ADVENTURES IN THE PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING COURSE WIKI: A WIKIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT
When I first visited the Principles of Learning (Pol) course wiki, I sensed the breadth and depth of the existing posts. The proceeding page has been intentionally left blank. It represents the feeling of dilemma when creating my first, new post. This paper will report on my contributions to the Principles of Learning (PoL) course wiki as a form of reflection on my first semester in the Masters of Education (MEd) program at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). The opening discussion poses the dilemma of first encountering the wiki. The next section describes a series of smaller posts to the wiki while reflecting on the work process of building wiki content. This is followed by a summary of contributions to the wiki featuring people in education: Bill Bigelow (2017), Malcolm Gladwell (2008), John Goodlad (2004), and a discussion of revisionist history. A final section will consolidate what I learned during this process for use in future course work. An afterword notes additional contributions that I made before 2016 came to a close.
**Dilemma and Introduction**

The preceding blank page represents the dilemma when first encountering the Principles of Learning (PoL) course wiki.

I wanted my students to face a kind of shock of realization that they would have to deal with new technologies in new ways and they would have to question what they knew about learning. It seemed to work (Hunter, 2012, p. 2).

Indeed. The existing course wiki is substantial. PoL was my first course in the program – who am I to start posting about learning theories? What contributions could I make? Who am I to write about seminal educational thinkers? What if I posted something inaccurate?

With its syntax and rules, writing within the wiki medium posed a dilemma; fussing with formatting code while simultaneously writing content became a hindrance. Also, the incremental nature of wiki work is counter to my experience. I have a varied background of research, event planning, and teaching. One aspect of my experience is that no one cares how you got there; the result is what matters most. I am prone to develop work in isolation and share when complete.

With these themes in mind, this paper will report on my contributions to the PoL course wiki as a form of reflection upon my first semester in the Masters of Education (MEd) program at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT). The first section will discuss the work process and report on several small contributions. The next section will feature people and education and review more substantial contributions. These include: Goodlad’s (2004) study of schools; Gladwell’s (2008) discussion of the purported 10,000-hour rule; (Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007) and Bigelow’s (2017) work on revisionist history. Learning outcomes for my future studies will solidify my reflections. An Afterward will discuss additional contributions that I made before 2016 came to a close.

**Wiki Process**

I began with several small contributions to develop my wiki process. First, I grappled with the syntax. In the past, when writing in HTML for websites, I created cheat sheets and the wiki uses a similar HTML mark-up language. I did not immediately transfer that prior learning into this experience; it was a while before I caught on to this. The interface for the wiki is not a What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) interface. It was disorienting. To adapt, I eventually created a cheat sheet for common wiki formatting code to expedite posting and learn the syntax. As I progressed, I stopped using the cheat sheet altogether and wrote the syntax as I went.

I maintained a log of ideas and contributions to monitor my progress. I wrote less and less within the wiki interface. I used Microsoft Word to build content, including the syntax, and then fussed with formatting within the wiki platform. This slowed down a steady flow of contributions. My content was not methodically posted; this was a weakness to be sure. Toward the end of the process, I had a lot of new pages and entries that needed tidying up before writing this paper.
My posting behavior fits the patterns found in Meishar-Tal and Gorsky (2010) who state that “students most frequently add content to a wiki rather than delete existing text” (p. 25). I did not edit existing text nor did I delete or amalgamate existing pages. I added new sections within existing pages or created entirely new pages. I believe I saw my value as a contributor of content instead of an editor of existing content. I speculate that if I had been assigned to manage sections of the wiki, I probably would have edited content without compunction. Additionally, I did not collaborate with colleagues on content, though I was pleased to see a peer contribute to the Gladwell page when I posted it in the help wanted section of the wiki.

**SMALLER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COURSE WIKI**

**Explain Everything App**
This is a digital whiteboard app that I use in my teaching practice. The existing wiki page did not express some of its uses. I added descriptions of functionality and then provided examples of how I use it in my classroom. I posted links to videos that I created using the app itself.

**321 Reading**
321 Reading is a reading and response format. For example, when students first encounter scholarly journals, it can be helpful to have them respond to:

- the three main ideas of the article
- the two facts they found interesting
- the one idea they perhaps found confusing

On the wiki, I created a description page for 321 Reading and linked to templates and web resources. I left the page open as it requires additional ties to scholarly research with regard to how this approach relates to literacy or critical thinking.

**Contributing Papers**
I contributed my PoL papers to the course assignments page. Before I did so, I placed an informal author's note at the beginning to explain the process. For example, as a cautionary tale, I pointed out that my Analysis & Synthesis paper (another course assignment) had become far too large.

**Activities vs. Active Learning**
Haak (2008) makes a distinction between mere activities and activities that build deeper learning. I was unable to fully apply her four principles within another course paper so I added the criteria to the Active Learning Page.

**Critical Pedagogy**
While writing on revisionist history, I noticed that principles from Kincheloe (2005) were absent from the wiki’s Critical Pedagogy page. While the post was a summary with brief descriptions, this is a significant contribution for anyone (like me) who is beginning to study critical pedagogy earnestly.
Reflection
Here are some of the things I learned during this process:

- The more you wiki, the faster you become.
- Syntax and citations will become more natural and you will write them without referring to guides or cheat sheets.
- Edit in your word processor and drop the content into the wiki. This avoids using the wiki interface, but may also slow incremental and steady posting behavior.
- The wiki can be a place for topics and ideas that may have been cut from other papers and assignments one has written. It is a forum where you can advance these ideas.
- You may start something and intentionally leave it open for further research or for other students to finish (for example, 321 Reading was posted to the wiki’s Help Wanted section.).

LARGER CONTRIBUTIONS: PEOPLE AND EDUCATION
These contributions represent a series of topics from my first semester that were a) brought up in lectures, breakout rooms, discussion posts, or readings; b) cut from papers or presentations or; c) of a personal interest. Generally, these topics created new pages within the wiki. This section will feature people and education such as: Goodlad’s (2004) study of schools; Gladwell’s (2008) use of 10,000-hour rule (Ericsson et al., 2007); The Zinn Project (2017), revisionist history, and critical pedagogy.

John Goodlad
Before embarking in the MEd Program, my crude definition of curriculum was along the lines of: “Here’s a course outline – go make an awesome class.” During the semester, I came to understand the what (content) and how (methodology) view of curriculum (Egan, 2003). That would suffice until I encountered Goodlad (2004); he pushed my understanding of curriculum toward a larger view of school culture. I was compelled to add him to the wiki even though PoL is not a curriculum focused course. I felt that, even though A Place Called School was published in 1984, it provided a context that resonated with me. Goodlad’s (2004) study of schools was an enormous undertaking that studied 13 triples of schools by starting with a high school and then the feeder junior and elementary schools (Goodlad, Sirotnik & Overman, 1979). Goodlad (1977) criticized existing research as not providing an adequate picture of schools: “The cumulative picture derived from putting together all the data collected...would not reveal to us a school” (p. 3). Goodlad wanted a larger view of a school, not merely classroom observations.

Goodlad provokes a larger view of schools as cultures while contending with curriculum change and implementation. The research for this post draws from a number of articles and reviews and gives a sense of the enormous scope of his work. I added PDF’s of the articles as some were difficult to track down. I hope it incites future students to engage with John Goodlad.
Malcolm Gladwell
On the existing Malcolm Gladwell page, I added a section specifically about his theories. I added a discussion on the 10,000-hour rule which is based on a study by Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer (1993) that explored differences in the deliberate practice habits of violinists who were moving from novice proficiency to the professional or expert level. Gladwell (2008) uses Bill Gates and the Beatles to reexamine the notion that success requires raw intelligence or socio-economic status. I expanded on the Beatles example using the McCartney biography from Miles (1998) while also putting forward some ties to Expert Learning (Ertmer & Newby, 1996) (see Afterword for planned work). This is related to the notion of grit and Angela Duckworth's Ted Talk (Duckworth, 2013) which I use frequently in my practice when I teach success courses.

These contributions to the wiki drew from the Ericsson et al. study (1993) and opened the door for other students to make contributions; i.e., the page is an opportunity to tie Gladwell’s ideas to scholarly research or, to update the content to refute those ideas (Macnamara, Hambrick & Oswald, 2014). One of the reasons that Gladwell’s books are so accessible is that when presenting his ideas, he uses a narrative style and draws from popular or relatable examples. This is why I thoroughly listed the episodes of his recent Revisionist Podcast on his wiki page. Gladwell uses those examples to revisit and revise existing assumptions in the zeitgeist as a form of revisionist history.

Revisionist History and The Zinn Project
While researching The Zinn Project (2017) for another course in the program, I uncovered some problems with revisionist history. As a history major in my undergrad, my instructors definitely encouraged us to challenge “accepted narratives of past events in order to overcome subjectivity and to account for newly discovered, or long hidden, sources” (Kruian, 2011, p. 1477). Revisionist history is an important pedagogical tool to give voice to those who have been marginalized in the narrative, and build critical intellects to bring about social change (Kincheloe, 2005). I wanted to present critical pedagogical principles as the ideals we strive for and revisionist history as one of the tools to make those principles manifest in the classroom. I assumed that revisionist history had a school of thought, guiding principles, proven methodologies, or tradition. What I found was this: “Revisionism is one of the most elusive and chameleon-like concepts of the twentieth century” (Gkotzaridis, 2008, p. 725). And this: “Today it often seems we have more revisionisms than we have established doctrines to apply them to” (Wood, 2009, p. 407). To explore this, I conducted an interview with Medical Historian, Professor Kevin Siena from Trent University. He concurred with my findings and quandary. “It’s a wide term -- one that might be best written without the capital letters since I don't think there’s really an approach that holds it all together” (K. Siena, personal communication, October 28, 2016). I put this on the wiki because it raises important questions about a teacher’s pedagogical responsibilities when using revisionist history. I also added material and links to resources such as The Zinn Project (2017) and Zinn’s (1995) A People’s History of America.
The Zinn Project (2017) is a trove of content and lessons to bring revisionist history into the classroom. Zinn (1995) wrote A People's History of America to “awaken a greater consciousness of class conflict, racial injustice, sexual inequality, and national arrogance” (p. 619). The Zinn Project (2017) has materials that are sortable by theme, time period and reading level. If we seek pedagogical ideals to challenge accepted narratives and cultivate intellect (Kincheloe, 2005) then the Zinn Project (2017) is bringing us the how.

CONCLUSION
This paper explored and discussed contributions to the PoL Course wiki. The entries differed in the nature of their quality. Some were drawn to practical applications such as the using technology in the classroom. Others were adding depth to existing pages such as bringing forth examples of Gladwell’s (2008) theories and tying them to scholarly research. The larger entries about the work of Goodlad (2004), Gladwell (2008) and revisionist history were largely original pieces of research that came up during the semester. The sources for the work were all credible and often scholarly; the Goodlad wiki page was tied to several journal articles which I also posted for future students. The concerns I discovered with revisionist history also included a primary research interview with Professor Sienna. Finally, to strengthen the connections, pages have been linked to each other where appropriate and to existing pages and tables of content.

There are important learning outcomes I take from this experience. I need to plan incremental work more carefully. I must not underestimate how much time research, rumination, and writing requires. The more I work within a new medium, the faster I become. I am open to discovering flaws in theories. In fact, the flaws of revisionist history were a significant discovery this semester. In spite of my initial reluctance, wiki work is worth the effort. It is a forum for expanding ideas. It forces you to go back and re-read your research. It can be left unfinished and open for others to further. It forces you to connect to the work of others.

I am glad about the quality of the result, even though it began with a blank wiki page and a dilemma.

ACTION RESEARCH
Bill Hunter’s introduction to this collection frames the work as a whole in the context of action research. I feel obliged to address the ways my own contribution is a form of action research. Perhaps it is not, but it was rather reflective and, truthfully, my course submission was not intended to be action research. Bill talked about how the students’ contributions to this issue are part of his own analysis of work done in the course as a way to inform his own practice and to see the impact of the wiki work on students’ views of their own practices. Having made my own wiki journey the basis of a journal submission, I am now left pondering if a wiki is something I can construct for my students. My teaching practice is rooted in student success. Could a wiki provide a learning community where students share all their learning skills? Could it provide a forum for how to navigate the first semester of college? Could it become a repository of helpful templates, style guides, essay maps, research links, and resources? I have not yet begun to answer these questions
but framing them seems to be part of the processes of writing the original course assignment and turning that assignment into a journal submission. That is, the work and critical reflection on the work have had a trickle-down effect that seems to be impacting my teaching practice. I am a novice, but that sounds to me like an action research project.

**AFTERWORD: PLANNED CONTRIBUTIONS**

The best word to describe what happens when you wiki is sprawl. Connections beget connections. I kept seeing how “this could connect to that” and “oh, I should point to this.” There is a sprawling landscape of posts on the PoL wiki. Here are a few connections I wanted to improve and expand upon before the end of the fall 2016 semester. These additions came after I completed marking and final grades for my students.

- Added the 321 Literacy Portion to Help Wanted and explained why i.e., it is an opportunity to tie it to research on improving literacy.
- Added Ertmer & Newby (1996) and Expert Learning and make connections to/from Gladwell (2008) and others.
- Added more on the study of schools for Goodlad. Revisited Goodlad and *A Place Called School.*
- A general tidy up of some formatting and references –such as revisionist history.
- Added successful assignments to the examples page. I added author’s notes to those assignments in them to inform other students about the work and thought behind them.

**REFERENCES**


**Biographical note:**

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A Wikiography

Parsons