Chapter 10
Innovative Wiki Ways: Engaging Students in Collaborative Writing Processes

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ABSTRACT

Wiki-based collaborative writing has been increasingly implemented in second language classes. This chapter illustrates two small group writing projects conducted via Wikispaces (http://www.wikispaces.com/) and explicates how the distinctive wiki functions (i.e., “Discussion,” “Comments,” “Edit,” and “History”) mediate collaborative writing processes in the EFL and ESL contexts. The results reveal that wiki “Discussion” and “Comments” enabled the students to engage in the negotiation of writing tasks, as reflected in content discussion, task management, technical communication, language negotiation, and social talk. Transparency of wiki “History” records motivates students to be actively involved with recursive writing processes through multiple rounds of writing and revising using “Edit,” namely addition, deletion, reordering, rephrasing, and correction. The affordances of other wiki modules such as “Projects” and “Writing resources” are reported. The results within the EFL and ESL settings are also briefly compared to illustrate how the wiki tool is used by particular groups of English language learners. This chapter supports wiki small group writing as an innovative way to engage students in collaboration and learning during collaborative writing tasks in both EFL and ESL learning contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative writing, the shared and negotiated process where multiple authors are responsible for producing a single text (Storch, 2012, 2013), is gaining attention in the second and foreign language learning contexts. The increase in implementation of collaborative writing follows a shift toward more communicative activities, a greater support for writing development, and an awareness of the multiple affordances of collaborative tasks (Bruffee, 1993; Donato, 1994; Lee, 2010;
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Informed by sociocultural theory, collaborative writing is supported by the view of writing as a social activity, which builds on the collective group knowledge through scaffolded negotiation and problem solving. Thus, the primary benefit of collaborative writing draws from the pooled knowledge of many writers to contribute and co-construct a new text that transcends the capabilities of any one writer working alone.

The wiki, a Web 2.0 medium for collaborative writing, facilitates a convergence of the benefits through computer-mediated communication (CMC) and takes advantage of the social participation and interaction in an online learning environment (Kessler & Bikowski, 2010; Li & Zhu, 2011; Storch, 2013). Previous research (e.g., Lee, 2010; Lundin, 2008) posited that the affordance of wikis eases the collaborative process, facilitates interactions, and supports student writing development; however, little is known about the nature of wiki collaboration, and the collaborative process in wiki-mediated writing leaves a wide area for exploration (Storch, 2013).

This chapter illustrates two projects on wiki-based collaborative writing and examines the affordances of wikis for collaborative writing in two different learning contexts—ESL and EFL. In particular, this chapter explicates how the ESL/EFL students apply multiple wiki functions to negotiate writing tasks and co-construct academic essays throughout writing processes.

Theoretical Underpinning: Writing as a Social Activity

Collaborative writing is supported by the sociocultural approach that emphasizes the social construction of knowledge and acknowledges writing as a social process (Ede & Lunsford, 1990). Research on collaborative writing as a problem-solving task in second language contexts often focuses on the discussion of scaffolding between peers engaging in small group or pair work (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000; Swain & Lap-kin, 1998). A prominent example from Donato (1994) illustrated how learning took place via peer interaction manifested in collective scaffolding. As Donato (1994) noted, “the speakers are at the same time individually novices and collectively experts, sources of new orientations for each other and guides through this complex linguistic problem solving’’ (p. 46). The “collective orientation to jointly constructed activity’’ (Donato, 2004, p. 287) enables students to create a written work of higher caliber than the work any single co-writer may have produced independently.

Collaborative writing allows students to step into various roles such as tutor, sounding board, and critical reader (Weissberg, 2006). Collaborative writing also enhances students’ awareness of writing for an audience due to the availability of feedback during the process of co-constructing a text (Storch, 2011, 2013). With a specific focus on discussion about linguistic choices, students are engaged in languaging and collaborative dialogue reflected in Language-Related Episodes (LREs) while interacting with peers during collaborative writing tasks. The process of writing collaboratively forces language learners to express themselves aloud and through written text involving both speaking and writing to create an explicit organization of ideas (Storch, 2013). Unlike the spontaneity of speech, the element of time intrinsic to writing creates opportunities for languaging and reflective thinking about the writing process.

Given the development of CMC technologies, collaborative writing in the online modes such as wikis has been increasingly conducted in second and foreign language contexts. As Kessler and Bikowski (2010) posited, ‘‘the evolution of collaborative writing may be intrinsically connected with the iterations of technology since new developments provide new opportunities for collaboration’’ (p. 43). Recently, researchers have begun to examine how wikis’ collaborative and interactive nature mediates students’ joint writing process and facilitates the co-production of writing (e.g., Li, 2013; Lund, 2008).
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