

Wikipedia – for teaching and learning

Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. That's our commitment.

That is the vision statement of the world's largest open educational resource Wikipedia. Just in case there is anyone out there who hasn't heard of Wikipedia, it's a massive free online encyclopedia which is written and edited by internet users. It has long had a reputation of not being reliable, of being a repository of information that is neither credible nor peer-reviewed simple because it is written and edited by internet users, but is this still the case? Should we continue to discourage students from using Wikipedia to access information?

I have to hold my hand up and admit that I have long discouraged the use of Wikipedia, citing it as unreliable but I will now admit my mistake and retract that statement. I've learned just how much work and collaboration and peer review goes into every article on Wikipedia. How an article will not be accepted if it does not have academically acceptable sources to support its information and I've learned all this because this past year has seen me in a fantastic journey of discovery.

The University has taken on a Wikipedian in Residence, meaning we now have an expert in using Wikipedia for teaching available to all of us who'd like to learn more or start using this fantastic OER. He has helped to run some outstanding

events around the use of Wikipedia and more importantly about making sure the information on Wikipedia is top-notch and he's also pushing to correct the gender balance which exists amongst both editors. Only 15% of people who edit Wiki articles are female meaning there is a slant towards biographies and articles about men and those about women are woefully under represented.

So far this year there have been loads of events or editathons where students and staff have come together to update or create new articles, just a few to mention are;

- The Edinburgh 7
- Women in espionage
- Art and Feminism

and there are still a lot more to come.

But the purpose of these has not just been about updating the Open Educational Resource of Wikipedia, it's been about teaching the people involved digital skills, research skills, how to use citations and collaboration skills.

The process engages students, and in some cases engages with students who had perhaps been less confident when working on traditional assignments, in researching the topic and applying the digital literacy skills required to achieve the creation of an article. The end result is not an essay that could potentially be filed away and forgotten but instead something that adds to "the sum of human knowledge" and is discoverable by other readers and editors all over the world so that they, in turn, can add more to it.

This is a massive topic and I'm conscious of not producing a huge and unwieldy blog post so if you are interested in learning more about the use of Wikipedia in teaching, here are some starter for ten links to get your research groove on.

- Teaching with Wikipedia
- Some homegrown examples
- Teaching with Wikipedia, a University of Edinburgh case study (video)
- Teaching with Wikipedia, how to get started
- Women in red project: balancing the gender gap on Wikipedia

And watch out for an update when New College hosts its very own editathon in November where I'll be joining in and putting my newly learned wikipedian skills to the test.