



Teaching with Wikis: Toward a Networked Pedagogy

Rebecca Wilson Lundin

*Department of English, Penn State University, 139 Burrowes Building,
University Park, PA 16802, United States*

Abstract

Computers and writing scholarship is increasingly turning towards the network as a potential pedagogical model, one in which writing is intimately connected to its social contexts. The use of wikis in first-year composition classes can support this networked pedagogy. More specifically, due to unique features such as editability and detailed page histories, wikis can challenge a number of traditional pedagogical assumptions about the teaching of writing. This article shows how wikis can challenge assumptions in four categories of interest to composition studies: new media composition, collaborative writing, critical interaction, and online authority. The analysis demonstrates that wikis, while not automatically revolutionary to composition pedagogy, hold significant potential to help facilitate pedagogical changes. © 2008 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Wiki; Network; New media; Collaboration; Critical interaction; Authority

1. Introduction

For the past decade, the field of computers and writing has focused on literal and metaphoric networks as possible pedagogical models. Networks can socialize the writing process, readily providing real audiences for student writing and emphasizing the situatedness of each piece of rhetoric among a constellation of others. By viewing writing as a networked activity, students focus on the connectivity and complexity of rhetorical situations rather than understanding writing as the decontextualized product of a single, isolated worker. By viewing *teaching* as a networked activity, we focus on the collaborative nature of our professional work and on reciprocal relationships with our students. Given these apparent benefits, our hopes for composition are increasingly turning towards the network. Rice (2006) summarized this direction succinctly: Asking “What should college English be?” Rice answered, simply, “The network” (p. 133).

Our increasing focus on networks coincides with a growth in the pedagogical technologies that support such interactions. In growing numbers, rhetoric and composition teachers are using blogs, listservs, discussion boards, and web sites. Simultaneously, we are providing

* Email address: rebecca.lundin@gmail.com.

critical rationales and frameworks for the incorporation of these technologies in teaching, explaining how and why to use networked technology in the composition classroom (see, for example, Barton, 2005; Lunsford, 2006; Wickliff & Yancey, 2001). Fundamentally, these pieces ask how, or whether, networked technologies can help us teach more effectively. A second approach to the study of technology in the classroom is to focus on the challenges that new technologies present to established pedagogical methods (see, for example, DeWitt & Dickson, 2003; Eldred & Toner, 2003; Moxley & Meehan, 2007). This type of work encourages teachers to reexamine and redefine their goals for the classroom, asking and demonstrating how established teaching practices can be stretched and strained with the introduction of new technological practices. Though there is clear overlap between these two approaches to researching classroom technologies, this article primarily participates in the second. Like Eldred & Toner (2003), DeWitt & Dickson (2003), and Moxley & Meehan (2007), I begin with the premise that new technologies challenge, often in productive ways, long-held assumptions in the field of computers and writing. The increasing perception of a “networked” pedagogy as a productive possibility can and should encourage us to reexamine the goals and beliefs under which we operate, even as we discuss how new technologies may help meet those goals. Such reexamination gives us an opportunity to make visible, and subsequently reevaluate, the received wisdom of our field concerning the definition of writing, models of authorship, classroom authority, and more.

Wikis are a particularly productive site for this examination for a number of reasons. First, as a web-based technology they clearly participate in network culture. Wikis have steeply increased in popularity since their initial application as spaces in which computer programmers could collaboratively develop and share code. Now such web sites as Wikipedia and WikiHow have put the technology to a variety of literacy uses, developing massive, and popular, resources of collective information, aggregating copious amounts of text as well as a variety of multimedia elements. As Purdy (*in press*) observed, the online presence of Wikipedia is nearly inescapable (Wikipedia sites often appear first on Google searches for a wide range of issues) and serves as a testament to the growing popularity of wikis. Despite this popularity, academia often lags behind, both in its acceptance of resources such as Wikipedia and in its use of wiki software (see, for example, Cohen, 2007; Purdy, *in press*). Given the drastic break between popular network culture’s acceptance of these online writing environments and academia’s resistance to them, analyzing the challenges that wikis present to traditional methods of teaching promises to provide a constructive tension. This is particularly clear when we examine new modes of composition, which can broaden significantly in the new media environment provided by wikis, and when we explore the critical interaction that can occur in wiki communication between students.

A second reason wikis are a particularly helpful lens through which to re-view assumptions about composition is that they enact an ambitious version of hypertext. Unlike standard web pages or any other networked software, wikis provide a completely user-editable environment and thus align closely with early hopes for hypertext, which envisioned a space in which the author and reader roles could merge (see Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 1996). To this point, that vision has been relatively limited; readers “author” web pages in that they can follow a hypertext document’s linking structure, but the structure and content are still ultimately provided by an author. Wikis can more thoroughly integrate the roles of author and reader.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/348090>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/348090>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)