The use of Wikis in teaching

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Wikis are online collaborative writing tools that allow a group of participants to co-author a webpage or a website. The most famous example of a Wiki is Wikipedia that allows anyone with a user account to contribute to the development of Wikipedia content.

Some of the core features of a Wiki are similar to those of the more recently developed collaborative writing documents that are available through Google Docs or OneDrive:

- Multi-user access to documents with shared editing rights.
- Opportunity to co-create a single output (e.g., of group work)

And yet, Wikis have been designed for multi-user collaboration from the very outset, well over 20 years ago, and are rooted in the participatory and non-hierarchical ideals of the early web community's content development (Jimoyiannis & Roussinos 2017). This is reflected in the more streamlined functionality (e.g., version history and the possibility to revert to an earlier version) and the emphasis on the perceived equality of contributors.

The focus of Wiki-writing is on the 'construction of knowledge, rather than presentation of information' (Ruth & Houghton 2009). Multiple users are invited to add, delete, review and change the content working in an environment that is based on the principles of information sharing and collaboration. For students, this offers an opportunity to develop a community of inquiry with their peers through active involvement with a shared learning space (Jimoyiannis & Roussinos 2017).

TIP: Wikis work best as a long-term activity with an 'impact' – e.g., a course glossary that can be used by the class in exam preparation, a process guide to be shared with future cohorts of students, or as development of Wikipedia articles on socially significant topics.

Key features

- Detailed editing history and the opportunity to revert to a previous version.
- All wiki page edits are open for debate and correction by any member of the community. No version is considered 'final' for as long as the given wiki community remains in existence.
- In learning environments, gives students shared authority and responsibility for their own knowledge creation.
- Continuous peer review, which makes it especially suitable for classes with a high number of students where it might be difficult to ensure effective verification of work otherwise

Benefits

- Wikis are most often built to create an 'impact' (be it the class or wider audience), which increases students' motivation and results in deeper learning and a greater understanding of content.
- Establishes social connections with peers and teachers through the act of co-creation and strengthens ties to the other members of the learning community.
- When set up as group work, helps develop collaborative working skills – communication, organisation, self-regulation.
- Access to the writing of their peers engages students in the formulation of a shared understanding of data collection, analysis and writing processes that are most appropriate for the specified style conventions.
- Promotes and strengthens digital literacy skills.

Challenges

- **Technical challenges** – some form of training in navigating the wiki space may be required, and outages and system failures can affect student and staff access at certain times.
- High perceived time and effort required to become familiar with the **writing style of a wiki**.
- Lack of familiarity with the collaborative process in which students are continually editing individual contributions - students might not be comfortable with editing the work of others and could be concerned about the **ownership of contributions**.

General tips on how to minimise potential issues

- Offer a training session on the use of a wiki. This should cover the basic technical aspects of using a wiki, but also address the writing style that is expected from students. It is a good idea to set up a list of rules that each entry should follow and highlight those in the initial training session. This will increase students' confidence in using the tool and ensure the success of the activity.
- Be clear about the rules for making a contribution. Outline the expectations from each entry, preferred timings, and the process for debating the contributions of others.
- Highlight the benefits of the activity with regards to not only the final learning performance but also the social value of the activity and the impact it can create. Teachers can foster the social element by, for example, stimulating some competition between students or allowing them to take on the role of the teacher for a period of time.

Formats and tools

Although the basic principle of collaborative writing applies in all forms of Wiki-writing, the scope and the reach of the output can differ quite significantly. Below you can find information on the four formats that a Wiki may take with some notes on the available support, should you choose to implement it.

1. **Internal, single class wiki**: This is the most basic form of Wiki-writing that engages a single class in a joint effort. This activity could aim to create a class resource (e.g., a dictionary, a glossary of terms or an online textbook) or could be used as a tool for exposing students to other perspectives while working in an industry-relevant format (e.g., a promotional package for a product). Nuria López from Teaching & Learning describes her experience of using a Wiki to enable students to co-create a class dictionary.
   Tools: For a basic solution, use Pages in Canvas. NB Canvas does not have a dedicated Wiki integration, but it is possible to give students editing permissions and see page history.
   For a more Wiki-like experience, use the 'Wiki Page Library' app on Sharepoint. NB First, set up a 'team' for your course cohort on Sharepoint.
2. **Internal, multi-cohort wiki**: Widening the reach of the activity can be a powerful motivator, which can foster more thoughtful engagement with course material. On a course that focuses on the issues that are prone to rapid change, students could be asked to create an up-to-date glossary or a textbook to be further developed by their successors: Ruth&Houghton (2009) describe how students created and developed a wiki-textbook for the *Mobile Workforce Technologies* course to ensure its currency.
   Tools: Both Canvas and Sharepoint solutions mentioned above are possible. NB Consider how the wiki will be presented to the later cohorts (content presentation, data protection, etc.)
3. **Open access, CBS-curated wiki**: This type of a Wiki aims to develop content that benefits a wider audience while aligning with the learning goals relevant for participating students (as a single course, a programme-level or a multi-cohort project). E.g., a colleague from the Department of Organization in her previous role at DTU worked with students to create materials for a project's website.
   Tools: Neither Canvas nor Sharepoint is suitable for external publishing. The solution would be to either find an external wiki platform (e.g., PBWorks) or get students to collaborate on Sharepoint and publish the curated output on a CBS-owned webpage at the end of the project.
4. **Open access, dynamically edited wiki** (e.g.,Wikipedia): This type of activity fully embraces the open access collaborative philosophy of wikis. When asked to develop content available on Wikipedia pages following the stipulated writing conventions, students develop communication skills and contribute to open knowledge. When aligned to the learning objective of a course or a programme this can be a valuable and motivational activity, as in this example shared by Varia from her previous practice.
   Tools: To support student interaction and reflection in a long-term group activity, set up Group discussion spaces on Canvas. For the Wikipedia skill training, use Wikipedia training resources developed specifically for Higher Education. Further support can be provided by Varia from T&L.

References

Jimoyiannis, A., & Roussinos, D. (2017). Students' collaborative patterns in a wiki project: Towards a theoretical and analysis framework. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 9(1), 24-39.

Ruth, A. & Houghton, L. (2009). The wiki way of learning. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*. 25 (2), 135-152. Available online at https://ajet.org.au/index.php/AJET/article/view/1147/395