

Collaborative Learning through Wikis

During my 10+ years of teaching, I have seen how excited students become after accomplishing learning goals with the help of their peers. If you aren't using collaborative online tools in your classroom, one way to get started is by using wikis, which are ad free for teachers if you sign up at Wikispaces for Educators or PBWorks for Educators.

Educational sites allow students to collaborate in real time with their peers via audio, chat, and video. Their creations—presentations, research reports, stories, websites, videos, and podcasts—can be posted online and become part of another person's learning process.

Put Wikis to Work

Many schools may have a free school website on their servers, but wikis allow for more collaboration and participation by both students and teachers. A wiki allows learners to add, edit, and revise information on the site. And by embedding free widgets and tools, educators can bring a social networking aspect to the curriculum. Think of a wiki as a virtual classroom where learning takes place seven days a week because students can contribute their ideas from anywhere with an internet connection. They can also consume the information they choose using the medium they prefer. In this way, a wiki also helps students personalize and take responsibility for their own learning.

Learn from Social Networks

Students already use social networking sites, such as Facebook, to share information and learn from each other. So

when creating your wiki, it is important to mimic the design and features available on popular social networking sites to enhance communication, sharing, and collaboration.

What motivates our students to participate habitually on these networks? Social networks allow students to contribute audio and video recordings, images, and other content that represent each student as an individual. Students choose how to contribute.

In the same way, teachers can let students decide how to demonstrate their learning of a topic. We can give guidelines but allow them to choose the medium, such as a podcast, video, or multimedia presentation. You can embed, upload, or store these projects on the wiki for other students and parents to access and comment on.

Give Students Choices

You can also allow your students to decide how they want to brainstorm with each other. Some will use chat, which you can accommodate by embedding a chat widget. Others may want to collaborate through a forum. Wikispaces templates already include a discussion forum page, and PBWorks will allow you to embed one. Students may want to collaborate on a Google Doc or through mind-mapping tools, which you can embed in a wiki using HTML code.

Embed Collaboration Tools

You can easily embed widgets in a wiki by clicking Edit and then choosing from a menu of tools. Or you can select the HTML and paste the embed code. Here are a few tools you can embed to make your wiki support collaborative and participatory learning:

Wallwisher. This is a wall where students add digital sticky notes of text, images, audio, video, or links. You can embed the entire wall in a wiki page so students can easily offer tips, opinions, video recordings, or ideas on any topic. For example, if students are researching a topic, they can report their findings on the Wallwisher.

Twtpoll. This poll allows students to survey each other on various topics. Twtpoll has a nice layout when embedded in your wiki and shows a pie chart of the answer after students vote.

Photopeach. This is a multimedia tool that looks like a slideshow. In addition to using it to create a presentation with music and images, students can create animated quizzes about specific topics or vocabulary.

Fotobabble. This is a great tool for sharing personal stories quickly and easily. Students narrate the images they upload. They can even create their stories using their iPhones if they've downloaded the free app. Students can narrate a specific point in history or introduce themselves to their peers. Add a comment widget so peers can leave feedback.

Google tools. When students collaborate using docs, spreadsheets, presentation slides, and forms, they can embed them on the wiki. These documents continue to stay open to editing. Using Google Forms, students can survey others' work, then view the results in various charts and graphs.

VoiceThread. This site allows students to upload videos or images collaboratively in a presentation format. Viewers can upload an avatar image

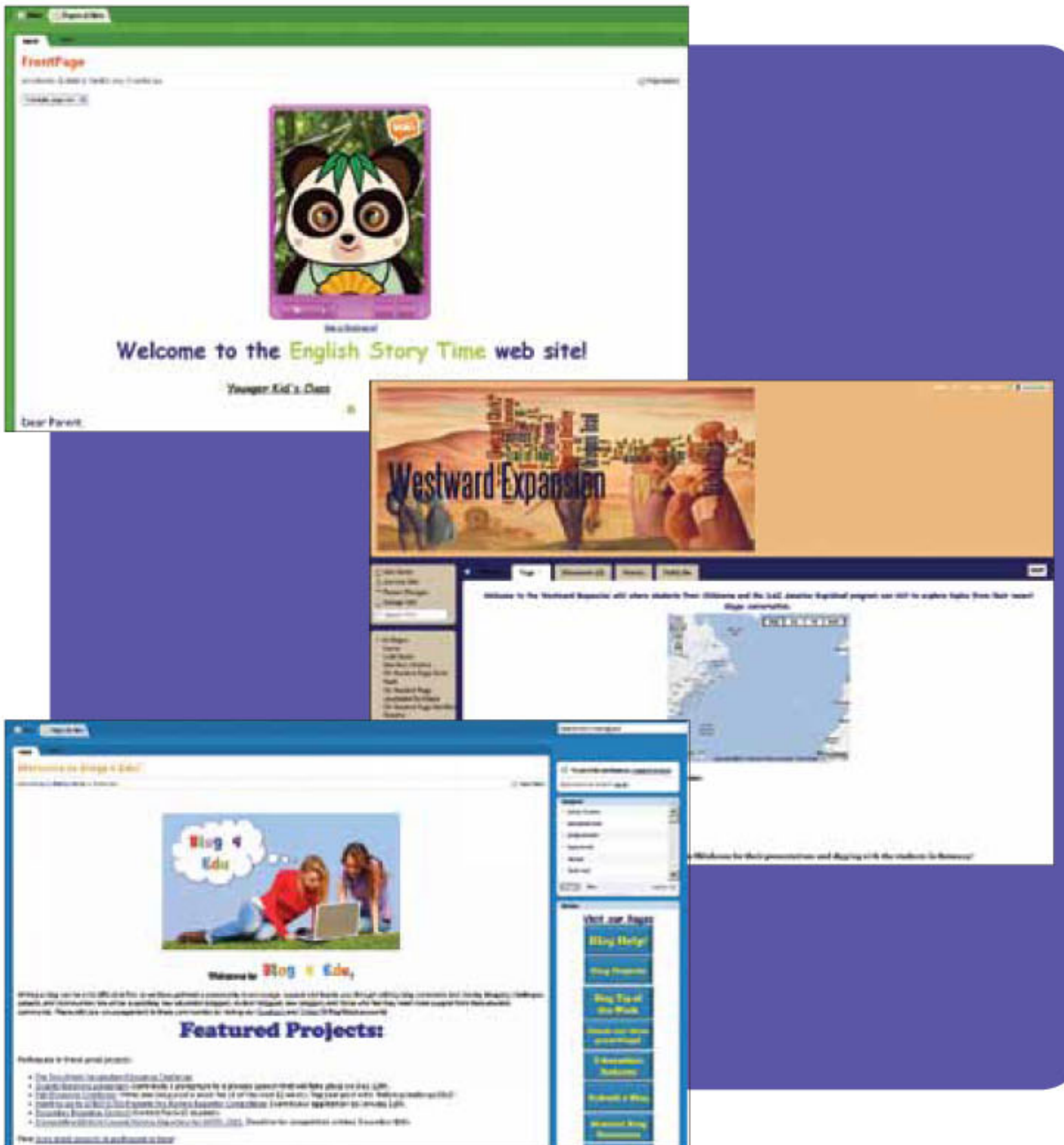
By Shelly Sanchez Terrell

Great Classroom Wikis

A wiki for young learners: **English Story Time** <http://englishstorytime.pbworks.com>

A student-created wiki for an international exchange: **Going Westward** <http://goingwest.wikispaces.com>

A collaborative wiki with profile pages: **Blog4Edu** <http://blog4edu.pbworks.com>



and then add an audio, text, or video comment about the presentation, which will appear in the border of the student's presentation. Viewers can also doodle on the presentation.

Let Students Play

Wikis allow your students to create their own pages. Let them play with the various widget options and design

their own learning spaces on the wiki. They can add speaking avatars with the Voki widget to provide a welcoming message. They can add slideshows, digital stories, visitor maps, and more. Keep these pages organized by adding links to the navigation bar. Make sure your students tag their pages for easy searching and navigating.

Collaborate!

A wiki should not be just another means to share class notes, instructions, and resources that the teacher has created. A wiki should show what the learning in your classroom looks like. Your students are an important part of the equation, so ensure they are part of the design and development of the wiki. Ideally, they should contribute a majority of the materials and resources. If you want students and parents to visit the class wiki and participate, they have to feel as if they are part of the website and its development.

Resources

Fotobabble: www.fotobabble.com

Google tools: www.google.com/intl/en/about/products

PBWorks for Educators: <https://plans.pbworks.com/signup/edubasic20>

Photopeach: www.photopeach.com

Presentation: Extending Learning Beyond the Classroom Walls Through Wikis: www.americantesol.com/tesolcafe/v/10071_tesol_lecture_-_wikis_for_the_classroom.html
 Teacher Reboot Camp blog, "Learning Beyond Walls—Games and Wikis!": <http://teacherrebootcamp.edublogs.org/2010/08/17/learning-beyond-walls-games-and-wikis>

Twtpoll: www.twtpoll.com

VoiceThread: www.voicethread.com

Wallwisher: www.wallwisher.com

Wikispaces for Educators: www.wikispaces.com/content/for/teachers

Wiki Tutorials and Resources on my presentation wiki: <http://technology4kids.pbworks.com/wikis>

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