Chapter 8
Wikibook Transformations and Disruptions:
Looking Back Twenty Years to Today

Curtis J. Bonk
Indiana University, USA

Mimi Miyoung Lee
University of Houston, USA

Nari Kim
The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, USA

Meng-Fen Grace Lin
University of Hawaii, USA

ABSTRACT

A Wikibook is a transformative and disruptive technology that is finding increasing use in schools and higher education institutions. This new form of technology is inexpensive, accessible, and fairly responsive to the user. When engaged in a Wikibook project in an academic setting, learners are granted power to control the content and process of learning. Wikibooks are part of the Web 2.0 which can provide a powerful force in changing, and improving education. However, the authors' multiple attempts to build Wikibooks in their own classes reveal that creating a successful Wikibook is not particularly easy. It is even more difficult when it entails more than one institution or class. Cross-institutional and internationally designed Wikibooks present many instructional challenges and dilemmas to learners and instructors. In addition, there are collaboration issues, technology issues, knowledge construction and sense of community issues, and general issues related to the Wikibook technology and the Wikibook design process itself. In response, in this chapter, the authors provide dozens of Wikibook collaboration ideas and suggestions based on our experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine a Web page that anyone with access to the Internet can edit, not just read (Evans, 2006). Now imagine if that editing process extended well beyond that page to an entire chapter or book. If successful, you have envisioned the birth of the wikibook. A wikibook is one of many so-called Web 2.0 technologies that are now finding their ways into K-12 and college classrooms. Wikis are collaborative writing spaces wherein a learner can perpetually tinker with ideas as well as remold and share them.

Clearly Wikibooks are empowering tools for education. With such devices at their fingertips, learners take control over their own learning situations. They might develop the theme or title of the wikibook and coordinate the entire process of assembling one. They might take on the role of writer who collaborates with others in building a product that is shareable. When done, they might decide to take on roles of editors or proofreaders of the wikibook. At the same time, they might provide help or resources as needed, including assistance with references, copyright clearance, page layout, and cover design.

A central aspect of the wikibook is that anyone can determine where, what, when, and how much to contribute. During writing, the learner is no longer just finding a perspective for a teacher or for herself, but for an unknown and potentially gigantic audience. There is a sense of contributing to the greater good of humankind. Along these same lines, there is a generative spirit and process that is exhibited in a wikibook project. Learners participate in their own learning as opposed to be given a preset learning agenda or set of learning items to review and practice until perfection. When individuals can contribute to the knowledge building process instead of passively consuming prepackaged knowledge and information, they engage more deeply with the content and assume control over their own learning. In a word, learners are empowered. It is in such situations that passion-based learning is possible (Brown, 2006). When passion is present, depth in learning often occurs as one seeks more knowledge that is later shared in the wikibook.

And that may be the most important factor of all--the wikibook is shared. If made public, a wikibook is an open educational resource for reading, discussing, and still further sharing among any member of this planet. Suppose it is a book on introductory algebra. Such a text could be translated into other languages and shared further still. Given that most introductory concepts in algebra do not change much, once created, that book could be reused for years or even decades. A student in Cameroon could enjoy and learn from it as much, if not more, than one in Canada, Korea, or Chile. Of course, the examples and problems should be localized for each culture and setting.

As indicated, a wikibook is part of the Web 2.0 where learners contribute to learning rather than being handed it in a textbook or a set of lecture notes. As opposed to the casual browsing that typified the initial incarnation of the Web, the Web 2.0 or "read-write Web" is no longer a device to be used for passive reception of information or for accessing and perusing content. When learners are put in charge of their own learning, it is nothing less than a revolution in human learning. Revolutions, however, are rarely won easily.

Wikibooks as a Disruptive Technology

A revolution in education? Yes! In fact, Christenson, Horn, and Johnson (2008) argue that the types of disruptive technologies that have found their way in business management practices will soon "disrupt" education. As they insightfully point out, disruption brought on by new technologies is rarely abrupt. The disruptive technology or innovation must obtain a series of minor improvements first. Often, they are more affordable, accessible, and responsive to learner and teacher needs than existing systems or resources. In addition, they