

Open Education Network Podcasting
Series 5 : Using Wikis in Education
Episode 5.1 : Introducing Wikis (mp3 8.3MB 9m06s)

“Hello. My name is Paul Kawachi. Welcome to Open Education Network Podcasting introducing a new idea or technique to students and teachers for use in education.

This is the first episode of the fifth series about using wikis in education. In the second episode I plan to interview an expert in multimedia on the educational use of wikis, and then in the third episode how we can evaluate wikis, or more accurately how we can assess students and their use of wikis in education.

For the first five years, the world wide web essentially provided resources on demand in a one-way read-only fashion. However, in the past five years search techniques have developed to enable users to input their own personal data securely to find matches to their enquiry. While at first this was a commercial dating service, the technology has developed to link users together into groups according to their interest. In a similar way, there are now groups who use emailing lists of their members to have asynchronous discussions. The internet has now evolved into a write-and-read medium for user groups, circles or special interest groups. Most of this software for connecting users is produced by commercial for-profit companies charging a one-time product fee or monthly subscription for hosting services. A small proportion of the available software however is free. These software applications are designed for individuals to meet like-minded individuals and are collectively termed Social Software applications or Social Apps for short. Leading Social Apps are Friendster, MySpace, and YouTube, as well as blogs and wikis. For educational purposes the leading social apps are blogs.

In the last series we talked about using blogs in education. Wikis are a special type of blog. Whereas blogs generally have short entries about work by others and mainly giving reference to work by others, wikis have entries produced by individuals together. The individuals may be separated by distance but they are considered to be synchronous tools since the individuals work on the entry collaboratively : one person may be writing one new sub-page while another is adding details to a previous page. Wikis are works-in-progress and are never finished. Despite being considered synchronous, a group may take up work produced years earlier and update it adding new pages and recent knowledge through more hypertext links. Such links are constructed automatically by the

software (rather than requiring the author having to write using html) and links are made to other wikis. If the new pages are inside someone else's wiki and are fairly self-contained not connected to other wikis, it is considered squatting – perhaps since the owner of the wiki in most cases pays for the wiki site hosting. Only a very few hosted sites are free, and open-source code is unusually difficult to put onto your own website.

Wikis are not used much by education administration, or by teachers and students. Several reasons might underlie this reluctance by those in education to use wikis. A wiki is a kind of blog in which multiple anonymous users can access and change the text on the wiki site. While the opportunity to destructive attack exists, surprisingly wikis have been very successful in building up a shared knowledge base open to everyone with any internet access. Wikis and blogs are leaders in first generation educational social software. We can expect refinements and further developments in the next few months and years.

Thank you for listening to OEN Podcasting. In the next episode of this series on using wikis in education, I will discuss the use of wikis in education with a special guest. My name is Paul Kawachi, and I look forward to our next podcast together. Thank you. Goodbye.”