

**Title:**                    **The use of Web2.0 technology (blogging) to form a community of practice for Asperger syndrome and neuro-typical students; to provide friendship, support and formative assessment, whilst undertaking their undergraduate dissertation proposal**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Understand the difficulties that students, including those with Asperger syndrome, have in undertaking extended project work such as the final undergraduate dissertation proposal.

Critically evaluate the use of Web2.0 technology (blogging) to create an academic community of learning for all students.

#### **Session Outline**

The undergraduate dissertation is an opportunity to showcase the knowledge that students acquire over three years of study, and is a compulsory requirement for the classification of an honours level degree. The first hurdle encountered is the dissertation proposal. Many students, aware of the importance of this module, can find the production of a focused proposal to be a daunting prospect.

The number of students with Asperger syndrome (AS) entering Universities is increasing. It is apparent that AS students can have difficulty undertaking extended pieces of project or written work (De Montfort University, 2005; Martin, 2008; NAS, 2008).

This problem was highlighted via a case study of an AS student at Anglia Ruskin University, undertaken during the 2008/9 academic year, who had difficulty completing an undergraduate dissertation, based on the development of an educational web-site. In the same year a trial was undertaken within the Computing School, in a cohort that included neuro-typical students, and two AS students, to see if an assignment could be undertaken through weekly online computer blogging. The blogs were available to the tutor for weekly monitoring and to the other students for constructive comment. This proved successful as all the students appeared to enjoy the exercise. In particular, the AS students were able, through the relative anonymity of the computer based system, to contribute to the academic community created and they scored well in the final assessment (Wenger, 1998; Bowman, 2007; Bowman & Scaife, 2009a).

The difficulties identified in the case study and the apparent success of the blogging exercise encouraged the presenters to successfully apply for a University funded fellowship to further research the use of blogging as a learning and assessment tool for extended pieces of project and written work for all students (Bowman & Scaife, 2009b).

The session will cover the research to date that has been undertaken in this project.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

Two anonymous case studies will be handed out based on a neuro-typical student and one with AS undertaking their dissertations and the emerging problems will be discussed – 20 minutes

Groups will identify strategies (based on the case studies) within Web 2.0 technologies (blogging) that provide a learning and assessment framework - 15 minutes

A sharing of the framework of postings developed by the researchers as a strategy for working with both neuro-typical and AS students will be presented on-line. A brief questionnaire will be undertaken in order to evaluate the achievement of the learning outcomes. – 10 minutes

### **References**

- Bowman, J. 2007, *The use of blogs in 3D visualisation*, Designs on E-Learning, 2nd International Conference on Teaching and Learning with Technology in Design and Communication, 12-14 September 2007, University of the Arts, London.
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- Bowman, J. and Scaife, W. 2009b, *Formative assessment using WEB 2.0 technology (blogging) to support students with Asperger's syndrome undertaking their dissertation proposal*, Chelmsford: Anglia Ruskin University. \*\*\*
- De Montfort University 2005, *Neurodiversity in FE and HE: positive initiatives for specific learning differences. Proceedings of two one-day conferences - 17 September 2004 and 16 September 2005*, Leicester and Bedford: De Montfort University.
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- Wenger. E. 1998, *Communities of Practice, Learning, Meaning and Identity, Learning in doing: social, cognitive, and computational perspectives*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

\*\*\* These papers are currently waiting for publication – please contact the proposers for copies.