Scenario 3: Engaging in structured online scholarly discussions.

Anna is a post-graduate student of Journalism and she has to write an article on climate change skepticism. She decides to start exploring Web articles from different online media (Newspapers and TV Channels) on the topic. She finds an article on the BBC news site on the top 10 claims of climate skeptics (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/629/629/7074601.stm). She then starts a fine grained exercise of annotating the page, highlighting the arguments and counterarguments for each position presented in the article.

The same assignment had been given to her classmates so eventually one of her friends, Rebecca, ends up on the same BBC news site and finds all the ideas created by Anna.
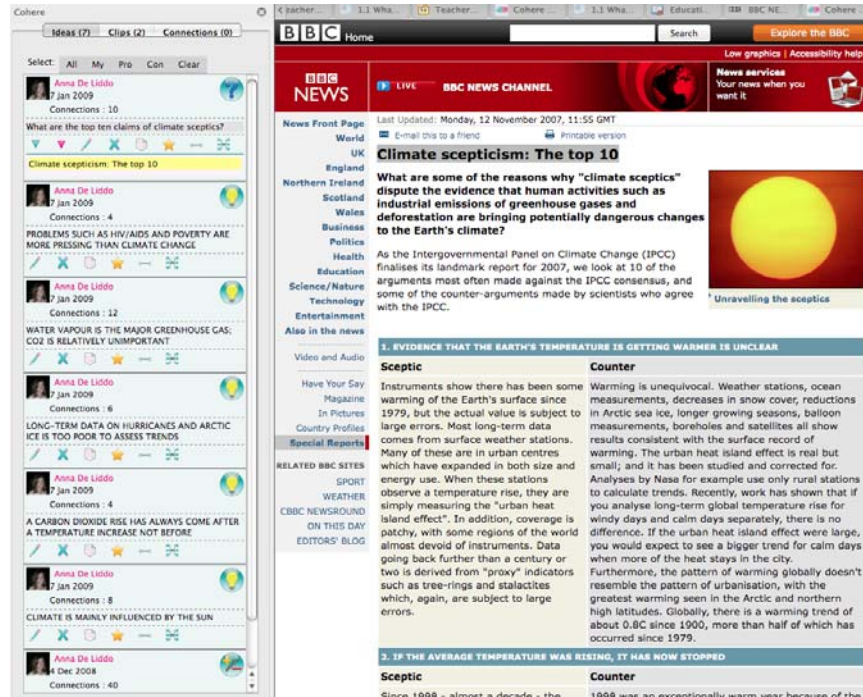

Figure 1

Rebecca, who does not sympathize with skeptics' positions, starts questioning the assumption presented in the paper, she is particularly interested to the claim that "computer model are not reliable" therefore she starts navigating the Web looking for resources and evidences that challenges this claim. She ends up on the Climate Wizard website (http://www.climatewizard.org/) in which the University of Washington presents results of simulations, based on scientifically sound climate models, that show how climate change will effect specifically problematic areas of the globe. Here, she discovers that Jack, one of Rebecca and Anna's Classmate has already annotated the site. She decides to direct Anna's attention to this site, as it is questioning the assumptions and ideas on which she is basing her article. Rebecca does this with the Cohere Jetpack plugin by creating a semantics connection between Jack's and Anna's ideas.

Figure 2

Rebecca feels that Jack holds a similar positions to her and that he is actually against the skeptics visions on climate change, therefore she decides to check out Jack's Cohere User Page to read other ideas and resources that jack has annotated. She can access the page by

simply clicking on Jack's picture in the slidebar. She finds another interesting idea on the Climate Interactive site (http://climateinteractive.org/). The site presents the work of a group of researchers in technology and climate science, which engages in developing user-friendly simulations based on scientifically sound climate models. She then decides to connect this idea of Jacks as challenging the assumption introduced by Anna that "computer model are not reliable".
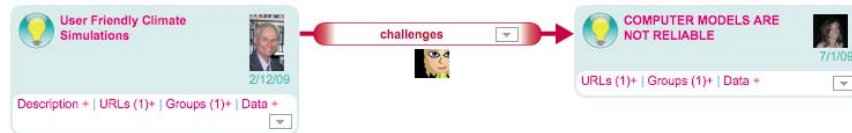

Figure 3

After she creates the two connections, Jack, who is at the same time working on his assignment, sees in the connections slidebar that Rebecca has connected his ideas to Anna's idea. He finds Anna's idea quite interesting and of course he holds a quite critical position against it. Therefore he decides to directly address Anna with a question. He does it by creating a question: "Where is the evidence for this assertion?" and connecting it directly to Anna's idea. After that he decides to navigate the resource associated to Anna's idea by clicking on the link to the source clip that is placed in the slidebar under Anna's idea. In this way Jack finally discovers the BBC news article, which he finds quite interesting to read.

Even if they were initially doing their assignments alone Anna, Jack and Rebecca are now engaging in an interesting online discussion on climate skepticism. The Cohere Jetpack allows them to view and explore this discussion as a network of annotations.
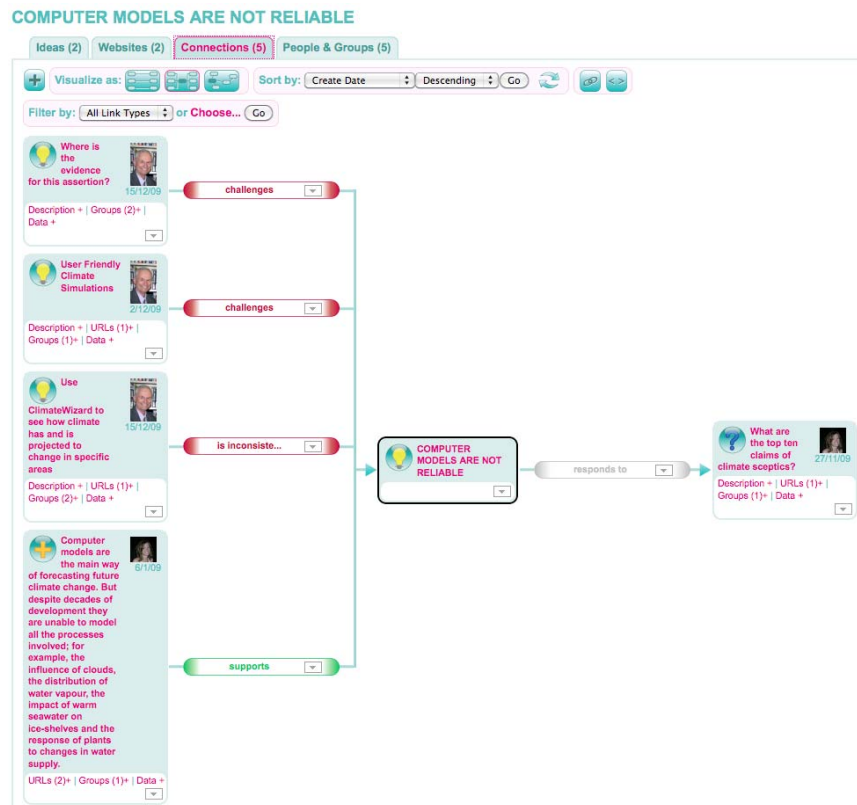

Figure 3

By exploring the network of claims and by reading the semantics of the connections, Anna, Jack and Rebecca, or any other learner, can understand the ongoing discussion. In particular it is easy to make sense of what the different positions are, and also the positions held by the different users engaged in the discussion.

Summary and reflections

By using Cohere-Jetpack extension Anna, Jack and Rebecca found a way to learn from each other's work, while caring on with their individual tasks. Moreover the Cohere Jetpack plugin has enabled Anna, Jack and Rebecca to engage in a structured online scholarly discussion on climate change positions. This discussion will surely affect the results of their work in a positive way since they will have been supported, and will have worked not in isolation but in a collaboratively engaging way. Moreover Anna, Jack and Rebecca have directly experienced that there are different world views and positions to consider in their investigation, they have learned also to be self-critical and to defend their positions by basing them on resources and evidence. This scenario gives an example of how the Cohere Jetpack plugin is a tool for learners to exercise their critical thinking and engage in online scholarly discussion.