

21st Century Dissertations: Using a Web 2.0 environment to empower academic writing through social scaffolding

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Dissertations are major components of most degree programmes; heavily weighted in overall performance and a key element of the student experience. No surprise, then, that the satisfaction in demonstrating synthesis and mastery of disciplinary knowledge is too often hijacked by anxiety, confusion and a sense of isolation.

This session introduces a dynamic tool to support students and supervisors negotiating dissertation writing's challenges: the AWESOME (Academic Writing Empowered by Social Online Mediated Environments) Dissertation Environment (ADE). Development of the ADE was funded by JISC (January 2008 to March 2009). This online social network environment is based on the pedagogic principle of social scaffolding and adapts Web2.0 tenets of collective intelligence and active user engagement in creating and sharing authentic content. It addresses key limitations of traditional learning technology platforms - poor knowledge structuring – especially in managing the tensions of generic and discipline specific support, the repository default, difficulties with knowledge articulation, inefficient knowledge finding and disconnection between individual and community contexts.

The ADE is an interactive environment which allows users timely access to relevant information, impacts positively on affective dimensions of the dissertation journey and enables students to share practices while working towards an individual product. In incorporating best practice, it allows for both learner and staff development. Trials have proved the successful integration of academic writing development pedagogy and technology in various discipline and non-discipline specific contexts.

The presenters will demonstrate the ADE and outline their project's main findings before opening the session for discussion.

Presenters

Kathrin Kaufhold, Research Assistant JISC-funded project AWESOME [Academic Writing Empowered by Social On-Line Mediated Environments] Environment, January 2008 – March 2009, University of Leeds
Rebecca O'Rourke, Principal Investigator, JISC-funded project AWESOME [Academic Writing Empowered by Social On-Line Mediated Environments] Environment, January 2008 – March 2009, University of Leeds

Please Note: Kathrin and Rebecca will be presenting the work and findings of the AWESOME Team, which also includes Sirisha Bajanki, Vania Dimitrova, Melissa Highton, Lydia Lau, Alex Le Bek and Aisha Walker.

