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Articulate: online support and development for academic writing for publication (0271)

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Research Domain: Learning and Teaching

Writing can be an isolated process and academic writers frequently experience challenges to their maintenance of momentum, quality of writing, and sense of community. This paper reports on early research into the specific effectiveness of Web 2.0 and other technology supported writing development for academic publication for postgraduates and academic staff. It suggests that through the use of such technology writers can be 'nudged' across conceptual thresholds into good writing, and that research communities can be built and nurtured through such practices. Early action research reported here involves email based interviewing, blog posts and other qualitative journaling responses and has accompanied the delivery of a writing for academic publication Master's module at the University of Brighton, and support for international PhD students studying at a distance.

SRHE conference proposal

Outline

Writing for academic purposes, either for qualification or publication, can be an isolated and often frustrating, as well as rewarding, process and academic writers frequently experience challenges to their maintenance of momentum, quality of writing, and sense of community. There is increased sector pressure for postgraduate qualifications, academic publication, and research community building, leading to a focus on developing the quality of postgraduate, professional and academic staff writing. Such quality writing involves raising conceptual levels of written engagement with, and articulation of ideas and arguments, developmental reflection, organisation and presentation. Successful production of academic writing for qualification, internal consumption and publication enables knowledge building, peer support and sharing, helping build research communities. Academic literacies at the postgraduate and professional levels require further development in the context of increasing need to craft academic writing in dialogue with experts, articulate critical, conceptual thoughts and arguments in a research context, develop a writer's voice and overcome 'stuck' places in the writing process. These new literacies develop in dialogue – and sometimes conflict – with existing literacy and pedagogic practices.

Skills and confidence using Web 2.0 technologies in online learning and teaching are proving useful to the development of writing skills and research community building, and need developing further to stimulate and critically accompany learning. This is particularly so for ways in which they offer familiar but transformed, new and unfamiliar ways to support and encourage academic writing development. New Web 2.0 and other technology based practices can augment and enhance current forms of development and help invent new practices which stimulate and nurture to fruition new, different or enhanced forms of reflective, critical, conceptual, dialogic, and creative academic writing. These

technologies enable desirable practices (Gilster, 1997; Tapscott, 1998; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004, 2005; Duffy, Peter and Bruns, Axel, 2006) such as:

- support for each other's developing work and skills including help with 'stuck' places and confusions,
- opportunities to reflect and move on – and share the reflection,
- collaborative content creation,
- peer assessment,
- formative evaluation,
- individual as well as group reflection on learning experiences,
- user-centric up-to-date information regarding changes in collaborative spaces,
- research community building.

Work reported here builds on successful JISC funded projects and other funded and/or published work, including Mod4L which aimed to *develop a range of practice models that can be used by practitioners in real life contexts enhancing learning and teaching* (2006); and a current ESRC funded research project *Digital Literacies in Higher Education* (Lea, 2007 - 2009) exploring effects of blended e-learning on students' literacy. Previous research includes exploration of the effects of e-learning on literacy (Kress, 2003), and on students' academic writing courses (Goodfellow, 2006; McVey, 2008; Peretz, 2005). These practical initiatives and research projects primarily focus on, or explore *undergraduate* development of academic writing through blended e-learning. It also builds on previous work undertaken by the project team and related colleagues. This includes research into moments of conceptual threshold crossing (Kiley and Wisker, 2008) in the writing process and work on 'stuck' moments (Lather 1998; Meyer and Land, 2005) in writing followed by exploring processes of moving on, and the shift into focused, formed articulation in writing. In a recent small-scale study Wisker and Savin-Baden (2008) discovered ways of identifying and overcoming 'stuck' places in writing. Our project is innovative, combining practical e-learning/academic writing development, accompanied by action research to enhance academic writing of postgraduates, professionals and academic staff. Research and writing communities need sustainable development, to respond to changing social contexts for knowledge and communication and social networking enabled by Web 2.0 technologies can be particularly helpful in this regard. 'Academic writing' is a specialist language - involving specific discourses, grammars, vocabularies, genres, texts and social practices - with no native speakers, 'digital immigrants' or 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001). We recognise technology can both block or enable development and writing, and plan to continue with the development and research in order to:

- Identify kinds of writing development activities best enhanced and supported by Web 2.0 environments such as blogging, and developing critical friend communities.
- Understand barriers, incentives and practices enabling articulation between technology enhanced learning and successful writing practice development as experienced by postgraduates, professionals and academic staff.
- Develop and test appropriate vehicles, practices and models for academic writing in socially mediated environments.

Online writing development, interaction and support needs to be introduced for diverse, busy and/or dispersed academic writers, postgraduates, professionals and staff who, by learning through using Web 2.0 technologies, benefit from skill development in Web 2.0 enhanced, online learning, and academic writing, which they can then transfer to their own practice.

This paper reports on early research into the specific effectiveness of Web 2.0 and other technology supported writing development for academic publication for postgraduates and academic staff, suggesting that specific writing capabilities can be enabled through Web 2.0 and other technology supported opportunities, and that research communities can be built and nurtured. Early research reported here involves email based interviewing, blog posts and other qualitative journaling responses and has accompanied the delivery of a writing for academic publication masters module at the University of Brighton, and support for international PhD students studying at a distance.

The online community-based academic writing support development, and accompanying research, addresses three user needs:

1. development of postgraduate student and staff skills in using learning technologies;
2. academic writing development for publication and qualification;
3. research community building.

This early work is part of a larger planned project. **Articulate** explores experiences of postgraduates and academic staff as they encounter and respond to demands of writing for qualification and publication. It provides academic writing support, initially through further development of Brighton University's Web 2.0 technologies, *community@brighton* and *studentcentral*, enhancing technology skills of postgraduates and academic staff through online interactive processes (blogging, critical friends, joint writing) enabling writing development. Action research reinforces effective learning (in e-learning, Web 2.0 technologies, academic writing for publication) and draws good practice from across the sector.