Wikis as Instructional Writing Environments for Graduate Students

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Acknowledgements

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What is a wiki?

- Collaborative, open, web-based writing environment
- Anyone can edit the contents of any webpage.
- Wikis use a simplified hypertext markup language that allow learners to format text and create hyperlinks between webpages.
- You can also use the markup language to refer to pages that do not yet exist, with the expectation that others will later create the content for those pages.
Instructional Value of Wiki’s

- Social writing with potential impact because people go back to revise and improve it.
- Can offer authenticity and permanence—unlike a term paper seen by more people than the instructor and writer.
  - The class audience is too varied to simply default to using jargon.
  - Students also have to think about organization and clarity of expression.
Instructional Value of Wikis

- Can offer a model of publication. This is a tacit process usually not evident to outsiders. Wikis potentially offer this view of the process of idea development in writing.

- Wikis offer a means of organization, because they have hierarchical relationships possible among pages and to outside resources.

- Also because they are not temporally defined (like weblogs for example) there is an underlying assumption of improvability.
Description of Course

- Fully online distance course
- Using a variety of media:
  - asynchronous conferencing;
  - synchronous video chat
  - asynchronous video clips;
  - weblogs for individual online reflection;
  - Wikis as collaborative writing environments.
Wiki Possibilities

- Exploring aspects of collaborative writing environments
  - To support various kinds of academic writing tasks
  - To provide a social context for modelling tacit aspects of academic writing practice
  - To provide an opportunity for students to engage in legitimate peripheral participation activity around writing
Genres and activities

- Many different kinds of writing and authoring activities that could be supported through modelling and collaborative work, e.g:
  - reviews,
  - journal articles
  - course design
  - research proposals
  - annotated bibliographies

- Each has particular requirements: e.g. formatting for bibliographies and reference lists; sections of typical research proposals etc.
Contexts

- Annotated bibliography for an online course
- As a course environment
- Collaborative journal article writing with GRAIL team and students.
Wiki technical affordances

- Support modelling through revision histories
- Collaborative text editing
- History
- Recent Changes
- Linking
Example wiki environments

- Meatball ‘Generic’ wiki
- Standard wiki markup [[Brett, 2006]]
- Flexible structure-growing site
- Everyone can edit any part of the site

- Writely
- Wysiwyg editor
- Constrained, single purpose environment
- Author assignment, easy author tracking with colour
Welcome, cbrett! (Log out)

Home

Welcome

Welcome to the GRAIL Bibliography Wiki. This site exists to collect and annotate academic resources of in Fall 2005, students from CTL1608H are editing this site with readings of their own interest.

Quick links

Wiki

- Sandbox to play in
- Recent Changes to keep track of what's going on
- Overcoming dread a primer on getting over the fear of editing.

Course

- Readings about wikis
- Assignment instructions
- Annotated bibliography. The existing bibliography.
- Distributed Cognition Part 1 discussion
- Distributed Cognition Part 2 discussion

Meta-course

- Feedback complaints, suggestions, brainstorms, bugs, love, hate back to Sunir.
- Development diary to keep track of the changes here.
1. Instructions

For this week—up until Thursday, I want you to continue to USE THE WIKI to write your thoughts and reactions to the articles as you do your reading this week in response to one of the two following questions.

You should also read each other’s entries and make comments (these should be substantive rather than the kinds of comments we put in annotations in KF).

Here is the movie of the week: distrib.mp4

THEN, on Friday, I want you to GO BACK to KF and answer the questions there in the WEEK 8 View.

2. Question 1

1. In the paper on Distributed Constructionism this week the authors talk about the kinds of “constructions” that can go on in various kinds of online environments: to what extent do you think online contents can support different kinds of thinking?

2.1. Summary so far
“Writely”: wysiwyg Wiki

Expectations

- public presentation for personal thoughts
- the weblog is a socially-mediated environment, gain access to other’s experiences, doctoral process
- A personal space
- a blog is for individual reflection
- the public (published) aspect of a weblog is an important reason to use the tool
- journaling is an individual activity and therefore if a weblog is a journal then it is an individual activity
- Approaching the task as a collaborative learning activity
- (b) public aspect of weblog requires that writing and ideas be fully formed--style (5)
- (c) (of the thesis process) that it is an individual process of thinking, not socially mediated, but this may not be the case, there is literature regarding how science labs work and how scientific discoveries are made that supports the requirement for social interaction (5)
- understanding of how knowledge is shared within the blogosphere

(1) To me the blog is a space for the public presentation of one’s thoughts.
(2) Gloria - The weblog is a way of keeping in touch with others in our research group and learning from their experiences. I have found it very useful for developing awareness of the doctoral process.
(1) Lynn - A weblog makes your private thoughts public. - the difference between public versus private as opposed to public versus personal, writing for yourself versus writing for a public
(1) Julie - My initial response is that the purpose of a blog is for individual reflection, however after reflecting on this, I can think of a number of other purposes such as getting your opinion out there, a storage site for references, determining public opinion, and disseminating information.

(2) Blogs are most definitely a public tool for me. Indeed, I’d go as far as to say that they lose their power when they are not public. Private postings, by definition, will be accessible to a potentially smaller audience and therefore be less valuable as a contribution to the blogosphere.
(2) Lynn - Public. I don’t know how a weblog could be considered private, unless it was password protected and available only to a limited
Annotated Bibliography & Discussion

- Distance education course on Online learning and design of Online Learning Environments
- 15 graduate students
- Used KF as the primary discussion environment; weblogs for reflection and a wiki as the annotated bibliography environment and for two weeks of discussion mid-course.
Phases

- Phase 1. Introduction. [Weeks 2-6] Students and instructors are introduced to the wiki environment.
  - Help, articles, examples.
- Phase 2. Discussion weeks. [Weeks 7-8] Weekly discussions are diverted to the wiki from Knowledge Forum.
  - Reactions, on-demand support
- Phase 3. Annotated bibliography. [Weeks 9-10]. The annotated bibliography is due at the beginning of Week 10.
  - More on demand support and feedback
Results

“I liked doing new things (ie.wiki) and this is the kind of stuff I envisioned doing more of when I started the course.”

“...more experimentation within the Wiki, playing around with collaboratively designing various environments - more examples and modelling needed”

“I like computer mediated communication; I like it a lot, but I didn’t like the Wiki; it just didn’t suit the way I construct knowledge in a community setting.”
One student’s wiki reflection

At first, the Wiki = chaos
“Our real discoveries come from chaos, from going to the place that looks wrong and stupid and foolish”.
(Chuck Palahniuk)

Using the Wiki = out of my comfort zone, confusing environment
“Chaos in the world brings uneasiness, but it also allows the opportunity for creativity and growth.”
(Tom Barrett)

In the end, the Wiki = growth and learning
## Wiki Advantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plus</th>
<th>Supporters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge building</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make changes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything on one page</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunir’s editing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less ownership</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaos</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned about readings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threaded</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asynchronous</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change summary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutrality</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner-driven</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature group</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wiki Disadvantages

Red = Factors related to task organization (rather than wiki design per se).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minus</th>
<th>Supporters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No threading (meta-information)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost text</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing others work</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No orientation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-reading text</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others editing my work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't see what's changed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to adjust</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrust upon us</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time consuming</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jump in late, see giant 'note'</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readings too hard</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to negotiate without metachannel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent changes bugs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't edit where you want</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wiki syntax</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ugly</td>
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</table>
Feature requests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature request</th>
<th>Supporters</th>
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<tr>
<td>Colour coding by author</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Titles for posts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richer editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Page ownership and security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change visualization</td>
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<td>Dates for posts</td>
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<td>Find in page tool</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change summary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last person to edit page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edit at insertion point</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future Directions

- Use a middle ground wiki for course activities: [http://grail.oise.utoronto.ca/mediawiki](http://grail.oise.utoronto.ca/mediawiki)
- Design course activities which balance individual sense of ownership, with opportunity for group contribution.
- E.g. Annotated bibliography would have a collaborative component; if discussion, then it would have a sub component structure.
- For GRAIL: use Media-wiki to design specific skins for particular collaborative writing activities: journal submission; reviews of conference presentations etc.
URL’s and Contact Information

- Prof. Clare Brett: cbrett@oise.utoronto.ca

- This year’s wiki:
  http://grail.oise.utoronto.ca/bib.cgi

- The emergent wiki for the next iteration can be found at:
  http://grail.oise.utoronto.ca/mediawiki/index.php/Main_Page