

# Wikis in Education: Is Public Better?

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## Abstract

Wikis are being used in educational settings more and more but they are often installed within existing institutional Learning Management Systems (LMS) and as such are private, i.e. readable and editable only with a password, or semi-public, i.e. readable but not editable without a password. What differentiates the use of social software tools such as wikis in the classroom from other traditional computer mediated communication (CMC) tools is that they enable communication between people and knowledge sharing beyond the limits of the classroom and classroom activities. This paper investigates whether or not closing a wiki limits the very potential the tool has in education. Based on a brief review of the literature on wikis in education, the first section discusses how the benefits of wikis might be greater when they are public. This is followed by a description of two courses carried out at the University of Padua, one using a semi-public wiki and the other a public wiki. The same groups of students contributed to both wikis over two semesters and conclusions on the advantages and disadvantages of using a public wiki are drawn from a qualitative analysis of the data gathered. The preliminary findings are then used to suggest that a compromise between public and private wikis in education might provide the ideal learning environment.

**Categories and Subject Descriptors** K.3.1 [Computer Uses in Education]: Collaborative learning.

**General Terms** Design, Experimentation, Human Factors, Languages

**Keywords** blended course development; collective authoring; public wiki

## 1. Introduction

What differentiates social software tools from other forms of computer mediated communication is that they enable communication between people beyond the classroom and pro-

vide new ways for creating and sharing information. The notion behind many of the tools that characterize Web 2.0 is that of community gains, i.e. users benefit from each other in the spirit of ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’. Wikis are possibly the social software tool that best represents the fact that the greater the user base, the greater the potential for real knowledge construction, Wikipedia being the most well-known example. Although incorrect information can be found on Wikipedia, it has a self-correcting mechanism through its global community of users such that it is considered to be about as good a source of accurate information as the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Giles, 2005).

Wikis, like other social software tools such as blogs, are being used more and more in educational settings. This is taking place at the same time that “educational agendas are shifting to address ideas about how we can create personalised and collaborative knowledge spaces, where learners can access people and knowledge in ways that encourage creative and reflective learning practices that extend beyond the boundaries of the school and the limits of formal education” (Owen et al, 2006). However, quite often educational wikis are limited to the boundaries of formal education (Augar et al, 2004; Bruns & Humphreys, 2005; Lund & Smordal, 2006). This paper considers whether ‘closing’ a wiki does not limit the very potential of the collective authoring process and the authenticity of publishing online since “knowledge construction is discursive, relational and conversational in nature [and] as students appropriate and transform knowledge, they must have authentic opportunities for publication of knowledge” (Ferdig & Trammel., 2004).

A brief survey of the literature on wikis in education points out that many of the potential benefits might be enhanced if public wikis were used. This is followed by a detailed description of an action research project carried out at the University of Padua in Italy to study students’ reactions to public or private wikis and differences in their performance. Based on the preliminary findings of this study, the paper concludes with a discussion of a possible solution to exploit the advantages of both types of wikis: the creation and use of a public wiki that actively involves classes from numerous institutions in the development of the wiki.

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## 2. Educational Benefits of Using (Public) Wikis

Today's economy has changed from an industrial economy to a global knowledge-based, networked economy. In this context students will "need to have attained skills in collaborative and creative project-based work and to have developed critical, reflective practices" (Bruns & Humphreys, 2005). Wikis are an ideal tool for helping students achieve these skills.

### Collective authoring: critical reading and responsible writing

When contributing to a wiki project, students are not just writing for the teacher, as is the case in traditional classroom environments, but for and *with* their peers. As such, they promote collective authoring which inherently entails peer review. Contributing to a wiki requires students to critically read existing contributions in order to identify areas where a writer's intended meaning is unclear or not conveyed (Berg, 1999) or where information is lacking so as to then have the possibility of changing or correcting it. Although students are often hesitant to directly intervene on a peer's written work (Lund & Smordal, 2006), through the discussion or comment functions available on most wikis they can learn how to provide constructive criticism. As students learn to depend on one another for feedback, they become less dependent on the teacher, more autonomous and have an increased sense of responsibility for what they write (Whigham, 2000). Furthermore, as students learn how to create new pages and edit existing ones, they become quite active in developing the wiki and learn to structure content from within. This bottom-up organization empowers students and, again, increases their sense of responsibility for what they write.

Writing on a public wiki may enhance these benefits. When editing a public wiki, students must critically read what has already been written by people they do not know, paying close attention to content, structure and style in order to see what needs to be modified or added and how to write contributions. On a private wiki, it is often the students, together with the instructor, who decide on form, structure, etc., whereas on a public wiki, students must adapt to existing ground rules. When they disagree with what has already been written or with the structure of a page, they cannot simply discuss it with their peers in the classroom but rather have to make a decision to edit the page, or to open a discussion on the page, which encourages students to explore collective uses and negotiations of knowledge (Mejias, 2006). Their sense of responsibility for what they contribute and edit would, therefore, be much greater in an open context.

### Collective ownership of work

Both a challenge and a benefit of using wikis in education is helping students let go of individual ownership. As students learn to collectively author pages they can also start to overcome the traditional epistemology of most Western educa-

tional systems which involves promoting individual ownership of what one writes. Writing in a distributed, collaborative environment teaches students *network literacy* (Lamb, 2004). Research has found that when writing on wikis, students have a tendency to only edit the contents they have created and feel individual ownership for these contents even if their peers have provided feedback or edited 'their' pages. In Lund and Smordal's (2006) wiki experience, "learners did not immediately embrace any notion of collective ownership or epistemology but continued a practice where the institutionally cultivated individual ownership persisted." The teacher, therefore, had to intervene to encourage revisions, though many students were reluctant. On a public wiki, on the contrary, unless students create new pages, there is automatically collective ownership with unknown members of the community. This may help students better understand how knowledge can be created collaboratively and, consequently, that the final product is a collective work.

### Writing as a process and knowledge sharing over time

Since wikis are organized by content, they can be used to develop a repository of shared knowledge over time (Godwin-Jones, 2004). This has two advantages: first, it facilitates writing as a process rather than a product and, second, it promotes the continued use of a wiki in different contexts. With regards to the first point, students can use the revision history function available on most wikis to keep track of changes in a piece of writing over time, promoting close reading, revision and tracking of drafts (Lamb, 2004). The very process of editing different pages discourages product oriented writing and students learn by tracking changes and improvements in structure, contents and form. In the case of a public wiki, it would be very useful to see how contributors outside of students' personal learning experience write and edit. Within a limited classroom setting with one instructor, the approach to editing is often guided by the instructor whereas on a public wiki students would be offered the opportunity of accessing other approaches. As far as the time-less nature is concerned, what has been created by one group of students can then be added to and integrated with the contributions of different groups of users in subsequent semesters and years. In this way the knowledge-sharing process becomes an integral part of the learning process as students learn to learn from previous groups and offer what they know to future groups. If the wiki can be edited by users outside the context of one single course, it truly becomes a never-ending project based on knowledge sharing.

### Benefits of publishing online

As students are using the Web as a resource more and more, wikis give them the opportunity to focus on issues such as referencing online sources and considering copyright issues of the multi-media content (e.g. images) added to a wiki. An important aspect of learning to share knowledge and benefit

from others' sharing of knowledge on the Web is learning attribution. Students might be more aware of these issues on a public wiki since anyone could 'find them out' were they to commit plagiarism, not respect copyright or not cite or link to resources they found on the Web.

Finally, there is the issue of the empowerment students can feel by contributing what they know to enrich a group project. On a private wiki, their knowledge benefits their peers whereas on a public wiki they might feel they were contributing to knowledge sharing and creation on a global scale. Contributing to a public wiki would encourage students to effectively process what they have learned and gain the confidence needed to share it with anyone accessing the Web.

### 3. Wikis for Knowledge Creation

#### Setting and methods

In the Spring of 2006, an action research project was set up at the University of Padua to study the potential of social software to effectively teach a blended learning course for English as a foreign language. The first stage involved an experimental course that was held at the Faculty of Engineering using a blog and a wiki to conduct an upper-intermediate English language course. Overall, students proved to be highly motivated by using these tools, participated actively and were satisfied with the course. Through informal interviews and questionnaires students expressed a positive reaction to writing on a public blog and a more hesitant reaction to writing on a semi-public wiki, i.e. readable but not editable without a password. Although several reasons were identified for this, e.g. writing on a blog fits into a more traditional paradigm of writing whereas collective authoring does not, the question was posed whether or not the fact that the blog was public and the wiki semi-private influenced their behaviour and reactions. To investigate this, the following school year, a study was carried out with a group of 28 second-year English language students in a graduate course in International Communications Studies. Their advanced English language course was divided into two 10-week courses in which they contributed to a public wiki in one semester and a semi-public wiki in the other semester. The students were divided into two groups such that one group experimented first with the public wiki and then with the semi-public one and the other group vice versa.

The semi-public wiki was used as a platform for a telecollaboration project (Belz, 2005; O'Dowd, 2005) called Tulane Padovaxchange (<http://tulanepadova.pbwiki.com/FrontPage>) between students of English at the University of Padua and students of Italian at Tulane University in the United States. The public wiki was used within the context of a course called BloggingEnglish that used a course blog (<http://www.bloggingenglish1.blogspot.com/>) and personal student blogs to explore the potential of Web 2.0 tools for autonomous and collaborative language learning; the public

wiki, EduTechWiki hosted at the University of Geneva ([edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Main\\_Page](http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Main_Page)), was used as one of the Web 2.0 activities in the course.

Based on the literature review and experience in the first course, three hypotheses were developed.

1. Students will have a greater sense of responsibility for the contents, structure and referencing of their written work in a public wiki.
2. Students will gain a greater sense of collective ownership by contributing to a public wiki.
3. Students will develop a greater sense of knowledge sharing and community by contributing to a public wiki.

Qualitative research was used as the methodology. A variety of qualitative data sources were involved including posts in students' personal blogs, transcripts of students' online correspondence on the wiki, informal interviews, comparison of students' writing at different points throughout the courses, and end-of-course questionnaires. Assessment in the course was divided into percentages in order to evaluate both the process and the product, as well as collaboration. The wiki used (pbwiki) sent each student's edit to the instructor as an email making it possible to assess quantity of participation and quality of individual participation. Students then received a collective grade for the final wiki pages and an individual mark for final papers and presentations. Individual written production was assessed on a regular basis throughout the course as well as at the end of the course. Data analysis was carried out as an iterative process in which data was continuously collected and reduced and new conclusions drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The instructor used informal interviews with students to check her interpretations of students' reactions and assessment of their written work at different points in the course and in different contexts to evaluate students' written performance.

In the following paragraphs each course's structure is described and comparisons made between the two semesters.

#### TulanePadovaxchange

Telecollaboration projects have been carried out in recent years using everything from simple e-mail exchanges to specifically designed software. Regardless of the tool chosen, "the underlying rationale is to provide the members of each parallel class with cost-effective access to and engagement with age peers who are expert speakers of the language under study in an effort to increase intercultural awareness as well as linguistic proficiency, to increase the authentication of foreign language use in the tutored setting, and to broaden the range of discourse options and subject positions available to classroom learners of language" (Belz, 2001). A wiki could just be considered another tool for telecollaboration, but what a wiki offers that other tools don't is the possibility to create an ever-growing repository of cultural knowledge that could be used and re-used by students in various learning contexts over time. In order to introduce an oral component into the course and to explore the potential of using Skype for didactic purposes, students had several interviews

with their peers using Skype and the software Pamela to record the conversations.

During the first semester, students initially carried out the exchange on wiki pages dedicated to each set of exchange partners in very much the same way as if they were using a forum, but with the added benefit of having all of the information exchanged available to all groups. Their Skype exchanges were informal and at most they had three 15-minute conversations. Based on the information exchanged on the wiki, the Italian students began to create wiki pages on various topics of intercultural interest. Students chose what to write and how much to write; it was *their* wiki. The teacher played an active role in the F2F classroom by working together with the students to help them better structure their content, get their point across better and negotiate disagreements in content (Lamb, 2004). As students were hesitant to edit each other's pages, peer editing had to be integrated into the classroom and online activities and be actively encouraged by the teacher. However, students maintained a very strong sense of ownership of their pages.

During the second semester, the student exchanges were carried out solely on Skype. The conversations were recorded and made available as mp3 files to all students on a blog. In an attempt to better promote collective writing and focus for the exchange, the wiki was given much more structure. Six wiki pages were created by the instructor based on the three topics chosen by the teachers at Padua and Tulane: Recycling in Italy/the USA, Alternative Energy Resources in Italy/the USA and Water Resources in Italy/the USA. The Italian students had to collectively develop the 'Italian' page as preparation for the Skype exchanges and then, based on the information exchanged with their American partners, had to develop the 'American' page. An analysis of the six wiki pages shows significant improvements in their ability to collaborate and write collectively compared to the work done in the first semester. There was also much more knowledge sharing as students were developing only 6 pages and developing them together. Nonetheless, they still felt strong ownership for their personal contributions and had difficulty editing each other's work, as was the case in the first semester.

Finally, one of the main aims of the project proved successful during the shift from the first to the second semester, i.e. continuity. Students during the second semester continued to contribute to the wiki created during the first semester and reading what other students had written and experienced proved to be motivating for students during the second semester.

### **BloggingEnglish on EduTech Wiki**

Many blended language courses are carried out using forums or other tools in traditional, closed LMSs to promote communication. However, as current language learning aims to offer students authentic opportunities for accessing and producing language, the decision was made to use blogs to conduct the other part of the advanced EFL course. As they are

public, blogs give students a real audience for their writing. Furthermore, the journal-like nature of blogs and the fact that posts are archived and can be retrieved promote reflective analysis of one's writing (Ferdig & Trammel 2004, Bryant, 2006). Weekly e-tivities (Salmon, 2002) were posted on the course blog. Students also developed their own personal blogs since, as Godwin-Jones (2006) states: "it is possible to create a more student-centred learning environment using blogs, particularly if students create blogs that they control and whose content they own".

Each week students were faced with a new Web 2.0 tool with the aim of helping them improve their information literacy skills, i.e. how to exploit the Web for their own personal autonomous language learning; participation literacy skills were also addressed, including how to exploit the knowledge of other web users and share their own knowledge with the global community. There were e-tivities on exploring the blogosphere, podcasts, social bookmarking (del.icio.us), image and video sharing (Flickr and Youtube), and feeds and feed aggregators. The last tool to be explored was a public wiki. Given the fact that writing on a wiki is much more complex than learning to use the other tools, the last three e-tivities were dedicated to this activity.

Originally the instructor had planned to use Wikipedia to experiment with a public wiki. However, during the initial exploratory e-tivity on wikis, one student found a wiki created by and hosted at the University of Geneva called EduTech Wiki ([http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Main\\_Page](http://edutechwiki.unige.ch/en/Main_Page)). It is a wiki about educational/instructional technology and is aimed at researchers, practitioners, students and anyone interested in the topic. Many of the pages in the wiki deal with issues and tools that had been explored during the course and most of the pages were stubs, i.e. incomplete. Therefore, it seemed like a much better opportunity for giving students a real chance to contribute the knowledge they had gained during the course.

The home page invites anyone to contribute and provides guidelines on how to use the wiki. Students were to find a page they were interested in editing and to work in groups of 2 or 3 to edit the page. For students in the first semester it was their first experience contributing to a wiki while second semester students had already spent an entire semester working on the TulanePadova wiki.

In the first semester, following students' first edits, the wiki administrator, Dr. Daniel Schneider, wrote the instructor an email welcoming the class to the wiki but inviting students to more carefully follow the guidelines with regards to issues such as internal linking and external referencing. This intervention from outside the classroom proved very effective with students in that it made them realize that the wiki really was public and the importance of quality. One student commented: "As Dr Schneider wrote we had to pay more attention on references and on sources, but also on the layout, in fact the web pages should capture the reader's attention, not make him bored! These elements are extremely important for the accuracy and quality of a wiki." Students

felt motivated to pay more attention to the contents, structure and layout of their contributions. Students' reflective blogging posts following these e-tivities talked about collaboration and cooperation not only within their small groups but also with the outside world. It is worth noting that their overall impressions of contributing to EduTech Wiki were very positive. However, when interviewed during the second semester, after having contributed to the TulanePadova wiki, they developed opinions similar to those of second semester students, which are described below.

During the second semester, Dr. Schneider and other contributors directly intervened on the wiki contributions made by BloggingEnglish students. Second semester students were able to compare this 'intrusion' with that made by their peers in the TulanePadova wiki in the first semester. When working on the TulanePadova wiki students often discussed changes to be made on the pages during class and outside the classroom. Students from both semesters indicated frustration with not being able to do this on the public wiki. They found editing even more difficult: "I didn't feel good in changing or deleting what my peers wrote in the first semester in our wiki, and in the EduTech Wiki I found it even more difficult." They also found it more of a challenge to have to provide more factual, authoritative information:

Last semester's Wiki was much more personal, and what we wrote consisted very often on OUR personal opinion. This time we had to write about something which was much more technical. Therefore, we were not asked to write what we think about this or that, but we had to focus mainly on finding and summarizing information, and then giving it a certain "structure", making references, using impersonal and technical forms.

Students had different reactions depending on whether they were adding to an almost empty page or editing an already well-structured page. In the former case, they felt the responsibility of providing authoritative and accurate information but did not have to deal with collective authoring. In the latter case, however, many decisions had to be made as to how much, when and where to intervene on what had already been written, i.e. real collective authoring on a wiki. In one case the students found their content being changed even hours after they'd edited it.

Finally, though both first and second semester students indicated a preference for the TulanePadova wiki experience, it is interesting to note that students' contributions to the public wiki were much more accurate, precise, and concise than the pages they developed in the TulanePadova wiki.

#### **4. Preliminary Results: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using a Public Wiki**

A careful analysis of the data reveals a series of advantages to using a public wiki:

- writing on a public wiki promotes collaboration beyond the classroom;

- publishing online leads to an increased sense of responsibility and more accurate writing;
- knowledge sharing on a public wiki gives students a sense of empowerment.

Although few students actually had their contributions edited by other users of the EduTech Wiki community, they were aware of this possibility and conscious of the fact that they were editing something other contributors had already written. In their small groups students also collaborated actively online outside of class time. One first semester student described the collaboration process that took place as multi-step:

[there was collaboration] between me and my classmates, but also between us and the Edutech's online community. In simpler words, me and my classmates worked together in order to find useful information in the web space and then edit our article on Edutech. By editing it we had to pay attention to what other people ... had previously published on Edutech about the same subject. We integrated our article with the previous one and then add the new information.

This offered some a sense of security that any mistakes they made would be corrected by the community: "*If I write something wrong and if my sources are not reliable?* Fortunately a wiki means overall COLLABORATION, and now I'm sure someone will correct it." For others, this awareness strongly influenced their sense of responsibility. Several issues in particular came up: the importance of finding information to back up statements, referencing and avoiding plagiarism, paraphrasing, being original, being concise and clear, and carefully reading existing contents in order to avoid repetition. All of these aspects are important parts of the writing process that Italian students are often not taught and do not apply when writing. One student in the second semester wrote:

[...] contributing to EduTech Wiki is a good way to make students more responsible and aware of what they're writing. Here anyone can access the pages and contribute to them, while last semester this didn't happen. Writing for a public audience helps us improving our languages, our style and- as in this case- our content (in the sense that maybe we are more careful in looking for sources, links, information and in deciding which of them are more reliable than the other ones).

Throughout the first semester students received the same input for publishing online, e.g. organizing content, referencing, etc., but the quality of the students' work on the public wiki was significantly more 'academic' than the work on the exchange wiki.

During the three weeks of editing the public wiki, the students felt they made significant improvements to their contributions and had actually enriched the wiki. After having expressed frustration and insecurity about what she wrote, one student concluded: "The fact that I wrote something in one wiki makes me feel a little bit important." They also appreciated being to able to share their knowledge with a wider

community: “we are given the great opportunity to ‘tell the world’ what we’ve learned so far during the English course.”

Second semester students’ inevitable comparison of the two wiki experiences allowed them to be more critical. An analysis of their data points out some of the aspects students considered to be disadvantages when working on EduTech Wiki:

- contributing to a wiki created and edited by users outside of the specific classroom context was challenging;
- following the public wiki’s editing rules required more careful attention when writing;
- having contents edited by people students didn’t know was frustrating;
- students felt confident in editing language mistakes but not in editing contents;
- students felt more pressure when writing for a potentially global audience of users and readers.

Clearly, the students were more comfortable in what they felt to be the secure environment of the semi-public wiki where they had, together with the teacher, established the editing rules and knew all of the other editors. In her blog, one student explained why it was easier to write in the exchange wiki:

The **Tulanepadova** was ‘our’ wiki for some specific reasons:

- we (students and Sarah) were the only ones who could contribute to the pages,
- we all more or less knew each other and our language skills, technological experiences, “cultural” background,
- we all knew what we were supposed to do in that space,
- we always had the possibility to talk face to face in class about the e-tivities we had to do using the wiki.

It is also worth noting that though students were encouraged to start discussions on the public wiki when they wanted to significantly modify an existing page, wiki users outside the class did not participate in these discussions. Therefore, students felt more hesitant to make major changes to pages, even if discussions in class and online between students indicated they might be appropriate. However, if a public wiki had effective discussions, it would be an opportunity for students to develop their negotiation skills. Rather than ‘disadvantages’ it might be more appropriate to speak of ‘challenges’ that, when overcome, leave students having learned more. In the questionnaire, when asked if they preferred writing on the public wiki, 10 did not, 6 were neutral and 8 did. This relatively even distribution in responses may very well reflect differences in learning styles and preferences. Nonetheless, an analysis of their writing, shows that students wrote and referenced more accurately on the public wiki in both the first and second semesters.

To conclude, it appears that writing in a public space empowers students. One student concluded: “I have the impression that our works are much easier to read than many others: they are well- structured, clear but at the same time the language used is not very technical. I’m sure this will help future visitors of that Wiki page!” Whether her impression is correct or not, having developed confidence in their writing is an achievement in and of itself.

## 5. Discussion: A Compromise

Based on the preliminary results, some initial conclusions can be drawn. There were many similarities in students’ reactions to using both the public and semi-public wikis, most related to issues surrounding collective authoring. As has already been stated, most research on wikis in education has shown that collective authoring does not come naturally to students and initially creates significant challenges that must be overcome through the guidance of a teacher (e.g. Lund & Smordal, 2006). This study confirms these results. Nonetheless, a preliminary data analysis confirms the three hypotheses indicating that there are indeed differences as well.

1. Students felt more responsible for the contents, structure and referencing of their written work on the public wiki.
2. Students gained a greater sense of collective ownership by contributing to the public wiki.
3. Students developed a greater sense of knowledge sharing and community by contributing to the public wiki.

The question to be asked, then, is whether or not these aspects benefit students or not. The answer might depend on the aims of a given course. If, for example, the aim is to have students collaborate on a project within the limited context of a course, then these advantages may not be relevant. However, in this case, wikis are not necessarily the only tools available, e.g. other tools such as google docs and spreadsheets might also serve the purpose. A public wiki, however, brings with it all of the advantages of truly publishing online.

A compromise between the two courses proposed here may be the best solution. In addition to the differences in the wikis, the contexts were different (TulanePadova was a tele-collaboration project and BloggingEnglish was not) as was the amount of time dedicated to contributing to the wiki (10 weeks in the TulanePadova course, 3 weeks in the BloggingEnglish course). An ideal situation might be to set up a public wiki on a theme broad enough to attract and involve students in courses in different institutions. Organized collaboration between different universities could help overcome some of the ‘unknowns’ of using a public wiki and at the same time create a large enough user base of unknown contributors to really create and share knowledge. Developing the wiki could be an integral part of the classes involved but take up fewer weeks of work, ideally at the same time as other classes. Clear guidelines indicating the need for discussion and negotiation including pages where these processes are modelled, could help facilitate interaction. Finally, this

sort of public wiki could be an endless project and promoted in different contexts in different years in the development of a knowledge repository that grows over time and where students not only contribute but use what their peers before them have created as a starting point for their learning.

## 6. Conclusions and Future Work

This article has discussed whether or not using a semi-public may limit the benefits of using wikis in education that are cited in the literature whereas using a public wiki might enhance them. Three hypotheses were developed to be tested in the context of a blended learning course involving 28 second-year English language students in a graduate course in International Communications Studies at the University of Padua. In the first semester, one group of students used a semi-public wiki as a platform for a telecollaboration project called TulanePadovaXchange between students of English in Padua and students of Italian at Tulane University in the United States. In the same semester another group contributed to a public wiki within the context of a course called BloggingEnglish that used a course blog and personal blogs to explore the potential of Web 2.0 tools for autonomous and collaborative language learning; the public wiki, EduTech-Wiki hosted at the University of Geneva, was used as one of the Web 2.0 activities in the course. In the second semester, the two groups switched so that both groups experienced both types of wikis, but in a different order. Preliminary results indicate that many of the challenges involving the use of wikis in education exist in both public and semi-public wikis. However, students did have very different responses to the two experiences and performed differently.

On the semi-public wiki, students were unable to let go of ownership over the pages or contents they had created even if peer editing was carried out. By contrast, on the public wiki, they had to let go of ownership as they were neither creating new pages nor the only editors of existing pages. In other words, students developed a greater sense of what collaboration truly means when contributing to the public wiki. Students felt increased responsibility about the quality of their contributions when writing for an unknown audience. They paid closer attention to respecting the rules of academic writing when contributing to a site that was online and accessible by anyone.

Finally, one of the goals of the course was to help students learn how to learn from each other through knowledge sharing and creation. Though the information exchange on the semi-public wiki was active and students certainly learned from the contents contributed by their peers, they had a greater sense of contributing to something worthwhile to a wider community when writing on EduTech Wiki.

Contributing to the public wiki did, however, present challenges that did not occur on the semi-public one. Students felt intimidated by the responsibility of publishing on the Web. They also felt frustrated when their contributions were edited by users with whom they did not have the opportunity to talk to face to face. Adapting their contributions to existing

structures and styles that they had not negotiated with the teacher also presented a challenge. As the focus of the two courses were also different, students seemed to have a preference for the intercultural contents dealt with on the semi-public wiki compared to the more technical, factual contributions they had to make on the public wiki. Overall students felt more comfortable working in the semi-public wiki.

In order to try to maintain the benefits gained by a large user base and at the same time offer students a sense of the more secure semi-public environment, a project is being developed at the University of Padua to create a public intercultural wiki in collaboration with other universities. The aim is to involve classes in different countries in telecollaboration projects that entail not only exchanges via wiki or Skype, but the development of the intercultural wiki by all of the students involved and, potentially, any outside user as well. As the user base and number of pages and issues expand, the hope is that students will be able to exploit the benefits of public wikis while dealing with contents of direct interest to them on a wiki that has been created for and by students like them.

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