BOOK REVIEW
Mark Hawkes, *Book Review Editor*

Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web, By James A. West and Margaret L. West

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Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web, by James A. West and Margaret L. West (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009, 142 pages, $27.00)

I use wikis in all of my online classes, so when I saw this title, *Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web,* I was very excited. A quick scan of the table of contents promised practical advice as well as suggested activities utilizing wikis to promote collaboration as part of an online or hybrid course. *Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web* is one of eight guides to online teaching and learning published by Jossey-Bass, an imprint of Wiley. As part of a series intended to serve as a concise and practical resource for higher and adult education, these guides address the pedagogy and technology use specifically related to online teaching and learning. Like many others in this series, *Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web* focuses on collaboration. The primary audience is higher education online instructors, designers, and developers. Graduate students in instructional technology and/or higher education would also benefit from the content of this book.

A surprising amount of information is packed into this relatively short, six chapter book. Beginning with the preface, the authors lay out the theoretical framework for utilizing the read-write web to promote interaction, collaboration, and critical thinking. Though purposely keeping theory to a minimum, it is obvious from the start that the text supports a constructivist viewpoint through the use of sound pedagogy. The reader moves from simple definitions and technical information to

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well design suggestions for having students work collaboratively through wikis to construct knowledge and use critical thinking skills.

The authors start with the basics. Those new to wikis will benefit from the information presented in the first chapter. Wikis are clearly defined and compared to other readily available online asynchronous communication tools. Strengths and weaknesses of the various wiki services are discussed, followed by a detailed explanation of the various wiki features. Before getting into the actual design of a wiki, the foundations of learning in the digital commons, working with millennial students, adults, and nontraditional students are provided. While the authors provided only a very brief overview, it allows the reader to put into perspective the authors viewpoint in designing a successful wiki project. There are many helpful figures and exhibits to guide the reader through this detailed design section.

As someone who has used wikis in online courses for a couple of years, the three chapters offering practical suggestions for wiki projects were the most interesting. Each chapter focuses on a particular level of learning: knowledge construction, critical thinking, and contextual application. All require the learners to work collaboratively to accomplish learning tasks. Chapter 3, knowledge construction, provides activities to assist the learner in collecting and organizing information. Chapter 4, critical thinking, encourages the learner to analyze the information they have collected. And, finally, chapter 5, contextual application, has the learner synthesize and transfer his or her learning into real-world settings.

The structure of these chapters and the fact that the activities are non-content specific is particularly helpful. A purpose and description are provided for each activity, frequently with several variations. While many of us have used these or similar activities in the face-to-face classroom, the transfer to a wiki environment is not always obvious. The authors address this issue by providing a "frame" as well as management tips for each activity. The frame actually gives the reader a suggested layout and content of the wiki including the HOME page and additional pages needed to complete the activity. An organizational structure of each page as well as the relationship among pages is presented. Management tips include helpful information on group size, adjustments needed for novice to expert learners, and additional resources.

The authors conclude with a look to the future of wikis and Web 2.0 tools for collaboration and provide a useful web site encouraging others to create and share wiki frames.

CONCLUSIONS

Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web was a quick read. I really appreciated the "frames." I currently use my own version of a couple of these activities. After reading this text, I now see ways I can improve the structure of these activities making it easier for the students to collaborate and fulfill requirements of the assignment. While intended for the higher education environment, most activities could readily be adapted to the K-12 or business setting. As the authors stated in the preface, it is not heavy in theory, which may keep it from being at the top of the list for graduate classes in instructional technology. That being said, anyone teaching a fully online or hybrid course will benefit from the variety of activities and the suggestions for organizing those activities. In addition, as a supplemental text for a graduate course, or a required read for a teaching assistant, *Using Wikis for Online Collaboration: The Power of the Read-Write Web* has much to offer.