Use of the Wiki for Cross-Institutional Collaborations

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how groups of student teachers use the wiki to collaborate cross-institutionally in order to design tasks for English language learners. Participants in this case study involved student teachers at a private graduate institution on the East Coast in the U.S. and students at a public graduate institution in Luxembourg. In this action research approach, data triangulation involved gathering information through a combination of different instruments such as computer-mediated communication data, needs analyses, journal entries, and post-course questionnaires. Findings showed that in addition to writing collaboratively, groups used the wiki as a discussion tool. This subsequently led to an exploration of the interactions through computer-mediated discourse analysis and a discussion of methodological implications.

Keywords: Action Research, Blended, Computer-Mediated Communication, Discourse Analysis, Hybrid, Language Teacher Education, Technology, Telecollaboration, Wiki

INTRODUCTION

Goal and Rationale of the Study

This exploratory case study aims to contribute to prior research on online and blended learning formats in telecollaborative teacher education settings (e.g., Arnold, Ducate, & Lomicka, 2007; Dooly, 2010; Develotte, Guichon, & Kern, 2008; Develotte, Guichon, & Vincent, 2010; Fuchs, 2006; Hauck & Lewis, 2007; Lord & Lomicka, 2007, 2008; Müller-Hartmann, 2005; Scherff & Paulus, 2006; Shaughnessy, Purves, & Jackson, 2008). The study explores how groups of student teachers in the U.S. collaborated with partner groups in Luxembourg on a wiki to design tasks for English language learners.

The goal was for groups of student teachers to explore technology tools such as podcasts, wikis, blogs, and discussion forums through model learning (Willis, 2001). Participants included one class of student teachers at a private graduate institution on the East Coast in the U.S., and one class of students enrolled in a public graduate institution in Luxembourg. Cross-institutional groups used a class wiki for collaborative writing and discussion, and they created their own group wiki as a platform for English language learning tasks.

In the next section, the author first presents research on the wiki’s potential for language teaching. She then outlines how participants used the wiki for the purpose of task negotiation and design, and how she used a computer-
mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) approach for exploring the computer-mediated communication (CMC) data.

**Using Wikis in Learning and Teaching**

The potential of asynchronous Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs and wikis, has been well established for collaboration (e.g., Arnold & Ducate, 2006), reflective writing, and for writing for an authentic audience in foreign language instruction (e.g., Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 2007; Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2004; Reinhardt & Thorne, 2007; Warschauer, 1996). In the literature, the ease with which the wiki can be used has been stressed on numerous occasions. For instance, the wiki promotes meaningful topic associations between different pages by making page link creation almost intuitively easy (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001). Users can also easily add text, photos, and videos (Niño, 2009), co-construct knowledge and participate in virtual communities of practice (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006), and collaboratively create and edit a document on one central wiki page (Duffy & Bruns, 2006; for an overview see also Parker & Chao, 2007). For example, Wikispaces showcases a number of educational wikis that range from 2nd grade class wikis to wikis for early childhood educators, and anyone can contribute to these educational sites.

Others have emphasized the wiki’s potential for “reflection and progressive articulation to be done collaboratively” which can then result in “fully social constructivist mode of learning” (McMullin, 2005, p. 72, italics in original): “[W]ikis, with their very low technological barriers, yet very rich and flexible functionality, offer the opportunity to embed collaborative, constructive learning more extensively in our educational environments” (pp. 72-73).

Warschauer (2010), in his most recent commentary in *Language Learning and Technology* seconds the enthusiastic reviews of the wiki because he considers the wiki a “powerful digital tool for collaborative writing and collective knowledge development” (p. 5). Wikis “follow closely the open-source software ideal that the quality of the collectively produced product is more important than owning the idea or the code” (Richardson, 2006, p. 63). According to Richardson, the collaborative nature of the wiki assigns only a marginal role to authorship (2006). In other words, the concepts of authorship and ownership are of secondary importance for wikis—in contrast to blogs, for example. Earlier studies on the use of the wiki in language learning and teaching have shown that when used for collaborative writing, the wiki tool enabled students to increase the amount of writing they produced, to develop more confidence in their writing, and to feel more motivated through such assignments (e.g., Mak & Coniam, 2008; Kovacic, Bubas, & Zlatovic, 2007). Lund (2008) documented the wiki activity in an English as a Foreign Language class via log files and videotaped activities which demonstrated transitioning from local collaboration to collective and networked production: The activity types showed “that a wiki affords collective production, networked structures, and shared spaces” (p. 50). By the same token, one study found that the public nature of the wiki can have an inhibiting impact on students (De Pedro, Rieradevall, López, Sant, Piñol, Núñez, & Llobera, 2006). Other critical voices have highlighted that in order for wikis to work, it takes careful design and implementation. Lin and Kelsey (2009) have questioned whether students feel comfortable editing each other’s wiki articles. Their findings suggest that collaborative writing and learning are not the norm among participants in the early stages of working with the wiki; the authors thus proposed that teachers would need to do a great deal of learner training with regard to how to use the wiki, and how to work collaboratively to maximize the supportive learning experiences.

A number of wiki studies have focused on form in peer editing (Kessler, 2009), and on the tool’s potential to aid in developing collaborative autonomous learning abilities (Kessler & Bikowski, 2010; Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012). Arnold, Ducate, and Kost (2012) have analyzed collaboration on the wiki in terms

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