The Fellowship of the Wiki? OR, A Readers Response to Hogendoorn’s “There and Back Again”

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Having spent countless hours in my youth reading and re-reading J. R. R. Tolkien lore, it was hard for me to miss Adrian Hogendoorn’s appropriation of the subtitle of Tolkien’s most accessible work. Tolkien published The Hobbit in 1937 with the subtitle There and Back Again as a children’s adventure novel, detailing the quest of Bilbo Baggins, his 13 dwarfish companions, and the wizard, Gandalf. The quest to reclaim the kingdom and treasure of the Lonely Mountain begins and ends in Bilbo’s sleepy, but respectable hobbit-hole, Bag End. Although Bilbo eventually returns home to Bag End, his journey there and back again has profoundly changed him, and in more ways than just making him inordinately wealthy. According to Tolkien lore, Bilbo recorded his adventures for posterity in The Red Book of Westmarch, which became Tolkien’s source for The Hobbit. Likewise, Hogendoorn’s Principles of Learning (PoL) wiki contributions illuminate episodes of his learning journey. He makes the connections between moments of learning in courses and specific wiki entries in his wikiography. I am slightly envious of his use of the wiki and the wikiography as a capstone project for his MEd studies. This “off-label use” of the wikiography seems to be a brilliant means of further entrenching the learning of his program of studies.

One discovery during Bilbo’s journey was pivotal to the success of the company’s mission. The ring Bilbo found deep under the Misty Mountains enabled him to fulfill his burglar’s role in the quest. More than being merely a burglar’s tool though, the ring altered the course of Bilbo’s life and the lives of his kinfolk, as anyone familiar with Tolkien lore knows. Similarly, we read of the beginnings of the effects of Hogendoorn’s PoL wiki exposure. He has experimented with wikis in his educational practice and continues to contribute to the
PoL wiki, although now a graduate of the MEd program. This early data provides evidence that he will be an innovative practitioner and a lifelong learner.

As Tolkien’s title indicates, the narrative follows Bilbo, who made the success of the mission possible and is the hero of the story. However, Bilbo’s quest was not solitary; the tale of his adventures is wound up in the tale of Thorin’s company. Bilbo’s story could not be told apart from the story of them all. The situations encountered and the relationships formed among Bilbo, the dwarves, and Gandalf ultimately led to the events recounted in *The Lord of the Rings*. That narrative primarily follows Frodo, Bilbo’s heir; however, even more than in the first story, Frodo’s journey required the collaboration of the nine walkers, the so-called fellowship of the ring, to accomplish the mission. In contrast, the wikiographic account of Hogendoorn’s educational journey appears quite solitary. The wizards, er, professors play a role with three mentioned by name. However, the only collaboration mentioned occurs in the background, related to the coursework that eventually spawned wiki contributions. While collaboration is cited as the nature of wikis (Hunter & Austin, 2015), the process of the collaborative co-creation of knowledge recorded in wiki contributions is not evidenced in Hogendoorn’s wikiography (nor in my own!). The wiki artifacts might be considered collaborative in that multiple authors and editors have contributed to wiki articles and organization. However, Hogendoorn’s experience failed to reach the potential of engaging “students in an application of their learning through the process of co-authoring, co-editing, and co-publishing course related content” (Eddy & Lawrence, 2013) and simulating “workplace experiences that increasingly rely on teamwork” (Eddy & Lawrence, 2013). Perhaps, previous educational experiences have not adequately prepared PoL students for truly collaborative work. Helping students develop collaboration skills will increase the learning benefit of wiki activities (Lai, Lei, & Liu, 2016). Who will convene a council to form a fellowship of the wiki?

**REFERENCES**

