Chapter 16
Designing a Wiki-Based Course for Enhancing the Practice of Writing Skills in the 21st Century: Moving from Theoretical Grounding into Practical Knowledge

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ABSTRACT
This chapter describes an intervention of a wiki-based course to enhance the practice of academic writing through the process approach. This course was experimented on a freshmen year class of medical students learning English for specific purposes at a university in Saudi Arabia. This chapter draws on the relevant theories and their relationship to the practice of wikis in learning academic writing. Wikis have been introduced into the teaching of writing to afford collaborative assistance and social support. Accordingly, the chapter demonstrates the structure of the course and details the systematic organization between the in-class teaching and on-wiki practice. The intervention of a wiki-based writing course gives emphasis on the background of the tasks assigned. It points out the essential characteristics of the structure of wiki interface that would enable learners to accomplish the process-oriented wiki-mediated collaborative writing (PWM CW) tasks. This new practice reveals the evaluation of this course with its writing tasks, based on the learners’ perspectives.

INTRODUCTION
The practice of academic writing production embodies a challenge for several learners of English academic writing in preparatory year at university in Saudi Arabia. One facet of this challenge is because English is located in Saudi Arabia within the expanding circle which requires its learners, either for speaking or writing, to follow British or American English (Kachru, 1992). Determining the causes related to the
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deficit of learning academic writing is demanding; yet without a doubt, using old-fashioned methods in teaching academic writing, without taking the advantages of technology, would retain learners’ motivation in developing this skill. In some instructional contexts, there is an emphasis on the product approach which neglects the strategies and process writing of making a sound piece of writing (Al-Seghayer, 2011). In this chapter, process writing has been suggested as a solution for the current problem as Al-Hazmi (2006) emphasizes that process writing helps to construct various meanings and realities; enables writers’ needs to be raised, discussed and resolved and formulates a channel for expressing individuals’ own opinions.

Furthermore, social networking tools, online-based applications and multimedia (e.g., wikis) have positively contributed to the advancement of academic writing practice which has become socially interactive-based. It enforces learning through acts of collaboration. It also looks for members’ partnership in groups rather than teammates’ competition. According to this view, social relationships and communication skills are encouraged; sense of belonging to a group and being a member of a group is highly provided (Johnson and Johnson, 1999). As this era is called digital age, it is undoubtedly that investigating interaction in online learning has become the tip of the iceberg in the educational research (Roblyer and Ekhaml, 2000; Anderson, 2003). Our concentration in this chapter is that all users should be stimulated socially through engaging into a variety of tasks. Thereby, the more social presence is the more collaboration and interaction is expected to happen.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The course drew on theories concerning wiki-mediated collaborative writing, and the process approach (i.e. the PWMCW), in order to apply them to classroom and online learning. Such theories support the development of the practices adopted and the incorporation of peer collaboration into the learning process. In other words, the design of this course has been consolidated with theoretical knowledge and these principles:

- Firstly, drawing on social constructivism, the PWMCW (Process-oriented Wiki-Mediated Collaborative Writing) was seen as a joint enterprise between the teacher, learners and their peers in creating new meaning (e.g. Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002).
- Secondly, the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky, which is the area between the actual development of learners and their level of potential development, was at the heart of this course design as the learners were encouraged to get engaged and expand their thinking, understanding and performance with the help of “experts” (e.g. Lund, 2008).
- Thirdly, in terms of collaborative learning (CL), learners were encouraged to participate in explicit collaborative tasks, mutual communication and knowledge sharing (e.g. Davoli, Monari & Eklundh, 2009).
- Fourthly, the practice of computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) was initiated so that the learners could share knowledge asynchronously (e.g. Lehtinen, 2003; Bradley, et al., 2010).
- Finally, motivation in language learning was seen as key so that the opportunity for language learning success was increased (Dörnyei, 1998).

The course was thus designed according to how collaboration, collaborative writing and wiki-based writing can be introduced, nurtured and maintained. It focused on meeting learners’ social needs and the
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