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Chapter 4 - What Running a Class Wiki Taught Me About Teaching History

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WHAT RUNNING A CLASS WIKI TAUGHT ME ABOUT TEACHING HISTORY

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SPIRALING UPWARDS

Teaching is very much an iterative process. We learn our material, develop some lectures, and teach a class. And then, in the delivery we find that some lectures or projects worked and that others did not. We make changes, go again, and reflect again. Each step is a learning step, not only for students but for teachers as well. With each change, teachers improve. It is this cyclical process around planning, delivery, reflection, and reform that makes teaching and learning an upwards spiral.

Within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), we take this cyclical reflective process as a core concept. Teaching and learning become our objects of study and our problems for investigation. SoTL has an investigative method: By observing our object of study we learn how it operates, how it changes. If the subject (our student's learning) cannot be seen, then we have little evidence by which we can estimate learning and the effectiveness of our teaching. In the second volume of the Eastern Michigan University's SoTL seminar, efforts focused on "making learning visible." As Jeffrey Bernstein (2008) explained, showing that learning has occurred is a "key element in the evidence-based culture of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning" (p.2). But Bernstein's point was to highlight two principal activities in academic research and teaching and to underscore how we as scholars tend to privilege one at the expense of the other. He and other scholars have noted that the problematizing of research tends to build "community" and "communities of scholars," whereas the problematizing of teaching tends to isolate teachers as few academics wish to acknowledge that they are finding "problems in their teaching" (aside from the universal complaint that teaching takes away time from one's "real" academic pursuits) (Bernstein, 2008; Shulman, 1993; Bass, 1999; Coppola, 2007). SoTL is powerful as a research field as it takes our core activities (teaching) as our research object.

With the advent of new text-based technologies in the early twentieth century, teachers have opportunities as never before to "look under the hood" of student learning and see how students go about the process of constructing their knowledge about a particular topic. For me, the Web 2.0 application, the wiki, has enabled me to see the learning behaviors of my students "behind the scenes.". Then, using the knowledge thus gained, I can make changes to how I teach. As I used the wiki more and more in my courses, I began wondering about the meta-cognitive learning that was going on in students. I could see what content they were learning, but what core disciplinary notions were they learning about the subject? In what ways did their course assignment affect how students understood disciplinary skills, principles, and values? What disciplinary values and techniques were students learning through their participation in my course wiki?

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WHAT'S BEHIND A WIKI?

Probably by this point anyone who is teaching and learning in a post-primary school has heard of Wikipedia. Wikipedia is a portmanteau of two words: "wiki" and "encyclopedia." It is, it claims, an encyclopedia using the wiki application. The wiki application is a text translator that takes simple and easy to master text-commands (such as apostrophes ['], brackets [], pipes [|], and equal-signs [=]) and turns them into HTML code to edit and produce a web page. In short, using a wiki, one does not need to have the esoteric and specialized knowledge of HTML code in order to produce slick-looking web pages. The wiki application therefore essentially democratized and leveled web-page production (Leadbeater, 2009).[1] "Wiki Wiki" is a Hawaiian phrase meaning "quick" (Wiki, 2009). Thus, a "wiki" is a quick way to create a web page (Cunningham, 2005).[2]

A wiki is also a social space much like Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, and blogs. Anyone on the wiki can access the same page and alter ("edit") its content. Thus a wiki allows for *collaboratively-constructed* knowledge. People have created collaborative projects around all manner of subjects: There is a Dr. Who wiki; wikis for television shows; wikis for conservatives, educators, Asian baseball teams, cooking, and investments. And, of course, there is "the encyclopedia that anyone can edit."

Wikis have many features that are useful for teachers. One feature is that every saved change (or edit) to the wiki is logged in the database. This means that nothing on the wiki is ever lost. Users can roll back any page and see what it looked like yesterday, last week, last year, or (now) last decade. Because every change is logged, a wiki can tell the teacher who made what changes, to which pages, and at what times. A wiki can also compare any two versions of a single page. So if I wanted to know what sorts of changes had been made to the "American Revolution" page over the past month, it is simple to query the "page history." And last, if I wanted to know what contributions particular students made, I could query their "user histories" and get a list of every contribution the student made and at which times. A teacher who knows how to interact with the wiki application can gain a lot of information about how students behave while researching and writing their assignments. I was excited about the possibilities of the technology and became active on Wikipedia and other wikis. I gained first-hand experience about the communities and behaviors that are common in wiki environments and had many positive experiences where collaboration produced some quality research.[3] At the same time, participants on wikis can sometimes be hostile to ideas in their formative stages and participants can be brutal in their comments or aggressive in their behavior, neither of which are conducive to student learning. I decided, therefore, to use the Wikimedia application on a university server behind our firewall. While the wiki was public, participation was possible only through logins.

In January 2008, I set up a history course wiki at Eastern Michigan University. In fine Web 2.0 fashion, I decide not to dictate to the students what the website would be called and held a competition for the name. The students named it the "Eastern Michigan University's Digital Textbook" or E D i T . I liked the name because that was the essential activity on a wiki. I placed few regulations on its use. I told students to go figure out how they could use this web-application for learning about U.S. history. The one requirement I did have was that by the end of the semester the students participating in the wiki project should have written something akin to a research paper. This requirement would provide me with an easy comparison for student assessment.

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[1] On the leveling aspects of Web 2.0 applications, see Charles Leadbeater (2009) pages xxxi-xxxv.

[2] Cunningham was the software developer of the wiki application (Shirky, 2008).

[3] For an example of collaborative research and design, see Richard Nevell's page on Pompei on Citizendium, http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Pompeii.

About thirty students that semester chose to participate and about ten students were actively involved. Those ten wrote a little every week, commented on each other's' work, interacted with their professor, and generally created a vibrant discussant community on a couple of pages. By the end of the semester, nearly all of the participants had completed their "research paper" assignments on the wiki. Then in assessing student work, I queried their "user histories." I discovered that about half of those who completed the wiki assignment, started during the last week of the project and that a substantial number started (and finished) the project on the due date. This validated an assumption that probably every teacher makes about student behavior: Students wait until the last minute to do assignments.[4] The time-stamps do not lie.

While teachers (and students) often assume that assignments are done at the last minute, the wiki application gave me concrete time-stamps that showed when students worked on their assignments. But there were also qualitative questions: Was the last-minute work any good? Did these essays meet the criteria of the assignment? Did students gain lasting knowledge about their subjects? Here, in comparison with the research papers turned in by students not doing the wiki project, the "last-minute" wiki pages were about as good as the term research papers. They used evidence about as well; they quoted sources about as often; and they struggled equally to get their points across. Of course, there were outstanding research papers, too; and the core group of wiki participants also tended to produce better work because they had more people reviewing for longer periods of time (a couple of weeks). Collaborative writing and editing tends to produce better results, which is why we as teachers want our student papers proofread. So given that, in many cases, the quality of the last-minute assignments was comparable to the term papers I had assigned to the remainder of the classes (albeit shorter and shallower, but meeting my bare minimum requirements for research papers), it was clear to me that students did not need the twelve to fourteen weeks that I normally assigned to do a research project in U.S. history. Indeed, three to four weeks would be sufficient for the students who put time and effort into such projects, and it was more than enough time for the students who spent four hours (or less) on it on the due day. With this learning made visible, I made a dramatic change in the next semester: I moved the term paper due date forward to mid-term. I gave students about five weeks to finish a term paper (I was generous), which the evidence from my first wiki experiment showed was plenty of time. The wiki was still a volunteers-only assignment.

The next round of the cycle required that I observe the results of my change. The results here were that I found no differences in quality between mid-term papers and end-of-term papers. Overall student grades did not suffer. Plus, I had the added luxury of grading essays with plenty of time on my hands, and not being rushed by end-of-term grade submission deadlines. I had tried something new; reflected upon the experience with concrete data learned; and reformed my course. I spiraled upwards, but I had more questions about what students were learning about the history discipline.

SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE PROJECTS AND THE HISTORY DISCIPLINE

With the knowledge gained from my first experience with a course wiki under my belt, I began thinking about other ways that this application could enhance student learning, boost student interest, and teach the disciplinary skills of history.

Introductory surveys courses at my university are responsible for a dual focus. I am to teach both the subject content matter, the history of a specific time and place, as well as to teach something of the methods and practices of the history discipline. As a teacher of the U.S. history survey, my approach to the first goal has been fairly traditional. The subject matter was delivered mostly through lecture with assessment via

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[4] For an insightful view of how students write college-level research papers, see Lee Ann Carroll's (2002), *Rehearsing New Roles: How College Students Develop as Writers*, Chapter 4, "Supporting Writing Development."

examination. But, I struggled in efforts to address the second goal of my course, methods and practices. I had experimented previously with various course projects (Jones, 2007). Web 2.0 and social networking applications caught my imagination. While I was experimenting with my first wiki-writing project in 2008, I began asking how the wiki affected a student's understanding of history discipline. In some regards, I understand the discipline in conventional ways: It is a set of research and interpretative practices involving primary and secondary sources. But, I also place a greater emphasis on the constructiveness of the historical discipline, explaining that the conclusions we reach are also a product of socially shaped fashions and conventions current in the profession. Thus I also wished to discover the suitability of the wiki project for teaching the idea that a discipline is also a social-knowledge project.[5]

CONTENT OR METHOD?

Over the past decade or more, universities have started to focus more on core instruction which often goes by the name "General Education." At Eastern Michigan University, General Education courses in U.S. history are intended to teach a "Knowledge of the Disciplines." The U.S. History Survey "provides an introduction to a variety of social science methodologies while emphasizing history's unique contribution to the social sciences." The expectation is that students, while learning about historical method, "will gain the foundational content knowledge needed to understand and interpret the major trends, people, ideas, and events that have shaped the United States" (Eastern Michigan University, 2006).

If the mandate is to teach knowledge of the disciplinary practices of the subject and if an aim of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is to make learning visible, then how does the instructor know whether or not learning about the discipline has occurred? The instructor needs to witness student practice in the discipline. If the discipline is defined as a core body of knowledge ("Content"), then simple examination is sufficient for determining the quality of learning that has occurred. Historians at EMU, however, have defined the historical discipline as more than a core set of facts. The discipline is also a set of historical skills and practices ("Method"):

> Students will learn the basic historical skills of sifting through source material and discovering patterns and repetitions that will often serve as the basis for their argument. The key social science methods focused upon will be close, critical readings of key primary sources to uncover cultural values, political beliefs, and social mores, and the use of quantitative data to determine economic, political, and social trends (Eastern Michigan University, 2006).

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[5] For social knowledge projects, see Larry Sanger's (2007) inaugural talk for the IEA's "Our Digital Futures" program. Alvin I. Goldman (1999) discusses today's "social epistemology" in *Knowledge in a Social World* (pp. 3-4).

Note that the term "social knowledge" has taken on a different caste over the last ten years. Previously when scholars spoke about "social knowledge" it was in the context of knowledge about society. Now it tends to imply a social constructivism of knowledge, knowledge created in social environments. Compare Thomas B. Farrell (1978) and Peter J. Taylor (2004). Psychologists continue to use the term in its original context: Roland Zahn (2010), "The Architecture of Social Knowledge," University of Manchester psychology research using MRI to map the areas of social knowledge in the brain. Psychologists at the University of Washington are now adding experimental data to this insight (Schwarz, 2009).

Thus the skills to be learned are the critical faculties of discerning patterns; discerning values, beliefs, and mores; establishing quantifiable facts through primary-source documents. Thus we see in this construction of the discipline emphasis on factual data, interpretation, and sources.

The historical essay has traditionally been the means by which the teacher is to determine to what degree the learning of these practices and methods has occurred. The research essay is the place where knowledge of disciplinary practices is demonstrated and, as an individual research project, is often considered to the most apt assessment item. "In history," writes Daniel D. Trifan (1997), "the student engages in a one-on-one relationship with the material" and that should form the basis of the student's grade. So by the end of the semester, after lecture, discussion, and classroom exercises focusing on the methods, the student is to submit to the instructor an argumentative historical essay using primary sources. It is graded and returned and presumably and euphemistically "filed." So the goal of the teacher is two-fold: provide content as well as method; knowledge and practice and time-tested, if not honored, methods of assessing the learning have been reiterated.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE

There is, however, another problem built into this program of teaching a disciplinary method. How does one "discern," in a practicable and concrete way, what a historical pattern is? How does the historian or student "identify" cultural values or political beliefs? How do the practitioners of the discipline establish "the facts?" These issues of knowledge creation have always intrigued me, and I want students to question, rather than just accept, the information often given to them.

Since the 1970s, scientists and social scientists have been critically examining the foundations of their knowledge. They have found a collaborative component to knowledge-generation. Within my own history sub-field (history of science and technology) there has been on-going debate over disciplinary epistemology. The authors in this debate (David Bloor, Bruno Latour, Michael Callon, Harry Collins, Steven Woolgar, Steven Yearley and many others), while arguing over the degree to which social involvement and interaction affects knowledge production, have nonetheless advanced the notion that scientific knowledge production is indeed a very social process. In the discipline of history itself, Peter Novick (1988) in his pivotal *That Noble Dream* underscored also the social processes at work in the production of historical knowledge.[6] The production of historical knowledge is the result of dialog among historians through journals, at conferences, and by correspondence. Historians are persuaded, sometimes by rational argument and sometimes by appeals to social convention, of what constitutes orthodox knowledge in the profession. The result of this line of inquiry has led professional historians to abandon the belief of historical knowledge as a "steadily accumulating edifice of unchallengeable knowledge" (Haskell, 2000, p. 147).

On the other hand, history students in the classroom readily accept a history as "unchallengeable knowledge." They accept their textbook as established truth, verified, and ossified (Calder, 2006; Wineburg, 1991). There is an epistemological gap between what history professionals do in the production of their knowledge (conference papers, discussion, peer review, book reviews, historiography) and what history students do in the production of their own historical knowledge (acceptance of lecture or textbook). Robert Bain (2000) described the "epistemic gap" this way:

> History at the university was a discipline, a unique way of knowing the world that professionals shared. In the high school, history was a subject students took and teachers taught, differing from other subjects only in the facts covered. Students claimed that they did

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[6] See also Thomas Haskell (2000, p.150-151).

in history exactly what they did in other courses—used texts, memorized facts, did homework, and took tests. In the minds of adolescents, there is little unique about history (p. 331).

Generally speaking, only four months (the summer) separate the students that Bain taught (high schoolers) and those who enter my U.S. history survey courses as first-year college students.[7]

Perhaps this epistemological gap exists as the space between the novice and disciplined professional, as I too will gladly accept what a particle physicist tells me is true (or "acceptable") about particle physics. I have little invested in a debate with a particle physicist besides pleasant conversation or the satisfaction of curiosity, and I am not about to attempt to duplicate his or her research. Alternatively, this gap could be generational. Today's college students have become exceptionally adept at sifting presentational material in order to arrive at a threshold of knowledge that meets their goals (general education requirements) and have little patience for their professors' exercises in "epistemic activity." Mark Bauerlein described today's generation's approach to their college experience as a "mercenary activity" "that really makes the academic experience organized around achievement" (test-taking and checking off the requirements towards the credential) (Bauerlein & Howe, 2008, 1:11:05). Neil Howe agreed that today's students, "millennials" as he and William Strauss have called them, have a certain level of frustration at their teachers, their teachers' multiplicity of viewpoints, and their teachers' admiration of Socratic questioning (Howe & Strauss, 2000). "I think a lot of millennials," Howe once remarked, "just say [to their professors], 'look, if you've already thought about this so much and you've thought about every possible way of interpreting it, just summarize it for me so I can move on'" (Bauerlein & Howe, 2008, 1:29:35).[8] This same sort of impatience is representative of the gap between the skilled practitioner and the inquiring novice who admires efficiency: Why re-invent the wheel if the skilled practitioner has a working prototype; just give me the wheel so that I can start building cars. A physicist doesn't need to teach me the math behind elementary particle physics in order for me to understand that splitting the atom in a chain reaction releases a lot of energy.

To close the gap, either disciplinary or generational, between the practitioner and the novice, the transmission model of learning (lecture, memorization, and textbook) has demonstrated its inadequacies. As Bain (2000) continues, "Though storytelling may help students develop models of historical narratives, lectures and textbooks do not seem to develop in them [the students] the historian's thinking skills" (p. 334). During the 1990s, "active learning" became a mantra for an alternative model of learning. By having students engaged in historical practice, for instance, working with documents and doing historical research, students would cross that gap and learn the historian's thinking skills. But as Bain (2000) points out, the shortcoming here is that active learning encourages mimicry and only addresses the epistemological gap tangentially; behaviors are copied which may or may not indicate an epistemological shift. And what we're seeking as teachers are those shifts in thinking and we may not have the patience to wait out students who fake it until they make it (Seixas, 1993; Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004; Sowell, 1993).[9]

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[7] Bain (2000) also identified history as an "epistemic activity" (p. 332).

[8] See also Mark Bauerlein's (2009) *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)*; Neil Howe's and William Strauss' (2000) *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, and Howe's & Strauss' (2003) *Millennials Go to College: Strategies for a New Generation on Campus*.

[9] For serious criticisms of the short-comings and faddish nature of "active learning," see Trifan (1997). In *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the classroom*, Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison in various

These changes in thinking, the epistemic activity that defines a discipline, are communitarian and social. The disciplinary community establishes and develops meaningful tropes, schemes, scripts for understanding the data. These frames of meaning scaffold a discipline and provide the shared basis for building community (Britt, Rouet, Georgi, & Perfetti. 1994; Carretero, Jacott, Limón, López-Manjón, & León, 1994; Wineburg, 1991; Wineburg, 1994; White, 1973; LaCapra, 1985).[10] So, recognizing that a discipline is a body of shared knowledge-creating practices, how do we teach the communitarian epistemological aspects of a discipline? Do students even see a discipline as a community of scholars? And if my task is to teach a knowledge of the discipline, is it not also my task to demonstrate the communitarian and collaborative aspects of knowledge production?

WIKI WRITING AND A DISCIPLINE

My selection of a wiki writing project was made with the aim of fulfilling the multiple goals of the general education requirements with the added nuance of attempting to instill in students a sense for the social nature of knowledge construction. I had, during 2005 and 2006, become an active participant on Wikipedia editing articles in my areas of expertise (history of science and technology). I became disenchanted, like many higher education instructors, with Wikipedia mainly over the rabidly democratic nature of knowledge creation. My Ph.D. and specialized research did not seem to count for much in the areas where I knew the most. Indeed, Wikipedia policies are prejudiced against the original research undertaken by any Ph.D. There is also a rather pugnacious culture on Wikipedia that could conceivably intimidate students who were very new to the community or to online collaboration and who were hyper-aware of the relationship of their online performance to their final grade. In short, I was too aware of the social factors in the construction of wiki-knowledge.

Certainly, Wikipedia has demonstrated its power as a social knowledge-creating project, much like an academic discipline. But if the wiki-application is worthwhile as a teaching tool, we must ask what sorts of disciplinary knowledge are students learning from their participation in the project? To find out, I began surveying my students about their ideas about the history discipline. These surveys were both quantitative and qualitative. Additionally, I surveyed a class that did not participate in the wiki writing project in an attempt to isolate how the wiki project affected their understandings of the discipline. Students in the class that did not participate in the wiki project wrote an individual research paper in the traditional manner. I surveyed student perceptions about the discipline and knowledge production within the discipline at both the beginning and end of the semester. The aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between the method of instruction and the lessons students learned (Grant, 2003).

I asked students questions regarding various aspects of the history discipline: the objects of study, themes of study, the natures of facts and interpretation in the study of history. Thirty-one students completed both a pre-project survey on the first day of class and a post-project survey completed in the last week of the class. About one-third of the survey respondents (10) wrote term-papers while twenty-one participated in the wiki-writing project. For most questions in these surveys students could select multiple values. Since I gave the same lectures to both groups of students, I've controlled for student attitudes that may have changed as a result of my lecture presentations. While the sample size is too small to make clear conclusions about how the

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places note how untried and unpersuasive the proponents of active learning have been (see pp. 5 & 76 in particular).

[10] Benedict Anderson (1983) notes how the shared frames of thought constitute the foundation for community. "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (p. 6).

general college student understands the history discipline, the results did point me towards some interesting ideas about the relationship between assignments and student learning outcomes.

When I asked what students thought historians studied, some differences between the class projects emerged. First, the ten surveyed students who wrote traditional individual term-papers reported a higher emphasis on studying documents, whereas students participating in the wiki-writing project reported lower emphasis on studying documents by the end of the semester. The students who wrote individual term-papers also believed that history should focus on national stories, whereas there was little change in wiki-writing students' emphasis on national stories over the term. It would seem, then, that the traditional term paper was an effective tool when teachers focus on teaching a nationalistic history based on research in primary sources.

Regarding the disciplinary practice of identifying and using varieties of facts, students who wrote research papers by the end of the semester tended to see more types of facts. Students who wrote term papers began to see historical evidence in statements by witnesses, official documents, statistics, and corroborating statements by 3 or more people. For the wiki-writers, I could not see much change in their views about facts. Both groups believed that "irrefutable statements" and statistics constituted facts and that this belief saw little change over the semester. It seems that for many students, if something is quantifiable it must be factual and are untroubled by the constructed nature of statistical evidence. Also, it seems that these data show that the term paper is a better tool for impressing upon students what primary sources (witnesses and official documents) are.

Where I surveyed for students' understandings about the social aspects of knowledge generation, the wiki-writing project proved its strength. When asked to rank methods by which historians discover facts, term-paper respondents expressed a greater appreciation for reading secondary sources and finding primary sources by the end of the semester (every respondent in both groups noted that finding primary sources was the highest priority for historians). However, fewer wiki participants at the end of the semester emphasized reading and research as means of discovering facts than at the beginning. Over the course of the semester, term-paper students found less value in criticizing, debating, and revising other historians as a means of establishing facts. On the other hand, participants in the wiki-writing project came to see much greater value in criticism, debate, and revision as a disciplinary method for identifying facts. For those who participated in the wiki project, they identified that the historical method involved first discovering the primary sources, then learning about and engaging in debate other historians as the means of establishing a history. Given that the wiki-writing project itself creates an environment where knowledge is established through peer-to-peer interactions, the wiki assignment tended to instill a sense that the discipline was also a social knowledge project.

I also asked students about the methods that they and historians used to verify facts. Students who wrote term papers ranked "contextualization of primary sources" and "using published history" higher at the end of the semester than at beginning. Professionally, historians do try to contextualize their evidence in order to understand how their sources view and understand their world; so it is good to see that students who wrote term papers understand the importance of contextualization. However, that they believed a history should be checked against a published history for accuracy shows that the term paper doesn't emphasize the political, critical, and or constructed nature of historical knowledge. I suspect that the term paper assignment tends to reinforce the idea that students believe that there are correct facts about which they are being tested and that the term paper is another form of a test. For the wiki participants, there was little change over the semester in their ideas about the veracity of evidence, except that a few saw greater value in using the internal consistency of the source as a means to assess the accuracy of evidence.

One last area of disciplinary perceptions I inquired about was the purpose of historical interpretation. Both groups tended to rank lower "to show change," "to show the core character of a people or nation," and "to show the progress of a person's, a society's, or a nation's character." But beyond this some interesting divergences were revealed. First, wiki writers by the end placed much more emphasis on "objectively telling

the story" and showing the causes of conflict as a purpose of historical interpretation. Term paper writers ranked the causes of conflicts much lower.

While I did not engage in rigorous research into the causes of these changes, I did ask for student reflections on their learning. Over three-quarters of the respondents in each group reported that their class project affected their perceptions of what the history discipline was. Thus it seems that the wiki project tended to reinforce history writing as an exercise in objectively explaining causation and resolution of conflicts where objective story-telling and individual agency is not emphasized. But conversely, for term-paper writers, history is not so much an objective story of the causes of events but an objective explanation of change in order to discern the meanings of events in which individuals made choices and affected outcomes. Also, many students who participated in the wiki project expressed skepticism at the notion of trying to create a social container for knowledge creation. Many expressed the thought that just because the wiki was an assignment, negated any valuable group debate or criticism towards the creation of an accurate or engaging story. Whereas professionals engage in debate and criticism in order to further the boundaries of the discipline, students, when compelled by an assignment expressed little incentive to do more than asked.

What I think these surveys show is that the wiki project was much better than the term paper at having students focus on conflict, whether within the historical discipline, as an interpretative framework, or as a means of testing for evidentiary veracity. Their histories tended towards interpreting the causes and resolutions of conflict. The higher emphasis that wiki writers placed on objectivity also seemed to support their awareness of conflict because part of objectivity is to resolve conflicting viewpoints. The term paper seems to be a better tool to help students focus on the agency of historical actors in a national setting and how people's actions are meaningful for us today. Throughout, term paper writers believed that they focused more on the individual: primary sources as individual witness, a source's veracity identifiable by internal consistency, and the purpose of historical interpretation is to make meaningful individual expressions of agency.

What these student surveys also seemed to suggest was that the term paper as an assignment tended to reinforce a vision of the discipline as an individualistic endeavor that focuses on individual and discrete events, people, sources, and choices. This is probably because writing a term paper itself is an individualistic endeavor. Whereas the wiki project as a collaborative and communitarian assignment (however limited that may be) tended to reinforce a different vision of the discipline: one that focuses on the origins and resolutions of conflict in order to arrive at an objective version of the past. Not surprisingly, both assignments seem to accurately reflect certain aspects of the profession itself.

This notion that the structure of an assignment can itself be the teaching tool gives us more tools towards meeting student learning objectives, when we wish to impart the values, methods, and principles of the discipline. Historians have noted that class projects can "recreate what historians do in colloquia and at conferences." Thus, the assignment can teach the norms and techniques of the discipline: Where we wish to teach social and collaborative strengths of the discipline, a collaborative project seems appropriate. When we want to stress research method, a term paper might be better. Teachers' goals should indicate a particular pedagogical tool (Grant, 2003).[11]

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[11] See also Samuel Wineburg and Suzanne M. Wilson (1991) in "Subject Matter Knowledge in the Teaching of History" pages 305-347, where they show that the teacher's instructional practices reinforce the pedagogical aim of the lesson.

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THE NEXT STEP UP THE SPIRAL

       For teaching a knowledge of the history discipline, the wiki-application adds another tool to the teacher's shop. It is a tool that seems to impart communitarian values and focuses on history as a story of conflict and resolution. The term-paper has its strengths in its emphasis on sources, agency, and meaning. Just as this project demonstrated to me that different assignments teach different skills, this project also showed that class time is extremely valuable in building the classroom community and that sense of community transfers to the online wiki-writing project.

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