

## **Empowering students: Wikis as a revolutionary force in education**

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**ABSTRACT:** In the traditional model of education, students are not involved in the production of knowledge. They read what others have written for them and they listen to what more knowledgeable teachers have to say. It has been observed by educational researchers that resources like textbooks often conceal from students the disciplinary practices, passion and effort that authors invest in producing texts. This is not the case with wikis. Readers of wiki texts can peruse editing histories and read the discussions that editors have had in the past. Moreover, the blurred distinction between reader and author creates an environment in which learners can actively engage in ongoing dialogue. In earlier work, I learned through interview studies that many Wikipedians explicitly treat participation in Wikipedia as an opportunity to learn about the world through writing and discourse.

The powerful learning experiences that Wikipedians described in these studies generated new questions about how contributing to wiki projects can bring about similar experiences for students. How might the design of wiki tools encourage specific kinds of writing practices? What role does the design of collaborative technologies play in shaping our epistemological commitments?

I will briefly describe learning theories (constructionism and knowledge building) that suggest young people are capable of producing beautiful and valuable artifacts as part of the learning process; in short, that they are capable of contributing to the intellectual life of the world. In fact, I suggest that we should expect no less from them. I challenge educators, Wikimedians, and researchers alike to think of wikis in education not as a staging ground for producing texts for the edification of students, but as a canvas on which students themselves can engage in the intellectual work of knowledge production.