



**eResearch: the open access repository of the  
research output of Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh**

This is an author-formatted version of a poster published as:

Giatsi Clausen, Maria and Nicol, Maggie and Gill, Jan (2009)  
*Qualitative Research via Internet: Asynchronous Online Discussions  
and the Use of WebCT*. In: General Online Research Conference 09,  
April 2009, Vienna. (Unpublished)

**Accessed from:**

<http://eresearch.qmu.ac.uk/1956/>

**Repository Use Policy**

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes providing that:

- The full-text is not changed in any way
- A full bibliographic reference is made
- A hyperlink is given to the original metadata page in eResearch

eResearch policies on access and re-use can be viewed on our Policies page:  
<http://eresearch.qmu.ac.uk/policies.html>

**Copyright © and Moral Rights for this article are retained  
by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners.**

<http://eresearch.qmu.ac.uk>

# Emerging qualitative research methods: Asynchronous Online Discussions (AOD) and the use of WebCT

**Maria Giatsi Clausen**

[mgiatsiclausen@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:mgiatsiclausen@qmu.ac.uk)

Prof. Margaret Nicol

Dr. Jan Gill



# Overview

- Online discussion: a permutation of traditional focus groups
- Why use an online discussion
- The study
- Asynchronous or real time online discussions?
- Communication in online discussions: a hybrid language
- What is WebCT?
- Advantages of using an institutionally-based Virtual Environment such as WebCT



# Moving the focus group online

Not a group interview, individual interview online or, a naturally forming online group

A “permutation” of traditional” focus groups with special characteristics:

- Ensured anonymity-> permissive atmosphere-> personal disclosure
- Allowing every participant a “voice” (through their computer)
- No physical cues-> no in vivo “judgement”
- Automatic recording and printing



# More reasons for deploying online discussions

- Eliminating costs e.g. travelling, telephoning, transcribing
- Time constraints
- Participation of geographically dispersed participants
- Time for participants to think and reflect before composing and posting a message
- Participation while being in a familiar environment



# The study

- Occupational therapists' perceptions of the academic difficulties of mainstream school children, born prematurely
- Mixed method study: survey, interviews, discussion groups
- Discussion groups: part of a triangulation process
- Discussions: forum for deeper, more extended analysis
- Advantages of the method: “naturalistic” interaction; argumentative justification of views; pluralism of views; opportunity for reflective comment



# Asynchronous or real-time?

- No requirement for the participants to be online at the same time; posted messages archived
- Increased flexibility -> minimizing drop-outs
- Linear, chronologically sequenced dialogue
- Interaction not endangered by the fast turn-taking of real-time discussions
- Independent of computer proficiency and participant's typing skills
- Time to read others' comments and reflect before posting



# A “hybrid” mode of communication

- “E-language”: elements of both written and spoken language

- Careful counterbalancing of:

Loss of spontaneity

Misunderstandings and superficial coverage

Distancing the thought from the speaker

WITH

Elaboration and expansion of writing-> rich, reflective responses

- Decision: subject to the study’s objectives, participants’ linguistic skills, instructor’s expertise



# What is WebCT?

- Evolution of older computer-mediated systems
- Initially designed for e-learning purposes
- User friendly, no requirements for specific software
- Accessed by any computer with Internet
- Computer competency of the researcher
- Host's (institution) technical infrastructure



# Features of WebCT

## MAIN:

- Communication: multi-threaded discussion board
- Document posting; links to websites (hypertext); resource bank
- Evaluation of WebCT experience tool (e-survey)

## ADDITIONAL:

- Access to email
- “Notice board” for up-dated information (announcements)
- Monitoring participation: “tracking down” participants tool





Occupational therapists's perceptions of preterm children's academic difficulties in the early years of mainstream schooling



[Resources](#)



[Discussion](#)



[WebCT Help](#)



[WebCT Evaluation](#)

## New

*"Dear all! WebCT has officially come to an end today. It will still be LIVE for some last comments and for you to read the summary of the 4th topic till Monday morning (13/02/06). From then onwards you username/ password will no longer be valid. For the ones that have not done so, I would appreciate it if you could complete the evaluation form that you can find in the "WebCT evaluation" area. Once again I wanted to thank you for your valuable contribution. Hopefully you have enjoyed the experience! All the best for the future!!!!!"*

Maria Giatsi  
[mgiatsi@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:mgiatsi@qmu.ac.uk)

Home Page > **Discussion**

## Discussions

[Compose message](#)



[Topic settings](#)

Click a topic name to see its messages.

Topic	Unread	Total	Status
<a href="#">Introductions</a>	0	10	public, unlocked
<a href="#">1st topic</a>	0	14	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Summarising the 1st topic</a>	0	3	public, unlocked
<a href="#">2nd topic</a>	0	19	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Summarising the 2nd topic</a>	0	2	public, unlocked
<a href="#">3rd topic</a>	0	23	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Summarising the 3rd topic</a>	0	2	public, unlocked
<a href="#">4th topic</a>	0	16	public, unlocked
<a href="#">Summarising the 4th topic</a>	0	1	public, unlocked
<b>All</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>90</b>	---

## Discussion Area



# Advantages of using an institutional virtual environment

- Safe, secure and confidential environment
  - Encrypted passwords protected area
  - ‘Netiquette’ to address unacceptable behaviour
  - Security patches, anti-virus software updates
  - Data archiving and deletion policy
- Institutional support: technical problems



- Arbaugh, J.B.; Benbunan-Fich, R. (2004). Contextual factors that influence ALN effectiveness in Hiltz's (ed): Learning together online: Research on asynchronous learning, Chapter 6, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, NJ, US**
- Centre of Academic Practice (2005). Notes from the WebCT 2005 summer course, Queen Margaret University**
- Cartwright, J. (2000). Lessons learned: Using asynchronous computer-mediated conferencing to facilitate group discussion, Journal of Nursing Education, 39(2), pp. 87-90**
- Cravener, P. (1999). Faculty experiences with providing online courses thorns among the roses, Computers in nursing, 17(1), pp. 42-47**
- Kenny, A.J. (2005). Interaction in cyberspace: an online focus group, Journal of Advanced Nursing, 49(4), pp. 414-22**
- Mann, C; Stewart, F.(2000). Online focus groups, in Mann et al (ed): Internet research and qualitative research: A handbook for researching online, Chapter 5, SAGE, London**
- Milstead, J.; Nelson, R. (1998). Preparation for an online asynchronous university doctoral course: Lessons learned, Computers in Nursing, 16(5), 247-258**
- Thomas, A.; Storr, C. (2005). WebCT in occupational therapy clinical education: Implementing and evaluating a tool for peer learning and interaction, Occupational Therapy International, 12(3), 162-179**

