

What is a wiki?

Tutorial 1

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Introducing a Wiki



Objectives

In this tutorial we will:

- provide an overview of what wikis are;
- show examples of their different uses;
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using wikis to develop content;
- describe the main features of WikiEducator.



Preknowledge for Learning4Content participants

We encourage Learning4Content participants to review the following resources before embarking on your WikiEducator journey:

- **Video** - Think about what Desmond Tutu says about freedom in education by viewing the short video clip^[1]
- **Video** - View Wikis in plain English^[2] on Youtube^[3] which provides a short explanation of the technology and how they can be used to co-ordinate groups.
- **Handbook** - Familiarise yourself with the concept of Open Education Resources^[4]
- **Declaration** - Read the Cape Town Open Education Declaration^{[5][6]} (consider signing the declaration in your personal or institutional capacity); and
- **Video** - See how WikiEducator, Declan McCabe assists student teachers in an innovative project by watching this short video;

What is a Wiki?

The name "Wiki" was chosen by Ward Cunningham -- the creator of the first Wiki. It is a shortened form of "wiki-wiki", the Hawaiian word for quick.

A wiki is a web site that is generally editable by anyone with a computer, a web browser, and an Internet connection. Wikis use a quick and easy syntax to allow users to apply formatting to text and create links between pages. This simple formatting syntax means that authors no longer need to learn the complexities of HTML to create content on the web.

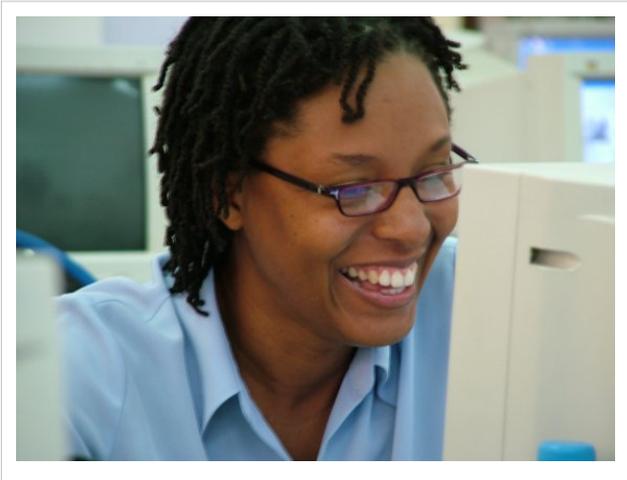
The main strength of a wiki is that it gives people the ability to work collaboratively on the same document. The only software you need is an Internet browser. Consequently, wikis are used for a variety of purposes. If you make a mistake, it's easy to revert back to an earlier version of the document.



Examples of Wikis

The largest and most talked about Wiki on the Internet is Wikipedia ^{[7][8]}

Wikipedia is, for the most part, editable by anyone in the world with a computer and an Internet connection and, as of 2009, contained over 14,000,000 articles in more than 260 languages. Since its creation in 2001, Wikipedia ^[9] has grown rapidly into one of the largest reference web sites, attracting around 65 million visitors monthly as of 2009. There are more than 85,000 active contributors working on Wikipedia articles! While Wikipedia's mission is to create an encyclopedic resource of knowledge, wikis can be used for a variety of purposes and are quickly becoming the



defacto technology for collaborative group work online. They can be great social tools for classrooms, teams, and community groups, or configured to provide easily updatable web sites for organisations.

The following wikis display a range of different applications of wiki technology:

- WikiWikiWeb ^{[10][11]} - the first ever wiki, it has been around since 1995.
- Wikitravel ^{[12][13]} - a project to create a free, complete, up-to-date, and reliable world-wide travel guide.
- Moodle docs ^[14] - a community wiki used to develop and maintain the documentation for Moodle ^[15], the popular open source learning management system.
- Scholarpedia ^{[16][17]} - a wiki project based on a system of peer review.

There are literally thousands of wikis around the web on a diverse range of subjects and supporting many communities.



Activity

The purpose of this activity is to introduce you to a few examples of wiki projects. In this activity you are encouraged to visit at least three of Wikipedia's sister projects listed below.

For each of the Wikimedia project sites, you should:

1. Identify the main purpose of the site and how this differs from Wikipedia
2. Skim through at least three representative pages on the site to get a feel for contributions from the community
3. Determine which content license is used for the site.

Visit three sites from the list of Wikimedia projects below:

- Wikinews ^{[18][19]}
- Wikimedia Commons ^{[20][21]}
- Wikiversity ^{[22][23]}
- Wikiquote ^{[24][25]}
- Wiktionary ^{[26][27]}
- Wikibooks ^{[28][29]}

Many of Wikipedia's sister projects were initiated because the encyclopedia was being cluttered by entries that were not appropriate for an encyclopedia.

Interesting uses of Wiki technology

- British Council Case Study^[30] on using wiki technology to promote collaboration at the office.
- Conference planning, see for example Wikimania 2006^[31]
- Wiki as an online presentation^[32] tool demonstrated by Meredith Gorran Farkas, a distance education librarian.
- Open Streetmap^[33] is a wiki project to provide free geographic data such as street maps to anyone who wants them.
- Distinguishing between types of wiki communities^[34] - the difference between "above-the-flow" and "in-the-flow" wikis.
- The Wealth of Networks WikiNotes^[35] - This Wiki is an invitation to collaborate on building a learning and research environment based on Yochai Benkler's book, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, available under a Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike license.
- Other uses include:
 - Meetings (Posting of agendas, prior meeting discussions, minutes)
 - Documentation for collaborative projects
 - Web space for personal note taking
- If you find a really interesting use of a wiki - please feel free to add it to the list above.

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Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- Anyone can edit.
- Wikis are easy to use and learn.
- Wikis are instantaneous so there is no need to wait for a publisher to create a new edition or update information
- A rich text editor offers a what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) interface, facilitating the formatting and layout of content.
- People located in different parts of the world can work on the same content.

```
<td class="MainPageBG" style="width:45%;
<table width="100%" cellpadding="2"
<tr>
<th> <a name="The_purpose_of_WikiEducator">
</th></tr>
<tr>
<td style="color:#000">The WikiEducator is
<ul><li><b>planning</b> of education projec
</li><li><b>development</b> of free content
</li><li> work on building <b>open educatio
</li><li> networking on <b><a href="/Metawi
</li></ul>
</td></tr>
<tr>
<th>
<a name="Our_community_values..."</a><h2
</th></tr>
```

In the old days you had to edit quite complex HTML syntax to create web pages.

- The wiki software keeps track of every edit made and it's a simple process to revert back to a previous version of a page.
- Non-technical users have access to the power of web publishing.
- The wiki has no predetermined structure - consequently it is a flexible tool which can be used for a wide range of applications.
- There are a wide range of open source software wiki's to choose from so licensing costs shouldn't be a barrier to installing an institutional wiki.

Disadvantages

Advantages in one context, may be disadvantages in another.

- Anyone can edit so this may be too open for some applications, for example confidential documentation. However it is possible to regulate user access.
- Open to SPAM and vandalism if not managed properly. There are easy ways to restore a page and in the case of WikiEducator you must be logged in to edit pages so this reduces vandalism by automated spam bots.
- Requires Internet connectivity to collaborate, but technologies to produce print versions of articles are improving.
- The flexibility of a wiki's structure can mean that information becomes disorganised. As a wiki grows, the community must plan and administer the structure collaboratively.

The usual guidelines for healthy computer use apply ^[1]

What about quality?

Before proceeding with the discussion activity for this tutorial, you should read the following short article.



Reading

There is divided opinion and a healthy debate among educators concerning the quality of content developed in a wiki environment. In your opinion, do you expect to find significant differences in the quality of content when comparing open and closed authoring approaches? Given the recentness of the wiki phenomenon, research on this question is limited. Can both open and closed authoring models produce high quality material? To find out more, consider the Wikipedia article on the reliability ^{[2][3]} of articles.

The *Wall Street Journal Online* has an interesting debate between Jimmy Wales of Wikipedia and Dale Hoiberg, editor in chief of Encyclopaedia Britannica, and you may find this to be an interesting read ^{[4][5]} as well.

When comparing closed versus open authoring approaches, it is worth looking at the history of Wikipedia, which has succeeded in creating the largest encyclopedia in history. Wikipedia was preceded by the Nupedia^[6] project, which also aimed to build a free content encyclopedia. Nupedia was not an open wiki like Wikipedia and adopted an extensive process of peer review before final publication of an article. After 3.5 years, Nupedia had only completed 24 Articles, with 74 more articles as work in progress. Clearly this authoring model was not scalable, and was a strong motivation for Jimmy Wales, the founder of Nupedia to open up the authoring model by starting the Wikipedia project.



Discussion

This activity is designed for participants using these tutorials in a face-to-face workshop, or alternatively in an eLearning format with a group of learners. Consider the following questions, which can be discussed in small groups or using an online discussion forum:

- Do you have any concerns about the quality of educational resources developed using an open authoring approach? If so, what are your concerns? If not, how does an open authoring approach contribute to high quality learning materials?
- In your opinion, should closed or open authoring approaches be used in the development of learning resources for use in education? Give reasons for your view?
- What mechanisms can be adopted to assure quality of educational content developed in wiki environments?

Concluding thoughts



Reflection

Am I still concerned about the openness of wiki editing?

- What is to prevent such a website from anarchy?
- How does a wiki protect my authorship?
- What if someone deletes my work?

Matt Barton provides a candid yet light hearted response to your concerns in a posting ^{[7][8]} on a list, which is repeated here for convenience of access. Matt says:

"They [wikis] will not help a writer develop a personal voice. They will, however, enable collaboration and teach us all something very important about what a true democracy is all about.

So, if wikis elide all claims to authorship, offer no protection of material, and allow any 5-year old child or racist bigot to edit a page, what good are they? Well, let us explore why so many wikis are able to flourish in the well-fertilized fields in which they are sown.

For one thing, wikis are not really as vulnerable as you may think. They are at least as well-protected as your home. Now, I beg you to consider: Is your home really invulnerable? Couldn't a small group of hoodlums take it into their minds to vandalize your home? How is that you are able to drive a car at all, since anyone with a fifty-cent pocketknife could slash your tires wherever you park it?

You may say that the police are there to prevent such things. However, I'm looking out my apartment window now at my tiny little Mazda Miata. There are no uniformed people about. However, there are some neighbors. Hopefully they would notice if someone was deflating one of my tires and do something about it.

Wikis work under the same model. In wikipedia, authors can choose to "subscribe" to a wiki page, which means they are notified via email when anyone tries to change a page. They are free, of course, to re-visit the page and investigate. If someone has written something disagreeable, it's a small effort to change it back. You see, wikis do not only save one version of a page, but every version. Each time a user saves a new version, the old version is stored in a database where it can be accessed by examining

the "History" of the page.

Thus, while wikis by default display the top layer of each page, one can easily dig down into the underlying layers and examine the sediment there. What one finds is that highly controversial topics (like abortion) are often loaded with hundreds of layers, whereas boring topics like "comma usage" are typically left alone after three or four changes.

In short, wikis are protected not by code, or by law, but rather by the participation of an active wiki community. If you are proud of your entry, you will feel compelled to see what's up if you receive a notification that the entry has been changed, and "roll it back" if it's obvious the page was vandalized or rendered less intelligent."

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Introducing WikiEducator

The WikiEducator family



Wikis are about communities -- not the technology that enables them. Social communities develop around projects and ideas. For instance, the Wikipedia community is working together to build a free online encyclopedia. These communities are drawn together by a common set of values.

The WikiEducator ^{[1][2]} domain names were first registered in February 2006, and the first site was hosted on a desktop machine at the University of Auckland ^[3]. WikiEducator was nurtured and incubated by the Commonwealth of Learning ^{[4][5]} from May 2006 till June 2009. Due to the phenomenal growth and international success of the project, WikiEducator is now an independent initiative hosted by the Open Education Resource (OER) Foundation ^[6], a charitable

non-profit organisation.

The WikiEducator community aims to develop open content resources in support of all national curricula. This represents a return to the core values of education, namely to share knowledge freely.

Many wiki communities believe that content should be free. The slogan of the Mediawiki software, which runs WikiEducator and all the projects of the Wikimedia Foundation, encapsulates this spirit rather well: *Ideas want to be free*. This is why wiki software is often cited as an example of social software ^{[7][8]} because of the ease with which users can work together on content. This combined with the communication features of wikis enables people to connect with each other and to build a real sense of community.

The values of our WikiEducator community

It is important to recognise and respect the core values that embody a wiki community. The WikiEducator community embraces the following values:

We believe:

- In the **social inclusion** and participation of all people in our networked society (Access to ICTs is a fundamental right of knowledge citizens - not an excuse for using old technologies).
- In the **freedoms** of all educators to teach with the technologies and contents of their choice, hence our commitment to Free/Libre and Open Source technology tools and free content.
- That educational content is unique - and by working together we can improve the technologies we use as well as the reusability of digital learning resources.
- In a **forward-looking disposition** working together to find appropriate and sustainable solutions for e-learning futures.

WikiEducators strive to be friendly and neighbourly. Our *mantra* is: "**Just try it! Our community will support you**".

Types of initiatives and content on WikiEducator

You will find different types of content on Wikieducator, including:

1. **International clusters**, project hubs and initiatives within the WikiEducator community. These pages are used for **planning** of WikiEducator projects;
2. **Learning materials** -- our free educational materials;
3. Resources on **how to create open education resources** (OERs);
4. **Funding proposals** developed as free content.



Reflection

Educational wiki projects -- Thinking about similarities and distinguishing features

There are a growing number of wiki projects working in the educational sector. Consider for example:

- The Wikimedia Foundation ^{[9][10]} projects, specifically Wikibooks ^{[11][12]} and Wikiversity ^{[13][14]} ;
- The Curriki ^{[15][16]} project;
- The Scholarpedia ^{[16][17]} project (See also the Scholarpedia ^{[18][19]} entry on Wikipedia.)
- Google's Knol ^{[20][21]} project. (See also the entry for Knol ^{[22][23]} on Wikipedia).

Questions for reflection

- In what ways does or should the WikiEducator community differentiate itself from these projects?
- Based on your analysis of the listed wiki projects, what advice can you provide for our community to promote a sustainable and successful project?

Distinctive characteristics of the WikiEducator family

In response to these questions, it is fair to say that WikiEducator has established a distinctive niche in the global OER landscape.

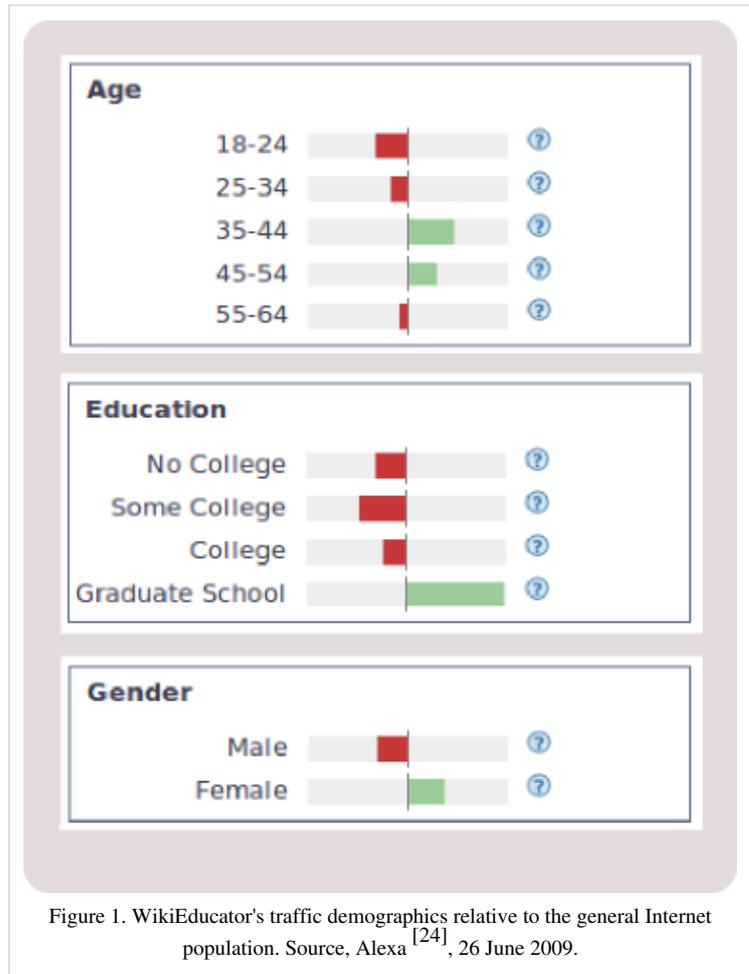


Figure 1. WikiEducator's traffic demographics relative to the general Internet population. Source, Alexa [24], 26 June 2009.

73% of WikiEducator's members are teachers, lecturers or trainers working in the formal education sector. Approximately half of our users are over 45 years old demonstrating a strong commitment by practising educators to learn and to use social networking tools for the collaborative development of teaching materials. Learning wiki skills is cited by new users as the top reason for registering an account on the WikiEducator site (70% of respondents). This is closely followed by "researching innovative educational trends and ideas" (68% of respondents) and "developing free content materials" (66% of respondents) as the main reasons for joining the project.

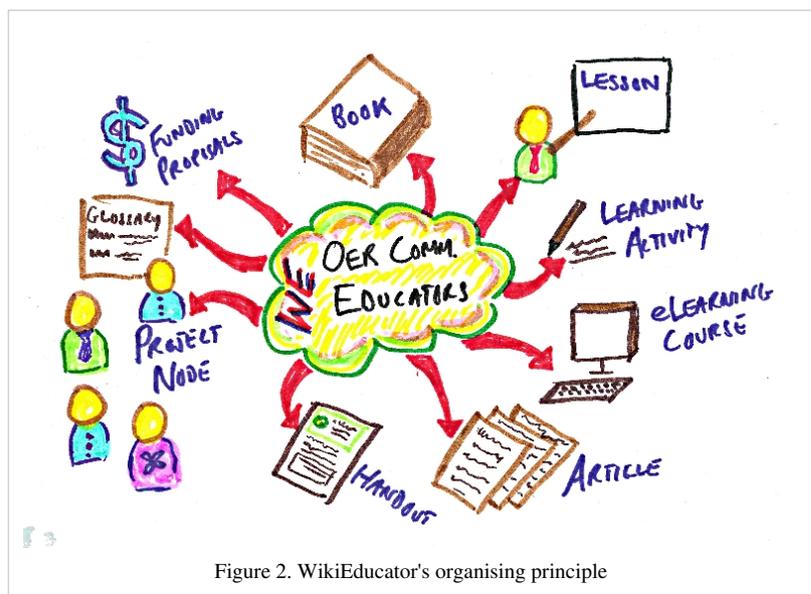


Figure 2. WikiEducator's organising principle

WikiEducator is a global project with registered users distributed around the world (Caribbean 26%; North America 23%, Africa and Indian Ocean 19%, South America 5%, Europe 10%, Pacific/Oceania 17%). The project also serves

a multilingual audience with only 51% of respondents indicating English as their first language.

WikiEducator differentiates itself within the OER landscape in a number of ways:

- **A focused education initiative:** WikiEducator is a targeted education project focusing on the formal education sector, when compared, for instance, to general public projects like Wikipedia, Wikibooks or Wikiversity. This is evidenced by WikiEducator's traffic demographics relative to the general Internet population. With reference to Figure 1, WikiEducator attracts a higher proportion of the 35 - 54 age group when compared to the general Internet population, contrasted for example, with Wikiversity which shows a higher proportion of the 18 - 24 age group for the same indicator^[25]. In addition, WikiEducator attracts a higher proportion of visitors with graduate qualifications and has succeeded in overcoming a male gender bias when contrasted, for example with Wikiversity which shows a male gender bias and lower proportion of visitors with graduate qualifications relative to the general Internet population. WikiEducator is uniquely positioned within the formal education sector when compared with the general Internet population.
- **Self-organising OER community:** WikiEducator has organised itself as a community of educators working on a range of different OER artifacts, for example: open textbooks, OER courses for online teaching, learning activities based on external resources, lessons, articles and research papers, handouts, glossary projects for use as reference resources, the establishment of project or community nodes, the development of funding proposals as free content etc. (See Figure 2.) Other projects within the OER landscape have organised themselves around the nature of the objects being produced, for instance: Encyclopaedia articles in the case of Wikipedia^[26] or books in the case of Wikibooks^[27], school textbooks with reference to projects like the Free High School Science Texts^[28]. Using a community-based organising principle contributes to the flexibility and agility of the project because incorporating additional OER related projects are easily accommodated.
- **Free cultural works approved content licensing:** Since the inception of WikiEducator, the project has subscribed to Creative Commons licenses which meet the requirements of the free cultural works definition^[29]. Taking into account the recent decision^[30] by the Wikimedia Foundation to migrate from the GNU Free documentation license to the Creative Commons Attribution Sharealike license means that our content is now legally compatible with the largest database of OER in the world. This generates significant opportunities for content interoperability among Wikimedia Foundation projects, WikiEducator, Connexions^[31] and other OER initiatives which use compatible licenses. Sadly, many OER initiatives within the tertiary sector do not currently use free cultural works approved licenses and are excluded from remixing content from these sources. Moreover, our licensing choices permit us to collaborate with the corporate sector in generating a financially sustainable ecosystem without the risks of commercial exploitation.
- **Refining technology and approaches for a mass peer-collaboration model:** WikiEducator is based on the mass peer-collaboration model pioneered by Wikipedia. As a community of educators, WikiEducator has been able to prioritise and focus on developing the educational refinements which distinguish teaching materials from, for instance, encyclopaedia articles. Examples include: the use of pedagogical templates, experimentation with interactive templates^[32], pioneering approaches associated with wiki-to-print^{[33][34]} technologies (aimed at widening access to digital OER for learners who may not have access to the Internet), initiating work on the development of a quality assurance and review^[35] framework suitable for the formal education sector, proof-of-concept^[36] work for exporting WikiEducator collections as IMS content packages (which would enable seamless export of our content into institutionally hosted Learning Management Systems), and planning projects aimed at making the technology easier to use for the majority educators. This experience distinguishes the WikiEducator community from many of its OER counterparts in the formal sector.

Additional reading

- Early history of WikiEducator^[37]
- News archive^[38], providing a chronological history of main events and milestones

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Conclusion

Wikis can be powerful tools to facilitate collaborative work and the development of online communities. The ability for distributed individuals to contribute to the same topics/content or project with just a web browser and a network connection has resulted in some amazing achievements of peer-produced content over recent years. The most notable example is Wikipedia but we are still in the early days of this technology and great things may come from a wide adoption of wiki technology by communities and groups interested in creating open resources. We hope that WikiEducator continues to grow as a place for communities of interested practitioners to facilitate and support the development of Open Educational Resources (OERs).

"For the gains in autonomy, democracy, justice, and a critical culture to materialize, the practices of non-market information production, individually free creation, and cooperative peer production must become more than fringe practices. They must become part of life for substantial portions of the networked population." - Yochai Benkler, The Wealth of Networks.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

If there is anything you would like to know more about regarding this tutorial, check out the FAQs page, someone else may have had the same question. If your question is not already covered on this page please add it to the talk page ^[1] under an appropriate subject or post your question on the main WikiEducator google group ^[2].

External links and resources

These links are provided for further reading. They will be particularly useful for facilitators wanting to add interesting points when working through the WikiEducator tutorials.

- 7 Things you should know about wikis ^{[3][4]}, provided by the Educause Learning Initiative
- Ward Cunningham's original wiki, called WikiWikiWeb ^{[5][6]} which he started coding in 1994
- Etymology ^{[7][8]} of the Wiki
- Uses and Potentials of Wikis in the Classroom ^{[9][10]}, by Ferris and Wilder
- Using Wikis in Schools: A Case Study ^{[11][12]}

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