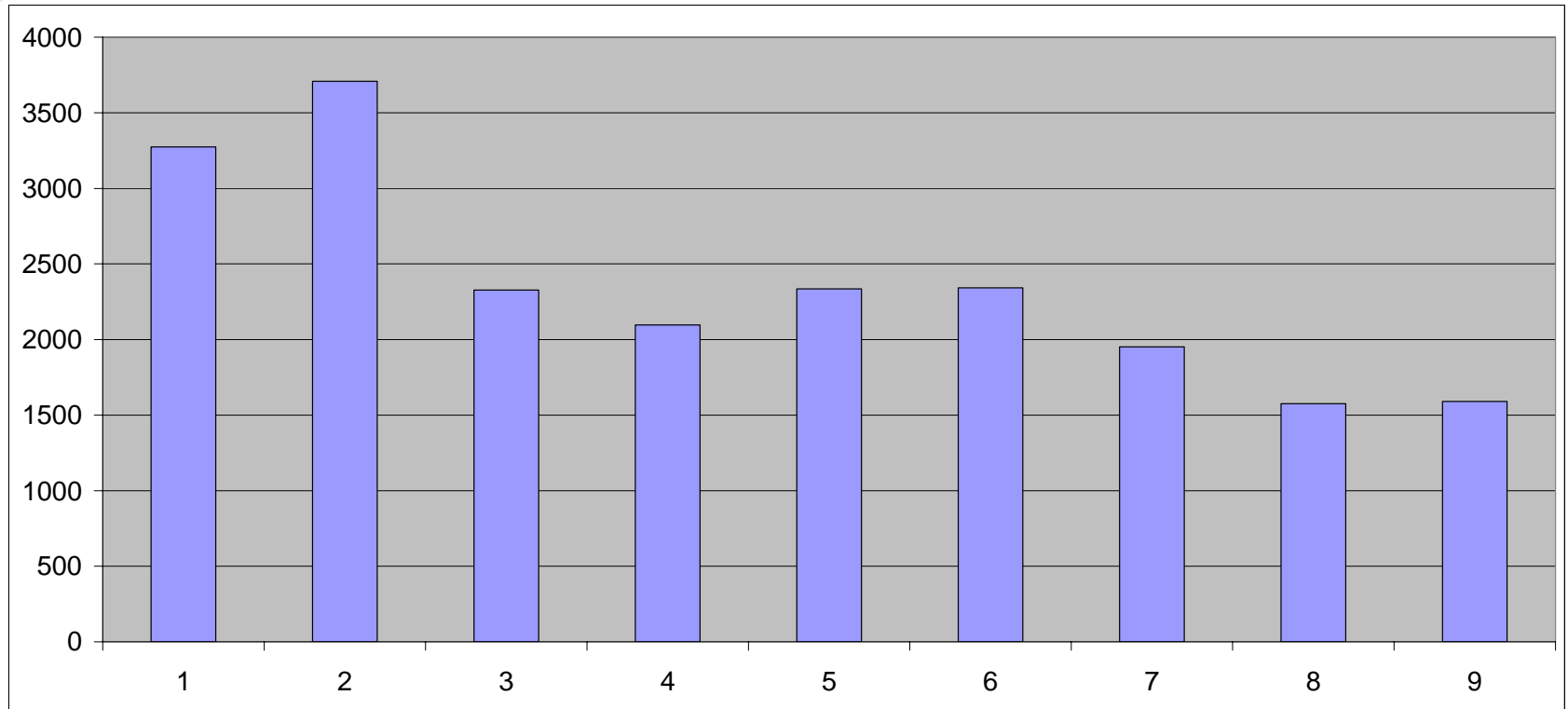
Outcome 2



- **Average 22 hits to each post - they *are* reading.**
- **Ratio highest for general module forum, lowest for week 10**



Outcome 3



- **Evidence of fatigue**
- **Need to inject new enthusiasm with e-tivities midway through module - 9 weeks is too long for repetitive activity.**
- **eLearning demands novelty for engagement!**



Outcome 4

- **Very popular with students (feedback).**
- **No significant difference in end of module marks.**
- **Gender difference: females contribute significantly more hits, but no significant differences in posts or marks.**



And Then ...

- **Leicester 2.0: Mid course variation, online collaborative writing exercise using [Wikipedia](#).**
- **Newcastle: 46 2nd year biomedical sciences students, 3 groups on Blackboard.**
- **Warwick: 70 3rd year students, 5 groups on [Warwick Forums](#).**



Recommendations

- Integration
- Icebreaker "E-tivity"
- Proportion of marks (10-15%)
- Balance assessment load
- Group size and dynamics
- Use the VLE: feedback and marks rapidly, via the VLE
- Staff e-moderating skills
- Plagiarism? [TurnitinUK](#)



www-micro.msb.le.ac.uk/AJC/talks.html

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[Alan J. Cann, Jane E. Calvert, Karine L. Masse, Kevin G. Moffat.
Assessed Online Discussion Groups In Biology Education.
Bioscience Education E-Journal, vol 8](#)

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