ITBL — INQUIRY THROUGH BLENDED LEARNING

Supporting Student Collaboration through the use of Wikis

A wiki is a collection of Web pages that can be edited by anyone, at any time, from anywhere. The possibilities for using wikis as a platform for collaborative projects are limited only by one's imagination and time.
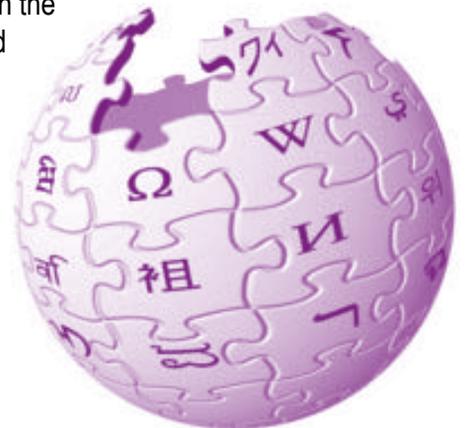
What Is A Wiki?

Wikis are Web pages that can be viewed and modified by anybody with a Web browser and access to the Internet. This means that you can add, edit or delete pages, text and hyperlinks right from a Web browser without the need for HTML, JavaScript or FTP programs. Content is posted immediately to the Web, eliminating the need for email distribution with the associated risk of virus transmission. Wikis are able to incorporate text, images, sound and video, creating a high-quality interactive, and collaborative Web environment.

The first wiki was developed by Ward Cunningham in 1995. Cunningham took the name from the WikiWiki shuttle bus at the Honolulu airport, which means, "super fast". He describes a wiki as "the simplest online database that could possibly work" (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p.5). The wiki provides efficiency, accessibility and an enormous forum to distribute information.

Why Use Wikis to Support Student Collaboration?

Wikis have recently emerged as a very powerful digital tool for supporting student collaboration. Their flexibility, ease of use and low barrier to entry, makes them equivalent to "digital paper" (Lamb, 2004). Higdon (2005), suggests that wikis allow students to "co-construct meaning in a democratized digital space" (p.1), and Fountain (2005), states that the use of wikis to support collaborative projects helps "promote 'pride of authorship' and ownership in the team's activities" (p.8). Wikis allow faculty and students to engage in collaborative activities that extend well beyond the classroom walls. Possibly the best example of a global collaborative project supported by a wiki is Wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org). This is a Web-based, multi-lingual encyclopedia, which has been co-created by thousands of contributors from all over the World.

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Give Me an Example

Wikis can be used by students to collaboratively summarize online discussion forums within a course:

1. Create a series of online discussion forums within a learning management system, such as Blackboard, which relate to the key topics/modules for your course.

2. Assign groups of students (2 to 3) to each of the topics.

3. Each student group is responsible for moderating and summarizing their selected online discussion.

4. The groups use a wiki to make draft notes and a final summary of the online discussion, based on guidelines provided by the instructor or developed by the students.

More Ideas

A wiki can be used by:

- *Students* to create online journals, lab books, research notebooks, ePortfolios, and even online textbooks for their own benefit, or for peer or instructor review.

- *Faculty* to communicate with their students and to collaborate on research and writing projects with their peers (e.g. textbooks, articles) through the collection of ideas, papers, timelines, documents, or to study results within a collective digital space.

- *Departmental personnel, instructors and teaching assistants* can use a wiki to organize and discuss common course assets such as; syllabi, office hours and assessments without having an endless email chain or difficult to schedule face-to-face meetings.

- *Conference organizers* as a means of planning, coordinating and implementing events.

Other Considerations

There are some risks involved in using a wiki since anyone on the Web can modify the content (e.g. add to, edit or delete material). Instructors often monitor student wikis to ensure that inappropriate language, spam and incorrect, or inappropriate content has not been contributed. This can be a very time intensive process and thus, some wikis have editing privileges where only group members can modify content.

Where Can I Go for More Information?

1. **Wide Open Spaces: Wikis Ready or Not**

   An EDUCAUSE article by Brian Lamb (2004) discussing how wikis are currently being used in higher education

   http://www.educause.edu/LibraryDetailPage/666?ID=ERM0452

2. **Wikis - EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative Library**

   An extensive listing of resources and articles related to the use of wikis in higher education

   http://www.educause.edu/Browse/645?PARENT_ID=695

3. **Teaching, Learning, and Other Uses for Wikis in Academia**

   An article by Jude Higdon (2005) about how wikis are being used at the University of Southern California

   http://www.campus-technology.com/news_article.asp?id=17502

4. **Wiki Pedagogy**

   An extensive Web-based resource by Renee Fountain (2005), which describes pedagogical experimentations that she is undertaking as part of her SSHRC funded research program.

   http://www.profetic.org:16080/dossiers/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=110

5. **The wiki way: Quick collaboration on the web**

   Leuf, B. and Cunningham, W. (2001).

   Boston: Addison Wesley

6. **University of Calgary Wiki**

   This wiki is hosted by the Learning Commons as a service to support innovation in teaching and learning at the University of Calgary.

   http://wiki.ucalgary.ca/page/Main_Page