CHAPTER 2

"YEAH, I WROTE THAT!": INCORPORATING CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY TO BUILD COMMUNITY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF WIKIPEDIA

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Abstract

In this chapter, we examine the relationship between open pedagogical practices and critical information literacy and how they intersect when Wikipedia is introduced in the classroom. Specifically, we discuss the collaboration between a librarian and a course instructor on iterations of Wikipedia assignments across three years and two classes. We unpack the importance of existing infrastructures, such as edit-a-thons and the WikiEdu dashboard, to support bringing Wikipedia assignments into the classroom. We also explore how we worked to connect course content to the renewable assignments and brought larger discussions of representation and community on Wikipedia into the classroom and assignments. Finally, we outline the lessons we learned through this collaboration. In sum, scaffolded projects allowed students to practice their contributions to Wikipedia in a supportive space and fostered critical engagement with course content. In their end-of-semester reflections, students stated that

contributing to Wikipedia felt more meaningful and elicited feelings of pride that traditional, disposable assessments did not. They saw themselves as knowledge creators and scholarship creation as part of an ongoing conversation rather than an "end product." By engaging in peer-review assignments, participating in edit-a-thons, and discussing the assignments with librarians who were not their professors, students also saw their work as part of a broader academic conversation. Through Wikipedia assignments, students can appreciate their own information privilege in terms of access to costly resources and become proactive in sharing that knowledge and their own growing expertise with a wider public.

Keywords

Open education, information literacy, open educational practices, open pedagogy.

Introduction

Critical approaches to information literacy invite us to "co-investigate the political, social, and economic dimensions of information, including its creation, access, and use" (Tewell, 2016, para. 1). Drawing from critical pedagogy and extending beyond merely learning to use library resources, critical information literacy develops a critical consciousness in students around information so that they might take control of their own lives and learning (Freire, 2003; Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994). As active agents in their own learning, students need a community with which to explore their information privilege, test and contest ideas, and create meaning. When students see themselves as authentic contributors to an ongoing conversation, instead of as mere consumers of information, their level of motivation increases (Elmborg, 2006; Jacobson & Xu, 2002).

Open pedagogical practices complement critical information literacy. These practices have clear connections to the open education movement and offer students opportunities to do inquiry-based work that is both available and accountable to a public beyond the classroom. With open pedagogy, assignments transition from being disposable to renewable. Laid to rest are assignments that both students and faculty know will likely be tossed in the recycle bin once the semester is

over, such as the quintessential research paper, in favor of assignments where students actively engage in the creation or adaption of open educational resources (OER) (Wiley & Hilton, 2018). While supporting individual student learning, these OER add value as they can be seen, used, and improved upon by a broader community once completed (Wiley, 2015). Renewable assignments allow students to "contribute to the knowledge commons, not just consume it, in meaningful and lasting ways . . . shap[ing] the world as they encounter it" (DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2017, p. 9). Open pedagogy focuses on open teaching, open content, and having student work and interactions brought into the public sphere. As Bali (2017) suggested, it has an ethos of sharing and a social justice orientation. This emphasis on equitable participation in knowledge creation, centered around affordability, exemplifies the ways in which critical information literacy seeks to intervene upon information systems of oppression. Wikipedia offers an ideal site of praxis for critical information literacy and open pedagogy to intersect, demonstrating to students how knowledge is constructed and made accessible in open systems (Fields & Harper, 2020).

Wikipedia offers an outlet for publishing information on topics that are underrepresented in traditional publishing and mainstream media. Wikipedia provides a platform for diverse stories and histories while promoting collaboration among content creators with varying levels of expertise. In the classroom, learning how to improve Wikipedia gives students the opportunity to intervene upon the inner workings of a resource they all use while translating and publishing concepts from the course to a wider, public audience (Davis, 2018). Editing Wikipedia in class is also an example of what Hartley (2011) has termed "outlearning," a distributed way to venture into "that intermediate space between expert elites and the citizen-consumer" (p. 163). Although one of our goals of incorporating Wikipedia into the classroom is teaching and practicing critical information literacy, it also produces a secondary effect of showing students that research is a communitybuilding process.

This chapter discusses the importance of existing infrastructures, such as edit-a-thons and WikiEdu, to support bringing Wikipedia

assignments into the classroom and the iterative nature of collaboration between a librarian and professor working on Wikipedia assignments across three years and two different classes. We also talk about how we worked to connect course content to the assignment and brought broader discussions of representation on Wikipedia into the classroom and assignment. Finally, we talk about some of the lessons we have learned through this collaboration. In sum, scaffolded projects allowed students to practice their contributions to Wikipedia in a supportive space and made them engage critically with course content. In their reflections, students stated that contributing felt more meaningful and elicited feelings of pride that traditional, disposable assessments did not. They saw scholarship creation as part of an ongoing conversation rather than an "end product." By engaging in peer-review assignments, participating in edit-a-thons, and discussing the assignment with librarians who were not their professors, students also saw their work as part of a broader academic conversation. Through Wikipedia assignments, students can appreciate their own privilege in terms of access to costly resources and become proactive in sharing that knowledge and their own growing expertise with a broader public.

Tapping into Existing Infrastructures

Incorporating Wikipedia assignments in the classroom is made substantially easier when there are existing support structures for this work (Bridges & Dowell, 2020; Cassell, 2018; Davis, 2018). For instance, although we had previously worked together to incorporate scaffolded information literacy learning opportunities into courses, the Library's Art+Feminism edit-a-thon served as the jumping off point for our Wikipedia collaboration. This was then further supported by Wiki Education's training modules and course dashboard system.

Wikipedia edit-a-thons are planned, public programming events organized by galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAMs) where attendees contribute edits to articles around a special theme, collection, or exhibition (Snyder, 2018). GLAMs view these communal events as "being a great outreach and engagement initiative" as they

bring community members into their spaces, making them aware of services, holdings, and expertise (Robichaud, 2017, p. 2). Edit-a-thons gained momentum and mainstream consciousness beginning in 2014 with the Art+Feminism organization coordinating its edit-a-thon series, an annual event taking place at GLAMs worldwide with the aim to address gender disparities found within Wikipedia—including biased and/or underrepresented content as well as a lack of diverse, contributing editors (Art+Feminism, 2020; Evans et al., 2015).

At Temple University, Art+Feminism edit-a-thons have been hosted or cohosted by the library since 2016. Efforts to extend reach have included partnering with the university's art school and nearby academic libraries, bringing in panel speakers, as well as having librarians identify relevant courses whose faculty may wish students to participate or who may design assignments around the event. Art+Feminism's ambassador network and online event kits—complete with organizing how-to guides, CC-licensed promotional materials, safe/brave space policies, lesson plans, video tutorials, training slide decks—have ensured that GLAM staff are supported and prepared to host edit-a-thons that foster communities of possibility.

Our collaboration on Wikipedia assignments began in December 2017, after an announcement about Wiki Education's resources and training modules (WikiEdu) was sent through a feminist academic listserv. Paired with the announcement of the spring 2018's Art+Feminism edit-a-thon, this seemed like a good moment to find a way to incorporate a Wikipedia editing assignment into a course called LGBTQ Media Representation. The goals of the edit-a-thon directly intersected with the course content, and there would be staff on hand to help students navigate the editing process. WikiEdu's dashboard allowed us to structure training modules, exercises, discussion questions, and assignments within a timeline so that students could work their way through learning Wikipedia policies, how the site works, and how to use the editor functions. The dashboard also permitted students to create sandboxes where they could draft edits and get peer and faculty feedback on them before migrating them to "Live" Wikipedia articles during the edit-a-thon. This also made it easier to assess their

edits, even if changes they make end up getting overwritten or rejected by later editors.

We worked together to find a way to experiment with an assignment that would feel meaningful to as well as manageable for students. We decided creating new Wikipedia articles from scratch would be unnecessary if the goal was to have students learn enough about editing to contribute to the edit-a-thon. Thus, we focused on creating a list of Wikipedia articles related to the course that needed improvement. We considered what contributions students could make to those articles, ranging from adding citations or external references, revising narrative text, or uploading public domain and/or CC-licensed content. We also discussed the logistics for preparing students for the edit-a-thon (e.g., including when specific WikiEdu training modules should be completed in relation to the edit-a-thon, technology needs, etc.) and whether this should be an individual or group assignment. We believe our dialogue exemplified Diaz and Mandernach's (2017) intentional relationship-building as well as Ivey's (2003) four essential behaviors for successful librarian-faculty collaboration: a shared, understood goal; mutual respect, tolerance, and trust; competence for the task at hand by each of the partners; and ongoing communication.

An Iterative Collaboration

This first iteration of the assignment in LGBTQ Media Representation had students complete WikiEdu training modules during the first weeks of the semester. Then they were assigned to groups, each of which was responsible for identifying edits they could make to one article related to the course. They had a few weeks to collaborate and collect their planned edits, which they would then make to Wikipedia during regular class time at the edit-a-thon. In addition to connecting students with a broader Wikipedia editing community, the edit-a-thon was beneficial for this first-time assignment as it meant there were librarians with Wikipedia experience available who could help students who may have forgotten elements of their training. Moreover, it gave the edits a sense of purpose as the students were part of an event larger than the class itself.

The lessons learned from the first iteration were useful in updating the assignment for a different course offered in fall 2019, spring 2020, and fall 2020: Technology and Culture. In this course, editing and talking about Wikipedia intersected with several course themes, and so it made sense to develop this into a semester-long project. Students selected an existing article relevant to the course to contribute to or identified a topic/person relevant to the course in which to create a new Wikipedia article. This longer project also made it easier to check students' progress week by week and allowed time for students to review their peers' drafted contributions in the WikiEdu sandbox (along with instructor feedback) before moving their edits to "Live" Wikipedia. In addition, students were required to write weekly summaries of assigned readings using "Wikipedia-style" neutral writing. Many students acknowledged that this type of writing was hard but also helped them learn how to better synthesize things they read (as well as how to paraphrase without plagiarizing). As one student wrote, "The main takeaway I received from contributing to Wikipedia is it has made me an overall better writer. Wikipedia has taught me how to concisely and accurately produce meaningful information based on academic sources." Throughout the iterative collaboration we were also able to connect editing Wikipedia to the course content in a way that helped students connect to core learning objectives in new ways.

Understanding Technology and Culture through Wikipedia

In Technology and Culture, the weekly WikiEdu trainings were scaffolded to connect with course topics. For instance, the discussion of "content gaps" on Wikipedia was covered in the same week the often-forgotten role of women as the earliest computer programmers was discussed (Abbate, 2012). Through our collaboration we found ways to do this better and more robustly over time. Following the fall 2019 semester where students had trouble finding media and images

they could use, for example, we decided it would be helpful to reinstate a unit on digital media and copyright that coincided with the WikiEdu module on contributing images and media files. Furthermore, we worked together to find the topics throughout the semester where class discussions could reflect on editing Wikipedia. Early classes, for example, focused on understanding points in history where Internet technologies were developed to serve communal, rather than commercial, goals, yet material infrastructure shapes who actually gets to engage with different Internet technologies (Curran, 2012; Lobato, 2019). A student later reflected that "Wikipedia is one of the ultimate crossroads between technology and culture, as its foundation is built on the mission to provide free information for all through the community." But, another student noted, "Depending on the technology (internet connection and a reliable PC) and sources we have access to, it affects the information we add to the article, and that in turn affects what information the public gets access to." The Wikipedia project made tangible lessons about the importance of understanding the cultural, material, and human infrastructures of digital technologies and critically addressing questions of representation and access to Internet-based media and communication technologies.

Moreover, students connected the work that they did in Wikipedia to topics that were only briefly touched on in class. A discussion on hacking, for example, included the story of Aaron Swartz, who took his own life after being charged with computer fraud and abuse when he downloaded and planned to distribute millions of academic articles from JSTOR for free; the charge could have resulted in millions of dollars in penalties and decades in jail (Gustin, 2013). This served as a chance to talk about how academic publishing works, how knowledge can and should be shared, as well as the students' own privileged access to academic materials they often take for granted. And students articulated these takeaways in their final papers:

> What makes this Wikipedia assignment different from other assignments I've had in the past is the impact it has had on how I perceive higher education. It was a refreshing change from the endless cycle of research papers

and presentations that leave me feeling drained and unfulfilled. As I've gone through college, I have found myself slowly losing interest in my education and, in turn, taking it for granted. This assignment has changed my perspective entirely, challenging me to let go of my frustrations with academia and instead consider my privilege.

Students were able to not only see their work as having meaning beyond the semester but were also able to better recognize information imbalances, confronting their own information privilege (Booth, 2014).

The course also focused on how power works through historical, material, political, economic, legal, and cultural frameworks culminating in a discussion of trust and information literacy. The students read research on mis- and disinformation online, as well as the intersections of online harassment and "trolling" culture in online spaces (Gray, 2011; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Phillips, 2015). Students watched misinformation expert Claire Wardle's 2019 TedTalk, in which she summarized her research-driven solutions for transforming the "internet into a place of trust" (Wardle, 2019). The model she described for creating a healthy information commons is in many ways modeled on that of Wikipedia. Similarly, she argued that understanding the underlying architecture of *how* online platforms work is central to rebuilding trust of information—pushing healthy skepticism over knee-jerk distrust. As one student commented, "The amount of research that Wikipedians use helps them sift between fake news and true information." All of this culminated in a key takeaway: understanding how things work is the best way to enact change (focusing on making the world more just and equitable). Or, as Freire (2003) wrote, "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (Freire [1970], p. 47). In addition to the assignment feeling more meaningful than a traditional course paper, it helped students feel more directly invested in the course content itself. This is seen even more clearly in the ways students connected broader course themes about representation, who

is left out and who is included in technology industries and digital spaces, to their own work editing Wikipedia.

Representation and Wikipedia

In bringing Wikipedia into the classroom, we did recognize the well-established drawbacks of Wikipedia, particularly in terms of representation (Davidson, 2017; Gauthier & Sawchuk, 2017). We knew that bullying and harassing behavior from some Wikipedia editors has chased women and members of marginalized groups off the platform (Menking & Erickson, 2015; Wulczyn et al., 2017). Rather than treating these as reasons to avoid the platform, however, these issues were part of the course. For example, while talking about online harassment, we also discussed how using the WikiEdu sandboxes to draft their edits was risk-free space for students to learn how to use Wikipedia without worrying about other editors critiquing their works in progress. This also meant they could refine their edits, guided by their instructor, so they felt more confident in them before changing existing articles.

At the end of the semester, students read about gender disparities in who Wikipedia articles are written about (Adams et al., 2019). And by this point, students were able to critique the norms created by "notability" rules, but they were also empowered to work within the rules of Wikipedia to push back on those norms. As one student wrote, "The quality and depth of content on Wikipedia can be improved by having more women and people of color editing articles, and the same can be said for further inclusion and diversity in other areas of cultural work and study." They also recognized that this was a space they could be part of the change to the culture and perception of Wikipedia.

In this final discussion, students were able to see themselves as shifting whose perspectives are represented in the site, adopting what Lambert (2018) deemed as representational social justice (p. 228). In part because of university/major demographics, half or more than half of the students in the courses were women or nonbinary, and about a third were students of color. Some students made connections between their own subjectivities and the project directly. One student elected to edit an

article on LGBTQ+ media representation, focusing on the possibilities of new digital media platforms. In this student's final reflection paper, they wrote, "With more than 70 countries that criminalize LGBTQ+ people and their identities, it is vital to have a tool like Wikipedia that serves as a resource for LGBTQ+ people." In the same class, another student elected to translate an article from English Wikipedia into Spanish, her first language, as the Spanish Wikipedia article had little information on a topic she had researched previously. In her final reflection paper she wrote, "As a Hispanic woman, I feel a responsibility to contribute information from a perspective that is lacking within the overall collaborative space. I can use Wikipedia to showcase how fun research can be."

As Freire (2003) wrote, "Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge . . . the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated . . . and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed" (Freire [1970], p. 81). Similarly, speaking of her experiences with engaged pedagogy, hooks (1994) wrote that her students "want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit" and want instructors to address "the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences" (p. 19). Later she said, "The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. . . . This is education as the practice of freedom" (p. 207). Although not all students explained their contributions in relation to their identities, several did elect to create articles for or contribute to articles that actively tried to improve gender and racial representation in what is available on Wikipedia. And the students' reflections on their work further informed our ongoing iteration of the assignment.

Lessons Learned

Bringing Wikipedia into the classroom required some trial and error. Several students in the fall 2019 semester, for example, opted to make

new articles for authors read in the course. Despite discussions emphasizing that this was more complex than editing existing articles, students still thought it would be easier. These students ran into problems finding reliable sources to cite (beyond faculty bios on university websites). We identified that this largely stemmed from students being unfamiliar with sources like academic book reviews, which facilitate scholarship as conversation (Rowland et al., 2019). Thus, in spring 2020, short academic book reviews were assigned to be read alongside the selections from academic books assigned in the course. This addition helped put academic conversations in context but also helped students realize what other sorts of information would be useful in creating articles about scholars. Rather than shy away from having students create new articles, the iterative process simply showed what skill sets and knowledge practices students would need before tackling such projects. Indeed, one student in fall 2020 created a new article for a scholar that has thus far met Wikipedia's notability standards. The article was shared with the scholar, who then immediately shared it with her entirely family, much to the delight of the student who had worked so hard on it.

In addition, one student in fall 2019 expressed concern that they did not feel comfortable making contributions to Wikipedia because they weren't an "expert" on the topic. We now know it was important to emphasize that students need not be subject matter experts to identify flaws with existing articles and restructured some of the training activities to emphasize this. The WikiEdu trainings were reorganized for spring 2020 so that students identified the article they were going to edit/create earlier in the semester. For students contributing to existing articles, they did an evaluation exercise, identifying the changes they would make before finalizing that choice. Students creating new articles analyzed similar existing articles, identifying what they would need to do to make a good one. Then each of the weekly trainings and exercises required them to work on the articles they had chosen (e.g., learning to add citations by adding content and a citation to their sandbox for their article). This required reworking the default training timeline offered by WikiEdu and indeed showed some of the limitations of relying on

adopting a premade, rather than creating a tailored, scaffolded training structure. Finally, students in fall 2019 were asked to write letters to the next semester's students to give them advice. This helped reinforce that they were part of an ongoing community, but also these notes helped ease students' anxieties about their contributions. Students in spring 2020 wrote similar letters to the next semester's students, but also some wrote to the fall 2019 students thanking them for their advice. This practice continued in fall 2020 as it has proven successful.

Conclusion

On the final day of class for fall 2019/spring 2020/fall 2020, De Voe visited the classes not to "give the library talk" (Eisenhower & Smith, 2009, p. 319) but to discuss her own perspectives on editing Wikipedia as both a librarian and scholar. This culminating moment reminded students that, by editing Wikipedia, they engaged in a scholarly project that reached beyond the bounds of the semester. The students enjoyed hearing someone else place their own experiences using Wikipedia in context. This was followed by a discussion of a reading on how to rebuild academics' trust of Wikipedia (Jemielniak & Aibar, 2016). Students connected their work as part of that broader mission. One student wrote, "I appreciated how Kristina De Voe described Wikipedia as more of an entry point into a subject, as opposed to the ultimate authority on it. If the cultural understanding and expectations of Wikipedia change, as they have for me, perhaps it will become more broadly accepted in academia and positively regarded in popular culture." Similarly, students found that they only really understood how Wikipedia works by actively engaging with it: "It was not until actively participating in the Wikipedia process, that I began to understand who is contributing, how they are going about doing it, and why."

Over the course of four semesters, and two different courses, 98 students have added approximately 73,000 words, 680 references, and 51 commons uploads while editing 56 articles and creating 7 new ones. These edits, as of December 2020, had been viewed 7.5 million times. Adding Wikipedia to these courses served multiple pedagogical

purposes, such as integrating course content into tangible real-world actions, improving students' writing skills, engaging in digital and information literacy skills, and creating projects in which students felt invested. As Davidson summarizes, assignments like these are "the ideal way to empower the next generation to use the avalanche of information at their fingertips in a purposive, responsive way to make possible their own future success and, ideally, their contribution to a better society" (2017, p. 97). At the end of the course, most students commented on feeling "proud" of their contributions: "After all of the time I put into this project I have to say that it is one of things I am most proud of doing here at school. I visited and worked on Wikipedia every week for the entirety of the semester, which really made this assignment mean a lot."

In *The New Education*, Cathy Davidson (2017) reviews the Stanford Study of Writing led by Andrea Lunsford, which found that students in the early 2000s felt more invested in writing that had an audience beyond their professor and classmates (pp. 94–95). Wikipedia can provide such an experience; as one student reflected, "Over one million Wikipedians viewed our pages! In just a few months our entire class made an impact. . . . Wikipedia is a true gem as its free information that would otherwise be hidden behind paywalls or for select individuals." In their final reflection papers, regardless of the negative feelings they had around the project at times, nearly all students said the project was unlike anything they have ever done before. In one student's words, "The process of actually editing a live Wikipedia page is not only educational, but gratifying. To be able to pull open Wikipedia and tell your family and friends, 'Yeah, I wrote that!' is a really rewarding and satisfying feeling."

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