Wikipedia articles as a genre for authentic learning-by-writing assignments

Eero Sormunen & Leeni Lehtiö
University of Tampere
Outline of the presentation

• Wikipedia as a framework for IL instruction
• A pilot study
  • Cases, data and methods
  • Main findings
  • Summary & discussion
• The main study
Background of research

• Independent information seeking common in schools
  • Typically writing research papers
  • Mimic good practices of scientists
• Wikipedia
  • Participatory encyclopedic
  • Seen as an unreliable source among schools
Wikipedia as a framework for IL instruction

- Common to students
  - Form of the articles
- Realism to the learning assignment
  - Real reason to writing
- Motivation
  - Responsibility to the readers
  - Aim high-quality article
Research questions

1. What kind of sources students use?
2. How do students process the information on sources?
3. What kind of learning experiences do students report?
4. How do students report the affections of publishing the article?
Pilot studies

- Upper secondary school/ City of Tampere

**Pilot 1: Geography (8 weeks)**
- 10 Students/ 4 groups
- Data collection
  - Pre-questionnaire
  - Pre-and post-interviews
  - Non-participatory observations
  - Wikipedia articles
  - Teacher’s written feedback
- Task: to write complete an article about erosion and water risks

**Pilot 2: Biology (8 weeks)**
- 16 students/ 7 groups
- Data collection
  - Observations replaced by context inquiry interviews
- Task: to write a major part on articles about health hazards of air pollutions
Information sources used * (n=70)

- Communal sites: 27%
- Governmental sites: 10%
- Reference sources: 7%
- Wikipedia: 9%
- Media: 4%
- Commercial sites: 4%
- Teaching material: 3%
- Student papers: 10%
- Dead link: 3%

* Cited (57) and not cited (13)
Source/article sentences (n=230*)

- Copy-pasted: 4%
- Mechanical change: 13%
- Rewritten: 6%
- Merging from a single source: 11%
- Merging from multiple sources: 30%
- Direct translation: 14%
- Edited translation: 21%

* 13 sentences not mapped to any source
Students’ learning experiences

• Wikipedia
  • Tool, writing, assessment of information

• Own topic
  • But not of the other’s

• Information and learning skills
  • Evaluation of sources, copyright, information seeking
Publishing pressure

- Carefulness
  - Use of information
    - Citations
    - Verify the facts
    - Avoid copy-paste
  - Writing style
    - To keep language fluent
    - ”Wikipedia- style”
Summary of findings

- Wikipedia learning task
  - Increased motivation and commitment
  - Students worked on sources
  - Relevant learning experiences

- Data collection needs some revision
  - More focused contextual inquiry interview questions
Main study

- Two cases on April-May 2011
  - Literature class; Wikipedia article
  - History class; article for the school’s wiki
- Data collection
  - Same as pilot, but also
    - Extended pre-questionnaire
    - Extended post-interviews and questionnaire
    - More focused contextual inquiry interviews
    - Wiki material, self-and teacher’s assessments
Contact info

• Know-Id project
  • https://www12.uta.fi/blogs/know-id/

• Eero Sormunen
  • Eero.sormunen@uta.fi

• UTA/School of Information sciences