**Description of features**

**Synergic Answer (Udai Arora)**

Assume that a student has a query and he starts a new thread for that. After some cognitive conflicts, assimilation, internalization, external accommodation his query might get resolved. But this will also lead to numerous posts and comments on those posts.

Now this might get very hard to follow for a student who has a similar query and bumped across this thread. It might even become impossible to extract the appropriate content from the thread without reading most of the posts and comments on those posts.

To tackle this problem, we introduce “Synergic response”, a feature which will allow students to form a common response to a particular thread which summarizes the key points and opinions. However, each edit will go to the thread owner for approval to make sure it is in line with the thread and that it helps to better answer the query in the thread.

In this way, every person who is suggesting an edit is indirectly interacting with the participants who constructed that synergic answer by building on the same idea and adding something new as well.

This feature would be provided for a thread which crosses a minimum number of posts. This will ensure that the feature is employed in scenarios it is useful in.

*References:*

[1] Fichman, Pnina. "A comparative assessment of answer quality on four question answering sites." *Journal of Information Science* 37.5 (2011): 476-486.

**Alias Names (Nikunj Dixit)**

The Alias feature will essentially be a link that each individual user can click on in their own account. Clicking on this link takes the user to a page where they can create their Alias name. Once an Alias name is created, the user can post whatever queries or responses that they want to, using the alias name.

This feature provides an opportunity for students to interact with each other freely without having to disclose their identity. It allows the student to create an alias of their choice through which they can communicate with other students which allows the students to be able to express their confusion and inadequacies without being under the pressure of being recognized and judged by their fellow peers. Therefore it opens them to ask questions that they may not ask normally and write answers that they may not normally write. Without the fear of being judged for the questions, the communication between students would be a lot more open and allows for a more knowledge flow between students.

A major notion about this feature is that it enables students to interact with each other without having the fear of peer pressure hanging over them. Peer pressure has a direct effect on learning. This can be substantiated through a study conducted by Heritage Foundation which shows that negative peer pressure has a direct impact on academic performance [1]. This implies that the students have difficulty in learning when under the stress of negative peer pressure. With the absence of peer pressure in this regards, the students can interact more freely with one another and therefore be able to exchange more knowledge and learn from one another. Therefore, in this manner, the feature enhances both student-student interaction as well as helps with learning.

*References:*

[1] Kirk A. Johnson, "The Peer Effect on Academic Achievement Among Public Elementary Students," CDA Report No. 00-06, May 26, 2000, Heritage Center for Data Analysis, *Heritage Foundation,* 214 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington D.C., 20002, (202) 546-4400

**Debate Activity (Sai Prasanna Baskaran)**

*Description:*

This feature allows instructor to create a new activity called ‘debate’. In this activity students are separated into groups of two. A topic is decided upon and each group conducts a debate about the topic, with one student ‘for’ the topic and the other student ‘against’ the topic. The students interact in this way until the end of the debate, after which each student produces a summary of what the student said, what the student’s debate partner said, and the conclusion. Finally the system aggregates this into summary points and provides it to the students for a discussion.

*Benefits:*

1. Better interaction among students, because each student only has to concentrate on the points made by his partner, without having to go through a list of points made by every user.

2. Since the topic is debated, the student is forced to go beyond the comfort zone, since the user may be assigned to be ‘against’ a topic, even though he believes that he is better at being ‘for’ the topic. This allows the user to think in different levels of perspectives.

3. Since the student tries to constantly ask well thought out questions so as to put the other student in an uncomfortable position in the debate, learning occurs as a result of understanding the topic in order to answer such questions.

4. Trying to summarize the points made by him and his partner he reconciles his cognitive discrepancies, which leads to better clarity.

*References:*

[1] Cheryl Hodgkinson-Williams and Markus Mostert, “Online debating to encourage student participation in online learning environments: A qualitative case study at a South African university” , International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT), 2005, Vol. 1, Issue 2, pp. 94-104

**Student Created Groups (Sagar Karri)**

The feature is about students being able to create their own group exclusively for those who are involved in a particular activity/project. This group enhances the members to discuss about the project or relevant information with the project mates and is accessible only to them.  
   
Collaborative learning in an online classroom can take the form of discussion among the whole class or within smaller groups. Let us suppose a group of students are interested in a particular topic and want to work extensively. Say for suppose the activity is not a part of curriculum but is out of their own interest, we cannot expect the whole class to be indulged in that activity but only a few who are interested. So, if that activity is done in the group intended for the whole class, it will be very inconvenient. In that scenario, this feature comes handy where the students have privilege to create their own group.  
  
When a specific group is intended for a set of people, interaction between them takes place in an efficient manner. As people are interested in the topic, so much ground work is done and they provide valuable inputs which will be definitely be a positive point to the whole group. Results also have shown us the benefits in working as groups who are targeted to a specific topic.   
  
References:  
[1] Mary Panko, “Small group learning in online discussions: Staying in your own backyard or peering over the garden fence?, 2002, School of education, UNITEC, Auckland, New Zealand