Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads

Wikis in hybrid classes as instruments for language learning opportunities

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Reference data:
Longcope, P. (2009). Wikis in hybrid classes as instruments for language learning opportunities. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT2008 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

Over the years, teaching points have been criticized for a variety of reasons. Recently, both Crabbe (2003) and Allwright (2005) have proposed replacing the teaching point with the language learning opportunity. What is proposed here is a way to use a wiki (a collection of web-pages that all members of a community have the ability to add to and/or edit) as the computer component of a hybrid class (a class that combines both a traditional classroom setting component and a computer component) to provide language learning opportunities.

長年、語学授業のティーチングポイントは様々な理由により批判されてきた。近年になって、クラブ（２００３）とオールライト（２００５）は、言語を習得する機会を学生に与えることを、指導計画上の単元の焦点となるティーチングポイントと置き換えるべきと唱えている。この論文で提案されているのは、学生に言語習得の機会を提供する為に、ハイブリッドクラス（混成授業：従来の教室における講義とコンピューターを利用した学習との構成で行われる。）のコンピューター部分として、ウィキ（所属するコミュニティの誰もが加筆、または編集できるウェブページ群。）を利用する事である。

Allwright (2005) states that a common approach to developing a lesson plan is to choose a particular point of the language to teach, for example a linguistic or sociolinguistic aspect, and develop the lesson plan around that point. These points around which lesson plans are built are called teaching points. Over the years, however, there have been several critiques of teaching points. For example, Nunan (1989) points out that the focus of the lesson is not always obvious to students. Similarly, Nabei and Swain (2002) make the point that students may be intentionally focusing on a different aspect of the language than the one the teacher has prepared as the teaching point for the lesson. Moreover, a number of studies have found that, regardless of the activity that teachers have prepared, learners will often perform the activity differently from each other and differently from the way the teacher had planned (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Ikeda, 2008).

Because of these problems with teaching points, Allwright (2005) urges replacing them in lesson plan development with the notion of language learning opportunities, which he states "covers opportunities created by learners as well as by teachers and opportunities created by chance rather than deliberate planned action" (p. 17). Allwright envisions a lesson as a place not only where opportunities for students to learn the language are provided—for example in the form of activities that the teacher expects will lead to learning—but also as a place flexible enough to allow students to develop and pursue their own language learning opportunities. As such, he sees the lesson not in prescriptive terms—i.e., what will be learned or might be learned can be mapped out prior to the class—but in reflective terms—i.e., what might have been learned can only be determined after the class, if at all.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that one way to increase the number of language learning opportunities available to students is by offering hybrid courses, which combine a computer component with a traditional face-to-face classroom component (Scida & Saury, 2006). Furthermore, in this paper I will argue that the computer element of such a course should be a wiki, which is defined as "a website where anyone can edit anything anytime they want" (Richardson, 2006, p. 59). In making this argument, I will first discuss hybrid courses in more depth. Then I will further explore the concept of the language learning opportunity. Following this I will describe how wikis can be used to provide language learning opportunities. Finally, I will offer some practical examples of activities incorporating wikis.

Hybrid courses

As mentioned above, a hybrid course is a course that has both a computer module and a face-to-face classroom module to it. Huang, Ma, and Zhang (2008) mention that such courses have three characteristics. First, hybrid courses allow "flexibility for providing learning resources" (p. 67). They can encourage more out-of-class interaction not only between the teacher and the students but also between the students themselves. Hybrid courses can also help teachers make class materials and supplementary materials more easily available to students. Furthermore, Ellis (2008) argues that class lectures become more effective when they are made available online for students to review independently at their own pace.

The second characteristic of hybrid courses which Huang, et al. (2008) mention is that they allow teachers to provide students with a more diverse learning experience. Teachers can now not only have students working on activities that stretch beyond the limitations of the classroom, but can also monitor the students' progress on those activities, as well as facilitate their completion when necessary. Moreover, teachers are also provided with a means of offering more interactive, individualized instruction.

The third characteristic of hybrid courses which Huang et al. (2008) mention is the enrichment of the learning experience. The inclusion of an online component to the class allows the learning experience to become more learner-centered. This argument is echoed by Ellis (2008) and Neo (2005) who see hybrid classes as much more suited to an educational approach that allows learners to take more control of when, how, and what they are learning. In hybrid

classes students are encouraged to become more responsible for their own learning than in traditional classroom settings.

As a hybrid course is simply a melding of a classroom component with a computer component, there are a number of ways that it can be accomplished. Chew, Jones, and Turner (2008) point out that too often, however, researchers focus on what can or cannot be done with the computer component without understanding how it matches up with the educational theory driving the class in question. As the purpose of this paper is to make an argument for how wikis can be used to provide more language learning opportunities to language learners, it is therefore necessary to first discuss the theoretical aspects of language learning opportunities before turning to a discussion of wikis.

Language learning opportunities

As mentioned above, Allwright's (2005) vision of language learning opportunities does not place all the responsibility on the teacher to provide predetermined language learning opportunities to students. Instead, Allwright's language learning opportunity empowers students to spontaneously pursue their own interests and curiosity as an equally legitimate method of providing themselves and their classmates with learning opportunities. Based on Huang et al.'s (2008) characteristics of hybrid classes, discussed above, these courses align well with Allwright's concept of language learning opportunities. The challenge is, however, to identify a computer-based educational component best suited to language learning opportunities. In exploring this question, it is appropriate to consider Crabbe's (2003) description of language learning opportunities.

Crabbe's (2003) definition of language learning opportunity hinges on making available to learners conditions that facilitate language learning. Included in these conditions are input and output. In order to choose a computer module that will aid in making these conditions available, it is first important to understand how these conditions allow for language learning to occur. First, regarding input, Krashen (1981, 1983, 1985) notes that it is important for input to be comprehensible, i.e., input must be far enough beyond the learner's current level that the learner is challenged to understand it, but not so far beyond it to make it completely incomprehensible. In other words, it is not enough to simply provide large amounts of input to the learner, the level of that input must be within a very specific range for it to be valuable in language learning. Moreover, van Lier's (2000) discussion about how an ecological approach to language learning encourages a re-conceptualization of how the interaction between the environment and the language learner is viewed proves informative. "In Gibson's ecological psychology, as in the work of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and their respective followers, the unit of analysis is not the perceived object or linguistic *input*, but the active learner, or the *activity* itself" (p. 253, italics in original). That is to say, it is not the input alone that is important, but rather the activity that the learner is involved in when that input is available that needs to be considered. In this argument, there are two important claims. First, learners learn language by participating in an activity that uses the language in a meaningful way. Second, as the learners participate in that activity, they may be exposed to input that aids them in completing that activity. The input may be provided by others in an effort to aid the learner,

conversely the input may be actively searched for by the learner in their attempt to complete the activity.

Swain (2000) focuses on the beneficial aspects of output by looking at collaborative dialogue, i.e., output that learners produce about the language as they work collaboratively to produce a written or oral text. She notes that research has found that in working together in creating a text, learners often engage in discussions about the language itself. Swain and Lapkin (2001) explain, "the activity of writing collaboratively led students to discuss their own language use as they encountered problems. They brought to conscious attention gaps in their own knowledge and worked out possible solutions through hypothesis formation and testing, relying on their joint linguistic resources" (p. 110). Furthermore, Swain (2000) points out that recent research has found that learners' answers on tests devised after a session of collaborative dialogue correspond closely with the solutions that those learners decided on during the activity. So by having students produce output collaboratively, students can draw not only on their own individual knowledge of the language but also on their partner(s)'s knowledge of the language in solving the linguistic problems they encounter while producing the text.

Therefore, in selecting a computer component for a hybrid class that will work well with language learning, it is important to choose something that meshes well with the aspects of input and output discussed above. Specifically, it is important to choose something that will not only provide comprehensible input, but will also make it available when learners require it while they are working on a specific activity. Moreover, it needs to be something that will allow learners to collaborate with one another. I believe that wikis meet both of these requirements.

Wikis and language learning opportunities

As I mentioned earlier, wikis are websites that can be edited by anyone at anytime. Perhaps the most recognizable wiki is the free online encyclopedia, Wikipedia (*Wikipedia Main Page*, n.d.). Not surprisingly, this setup lends itself well to student collaboration. Richardson (2006) states, "in using wikis, students are not only learning how to publish content; they are also learning how to develop and use all sorts of collaborative skills, negotiating with others to agree on correctness, meaning, relevance, and more" (p. 65). Moreover, because access and work is through the internet, students are not limited by space and time in their collaborations. If students are working on a project together, they can, at any time that is convenient to them, leave questions or comments for each other; respond to questions or comments; edit a part of the project; or add to the project. What is more, as Swain (2000) points out, these collaborations are likely to lead to language learning opportunities.

As I mentioned it is important for students to have comprehensible input available as they are working on an activity. Again, this is something that wikis can easily provide. If students, working collaboratively or individually, publish their work on the wiki, it then becomes available for other students to view and learn from. If students are working on an activity but are unsure of what the finished product should look like, they can view other students' work and use that as a model. It is also possible to publish class notes

or handouts on the wiki which students can refer to as they are working. Furthermore, if when viewing class resources students have questions, they can post those questions and other students or the teacher can respond to them.

As can be seen, wikis can be used as the computer component of a hybrid class as a way to provide language learning opportunities to students. Another aspect of wikis is that while they can be used for class assignments, once students have become accustomed to them, they can also offer students the opportunity to interact and collaborate in the pursuit of their own mutual interests. For example, first year students at a university might collaboratively create a page on the wiki where they can share information about university services or information about the area surrounding the university. While these activities may not be curricular-oriented, provided they are done in the target language, they provide the same language learning opportunities as class assignments done on the wiki.

Wikis: Getting started

There are a number of free sites through which teachers can set up wikis for their classes, for example, PBWiki (www.pbwiki.com), Wikidot (www.wikidot.com), Wetpaint (www.wetpaint,com), and Zoho (wiki.zoho.com—a Japanese site). All of these sites, though, have slightly different features from one another, so teachers should explore them to ensure the wiki chosen meets their requirements. PBWiki, as well as other sites, allows for teachers to keep the wiki private so that only people invited to the wiki can gain access to view or edit it. Once teachers have registered with the site, they are led through a quick and easy set up. After the wiki has been established, they can access it and set it up as they like. Then, depending on the site, students either need to give the teacher their e-mail addresses so that the teacher can send them invitations to the wiki, or the teacher needs to establish and distribute a password that will allow student access.

Examples of how wikis might be used

One of the clear advantages of wikis is that they are versatile enough to be used in many different contexts. They can be used in reading classes as well as writing classes and oral communication classes. Students in junior high school, high school, university, or beyond can all make use of them. They can provide language learning opportunities for beginning learners, intermediate learners, or advanced learners. In fact, as wikis are still very new to the classroom, more and more ways to use them continue to emerge. Below are two assignments demonstrating how teachers can utilize wikis in hybrid classes.

Collaborative class vocabulary notebook

In many language classes, students keep individual vocabulary notebooks, but a wiki would allow the entire class to keep one together. Students could draw words from class readings posted on the wiki, student-work posted on the wiki, their own personal reading outside of class, or something they found elsewhere on the internet. One advantage of having the vocabulary notebook on the wiki is that, provided the text in which the student found the word is somewhere else on the internet, the entry in the notebook could very easily be linked directly to the original. Thus

students may not only be exposed to new words, but they can also be exposed to the texts from which those words were taken. Furthermore, as the students are collaborating on the notebook, they can add extra information to other students' entries, and thus provide the original student with new knowledge about that word.

Self-introductions

At the beginning of the semester, teachers could assign students to write self-introductions and publish them on the wiki. Teachers could then ask that students read others' self-introductions, and request them to leave relevant questions for the writers. Students could then be required to go back to their own self-introductions and rewrite them in an attempt to include some of the information that their classmates had asked them about. This activity, and other variations of it, is clearly a meaningful use of language as learners are, on the one hand, using the language to introduce themselves to their peers, and on the other, using the language to learn more about their peers. While the activity is a simple peer editing task, because it goes beyond the spatial and temporal limitations of the classroom, it becomes much more beneficial and meaningful. Students as *writers* are able to receive feedback from more of their peers than would be possible in a classroom setting, and students as *readers* are able to self-select those self-introductions which they are interested in reading and responding to. Finally, as learners will have had a chance to read a number of their peers' self-introductions prior to the rewriting process, they will be able to draw on those in trying to solve any problems they initially encountered when writing their self-introductions as well as any problems they may encounter as they attempt to rewrite them.

These are but two examples of how teachers can incorporate wikis into their curricula. As teachers become more comfortable using wikis, they will no doubt find many more ways to use them in their particular settings with their own students. However, perhaps the greatest advantage of wikis is their potential for providing language learning opportunities, at any time. As students explore what they can do with the wiki, every time they use it, they will be engaging in meaningful use of the target language. Given a place to collaborate and interact with other students, the freedom to pursue their own interests in those collaborations and interactions, as well as a little encouragement from their teacher, students are likely to find far more ways to make use of wikis as learning tools than teachers could ever imagine.

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