



# Using wikis to enhance and develop writing skills among secondary school students in Hong Kong

Barley Mak\*, David Coniam

*Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Sha Tin, Hong Kong*

Received 9 July 2007; received in revised form 14 February 2008; accepted 19 February 2008

---

## Abstract

This paper investigates authentic writing through the use of wikis by Year 7 ESL learners in a secondary school in Hong Kong. The wikis were used as a collaborative writing platform to produce – with minimal input and support from their teachers – wiki content that describes the different facilities and features of their school. Over a period of two months, as an integral part of their ESL homework, groups of students designed and put together, through a series of successive drafts, a description of their secondary school which they had joined from primary school a few months previously. After an initial overview of how wikis function in terms of editing and revision, the paper describes the process one group of learners went through. Samples are provided of the students' intermediate and final drafts, as well as snapshots of the amount and the types of writing produced at each stage. The students' final draft became a printed brochure of their 'new' school to be distributed to parents. In the light of this real 'outcome', the paper discusses the place of authentic writing, situated within the domains of creativity and task-based learning, in a school's ESL programme.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Wikis; Collaborative writing; Creative writing; Authentic output

---

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel./fax: +852 2609 6912.

*E-mail addresses:* [barleymak@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:barleymak@cuhk.edu.hk) (B. Mak), [coniam@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:coniam@cuhk.edu.hk) (D. Coniam).

## 1. Background

This paper describes an integrated collaborative writing programme for secondary school (Year 7) students in Hong Kong. Specifically, it involves secondary school students (Year 7, age 11) who have recently joined a secondary school where English is the medium of instruction. The end-product, which students will be working towards through the use of the online collaborative writing platform, wiki, involves producing wiki-like content describing the different facilities in and aspects of their new school to present to parents as an information brochure. This purpose for writing the wikis enhances the authenticity of the task.

Three approaches to the development of writing in ESL are often identified in the literature. The first involves a focus on form – where emerging writers base their writing against ‘models’ provided by their teachers (see Proett and Gill, 1986; Rivers, 1968). The second takes the perspective of a focus on the writer – where the construction of a piece of writing goes through cycles of writing and re-writing activities – the concept of process writing (Cheung et al., 2003; Ferris and Hedgcock, 2005; White and Arndt, 1991). The third focuses on the reader; here, writing is viewed as a social activity where texts are produced for a particular purpose or audience (Elbow, 1998; Raimes, 1983). No single theory can be seen to be mutually exclusive, with all developments building on previous research. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) understand this and propose a descriptive model of communicative language processing as a means of integrating the cognitive, social and textual domains of a theory of writing.

The current paper could be seen to embrace parts of the latter two traditions described above in that it is perhaps a mixture of the second, process writing, and the third, within a social context for a real audience as an authentic piece of writing (see Hyland, 2003). The use of wikis in this project situates itself within a process-writing approach, with the effect that feedback and student revisions add to the writing process for a social purpose (Berg, 1999; Fathman and Whalley, 1990; Ferris et al., 1997; Liu and Hansen, 2002).

When older students (tertiary level students, for example) engage in a specific purpose language programme, the writing they are generating and working at with a teacher may have a real purpose and audience in mind – for example, a report for a superior, the minutes of actual meetings to be circulated for comments, an academic dissertation to be submitted to a supervisor. For students in secondary schools, however, this real-life potential is much more difficult to achieve. It can be achieved by, for example, a student writing a letter to the editor of an English language newspaper – which subsequently gets printed. Less grandiose ‘success’ in terms of audience involves students having their own pieces of writing published in a school magazine (see Reid, 1993 for a comprehensive overview). In some Hong Kong secondary schools, there have been innovative moves made in an attempt to give student writing a real audience. Mak et al. (2004) discuss how peer feedback between students enhances the quality of writing in Hong Kong secondary school classrooms, and report on an innovative project whereby secondary school students produce story books to be read to their ‘buddies’ in sister primary schools (Mak et al., 2007). Greenfield (2003) reports on a collaborative e-mail exchange between teenage secondary school students in Hong Kong and the US. Nonetheless, in many secondary schools in Hong Kong, the reader responding to a text tends to be the teacher, usually equipped with a red pen. Lee’s (1998) findings, for instance, concerning the teaching of writing in Hong

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373790>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373790>

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