

Chapter 9

Wiki–Mediated Peer Review Process: Participation and Interaction

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this chapter is to explore if the collaborative potential offered by wikis translates into actual practice. The study examines the peer review process of 20 groups of English as a foreign language (EFL) students from two classes, i.e. a paper-based class and a wiki class, of a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programme in a large university in Central Vietnam. Data analysis shows that the user-friendly wikis afford learning opportunities in two levels of analysis, namely participation and interaction, which lead to a high degree of information synthesis in the collaborative learning process. In terms of quantity, the multi-way nature of wiki-based exchanges confirms its characteristic of an architecture of participation. Likewise, the quality of the online peer review process is confidently affirmed in all three themes of collaborative interaction, i.e., socioaffective, organizational, and sociocognitive. It is concluded that the online platform of wikis turns the peer review process into a networking of both the academic and the social, and that wikis support a non-linear nature of collaborative learning.

INTRODUCTION

Different from traditional pedagogy where learning is a transmission of information from the teacher to learners, collaboration is a learning method that considers social interaction as a

means of knowledge construction. Three critical attributes used to measure a collaborative learning process, as identified by Ingram and Hathorn (2004), are participation, interaction, and idea synthesis. While participation is important since collaboration cannot occur without roughly

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extensive and equal participation among the participants, intensive participation per se is not enough. Even more important is the nature of interaction and synthesis of ideas among the group. Whether it is online or face-to-face (FTF), without these three characteristics, group work may be many things, but it cannot be called collaboration. Previous research (e.g., DiGiovanni & Nagaswami, 2001; Lee, 2010; Mawlawi Diab, 2010) consistently demonstrates that peer review (sometimes termed peer response, peer feedback, or peer editing) not only enhances a sense of audience and raises learners' awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses but also encourages collaborative learning in relation to idea synthesis among group members. This study aims to discuss the impact of computer-based technology, wikis in this case, on learner-learner interaction in an EFL collaborative task.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretically, collaborative learning and peer review originate from sociocultural theory (SCT) which has become the focus of much research interest in recent years. While the psycholinguistic view of cognition construes the language learning process within the individual mind and emphasizes the significance of final products as a single measure to evaluate a learner's language proficiency (Ortega, 2009), SCT views language cognition as occurring first between individual minds and then within the individual mind during the internalization process. The learning process is therefore best understood in the social, cultural, historical, and institutional context where a learner is embedded. As a result, both product- and process-oriented learning styles are equally important and should be treated in an equal manner.

SCT highlights the significance of collaboration in language development through the zone of proximal development (ZPD), one of the most important constructs of the theory (Vygotsky,

1981). In the field of language education, ZPD is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development through language, produced collaboratively with a teacher or peer (Ohta, 2001). Another outstanding construct of SCT is the concept of mediation. SCT stresses the central role of social interaction for learning as: all human learning is mediated through, or shaped by, interaction with others; and this shaping does not take place in a vacuum but through mediational tools. These tools include: language; cultural assumptions; social institutions; software or hardware; and time structure (Lamy & Hampel, 2007). Lantolf and Thorne (2007) even argue mediation is the principle construct that unites all varieties of SCT and is rooted in the observation that humans do not act directly on the world; rather their cognitive and material activities are mediated by symbolic (language, numeracy, concepts, etc.) and material (technology) artifacts. This concept paves the road for technology to enter into pedagogical approaches of collaborative learning and peer review.

Computer-mediated peer review can be considered an important aspect of collaborative learning (Arnold, Ducate and Kost, 2009; Liang, 2010; Nguyen, 2008; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008), as it enhances the process of evaluating and editing drafts, leading to the synthesis of information in the final product, as suggested in the work of Honeycutt (2001) and Liu and Sadler (2003). Honeycutt, for instance, compared the two classical text-based forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (email and chat) to study their effectiveness in the process of grammatical peer response. The results showed that synchronous conferencing and email could aid in the acquisition of collaborative peer review competence in different, yet complementary, ways. Liu and Saddler investigated the effect and affect of peer review in electronic, such as MOO (MOO stands for 'MUD object-oriented', and MUD stands for 'multi-user domain') and Microsoft Word, versus traditional modes on second language (L2) writing. The study

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