Wiki for the Academic Writing Classroom

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Abstract

Wiki is a Web 2.0 tool that offers a platform for collaboration, co-production of texts, and interaction throughout writing processes (e.g. Bruns & Humphreys, 2005). Its "transparency and openness" (Carr, et al., 2007:280) due to its editable features, lends itself to collaborative, process writing approach. While studies have revealed that wiki is a useful tool to be used to promote second language writing (e.g. Zailin Shah, 2010), its use in writing classrooms is underexplored.

As such, the proposed tutorial aims to offer participants with more insights into the used of wiki for the teaching and learning in the Academic Writing classroom. The session will be divided into three parts. The first part is an introduction to the wiki software including the descriptions of how wiki may serve as the medium for language teaching and learning, particularly in promoting collaborative second language writing. This will also include the theoretical framework that supports its application. The second part involves presenters demonstrating the processes of creating and managing wikis. The wiki features such as editing, monitoring, uploading files and tracking changes will also be discussed. In the third and final part of the session, the presenters will share their experiences with the participants some of the ways in which wiki has been implemented in their academic writing classrooms specifically for collaborative writing and teacher feedback.

By the end of the session, the participants will not only able to understand wiki theoretically but also pedagogically (practically).

INTRODUCTION

There are various writing genres to be taught and learnt by students during their academic years (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). They constitute genres that depend on what is considered important for survival in a particular discipline (e.g. engineering and medical disciplines) (Zhu, 2004). In engineering disciplines, one of the genres taught at the tertiary level is report writing because engineers are typically expected to write recommendation, feasibility and instructional reports (Riordan & Pauley, 2002). Students who are exposed to a report writing genre at the tertiary education level may have advantages later at workplace (Hyland, 2003; Zhu, 2004). They would have ample opportunities to engage in producing authentic texts that are common in their target discourse communities (Carter, et al, 2007; Luzón, 2005). Thus, preparing engineering students with the required rhetoric style and conventions is detrimental to the students' ability to adapt in the target discourse community (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Reimer, 2002).

Academic writing is a specific type of writing which is usually taught at tertiary level and constitutes, for example in engineering, report writing is an essential genre. In Academic Report Writing classrooms, prior to producing a research report, students are required to identify a research area, write reviews of the literature, collect and analyze the data. Once these processes are completed, students have to document these into a five-chapter report which comprises the introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion chapters (Gerson & Gerson, 2006; Riordan & Pauley, 2002). Understanding the report writing processes and documenting them involve hard work and patience on the students. On the instructor's part, the monitoring of students' work may be time consuming. Additionally, the task is meticulous as students often need close supervision, immediate and constant feedback. Such situation may lead

to time constraint on both students and instructors particularly when they have to organize for frequent face-to-face consultations.

An increasing body of research has looked into various alternatives in dealing with such limitation. One of which is to manipulate computer technology, which has been found to facilitate the teaching and learning of writing (Cunningham, 2000; Goldberg, Russell & Cook, 2003). With Web 2.0 technology more tools such as blogs and wikis are available for writing classrooms (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Wikis are editable, web-based free authoring software which allow users to create a fully editable website (Boulos, et al., 2006). Research has suggested for this technology to be utilized in the Academic Report Writing classroom (Zailin Shah, 2010).

Computer technology in the writing classroom

Computer technology has been explored to facilitate teachers and students in the writing classroom and it has been found to be beneficial both in developing students' writing skills (Cunningham, 2000; Goldberg, Russell & Cook, 2003) and in improving their writing processes (Lee, 2004; Ware, 2004). Computer-mediated communication tools (CMC), for example, is a "breakthrough in terms of enabling computers for interaction" (Appel & Mullen, 2000: 299). A number of research indicate that CMC environment emphasizes on students' engagement and teacher facilitation (Böhlke, 2003), and promotes learner-centered, collaborative activities in authentic and meaningful interactions either one-to-one or one-to-many in no boundaries with access to a web browser (Warschauer, 2000). Kern and Warschauer (2000) suggest that CMC interactions allow space for knowledge to be exchanged in a social process of negotiation and construction of meaning: through feedback, modeling and error correction. Furthermore the

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input and output of the interactions are visible for students to record, print and analyze, as well as not class time-constrained for more interactions to take place (Nik, 2010; Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). Such interactions can help develop writing skills (Braine, 1997, 2001; Harris & Wambeam, 1996; Nik, Adams & Newton, in press; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), cater to differences in writing process (Ware, 2004), as well as facilitate in the mediation of feedback (Tuzi, 2004; Sullivan & Pratt, 1996; Braine, 1997; 2001).

Wikis: A facilitative online writing platform

The potential of wikis in language learning has been lauded by a number of researchers who feel that wiki is a "powerful digital tool for knowledge development because it facilitates formal, topic-centric, depersonalized interaction" (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007:12). Research on wiki in the classroom has also gleaned positive aspects of the tool: wiki facilitates transparent online interactions, erases some of the boundaries between author and reader (Chen, et al, 2005, Richardson, 2007), empowers students when they feel that they have ownership and authority of their learning (Raitman, et al, 2005), enhances social interaction amongst students online (Augar, et al, 2004), increases foreign language students' exposure to a variety of topics (LeLoup & Ponterio, 2006), increases audience-awareness in collaborative writing projects (Chang & Schallert, 2005), motivates students to produce the best texts as the texts are published online (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007) and enhances ESL students' writing performance (Wang, et al, 2005)because each edits may further contribute to the development of the texts.More importantly, its openness is conducive for collaborative process writing activities (Carr, et al, 2007) as the collaborators are not confined by time and space

As indicated above, wikis can be used in a writing instruction especially in collaborative and process writing classrooms. Its "transparency and openness allows for timely intervention by educators and peers to ensure that students receive useful feedback and guidance at early and intermediate stages of the process" (Carr, et al., 2007:280). Because wiki works on an online platform, collaborative writing is more feasible since users only need an access to a Web browser to engage in the writing processes which include, but not limited to, providing feedback. Since it is fully editable, editing can be done directly onto the written work rather than on a separate page or section like in blogs or forums. This makes it less burdensome to make small, spontaneous edits (Chen, et al., 2005) since the tool allows for more minor editing without the hassle of sending emails back and forth or re-circulating edited documents to collaborating team members or peers for peer review. The changes made are apparent when the team members access the wiki site and use the *History* function. As a result, more ideas may be contributed, reflected and improved because changes especially in the form of feedback may anchor noticing of the problematic output, enhance and encourage the writing processes. The ease of editing also enhances students' sense of ownership because any work that is put up on the site is perceived as "validated work" that increases their motivation to write (Raitman, et al., 2005: para.17). To reiterate, wiki may offer a facilitative platform for collaboration, co-production of texts, and interaction throughout the writing process (Bruns & Humphreys, 2005:27).

Although much research have demonstrated positive findings on the implementation of wikis in the writing classroom, very few have discussed the implementation of wiki as a facilitative online writing platform to an academic report writing, a specific writing genre that is used in the current study.

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Objectives of the Tutorial presentation

The main objective of the current study is to explore the use of wiki as a facilitative online writing platform in the Academic Report Writing classroom. More specifically, the study examines the following:

1. How is wiki being implemented in monitoring students' collaborative writing?

2. How is wiki being used for data storage?

Structure of the Tutorial Presentation

The flow of the tutorial event is as follows:

(1) The first part: The participants will be introduced to the wiki software. This includes, but not limited to, the descriptions of how wiki may serve as the medium for language teaching and learning, particularly in promoting collaborative second language writing.

(2) The second part: The participants will have the opportunities to see the processes of creating and managing wikis. Discussions around the wiki features such as editing, monitoring, uploading files and tracking changes will be held.

(3) The third part: The participants will have the chance to see samples of the wikis as used by the presenters' students in the Academic Writing classrooms.

By the end of the session, the participants will be exposed to the benefits of using wikis specifically in regards to collaborative writing and teacher feedback in the Academic Writing classroom.

(For the actual presentation details please refer to the slides in Appendix A)

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