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Experimenting with English Collaborative Writing on Google Sites

Nicole Tavares, Chu, Samuel Kai Wah and Muriel Weng

Abstract:

A considerable amount of research has shown the advantages of integrating Web 2.0 technologies with language teaching to students. Specifically, this paper will shed light on the positive effects of Google Sites in teaching and learning English after the pilot scheme of online collaborative writing on Google Sites implemented by four local primary schools, revealed by the qualitative data such as samples of students' and teachers' revisions and comments, as well as the result of the focus group interviews. Both students' and teachers' revisions and comments reveal that most of the advantages of using Google Sites accord with those suggested by previous research studies. Some concerns will also be raised to offer insights into a serious attempt to integrate Web 2.0 and teaching language under the context of Hong Kong in the future.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, English writing, primary schools, Google Sites, Wikis, Hong Kong

1.Introduction

Writing in English has always been a challenge to many local students in primary schools. Acknowledging the fruitful results of using web-based collaborative tools in conducting projects across different subjects (Woo, Chu, Ho & Li, 2011), the study of Experimenting with English Collaborative Writing on Google Sites aims to examine the extent to which collaborative learning in a Web 2.0 environment can enhance students' writing performance. Web 2.0 technologies have been chosen to be the tools used in this study because they provide a free online collaborative platform for students to co-construct their group projects with the teacher's facilitation, enabling timely feedback, monitoring of their work and appropriate interventions.

2.Literature Review

New technologies have had a tremendous impact on the teaching and learning of English writing in the last few decades (Goldberg, Russell, & Cook, 2003). Many studies have started to appear on the application of Web 2.0 in education involving collaborative tools called wikis (Woo, Chu, Ho & Li, 2011, p. 43). Google Sites is a kind of wiki which is a "collaborative web space where anyone can add content and anyone can edit content that has already been published" (Richardson, 2006, p.8). Hossain & Aydin (2011) suggested that social networking applications such as blogs, forums, podcasts, and wikis are the successful implementations of the new generation Web 2.0 technologies (p. 116) which enable users to develop a collaborative virtual society to share information interactively and interoperably (p.118).

A considerably amount of studies in the past decade has pointed out the benefits of Google Sites and other similar wikis. First of all, it can promote social and achievement motivation. Alexander (2006) suggested that the interactive and read-write natures of Web 2.0 technologies could facilitate users' participation in and build many rich and user-centered virtual communities that could attract more people to participate and interact in

building many collaborative societies simultaneously. Also, providing a genuine audience enhances learner motivation, which helps L2 students become more engaged writers (Lo & Hyland, 2007). Likewise, as cited in Trentin (2009), wikis allow learners to be actively involved in their own knowledge construction (Boulos *et al.* 2006) and in the co-writing processes (Parker & Chao, 2007). Obviously, wikis are able to motivate every student to get involved in the writing process and contribute their best in knowledge construction due to social motivation.

Apart from igniting students' motivation to get involved in the writing process, Google Site is also convenient for students to contribute to the project. According to Woo, Chu, Ho & Li (2011), wikis allows students to work at their own pace. Hossain & Aydin (2011) also suggested that wikis allow users to have different levels of access to edit or delete content. Students can contribute according to their availability as well as their ability.

Moreover, Google Site is easy for students to use. Creating or editing a wiki requires only basic computing knowledge – no programming knowledge at all. So primary school students nowadays who are digital natives should find wikis like Google Sites not difficult to learn. According to Nicol, Littlejohn & Grierson (2005), the easy accessibility, simplicity and transparency of wiki pages helps learners to share information and resources among their team members and across groups. Wikis has proven to be manageable to the generation of digital natives.

The topics of the collaborative writing can be more personal, such as inviting students to write one of the aspects of their secondary school life (Sze 2010), or content-based like three instructional sciences themes: behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism (Zhu, Valcke & Schellens, 2009) so that all students regardless of ability can contribute to the project.

Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li (2009) did a similar study to explore the challenges and potential benefits that a wiki may bring to students and teachers in a Primary five English class. The result showed that the students held a positive attitude towards the process and the product of the collaborative writing. A more recent study by Woo, Chu, Ho, & Li (2011) has reconfirmed that students enjoyed using the wiki and the overall perception was that it helped foster teamwork and improve writing. Although a few studies have shed a positive light in the area of using technologies such as wikis to compose and revise text with primary school children, the number of articles which discussed specifically the effects of Google Sites or wikis in teaching English writing in primary school is still very limited. So far, no research has been found to involve several schools as a whole in the investigation under the Hong Kong context. Whether or not Google Sites are applicable to most of young learners at the primary school level in Hong Kong needs further investigation. This study aims to address these gaps, by describing the effect of using Google Sites for collaborative English writing online as well as the, with the example of four local primary schools in Hong Kong.

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants

Four local primary schools including FK, HS, SP and KS were invited to participate in this project so as to ensure a sufficient quantity of writings could be produced to examine the effect of online collaborative writing. Students were asked to do a collaborative writing on paper in the first term, then to do writing on wiki in the second term so as to refine their reading and writing skills. The four schools were different from each other in terms of the number of classes involved, the composition topic and the implementation plan.

FK involved two classes and the topic of writing is *Our Weekend Activities*. Only group entry with individual writing of all group members is required, for instance, in Appendix A, Gp03 refers to group 3's work. There are also two classes participating in online collaborative writing for HS, but the implementation plan is more complicated with *Cheung Chau Bun Festival* being the topic. Students from the ten groups need to do a group mind-mapping, presentations and peer evaluation before putting the group script-writing and PowerPoint slides on Google sites. An example can be found in Appendix B.

The topic of SP is *Lost* while the topic of KSW is *Good Person, Good Deeds*. But SP has a different approach of implementation which requires individual to write on paper and then post it on Google Sites for group and teacher feedback. All students are ensured to contribute to the Google Sites (see left roll of class number in Appendix C). Four classes are involved in KSW (see Appendix D) with eight to nine groups per class. There are less group members within the group, unlike the other three schools.

3.2 Intervention Program

There were pre- and while-intervention professional development workshops that the teachers learnt how to conduct process writing. Teachers would then intervene in students' writings in both pen-and-paper format and via Google Sites.

The role of teachers was compromised in the workshop to make sure every teacher understand their responsibilities and their role of a facilitator.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3a Focus Group Interviews with Teachers and Students

Focus group interviews were conducted so as to gather students' opinions towards the usage of Google sites to do their writings. In general, most of the teachers and students held a positive attitude towards Google Sites. Some qualitative data will be quoted in the part 4.

3.3b Documentary Analysis of the Students' progress

Google Site page history is able to reveal information on types of revisions that occurred, allowing a trace of how different peer feedbacks lead to actual revisions, resulting in better group writing as a result. This advantage is the crucial advantage for process writing as it can show the improvement of students during a period. As While & Ardnt (1991) suggested, process writing is "a complex, cognitive process that requires intellectual effort over a considerable period of time". Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and examined through multiple sources of evidence, including evaluation of students' group writing, students' comments posted on wiki platform and editing information recorded in the wiki's history page.

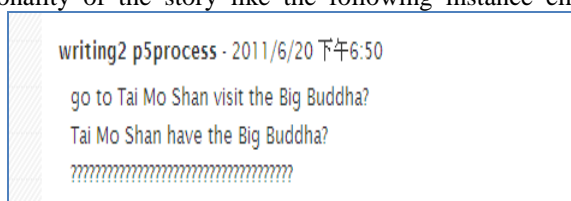
4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Peer Pressure to write

Shown by Appendix E, peers urge the writer to write something for them to read. "?????????", "Where is you writing?", "Were your writing eaten by yourself?" are some examples of their request to urge the writer write something. Peer monitoring is possible with Google Sites, which is more effective and able to share teachers' workload.

4.2 Peer Learning

Students are capable of leaving meaningful comments regarding spelling, grammar, organization and rationality. In many cases, the mistake that is easiest for all students to spot out is spelling mistake (Appendix F). Shown by Appendix G, stronger students can even list out a number of corrections at one time in a comment. Also, average students can comment on the rationality of the story like the following instance emphasizing the



impossibility of Big Buddha in Tai Mo Shan.

Most importantly, students offer help to each other when some of them have queries. An example is that a peer student said "Your writing is good but I do not the meaning of truthful", the writer then answers "truthful means honest".

The common platform enables mutual appreciation. As quoted by a student in the focus group interview, "If we use Google Sites as the collaborative platform, we read the writings from other classes and comment on our classmates' work in order to exchange views. If we write it on paper, we can just read a few pieces of writings."

4.3 Teachers' Support

Teachers were noticed to act as a facilitator throughout the project. Constructive comments like the following example were given by teachers to give guidance to students in how to write better.

Jacqueline Cheng - 2011/6/15 下午2:09

Good writing with great paragraphing! Your mum must be touching when she reads your writing. You can describe the appearance of mum, how hard-working she is, how good she is....

Also, encouragements were seen to be given by teachers to motivate students to strive for their best.

意見 (5)

Cherry KWOK - 2011/3/31 下午3:26
Good introduction (by Miss Kwok)

Miss Cheung - 2011/3/31 下午3:33
Good try ! Keep going !

Miss Cheung - 2011/3/31 下午3:40
I look forward to seeing your story soon. Keep going !

In this example, Miss Kwok and Miss Cheung praised the writer and encourage him to keep writing. All the participating teachers were noticed to be aware of their role as a facilitator and to try their best to drive the students to improve their writing.

4.5 Benefits of Google Site in itself

Students were asked about the advantages of Google Sites regarding how it had aided their group project. Out of many advantages, two of them stood out to be the most important in the eyes of students --- the accessibility and the convenience of editing and searching information.

4.5a Accessibility

S5A: "We can do our work both at home and at school."

S1A: "If we use Google Sites, all group members can do the group project at the same time, unlike Microsoft Word. It is simpler and easier to manage."

S5C: "If you save it, you can log in and access it on any computer. It is more convenient than using paper."

In the eyes of students, Google Sites can be accessed anytime anywhere, which is convenient for them to work as an individual or as a group.

4.5b Convenience of editing and searching information

S2D: "If we type something wrong, we can simply press the 'delete' button to amend the errors. If we write something wrong on paper, we have to waste correction pen."

S7: "we can check those words we do not know using the dictionary [on Google Sites], and can translate the Chinese words into English ... for those words we do not know."

S1A: "Working online is more convenient and we have the motivation to accomplish the task."

It is clear that students find it more convenient and easy to edit their work through clicking a few buttons. The additional function of Google Sites in translation also motivates students to accomplish the task.

5. Conclusion and Teaching Implication

The basic advantage of peer correction is that it will give students extensive practice in developing skills necessary for editing and revising their papers before they reach their final destination (Witbeck, 1976, p 322). In general, the students enjoyed using the wiki as it helped them to experience improvements in English writing and peer-to-peer interaction. It also facilitates them to work better as a team through the convenience of Google Sites. With the role of a peer reviewer, it is noticed that students do read and write more in English. By reading and leaving comments, peer learning and peer teaching is fostered among all students regardless of the extent, which shows that collaborative writing on Google Sites is not only beneficial to high achievers but all students. Moreover, students' comments can serve as an additional avenue for the teacher to diagnose students' understanding.

But several questions are left to be answered. Shown by Appendix (H), L1 was used by the students in online discussions to express some difficult concepts like indentation of paragraphs. Despite the benefits of

maximizing students' chances to use English as the medium of communication, it is commonly agreed that people express their ideas better in their mother-tongues. Whether L1 or L2 should be used in the interaction among students needs further research in the future.

To conclude, as Engstrom & Jewett (2005) suggested, the effectiveness of wiki application in learning and teaching depends on "careful planning and training of both students and instructors to familiarize them with the technology" (as cited in Woo et al, 2011). Obviously, a systematic approach with a comprehensive plan which familiarize students and teachers with the use of Google Sites is of utmost importance to the successful integration of web-based collaborative writing into the curriculum. The passion of both stakeholders can popularize the trend further more in the future.

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Appendix A

P5 English writing 03


final writing 01 Gp03

Paragraph 1
Paragraph 2
Paragraph 3
Paragraph 4
Paragraph 5
協作平台地圖

final writing 01 Gp03

We are Kary,Kenneth,Yuk and Sinon.We are from 5B.In this writing,we are going to talk about our weekend activities.

I am Kary.I am studying in CCC Kei Faat Primary School. I live in Kwun Tong.One day, my mum asked me what activities I have sone at weekend. I answered she,"I go camping with my teachers and classmates at Lei Yue Mun Park .I go there by school bus for 30 minutes.I usually go there.I like camping because it is exciting.I like going mountain biking,too.I go mountain biking with you in Shatin.I go there by bus about 1 hour.I sometimes go there.I like this activity because it is challenging."



My name is Kenneth.I am ten years old.I am studing in CCC Kei Faat Primary School.I play football with my friends in Lei Yue Mun.I go to there on foot about 5 minutes.I always play football because it is exciting.Sometimes,I go hiking in Pok Hong Campsite with my family.I go there by taxi about 30 minutes.I like hiking because it is interesting.

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Done

Internet 100%

Appendix B

5B

The teaching plan

協作平台地圖

編輯地圖

Group5

Buns Festival play

A=Alex B=Edward C=Cannon

ABC: Hello!

A: I am Alex.

B: I am Edward.

C: I am Cannon.

C: Today we are talking about the Buns Festival.

C: I have found some Buns Festival data.

B: Very good ! Cannon.

A: According to the customs, those who has got the buns can will get good luck and health.

C: The highest buns will get the most luck.

A: When does the Bun Scrambling Competition begin?

B: Bun Scrambling Competition time will be held on 10th May 12 noon to 18:00.

C: In the Buns Festival we must eat vegetables

ABC: Let's meet on that day. We can see more about the festival

ABC: Goodbye!

Translate

Done
Internet
100%

Appendix C

▼ PUPILS WRITING

NUMBER 1 Natasha Au

Mr Chan and Mrs Chan are tourists, they come from Taiwan.

Today is Sunday, Mr Chan and Mrs Chan went hiking in Sai Kung. They feel very happy and the view is very beautiful.

In the evening, they wanted to return to their hotel by bus. But they get lost. They saw some students in the road. Mr Chan ask them "Excuse me, how far is it from here to the nearest bus stop and how to get to there?" One of the students answer, "It's not far. It's one kilometre from here to the nearest bus stop."

They arrived at the bus stop, they saw the bus left. They wait for the next bus arrive, it takes half an hour. They thought Hong Kong people is helpful, they will visit Hong Kong again.

意見 (10)

writing1 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午9:30
Your ideas are very interesting!

writing1 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午9:38
Example of good word: nearest

writing2 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午9:44
Example of good word:tourists

writing6 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午11:35
your ideas are very interesting

writing4 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午11:41
Example of good word:tourists

writing6 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午11:49
your ideas are very interesting!(^,^)

writing3 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午11:50
your ideas are very easy to understand

writing6 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午11:57
your ideas are very interesting

writing4 p5process - 2011/6/20 上午11:58
is good

Done

Appendix D

Gmail Calendar Documents Photos Reader Web more -

hkucite.qefpb@gmail.com

Google sites group 1 Private to 程老師 + 114 more Updated Jun 26, 2011 3:47 PM

Create page Edit page More actions

WSK collabrative writing

首頁

▼ 5A a.m.

group 1

group 2

group 3

group 4

group 5

group 6

group 7

group 8

group 9

▼ 5B a.m.

group 1

group 2

group 3

group 4

group 5

group 6

group 7

group 8

group 9

▼ 5C a.m.

group 1

group 2

group 3

group 4

group 5

group 6

group 7

group 8

group 9

▼ 5D a.m.

group 1

group 2

5A a.m. >

group 1

Good Person , Good Deeds

In my family , I think the best person is my mum .

She has short hair , small eyes , a small mouth and a thin body . She is helpful , kind and friendly .

She always teaches me and my sister many things . She teaches us some homework that I don't know how to do. And she does housework every day . She is tired after finishing the housework , so I often help her to do housework .

Every day , my mum cooks three meals for us . It is healthy and delicious . We also love the food she cooks very much !

I think my mum is the best person in the world because she does good deeds for everyone .

Thank you , Mum !

By : Group 1

Circle Chan[4]

Winnie Leung[23]

Adrian Wong[36]

Bryan Wong [35]

Nicol Chan[3]

Done

Appendix E

Lost (CPS 5D)

搜尋這個協作平台

首頁

▼ LOST

Evaluation

MIND MAPPING

▼ PUPILS WRITING

NUMBER 1

NUMBER 10

NUMBER 11

NUMBER 12

NUMBER 13

NUMBER 14

NUMBER 15

NUMBER 16

NUMBER 17

NUMBER 18

NUMBER 19

NUMBER 2

NUMBER 20

NUMBER 21

NUMBER 22

NUMBER 23

NUMBER 24

NUMBER 25

NUMBER 26

NUMBER 27

NUMBER 28

NUMBER 29

NUMBER 3

NUMBER 30

PUPILS WRITING >

NUMBER 15

附件 (0)

意見 (7)

writing4 p5process - 2011/6/22 下午4:53

????????

writing4 p5process - 2011/6/22 下午6:15

Are this a picture

writing6 p5process - 2011/6/22 下午7:21

nothing

writing4 p5process - 2011/6/22 下午10:28

Where is your writing??

writing6 p5process - 2011/6/23 下午5:46

????????????

writing3 p5process - 2011/6/23 下午11:09

your writing??

writing5 p5process - 2011/6/26 下午8:43

was your writing eaten by youself???

Done

Internet

Translate

100%

Appendix F

Lost (CPS 5A)

搜尋這個協作平台

首頁

▼ LOST

Evaluation

MIND MAPPING

▼ PUPILS WRITING

NUMBER 1

NUMBER 10

NUMBER 11

NUMBER 12

NUMBER 13

NUMBER 14

NUMBER 15

NUMBER 16

NUMBER 17

NUMBER 18

PUPILS WRITING >

NUMBER 28

Tong Cheuk Hang

It was a summy day. Mr Chan and Mrs Chan decided to went hiking. At the morning, they went to the famous sport fo Lantau Island, Big Buddha but they got lost. They met a pedestrian and asked him/her. The pedestnam amswed. "How far is it from here to the bus station?" It's about 1 km for from here to the bus station.

Finally, they fonmed the bus stop. However, they cannot catch the bus, so they have to want for a long tinu tal to might.

意見 (1)

writing7 p5process - 2011/6/20 下午8:26

be careful the spelling like 「summer」, 「spot」 「pedestrian」

Appendix G

Lost (CPS 5A)

搜尋這個協作平台

首頁

[PUPILS WRITING](#) >

▼ LOST

Evaluation

NUMBER 19

MIND MAPPING

▼ PUPILS WRITING

NUMBER 1

NUMBER 10

NUMBER 11

NUMBER 12

NUMBER 13

NUMBER 14

NUMBER 15

NUMBER 16

NUMBER 17

NUMBER 18

NUMBER 19

NUMBER 2

NUMBER 20

NUMBER 21

NUMBER 22

[Law Tsz Kin \(19\)](#)

In the morning, Mr Chan and Mrs Chan went to Big Buddha on food, **start** from terry pier. In the afternoon They although losted the way to the Big Buddha but they met a pedestrian. Mrs Chan ask the pedestrian "How far is it from here to the bus station. The pedestrian said "It not far. It is one kilometer." Mrs Chan said "How long do we the from here to bus station." The pedestrian said It takes ten minutes.

In the evening they saw a bus stoped the bus station but they minuter because the bus station in 10 minutes so they would wait the neit bus alrus 30 minutes, they tired out and sit on the road.

意見 (1)

writing7 p5process - 2011/6/20 下午9:08

1.be careful the spelling:terry>ferry.

2.some verb in past tense should add [ed] [d] at the end,some verb shouldn't add at the end: losted>lost.

3.use the conjunction carefully

Appendix H

writing 03

Paragraph 5

I am Simon. I am studying in CCC Kei Faat Primary School. I live in Kwun To with my mum because she likes **doing** archery, too. Mum and I sometimes **doing** Yue Mun Park. I like do archery because it is exciting. Also, I like going mountain take a bus **to** go there **about** 1 hour. I usually go mountain biking with my family mountain **biking** because it is challenging.

意見 (5)

張希晴 - 2011/4/7 下午11:46

line 2 the word "Kwan" is wrong,you should write "Kwun".line 3 the word "from" is wrong you should say "in".
you should add the word to between "a bus" and "go".(line 5)
line 5 the word "a" is wrong,you should say "about or for".
you are missing the word "biking" between "mountain" and "because".

陳司聰 - 2011/4/13 下午12:32

thak you

Yuk Lam Chan - 2011/4/13 下午12:35

Your writting is very interesting!
Yuk Chan

hong tik ho - 2011/4/13 下午12:36

開頭要有空格

張希晴 - 2011/5/4 下午11:01

第三行 "I sometimes doing.....I like do" 應該係 "I sometimes do.....I like doing" 改野果陣要小心!!!

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