Re-visioning the Research Method's Final Project to Disseminate through Wikipedia

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When students use Wikipedia as a platform for disseminating research knowledge, they transform from student learners to critical practitioners consuming, applying, and disseminating research. This project was a teaching innovation developed using Wikipedia.com within a social justice oriented, practitioner-based final project for a master's level research method's course. It includes components of a traditional research methods course while emphasizing the critical consumer and dissemination component of the research process. In this way, research acts as both a mechanism for social change and innovation as well as a means of giving away research knowledge that has largely been kept for college students and faculty at university institutions.

Why Wikipedia? Students are often told not to rely on Wikipedia because of its open-source format. However, the general public regularly uses Wikipedia as a quick reference source on a daily basis. For those of us seeking to serve the most impoverished and oppressed students and communities, we know that access to information is one of the most important factors separating our communities. Therefore, cutting students off from a regularly used resource could be irresponsible. Instead, this teaching innovation teaches students how to be critical consumers of information on Wikipedia in much the same way that we traditionally teach this with empirical journal articles that are arguably elitist and predominantly catering to White scholars. Additionally, this activity provides students with an inherently external form of motivation. Instead of needing to merely please the professor to achieve an "A", students are also learning to see their work as contributing to their professional reputation, image, and voice.

The assignment is scaffolded across seven steps: (1) topic brainstorming through a free writing exercise, (2) evaluating the existing content on Wikipedia, (3) creating an annotated bibliography of published, peer-reviewed research, (4) drafting the entry, (5) Peer Reviews, (6) publishing the entry live to Wikipedia, and (7) an oral presentation. As you can see, the assignments are very similar to that of a traditional research literature review assignment. The most significant difference is the focus on dissemination in a public space. Wikipedia also provides additional support to instructors and students working on Wikipedia-based projects through http://Wikipediaedu.org.

Example Quotes through Semester of One Student

Wave 1 - *"I think that my community is highly exploited when it pertains to research, because for one, our community doesn't trust anyone easily, so in order to get this information (probably from a white researcher), it had to a community or people who was either paid or was super willing to participate. With that said, who is to say the information gathered was enough to represent a community and have those findings be "fact", to me that doesn't make any kind of sense. That is why for that matter I do NOT trust research, alongside majority of it is done by these white folks who just...well I don't even know their true intentions, but I don't think that is effective for research purposes."*

Wave 2 - *"I think an interesting thought that has come up is how curious about research I am now, and actually thinking about looking if there is research on my curious subjects in my head. Like I know there is no research on [personal identity groups] folks with albinism. Now I am more intentionally thinking about research and the function it serves. I am feeling very excited about doing my idea of research. I feel that I have come far from when I wrote about this prompt earlier, and this now makes me pissed the hell off and makes me want to actively do something about it!! The thought of reading hundreds of articles pains me, but I know I want to make research that hasn't been a priority to researchers and fields of study. Another big emotion I feel is anger. I am angry that I have been lead to believe that all research is good research and it has been done with the most ethical and competent way possible. I am angry that I never thought to question research. I think that speaks to my relationship with who is an expert in what and that power that I think they have over everyday folk"*

Wave 3 - *"This class has actually made me want to really fully tackle the world of research. I believe that having the perspective that we do research everyday of our life has made research feel less of a stranger and more so like a passionate dance, which is ironic because I have this same metaphor for anger. I think me and research want to find the flow and rhythm. One thing I realized and I reflected on was before CBB while I was still in undergrad I was doing so much research on the things that my soul felt deeply connected to at the time. Some of those things were conspiracies, ancient Egypt and Nonverbal behavior. I didn't think to make the correlation that it was something just as real as academic specific research. I will say that I don't believe to be anywhere near close to being in a place where I can just go casually looking for endless amounts of research, but I do know that I have more patience and a little more spark for it. As I came to a finish with my project I realized I spent hours researching and finding myself following these trails to other juicy information that wasn't necessarily for my project but it was related in other ways."*