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Teachers communicating with families at home serve as a small step toward addressing the many and constant changes in student's lives. We can think of this effort as having a hand in creating a colourful tapestry and building an online community. Blogging teachers begin the process of stepping into a new era where so-called digital immigrants start to feel comfortable among the digital natives—no doubt, the assimilation takes time and patience for all of us.

READ/WRITE IN SCHOOL

What if a school's success hinged on its ability to prepare students for an evolving, global society that demanded openness, peering, sharing and acting globally? The culture that created the Read/Write Web is the same culture that favours openness and sharing, and is best typified by the open-source software movement. Volunteer programmers that created the Linux operating system worked together, piece-by-piece—each volunteer with a different and varied experience, and each in a different location across the world. This culture would do well to find a home in today's schools, in order for our students to find success today and in the future.

The Read/Write Web ought to have a place in schools for a variety of reasons. For one, the Read/Write Web is where both business and society have turned to grow and learn. Whether our tool of choice is Google, Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>), or Ask Metafilter (<http://ask.metafilter.com>), we have access to a staggering amount of information online. The Read/Write Web is also a place where people make a living. "About one million of the most active traders on eBay have quit their day jobs and now make their living selling new and used goods full-time" (Tapscott & Williams, 2006 p. 100). "Lifelong learning" is frequently in the mission statements of schools around the world. During their school years and beyond, students will engage in endless opportunities to learn on their own. Teaching students how to self-educate using the Read/Write Web is an important new skill.

Students also deserve the experience of developing information and media literacies. The Center for Media Literacy (www.medialit.org) offers teachers resources for developing students' media literacy, which now includes, among others, both traditional media (e.g. commercials on television) and the nontraditional Read/Write Web variety (bias in blog entries, YouTube videos, etc.). The American Association of School Librarians provides resources for addressing information literacy (www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslissues/aaslinfolit/informationliteracy1.htm), and AT&T provides information on "21st Century Literacies" (www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/21stcent/), broken into four areas: information, visual, cultural and media.

WIKI CHARACTERISTICS

Different wiki servers offer different capabilities and features, but most wikis are defined by several key characteristics. The overriding principal of each one is that content can be updated by anyone, quickly and easily.

Traditionally, wikis host documents on a web server that can be not only read by anyone, they can be *edited* by anyone. This idea is alive and well on Wikipedia. There, you can search for an article on any topic, read it, and if you have something to add, you can click “Edit” and make changes.

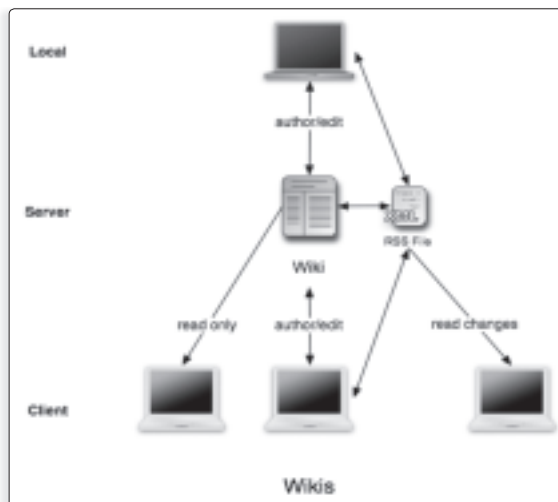


Figure 2.1 Wikis can be edited by you, but they can also be edited by others (clients). Some wikis limit the “powers” of editing to just reading for some users, and some wikis can keep documents password-protected altogether. Some wikis include an RSS feed for tracking changes to the wiki.

Wiki documents, or articles, are composed in some form of “wikitext”, a formatting syntax that controls the look of the text (boldface, italics, etc.) and provides links to other websites and wiki pages. Editing a wiki page is much simpler than using HTML, but it does include using some formatting symbols to structure text when displayed on the wiki pages.

Each time I introduce wikis to educators, they are engaged by the novelty of being able to manipulate a website so easily. I ask them to think of the wiki as a book. “It’s a book we can

While the wiki is a great organisational and productivity tool for logging thoughts, data and responses in a semi-public space, the real benefit of the tool is apparent when students are asked to discuss, compare and analyse their collective data. The wiki can capture all of this digitally, thus creating a database that can empower students with the objective of the lesson—being able to see both the macro and micro picture of their choices within the class and in their own lives. Digital data, including student thoughts, can impact the level of data analysis and comparisons students can explore. Having the data in a digital form can also facilitate its use in additional interdisciplinary study.

◆ Lesson 2: *Essay Submission*

Content area: English, writing

Synopsis: Blogging’s nature—including its short, quick, and “easy” content posts—does not lend itself well to the types of organised, planned writing that high school English teachers ask students to develop. Wiki pages are used in this lesson to collect and develop expository essays. Often enough in the classroom, the premium of time restricts students from being able to study one another’s writings. With the wiki, students can not only read one another’s work, but also analyse the writing of their peers with the intent to discover what makes a better essay. By linking to superlative student work, a teacher can use the open, editable format of wiki pages to organise further classroom discussions and activities.

Standards: NETS•S: 1.b, 2.a, b

Age: Years 5–12. The writing prompts used at upper year levels might incorporate other subject areas and standards.

Objectives: Students will develop the skills of communicating clearly through the expository essay, ideally enlightening the reader with new information. Students will study other student work to discover writing qualities that both grab and engage the reader’s attention. Students will respond to writing prompts and post their writings electronically on a wiki-based server for feedback from the instructor and peers.

Resources: word processor, wiki-based web server, including a course management system that includes a wiki module (i.e. Moodle), writing prompts, expository lesson ideas (www.Webenglishteacher.com/expwriting.html)