Teaching with wikis and blogs: Potentials and pitfalls

Nina Bonderup Dohn

Institute of Business Communication and Information Science, University of Southern Denmark, nina@sitkom.sdu.dk

Abstract

The use of wikis and blogs within higher education and continuing professional development is becoming increasingly popular. On the face of it, these tools seem ideal for facilitating learner-centered activities based on the production of material by the learner him- or herself, potentially drawing on different contexts of learning in and across school settings. Over the last few years, a number of conference papers and journal articles have been devoted to elucidating this issue. Quite a few of these papers and articles seem rather uncritically to rejoice in the possibilities of wikis and/or blogs of furthering e.g. knowledge construction, critical reflective thinking and collaboration between learners, often without substantiating the enthusiasm with empirical studies corroborating the realizability of the possibilities, or even their existence. Other papers report case studies, drawing very positive conclusions on fairly limited data. It seems time for a review of the potentials and pitfalls of teaching and learning with the employment of these technological tools.

The aim of this paper is to deliver such a review. This will be done, drawing on the interpretation of a range of case studies reported in the literature as well as on the experience from several educational development projects in which the present author has been involved. The structure of the paper is as follows: First, some putative potentials of utilizing web 2.0, including wikis and blogs, in educational practices are presented: *flexible learning, competences*, *pedagogical advantages*, *learner motivation*, and *ease of participation*. Second, the more specific affordances of wikis and blogs are discussed and examples are given of usages in accordance both with the general web 2.0-potentials and the more specific affordances of wikis and blogs. On this basis, a number of issues and pitfalls are identified which show up across the different usages. These issues include *the anchoring of the learning activities*, *assessment and quality criteria*, *the role of the teacher*, and *implicit competence demands on learners*. The discussion of issues and pitfalls leads, finally, to an appraisal of the extent to which the putative potentials, posited at the outset, exist and are realizable in educational practice of today.

Keywords

Wikis, blogs, review of potentials, teaching, life-wide learning, flexible learning

Introduction

The use of wikis and blogs within higher education and continuing professional development is becoming increasingly popular. These tools seem ideal for facilitating learner-centred activities based on the production of material by the learner, potentially drawing on different contexts of learning in and across school settings. Over the last few years, a number of conference papers and journal articles have been devoted to elucidating this issue. Quite a few of these papers and articles seem rather uncritically to rejoice in the possibilities of wikis and/or blogs of furthering e.g. knowledge construction, critical reflective thinking and collaboration between learners, often without substantiating the enthusiasm with empirical studies corroborating the realizability of the possibilities, or even their existence (e.g. Ferris & Wilder 2006; Parker & Chao 2007; Alexander 2006; Boulos et al 2006). Other papers report case studies, drawing very positive conclusions on fairly limited – and, upon scrutiny, ambiguous – data (e.g. Bruns & Humphreys 2005; Farmer et al 2008; Ducate & Lomacka 2008, cf. discussion below). It seems time for a sobering review of the potentials and pitfalls of teaching and learning with the employment of these technological tools.

The aim of this paper is to deliver such a review. The method employed is one of empirically informed theoretical analysis. The theoretical basis is a practice perspective on web 2.0 and on affordances and tool use in general, both developed elsewhere (Dohn 2009a and 2009b). The empirical basis is a range of cases studies

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

reported in the literature, supplemented by experiences from several educational development projects in which I have been involved at the University of Southern Denmark and University College Lillebælt, Denmark (UCL). Building on the practice perspective on web 2.0, a number of putative potentials of utilizing web 2.0 for learning are identified. This approach is chosen over a mere summarizing of the possibilities *de facto* claimed for wikis and blogs in the literature, because it gives a more general and theoretically structured overview of potential advantages, into which the particular claims found in the literature can then be incorporated. Following this, a number of paradigmatic actual uses of wikis and blogs are described and case studies exemplifying each type of use are referred to. 'Paradigmatic' is here understood to mean that the usages are a) in accordance with web 2.0-ways of using the tools; b) aim at realizing some of the potentials of web 2.0-based educational activities; and c) utilize the more specific affordances which wikis and blogs, respectively, have for the learners. Cases fulfilling these criteria must, all things equal, be expected to be the most apt for realizing at least some of the potentials of web 2.0, if they can be realized at all, since their overall design accords with both specific and general web 2.0 affordances. Investigating such cases theoretically and empirically therefore supplies a platform on which the potentials of teaching with wikis and blogs may be evaluated, along with issues and pitfalls common to them.

Putative potentials of web 2.0 for learning

In accordance with the view of web 2.0 which I have developed elsewhere (Dohn 2009a), the term 'web 2.0' is understood as practice, *i.e.* as denoting certain types of *use* of web-mediated technology, rather than particular technologies. More specifically, 'web 2.0' refers to activities and practices characterized by a high degree of interactive multi-way communication between users; 'bottom-up' production, reproduction and transformation of content; continuous use and reuse across contexts; and renunciation of copyright and distributive authorship. On this understanding, a number of potential advantages of utilizing web 2.0 for learning spring to the eye:

Organization and facilitation of flexible learning across contexts: Because web 2.0-activities focus on the use and reuse of content across contexts, their educational employment seem an obvious way to facilitate learners in connecting and integrating the diverse settings in which they participate, both in a lifelong and a life-wide perspective (Jarvis 2007). The ideal course design might here be seen as one which took learner produced material from the various life contexts of the learners as its outset. For views along these lines, cf. Farmer et al (2008), and Ducate & Lomacka (2008), who, however, only see flexible learning as a supplement to course teachings, not as its focal point.

Development of competences necessary for participating in contemporary society, including the future work contexts of the learners: Participating in web 2.0-activities arguably supports the development of a range of competences of both an ICT-related and a more general nature. Among the former would be skills in navigating and structuring digital resources along with communicative competences in collaborating and building knowledge through employment of web 2.0-media. Among the latter would be skills in critically evaluating information and resource types, in constructively critical peer- and self-assessment, and in transforming material in qualified ways in new situations. The relevance of such competences, both for specific types of work settings and in general for participation in the ICT-networked, globalized society of today, as well as the possibility of developing them through web 2.0-based learning activities, are urged in different ways by e.g. Bruns & Humphreys (2005), Gleaves et al (2007), and Singer (2008).

Concrete pedagogical advantages for teaching and learning: Web 2.0-based learning activities are similar to other learner-centered pedagogical designs[1] in giving priority to the independent formulation of content material by the learners themselves as a prerequisite for deep learning. Accordingly, they may be presumed to facilitate individual knowledge construction and critical reflection. Even more important, web 2.0-activities encourage the collaborative development of knowledge between learners, drawing on and collaboratively qualifying the experiences and perspectives of each individual. Arguments of this type are put forward by e.g. Ducate & Lomacka (2008), Xie et al (2008), Farmer et al (2008), Gleaves et al (2007), and Lund & Smørdal (2006).

Learner motivation and relevance of course material: Similarly, in accordance with analogous arguments for certain types of POPP, PBL, and portfolio activities (cf. references op cit.), the 'user-centered' approach of web

[1] Knowledge-building communities (Scardamalia & Bereiter 1994); portfolio (Klenowski 2002), problem-based learning (PBL; Boud & Feletti 1997) or problem-oriented project pedagogy (POPP; Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2002).

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

2.0 and, more specifically, the integration of the experiences and views of the learners in course activities may be expected to have a motivating effect on learners whilst at the same time making it easier for them to see the relevance of course material. This is especially so when the web 2.0-activities go across educational boundaries and involve material and experiences from the learners' other life-wide contexts. Cf. e.g. Ducate & Lomacka (2008) for arguments concerning motivation and authenticity.

Ease of participation in learning activities through the use of communication forms familiar from non-formal settings: At least for learners in higher education, web 2.0-sites like Facebook, Wikipedia and various blogs are frequently used to search for information and to upkeep informal communication with acquaintances. Since every learning activity involves communication in specific genres, employing the known genres of web 2.0-communication might be expected to ease participation in learning activities for the learners: It ought, *ceteris paribus*, to mean one thing less to learn for the learners.

Web 2.0-uses of wikis and blogs for learning

The educational uses of wikis and blogs suggested in the literature cover the full range from traditional one-way information publishing by the teacher (of for example syllabus, handouts, and explanations of important course concepts) to learner-produced knowledge bases and reflective collaborative negotiation of meaning in respect of course-related issues (cf. e.g. Parker and Chao 2007; Duffy and Bruns 2006; Ferris and Wilder 2006). Now, patently, wikis and blogs, considered as specific technological tools, may be used for whatever purpose one wishes, and in concrete cases there might be good technological, administrative, institutional, or even pedagogical reasons, for choosing to use them for teacher controlled information delivery. In such cases, however, from the point of view of web 2.0 as practice endorsed in this article, one would not be making web 2.0-use of the tools, but would rather be using them in a traditional web 1.0-way. More important, one would not be trying to realize any of the potentials listed above, which all presuppose that the tools be used in ways that significantly involve participation in the form of postings, comments, edits, etc. on the part of the learners.

In addition, a number of the suggested information delivery types of uses do not seem obvious ways of utilizing the affordances that the tools have for the learners. Importantly, the point here is not just that wikis, objectively seen, have features which support distributive authorship, and blogs, correspondingly, have features which support reflective writing and commenting. Employing the understanding of affordances which I have argued for in Dohn (2009b), affordances are not features of tools *per se*, but are the actionable meanings of tools for each particular agent. What these meanings are depend, in turn, on the previous experience and skills of the user and therefore on the practices in which s/he has previously participated. Wikis and blogs, therefore, have affordances for users in relation to the ways their objective features have been utilized in the practices they have hitherto participated in. More specifically, given that wikis and blogs in other contexts than educational ones are primarily used in ways that are characterized by 'bottom-up' multi-way interaction, distributive authorship, and continuous use and reuse of material, and furthermore that many learners at least in higher education have themselves participated in such uses of e.g. Wikipedia and various personal blogs, this will be the type of usage that wikis and blogs at the outset afford for the learners.

On this view of affordances, wikis basically afford the construction of a distributively written and/or compiled electronic information base and/or collection of resources. This basic affordance is determined, partly by the topical structure and layout of wikis, where each wiki page deals with one term, concept, sub-concept, event, person or the like, partly, and in concurrence herewith, by the usage previously experienced by the learners for example in relation to Wikipedia. Educationally, wikis are therefore especially well suited for learning activities aimed at learners' knowledge construction and information sharing. By comparison, blogs basically afford communication between individually discernible 'voices', where the individual identity of each communicator is drawn upon and expressed. This basic affordance is similarly determined partly by the structure of blogs, i.e. their reverse chronology and integrated comment functionality, partly, and interrelated hereto, by the established usage of blogs in out-of-school contexts. Consequently, in educational settings, blogs are particularly apt for discussion, for sharing of experiences, and for the expression of individual beliefs and attitudes.

Paradigmatic web 2.0-uses of wikis

Wiki-writing as a pedagogical method for acquiring an understanding of course content. I have been involved in numerous projects using wikis in this way at the University of Southern Denmark, in the BA and Master

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

programs in Humanistic Information Science and the Master program in Webcommunication. Lund & Smørdal (2006) supply an additional example. This kind of usage is motivated by the well-corroborated effect of writing upon learning (Dysthe & Engelsen 2005). As such, it centers on realizing potential 3 above. Learners are required to write wiki-entries which explicate course material such as significant concepts, theories, and methodologies, as well as the interrelations between them. The primary aim, it should be noted, is not the construction of an information base related to the course, though that may be a secondary aim, but the facilitation of understanding through formulating and constructively criticizing entries. Therefore, this use of wikis tends to lead to the reproduction of information already present in e.g. textbooks and articles, though in 'the words of the learners themselves' and often with the contextualization of the course.

Collaborative information compilation or knowledge construction. In contrast to the former usage, this one aims primarily at developing an information base. Bruns & Humphreys (2005) report using wikis for this purpose in a course on new media. The intention was that not only the current class, but also future classes (who were to further elaborate the wiki) – and the rest of the world – should be able to benefit from the wiki. Therefore it was published online after the course. Teacher editing of the entries were made to secure that quality standards were met. This usage aims at realizing potential 1 by developing a reliable information base usable in future contexts as well as in current ones. Depending on the permissiveness of what counts as 'acceptable content', wiki-learning of this type may also try to realize both potentials 1 and 4, by allowing learners to draw in material from their other life contexts. Arguably, creating the information base will also (secondarily) involve the pursuit of potential 2, since a number of both general and ICT-related competences will be needed – and thus may be fostered – in the process. This is indeed advocated by Bruns & Humphreys.

Development of course-specific, general and ICT-related competences. As in the first type of usage, this one utilizes the wiki-activity as a pedagogical tool. Here the aim is to facilitate the development of certain competences. These may range from course-specific ones like language proficiency and understanding of a given culture over ICT-related ones to general competences in self- and peer-evaluation. This type of usage therefore aims at realizing potentials 2 and 3. Quite obviously, it may, as Bruns & Humphreys urge, be combined with the previous one (and to some extent also with the first one). However, the ensuing learning activities as well as the content of the wiki may be expected to differ somewhat dependent on which aim is considered primary. E.g., discussions between learners are optional if the aim is to create an information base or manage a project, but necessary if the aim is to develop competences in giving and receiving feedback. In point of fact, upon consulting the wiki reported by Bruns & Humphreys (http://wiki.media-culture.org.au), it appears that many entries had only one author. Even if students have discussed entries at length before publishing them, it raises the question whether general and ICT-competences have been facilitated to the extent that they would have been, had this been the primary aim of the course.

Paradigmatic web 2.0-uses of blogs

Blog-writing as a pedagogical method for acquiring an understanding of course content: The general motivation for using blogs in this way is the same as the analogous one for wikis, and the aim is similarly to realize potential 3. I have used blogs for this purpose in several courses in the programs listed above, once in conjunction with a wiki. In all courses, students had to post precisely focused questions to the assigned readings prior to class. These questions were then used as focal points in my preparation for class and as the starting point of learning activities in class. This course design supported the students in reflective engagement with the texts and obliged me to take students' questions and (mis)understandings as my outset, rather than leaving a slot for them at the end of class. Singer (2008) and Farmer et al (2008) report somewhat similar uses of blogs, though in their cases, blogs were used solely for supplementary discussions of course content. Farmer et al also asked their students to draw in material from other contexts, thus pursuing potential 1 and 4 as well (see below).

Development of course-specific, general and ICT-related competences: When blogs are used with this aim, the content of the blog is to some extent secondary. A prime example of this is supplied by Ducate & Lomacka (2008) who, in the context of French and German language courses, had students first read and comment blogs on the Internet written by native speakers of the language in question, and later on write blogs themselves. The content of the blog was of minor importance; developing language skills was the prime concern. Similarly, Xie et al (2008) used blogs in a political science course with the aim of facilitating the development of the learners' reflective and metacognitive skills. The students were to blog relatively freely on questions that arose for them in relation to course content. Half of the students were coupled two and two as "critical friends" whose task it

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

was to comment on the blogs of one another. The other half of the students received no comments. Xie et al explain this design as aimed at assessing the effect of peer-feedback on the development of the skills in question. Even if in this case the topics taken up in the blogs were of importance to the course, the focus was on the *way* the topics were dealt with (more specifically: on the skills this 'dealing with' demonstrated), not on what was said about them. This use of blogs aims at realizing potentials 2 and 3, and, in the case described by Ducate & Lomacka, potentials 1 and 4 as well.

Creating connections between educational topics and experience/knowledge from other contexts: This use of blogs explicitly purports to realize potentials 1 and 4. In a project at UCL where I acted as consultant, blogs were put to this use in a program for students taking their degree in Social Education whilst working part-time in a pedagogical institution (Dohn 2009c). It is a requirement for entering this program that one already have at least 5 years of experience from working in pedagogical contexts. The blog was intended as a space for exchanging experiences from the different work settings of the students; for the integrative reciprocal illumination of theoretical perspectives and practical experience; and for the reflective discussion of difficult issues (of e.g. an ethical or collegial nature) related to the students' work.

Institution-wide counseling on certain topics: An example of this usage is the blog hosted by Academic Writing Center, University of Copenhagen (AWC), for students writing their master's thesis (http://specialebloggen.hum.ku.dk/skrivecentret/index.php?noid=-1). The blog is intended both as a place for students to discuss experiences and problems related to writing their theses and for them to ask for and receive advice on questions of academic writing. The explicit idea is that students should counsel one another on writing matters – and thus the usage aims at realizing potential 3 – but in practice most of the counseling in this area is done by the moderators of the blog, i.e. by writing consultants employed by AWC.

Issues and pitfalls in the use of wikis and blogs for learning

Across the different paradigmatic uses of wikis and blogs a number of problematic issues and potential pitfalls show up theoretically and empirically. Among these issues are the *anchoring of the learning activities*; *assessment and quality criteria;* the *role of the teacher*; and *implicit competence demands on learners*. The issues are interrelated, as are the pitfalls they may lead to.

All the paradigmatic usages are learner-centered as opposed to instruction-centered and in this sense are anchored in meaningfulness for the learner. Nonetheless, there is an ambiguity concerning the question whether this 'meaningfulness' is in relation to *goals set by the educational program* or rather the learner's *sense-making across* the diverse *contexts of life* in which s/he participates. That is, there is an ambiguity concerning whether the learning activities are undertaken as a pedagogical method for facilitating the learners' achievement of educational goals such as acquisition of course content and/or certain competences. Or whether, alternatively, they are initiated with the aim of supporting the learner in the holistic project of transforming, utilizing and making integrated sense of the experiences, perspectives, knowledge and attitudes pertaining to the different settings s/he participates in. This ambiguity mirrors the ambiguity between potentials 1 and 4 on the one hand (centered on meaningfulness for the learner) and 2 and 3 (centered on the attainment of educational goals through the employment of web 2.0 as a pedagogical methodology) on the other. The ambiguity has tensions in the wiki- and blog-usages described as a result: In the UCL-case, the intention of the blog was explicitly stated to be to support learners in sense-making of the second kind. Nevertheless, since the blog was implemented by the teachers in the context of the Social Education Program, both learners and teachers in practice expected activity on the blog to have some degree of educational directedness. This showed up e.g. in the expectations of both students and teachers that the latter at least to some extent initiate and partake in blog-activities; in the frustration of the teachers that the 'theoretical level' of the entries was not high enough; and in a general feeling of uncertainty on the part of the students as to what exactly the blog was for (Dohn 2009c). In the case of the AWC-blog, the tension shows up e.g. in the discrepancy hinted at above between the moderators' explicit statements of their limited participation role and their actual practice of commenting on nearly all questions raised by students: Though the blog was intended to be anchored in the students' sense-making of their experience with thesis-writing across academic and private settings, its implementation within the university, with consultants paid to moderate the blog, make these consultants (and probably the students, too) feel they are obliged to participate frequently with comments focused on academic writing. The tension is also vividly present in the case reported by Bruns & Humphreys (2005), between, on the one hand, the explicit intentions of creating an online encyclopedia which, in analogy with Wikipedia, would be useful across different contexts not

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

only for the students involved in writing it, but for future students, their teachers, and the world at large, and on the other hand, restrictions imposed for the sake of assessment on the number of students allowed to edit each individual entry. As Bruns & Humphreys themselves note (p.30), these restrictions are to some extent detrimental to the fulfillment of the intentions since they limit the amount of different student skills and perspectives involved in qualifying the entries.

The cases show an obvious pitfall related to the ambiguity of 'meaningfulness': The actual practice of wiki-and blog-activities may be drawn in the direction of 'meaningfulness in relation to educational goals', even if the explicit aim is sense-making across contexts. In particular, a decisive risk is that implicit expectations of teachers related to educational goals will pose implicit demands on learners which contradict explicitly stated intentions. Another pitfall to be avoided is, of course, the opposite, that the educational context plays hardly any role in the 'sense-making' of the individual learners in comparison with other life contexts.

A further issue centers on *assessment and quality criteria*. I have dealt with this issue for web 2.0 in general in Dohn (2009a). Here, I argued that web 2.0-activities raise questions such as a) whether quality is primarily to be assessed in relation to degree of participation (matching the practice logic of web 2.0) or in relation to the quality of content produced, b) whether assessment is to be a peer-matter (in accord with web 2.0) or a teacher matter (a top-down approach not in harmony with web 2.0), and c) to which extent the requirement that entries be 'made in the learners' own words' is to be viewed as necessary for learning and documentation hereof or, alternatively, as a waste of time, if similar material might be taken from somewhere else. A related ambiguity, one might add, concerns the question from which perspective 'quality of content' is to be assessed. Quite different evaluations will ensue from the perspective of facilitating sense-making across contexts, from the perspective of continuous usefulness of the material, and from the perspective of compliance with educational goals. Here again an evident pitfall is to place implicit competence demands on the learners, by employing other quality criteria in one's evaluative practice than those one is aware of. Assessment- and quality-related issues have been very conspicuous in my courses when students e.g. have contributed with copy-pastes of excerpts from Wikipedia. As indicated above, such issues were also prominent in the UCL-blog. Similarly, the fact that entries had to be edited by the teachers before publication in the Bruns & Humphreys case shows that quality concerns were also prominent here. As for the question of participation- versus content-related criteria of quality, the blog usages reported by Singer (2008), Ducate & Lomacka (2008), and Farmer et al (2008) all seem to have given course credit either solely on the basis of participation in blog-writing and -commenting or at least to have prioritized such participation over the quality of the content. One might reasonably question whether the realization of potentials 1 and 4 took place at the expense of the realization of potentials 2 and 3, even if the realization of the latter potentials were in most of the cases among the explicit goals of the blog-activities. One might even speculate that this fact may easily go unnoticed by course designers when they give priority to participation-related quality measures. In support of such speculation would be the rather low level of language proficiency and of depth of content of the instances of blog communication reported by Ducate and Lomacka (2008), in comparison with the authors' very positive evaluation of the learning potentials of the blog. The worry that potentials 1 and 4 may be realized at the expense of potentials 2 and 3 is further supported in the study by Xie et al (2008), where degree of reflectivity was a concern over and above mere participation: Even if one may question the operationalization reported by Xie et al, their result that the level of reflectivity was low for all students and even lower for students receiving peer-feedback is striking to say the least. At any rate, it seems obvious that unduly prioritizing participation over quality of content constitutes another pitfall to be avoided in the employment of wikis and blogs for learning.

As is evident in the above discussion, the question of the *role of the teacher* is also an issue across different uses of wikis and blogs: The authority – and evaluative power – of the teacher is from the outset at cross-purposes with the bottom-up content production and evaluation of web 2.0. Therefore, precisely which role – of e.g. discussion moderator with limited presentation of own views, of peer discussion partner, of provider of theoretical perspectives, or of evaluator – the teacher should take is likely to be unclear to both students and teachers. This was certainly the case in the UCL blog (Dohn 2009c) as well as in the wiki-activities in my classes. In all of these cases the students tended to expect the teachers to participate more and to provide much more 'corrective' feedback on their entries than the teachers themselves felt was in line with the 'bottom-up' pedagogy of web 2.0. Lund & Smørdal (2006) similarly report that the teacher found it difficult to find her place and level and type of involvement in the two consecutive wiki projects she implemented in her Upper Secondary English course. In the blog-activities described by Singer (2008), the teacher also experimented with different degrees and kinds of participation in order to strike a balance between 'real' web 2.0 voluntariness of participation on the part of both students and teachers (which in point of fact led to virtually no activity on the

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

blog) and "an overly didactic approach in which she controlled the conversation" where "students stayed within the boundaries set, thus defeating the broader pedagogical goal of student ownership of the knowledge construction process" (p. 21). Obvious pitfalls in relation to this issue include both *over*-participation leading to teacher determination of what is supposed to be a bottom-up process of sense-making, and *under*-participation, leading students to question the involvement of the teacher and the significance of the activity and/or to miss feed-back on the degree to which their participation meet the (implicit or explicit) quality criteria which the teacher has for the activity. These problems connected with under-participation may be part of the explanation of Xie et al's result that blog-writing only facilitated reflectivity to a minor extent.

Lastly, an issue implicit in all the other ones is that introducing wikis and blogs as learning activities in effect place *implicit competence demands on the learners* because of the tensions between web 2.0-characteristics and the educational goals to which end the activities are introduced. Instances hereof have been alluded to in the discussion above. This issue may itself be considered a pitfall, at least to the extent that learners' participation is evaluated in practice by other criteria than those which they – and their teachers – are aware of because of the non-acknowledged but assessment-influencing expectations of the latter. A further pitfall might be that using wiki- and blog-activities for learning might lead to the development of a quite different kind of competence from the ones explicitly stated as the goal of the activities: Since students are in practice met with conflicting requirements which they nonetheless have to comply with and maneuver in relation to, the most directly facilitated competence of the wiki- and blog-activities is arguably precisely the skill to so maneuver and more particularly, to conform to the sum of non-coherent implicit and explicit expectations of their teachers. Even worse, this maneuvering competence might in actual fact be what is primarily evaluated in the assessment of the students' wiki- and blog-production and not the skills and understanding intended.

Conclusion: Appraising the putative potentials

It is time for an appraisal both of the degree to which the putative potentials really are potentials and of how realizable they are, taken separately and in conjunction. The preceding discussion of issues, pitfalls and actually experienced problems in the cases reviewed would seem to render it obvious that the pursuit of all of the potentials at once is not likely to succeed. After all, many of the issues and problems arise as a result of the tensions between the educational goals focus of potentials 2 and 3 on the one hand and the focus on individual sense-making across contexts of potentials 1 and 4. In general, it would seem that the wiki- and blog-usages which involved fewest tensions and were most easily integrated with other course activities were the most restricted and educationally focused ones which most resembled assignments with which learners and teachers were already familiar (e.g. the blog-activities in my courses and the "overly didactic" blog-activities reported by Singer). This might indicate that by initiating wiki- and blog-activities which are very similar to other learning-centered assignments, the affordances of 'teacher assigned tasks' in practice to some extent override the affordances which wikis and blogs have in themselves for learners. Clarity here is, however, obtained by limiting the activities to one class of one course which is not very web 2.0 and further by assimilating blogs and wikis to other types of learning activities. One might well ask why one should not use such other learning activities instead and perhaps avoid the ambiguities altogether. Because, importantly, even in such restricted usages, tensions are not overcome, but only harnessed, and may break out again, as is witnessed by the prioritizing of participation over content even in Singer's "overly didactic" blog-activities as well as by the fact that copy-paste problems arose in my wiki-courses, even though they were educationally focused on learning through writing. The upshot of these considerations is that potential 5 is naive: Learners may be used to dealing with wikis and blogs in other contexts, but they are *not* used to employing them in educational settings and it is not clear to them what an educational web 2.0-usage is. Instead of having to learn one thing *less* by employing well-known modes of communication, they have to learn one thing *more*, since they have to learn to engage in educational ways in these activities, rather than engaging in more familiar types of educational activities.

These considerations, however, do not constitute decisive reasons for only employing wikis and blogs in the pursuit of potentials 2 and 3. After all, that learning activities be free from tensions is not a goal in itself. Conversely, freedom from tensions does not necessarily indicate that the activity in question was successful. Quite the contrary, accepting tensions may well be necessary as a step in improving educational practices and in making participation in them more meaningful for learners across their diverse life contexts. Over time, through continuous use of wikis and blogs in educational ways, the out-of-school affordances of these tools in themselves may be transformed into educational web 2.0-affordances for teachers and learners, transforming educational practice along the way. However, as the discussion of issues, pitfalls, and problems above shows,

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

this is not easy. A certain amount of sobering is necessary as concerns the excitement in the literature about the potentials of wikis and blogs. Potentials 1 and 4 may be pursued, but only at the expense of ambiguities in the goals and intentions of the activity; lack of clarity concerning quality criteria; and uncertainty on the part of the learners as to what is expected of them; at the further risk of diversion in practice of the anchoring of the activities (from the learners' sense-making across individual life contexts to educational goals); and with the clear danger of placing competence demands on the learners which are neither brought to awareness (i.e. stay implicit in the actual evaluative practice) nor would be endorsed if they were.

In sum: Potentials 2 and 3 exist and are realizable in current educational practice, but probably only at the expense of devitalizing some of the more interesting possibilities in web 2.0 of context-crossings and sense-making. Potentials 1 and 4 are real possibilities, but their pursuit is 'risky business' and involve implementing tensions and contradictions in educational practice. They certainly may not be realizable in all educational settings of today. Potential 5 is spurious and engaging nonetheless in its pursuit is an almost certain way to fall into the pitfall of placing implicit educational demands on learners, thus in effect making participation in educational practices harder, not easier for them.

References

Alexander, B. (2006). Web 2.0: A New Wave of Innovation for Teaching and Learning? EDUCAUSE Review 41 (2), 34-44.

Boud, D., & Feletti, G. (Eds) (1997). The challenge of problem-based learning. 2nd Edition. London: Kogan Page.

Boulos, M. Maramba, I. & Wheeler, S. (2006). Wikis, blogs and podcasts: a new generation of Web-based tools for virtual collaborative clinical practice and education. *BMC Medical Education* 6.

Bruns, A., & Humphreys, S. (2005). Wikis in teaching and assessment: The M/Cyclopedia Project. *WikiSym '05 – Conference Proceedings of the 2005 International Symposium on Wikis,* 25–32.

Dirckinck-Holmfeld, L. (2002). Designing virtual learning environments based on problem oriented project pedagogy. In L. Dirckinck-Holmfeld, & B. Fibiger, (Eds.), *Learning in virtual environments*. (pp. 31–54). København: Samfundslitteratur.

Dohn, N. (2009a). Web 2.0: Inherent tensions and evident challenges for education, *International Journal of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning*, *4* (3), 343-363.

Dohn, N. (2009b). Affordances revisited: Articulating a Merleau-Pontian view. *International Journal of Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, 4* (2), 151-170.

Dohn, N. (2009c). *Web 2.0 som lærings- og arbejdsredskab.* Jelling: UC Lillebælt. http://www.ucl.dk/media(7196,1030)/Web._2.0_udviklingsprojekt%2C_Jelling.pdf [viewed 11 Nov. 2009].

Ducate, L., & Lomicka, L. (2008). Adventures in the blogosphere: From blog readers to blog writers. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 21*(1), 9–28.

Duffy, P. & Bruns, A. (2006). The use of blogs, wikis and RSS in education: A conversation of possibilities. *Proceedings of the Online Learning and Teaching Conference 2006*.

Dysthe, O. & Engelsen, K. (Eds.) (2005). *Mapper som pædagogisk redskab*. København: Klim.

Farmer, B., Yue, A., & Brooks, C. (2008). Using blogging for higher order learning in large cohort university teaching: A case study. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 24*(2), 123–136.

Ferris, P. & Wilder, H. (2006). Uses and Potentials of Wikis in the Classroom. *Innovate. Journal of online education*, 2(5).

Gleaves, A., Walker, C. & Grey, J. (2007). Using digital and paper diaries for learning and assessment purposes in higher education: a comparative study of feasibility and reliability. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32 (6): 631-643.

Jarvis, P. (2007). *Globalisation, lifelong learning and the learning society – Sociological perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Klenowski, V. (2002). *Developing portfolios for learning and assessment*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Lund, A., & Smørdal, O. (2006). Is there a space for the teacher in a WIKI? *WikiSym '06 – Conference Proceedings of the 2006 International Symposium on Wikis,* 37–46.

Parker, K. & Chao, J. (2007). Wiki as a Teaching Tool. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Knowledge and Learning Objects* 3, 57-72.

Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C. (1994). Computer support for knowledge-building communities. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences, 3*(3), 265–283.

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2

Singer, J. (2008). Posting for points: Edublogs in the JMC Curriculum. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 63*(1), 10–27.
Xie, Y., Ke, F. & Sharma, P. (2008). The effect of peer feedback for blogging on college students' reflective learning processes. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 11: 18-25.

ISBN 978-1-86220-225-2