



Case

08

Wikis: Collaborative Publishing or Reason to Plagiarize?

Background Information

Among the emerging tools available on today's Web is the wiki. A wiki is defined as a collaborative web site with works created and modified by many different people (Richardson, 2005). The word *wiki* comes from a Hawaiian word for "quick", in reference to the rapid rate that wiki articles can change. Wikis were created in 1995 by Ward Cunningham in hopes of encouraging people to write more through the use of an easy tool in which to publish their writings (Richardson, 2005).

Perhaps the most famous wiki thus far is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia. Started in 2001, Wikipedia now includes about one million entries in many different languages (Hastings, 2005). Wikipedia can be freely edited by anyone. Although there are some who still question its integrity, "Wikipedia is generally regarded as a credible, constantly updated resource." (Richardson & Mancabelli, 2007, p. 14) Still, there are those in the academic world who question Wikipedia as a credible resource.

There are a variety of ways to use wikis in the classroom. Because of its collaborative nature, a wiki is naturally a good choice for groups of students to use on various projects. For example, students can use a wiki to compile lists of resources, construct a study guide, produce group lab reports, or write a story (Hastings, 2005). Wikis encourage active participation by the user. Although there is a concern regarding the accuracy of wiki entries or the vulnerability to "vandals" (individuals posting inappropriate content), the use of password protection has alleviated some of this concern. Wiki software programs can also track the changes made to a page so a teacher or monitor can determine who has made the modifications and which students have contributed (Stahmer, 2006).

Some teachers who have used wikis in their class have found the quality of student's writing has improved. Students were motivated to produce a quality product because they knew that others were looking at their published work (McPherson, 2006). But, because of this expanded audience beyond the teacher, the temptation to transfer information found on the Web verbatim to a wiki and claim it as their own is real. Therefore, another concern with the use of wikis is plagiarism.

With the growing use of technology in the classroom, wikis may prove to be a very useful educational tool. By using a wiki, students can develop their use of collaborative skills, learn to be more effective writers, learn to respect one another's work, and can learn how to publish content (Richardson, 2005).

Preview

Among the emerging tools available on today's Web is the wiki. There are a variety of ways to use wikis in the classroom. Because of its collaborative nature, a wiki is naturally a good choice for groups of students to use on various projects. Its use as a classroom tool in providing students with another method of developing their writing and collaborative skills is appealing to teachers at all grade levels. The wiki's many positive aspects also come with some concerns, namely its vulnerability to vandals, determining each student's participation, and plagiarism.

Focus Questions:

As you study the following case, keep these questions in mind: (1) Do wikis belong in the classroom? (2) Can wikis assist in developing the writing and collaborative skills in students? (3) At what grade level are students ready for wikis?

The Case

A New Approach to Writing

Miss Tanya Walker, a relatively new Social Studies teacher at Northville High School, decided to have her students create a wiki about major figures during World War II. There were approximately 75 students in her three American History classes. She divided the students in each class into groups of four and assigned them a "person." She instructed the students to research their person as a group and write a brief biography with emphasis on their role during WWII. They were then to place this report, including a bibliography, on a page in the Wiki that Miss Walker had created on the Internet.

The students were mostly enthusiastic about this new assignment. They enjoyed being able to use the computer to complete an assignment. Each group researched their person in the library and on the Internet. Then they compiled their information into a report that was placed on a page in the wiki. Each student was encouraged to add information or edit their group's wiki as they saw fit.

Miss Walker was pleased, for the most part, with the students' performance, both in their preparation and their reports. They knew that they were going to be "published," so they wanted to do well. But, she noticed that several of the reports had used language and grammar that were at a level above what she had seen previously from her students. She began to suspect plagiarism had occurred. Upon checking the references that the students had listed, she did indeed find evidence of direct passages being used without a citation. She began to wonder if she had adequately taught the students how to properly summarize or paraphrase another person's work? She decided to review proper summarizing and paraphrasing techniques with ALL the students. They were then allowed to edit their work if necessary.

Discussion Questions:

1. Could Miss Walker have handled the plagiarism situation any differently?
2. If wikis are to be used in the classroom, at what grade level are the students ready?
3. What can be done to assure that ALL students are involved in the writing and editing process?
4. What, if anything, should be done about those students that plagiarized work? Should Miss Walker have allowed them to edit their work after she found evidence of plagiarism, or just given them a "0"?
5. What, if any, other concerns do you envision with the use of wikis?

Links

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

More 'Reliable' Wikipedia Soon to Launch

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/showStory.cfm?ArticleID=6877&page=1>

<http://www.wikispaces.com>

<http://pbwiki.com>

<http://www.seedwiki.com>

http://schools.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page

http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Main_Page

Resources

Hastings, J. (2005). Cool Tools. *School Library Journal*, 51(9), 42-45.

McPherson, K. (2006). Wikis and Student Writing. *Teacher Librarian*, 34(2), 70-72.

Richardson, W. (2005). What's a Wiki? *Multimedia & Internet @ Schools*, 12(6), 17-20.

Richardson, W. & Mancabelli, R. (2007). The Read/Write Web: New Tools for a New Generation of Technology. *Principal*, 86(3), 12-17.

Stahmer, T. (2006). Think Outside the Blog. *Technology & Learning*, 26(6), 28-30.