This article explores the theme of Other(wise) as it relates to Web 2.0 and newer forms of creating knowledge. Through a discussion of Web 2.0, wikis, and Wikipedia, I explore newer ways of thinking about a text. Wikis represent modern texts and require different approaches than traditional texts. As a field, we need to become active on Wikipedia to develop our presence in ways that represent the complexities of our field.

I was so confused. Who was this person and why was he emailing me about what my class did on Wikipedia the previous night? As I read more emails, it became clear that something had happened between 8pm the night before when my class ended, and 9am the next morning, when I was back in my office logging on to my computer. I tried going back to the Wikipedia page that my students worked on the night before, but it was gone. After a bit more digging, I found that the entire Wikipedia page for my university had been shut down for a month because of what my students and I did. The Wikipedia moderator who shut it down stated that, “... the violations that I saw were quite serious and I'm very concerned that a professor appears to have made a class assignment out of violating Wikipedia policies.”

I sat in my chair stunned for a few minutes. As a non-tenured professor in my first year at my university, I was a bit terrified and wondered if anyone else at the university was aware of what we did and that the university’s entire Wikipedia page was shut down. And,
what was it that my students and I did that was so wrong? Wikipedia is all user-generated content, and we were a group of users who generated content. Because our previous attempt with a wiki (not Wikipedia) was not particularly successful, I brainstormed with another professor and we came up with the idea of having students make a Wikipedia page together about something they knew about—our department. It seemed to go well in class with students adding pertinent information, altering others’ posts, changing, rethinking, and editing all at once. If we violated Wikipedia policies, why was it necessary to shut down the entire university’s page?

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to argue for the importance of Web 2.0 in Art Education. At the same time, I offer a cautionary tale about how the democratic ideas of Web 2.0 may not always be manifested in the actual instances of its use. In this article, I interpret the journal theme “Other(wise)” as meaning other ways of being wise or alternative approaches to generating knowledge. The technologies of Web 2.0 represent a dramatic change in who creates content for the Web, how the content is created, whose ideas are represented, and who controls these ideas once they are released on the Web. Thus, the technologies of Web 2.0 bring other ways of being wise to everyone who has Web access. Tim Berners-Lee, who developed the first Mosaic Web browser in 1993, indicated his hope was to make the Web a place of collaboration where people could come together to read, write, and discuss (Carvin, 2005). Though this did not happen with the earliest iterations of the Web, it is now a reality with the development of Web 2.0.

After describing Web 2.0, wikis, and Wikipedia, I argue for the importance of these technologies to the field of Art Education.

1 Web 2.0 is also called the “Read/Write Web” or the “open source Web” (Maloney, 2007). For the purpose of this article, I use the term Web 2.0 exclusively.
Following this, I explore some of the complexities associated with Wikipedia and the ability of users to create content. Throughout this article, I offer relevant bits of my experience with Wikipedia and conclude with a call for art educators to begin creating knowledge about our field on Wikipedia.

As we become more technologically savvy as a culture, it is important that education reflects larger societal trends. The students of today are what Prensky (2001) termed "digital natives." He explains how their first instinct is to go to the Web for information and many of them may not recall life without the Web. Expanding this metaphor, he refers to those of us who are older as "digital immigrants." For us, using the Web will always be akin to speaking a second language and we will retain our accents, whereas our students are native speakers of this language. The "digital natives" may use the Web for many aspects of their lives, but "digital immigrants" tend to use it for specific finite purposes. Increasingly, our students are "digital natives" and their ideas about knowledge, research, and learning are shaped by the roles that these technologies play in their lives. Prensky (2001) stated that, "... the single biggest problem facing education today is that our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language" (p. 2). One part of this new language is Web 2.0.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is the general name given to a group of newer technologies that are usually freely available through the Web to anyone with Internet access (O’Reilley, 2005). The term, "Web 2.0," is generally believed to have originated from the O’Reilley publishing group. Web 2.0 is different from the rest of the Web because the uses of these technologies are not pre-determined by the creators of the software. The concept of Web 2.0 is somewhat nebulous; thus,
rather than attempt to create a definition, I will describe some of the aspects that it allows. Through Web 2.0, users are trusted to generate content, users are invited to play with the technologies, technologies are continually in a beta state with frequent updates, users are invited to remix both the content and the software, and user experimentation and hacking are encouraged.

Through Web 2.0, the Web changes from a static place, where users go to read content, to a dynamic platform that promotes a rich user experience on which users create content, generate new ideas, hack other users’ ideas and programs, rate content, etc. The concept of Web 2.0 uses the idea of the collective intelligence of its users rather than only relying on the intelligence of software developers (O’Reilly, 2005). Though there are many different technologies that are part of Web 2.0, specific names include wikis (Wikipedia), blogs (Blogger, Word Press, Type Pad), mind mapping (freemind), podcasts, social networking sites (Ning, LinkedIn, MySpace, Facebook, Friendster), RSS feeds, and many others. Until these tools were widely available, posting information on the Web required specific knowledge and technical expertise. Now, users create personal Web pages through Facebook in 10-15 minutes. Additionally, MySpace, YouTube, Blogger, Flickr, and other sites not only allow users to create content, but to post it also for free on the company’s server. The free availability of server space removes yet another barrier between potential contributors of knowledge and their ability to communicate it to a wider audience.

Thus, the emergence of Web 2.0 allows a larger number of people to have access to create and disseminate content on the Web, represents a significant change from the earlier model of publishing information on the Web, and moves us closer to Tim Berners-Lee’s vision of users being able to collaborate through the Web.

Previously, the way that content was created for the Web closely mirrored the publishing industry’s paradigm (Liu, 2006).
Usually, an author wrote the content, an editor altered it, and it was then posted on a static Web site. The fact that there are now many more authors and editors constitutes a dramatic shift in terms of the content that is available on the Web. Additionally, though the authors and editors may be working together, they may not know each other and may hold divergent views. Increasingly, advocates of Web 2.0 make suggestions for how these technologies can and should be used within education (Achterman, 2006; Alexander, 2006; Freedman, 2006; Hastings, 2007; Huffman, 2006; Maloney, 2007; Richardson, 2006; Warlick, 2006). Allowing students to use these tools to create and disseminate knowledge may represent an important direction for education, and art education in particular.

Because of its emphasis on creating content, Web 2.0 is particularly well suited for the field of art education. Though we often discuss creating in terms of traditional art objects, it may be useful for our field to extend the concept of “creation” to include what students may make or do through a blog, wiki, or podcast. Through these tools students may be able to keep a portfolio, reflect upon their artmaking, learn about the artistic process, and work in time-based media. Even though the tools of Web 2.0 offer the promise of user-generated content, a democratization of the Web, and unparalleled access to knowledge, it is important to examine these claims critically.

**Wikis**

As part of the Web 2.0 movement, wikis certainly present a dramatic paradigm shift in terms of how knowledge is created and disseminated. Developed in 1995 by Ward Cunningham, wiki is the name of a technology that runs many Web sites, including Wikipedia. The name “wiki” comes from the Hawaiian word for “quick,” and Cunningham explains it as an “alliterative substitute for quick,” thereby naming these pages quick web (Cunningham,
Wiki pages are Web pages that can be edited by anyone who chooses to visit the site, or if the site is password protected, anyone who has access. The concept of a wiki is fundamentally different from traditional Web sites in which someone creates the content and it is posted for others to view. Though they may email suggestions or comments to the web master, visitors to the site may not actually contribute content or change existing content. With a wiki, one person, or a group of people, create the content and all the visitors to the site are not just consumers of the content, they can also create content, edit the existing content, or delete content. This alteration of content happens in real time and, content may change quickly. Wikipedia is the best-known example of a wiki, and it strives to be a freely available, neutral online encyclopedia. Founded in 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, Wikipedia now contains more than 2.8 million articles in 200 languages and averaged about 65 million hits per month during the early part of 2009 (Wikipedia, 2009).

**Wikipedia**

The astronomical growth of Wikipedia shows that users embrace the technology of a wiki and utilize it frequently. On Wikipedia, knowledge is created collaboratively by users around the world and this empowers more people as potentially being able to tell their stories, contribute their knowledge, and shape the world of media in which we live. Users may register, if they choose, with Wikipedia. However, they may still participate even if they do not register. Users can edit content on existing pages, add new pages, and add links between and among pages. Wikipedia embodies much of what Barthes (1977) described in *The Death of the Author*. Because

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2 The person primarily responsible for Wikipedia is somewhat in dispute. Jimmy Wales claims to be; but, there is other evidence that Larry Sanger also played an instrumental role. Hansen (2005) points out that Wales edited his own biography on Wikipedia 18 times and changed references to Sanger’s contributions.
Wikipedia is both anonymous and collaborative, there is no author and no attributions are made on the main pages, though it is possible to view the history of a page and see the author's username, if s/he is a registered user. As such, Wikipedia is a modern text, as Barthes explained and readers are not able to intuit the meaning of the text from the identity of the author or from the context. Because there are multiple scriptors, the meaning comes to reside within the reader. However, this raises other issues. Since the information on Wikipedia may change, it is inherently different from traditional printed writing. Like a traditional text, readers of Wikipedia pages may move back and forth between pages and from the footnotes to the text. Unlike a traditional text, new ideas may appear and other ideas may disappear as the reader engages with the text. Thus, it is not a fixed text and this may also be a feature of a modern text. This is further complicated by Wikipedia's claim to be a neutral source of knowledge. Wikipedia is certainly different from past texts not only because of its ever-changing nature, but also because attributions of the authorship are not apparent, and the newest versions are immediately available worldwide. These distinguishing characteristics are not inherently positive or negative, they simply represent differences between the text of Wikipedia and past texts.

On the main page of Wikipedia, users are encouraged by the following, “Don't be afraid to edit — anyone can edit almost any page, and we encourage you to be bold! Find something that can be improved, whether content, grammar or formatting, and make it better.” (Wikipedia, 2007b). This type of language sets up Wikipedia as a welcoming place that wants users to be a part of the community. After registering as a user, I found the following on my user page,” Be bold in editing pages and don't let others scare you off!” (///en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User_talk:). This gave me the idea that Wikipedia welcomed my thoughts and knowledge.

Yet, after my students and I collaborated and wrote about the
Art Education Department, our motives were called into question. As I read the numerous emails and comments on my Wikipedia talk page that informed me of the Wikipedia policies, that my students and I violated, I was stunned. Among these policies is the Conflict of Interest policy. According to Wikipedia, “A Wikipedia conflict of interest (COI) is an incompatibility between the purpose of Wikipedia to produce a neutral, verifiable encyclopedia, and the purposes of an individual editor” (Wikipedia, 2007a). In my mind, this sets up a dichotomy between an editor who is neutral and an editor with a purpose. Additionally, the statement is based on the premise that knowledge is and can be neutral and raises issues about an individual and about groups. Because Wikipedia claims to be a neutral source of information, the concept of a conflict of interest becomes even more important. Though the page explains that merely having knowledge of a subject is not inherently a conflict of interest, there are surely some gray areas.

Why were our Wikipedia posts about our Department deemed to be conflicts of interest? We wrote verifiable information about the Department. We included information about the faculty, described initiatives in the Department, articulated ongoing research, and described student life. Since we are part of a nationally ranked School of the Arts (that did not have its own Wikipedia page), don't we have a place on Wikipedia?

As a contributor to Wikipedia, what I find dangerous are the twin myths of neutrality and democracy that Wikipedia promotes. Though the premise of Wikipedia promotes other ways of being wise and constructing knowledge, its function as a wiki inherently raises issues. In 2006, Wikipedia banned the IP addresses from computers on Capitol Hill (Seabrook & Chadwick, 2006) because staffers were posting too much laudatory information about the politicians for whom they worked. More recently, Virgil Griffith, a graduate student, wrote a program entitled Wikipedia Scanner that
tracks the IP address of the computers that individuals use to make entries on Wikipedia. Through this tracking system, he discovered many instances of previously unknown conflicts of interest including someone from Dow Chemical Company deleting information about the company's involvement in environmental disasters, someone from Wal-Mart positively enhancing information about employee pay, and an employee of Diebold, manufacturer of voting machines, eliminating information about concerns over the reliability of the machines (NPR, 2007). These recent issues, and the widely publicized case of erroneous and libelous information posted on John Siegenthaler's Wikipedia page that alluded to an implication in the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, raise significant issues about how we teach our students to use Wikipedia (Siegenthaler, 2005).

One comment from a Wikipedia moderator encouraged my students and I not to write about the department of Art Education, but to write about content in the field. This prompted me to continue my search on Wikipedia, and I quickly located the pages for “Art Education,” “Visual Culture,” and “Qualitative Research.” On each of these pages, there is information that is outdated, reflects the biases of the writers, and is not necessarily in the mainstream of art education. For instance on the “Art Education” page, there is no mention of visual culture (other than a link to the visual culture page that I created). The “History of Art Education” section, that focuses on the United States, does not include any information about the beginnings of our field through the Massachusetts Drawing Act. Major movements in our field including common school art, Jane Addams and Hull House, the Owatonna radio project, progressive education, and many others are absent. References to important art educators including Manuel Barkan, Dorothy Dunn, and Eugene Grisby are also absent. There are also no references to current issues including comprehensive art education, the inclusion of technology
in art education, multicultural art education, choice-based art education, service-learning, and critical thinking. Until recently, there was a section on the Art Education Wikipedia page that featured a list of 50 "... famous world contributors to art education academic theory" (Wikipedia, 2009). This list contained only five women and did not reflect a contemporary and comprehensive view of our field. During one of my 2009 NAEA presentations, I showed this page and commented about it. Within 24 hours, the list was removed.³

The idea that writing about my Department constituted a Conflict of Interest, but writing about topics in the field did not constitute a conflict raised numerous issues for me. The pages of the journal of Art Education contain arguments, letters to the editor, and counterarguments about many topics, notably visual culture. All of these articles and letters promote particular viewpoints. Surely, the contributors to Wikipedia, also, have viewpoints that their entries and edits reflect. It is this illusion of neutrality that Wikipedia promotes that I think is dangerous. Instead of trying to claim that knowledge can be neutral, or forbidding our students from using Wikipedia, we need to find another way to deal with these issues. As Wikipedia presents a new type of text, we need to learn new ways of understanding it. Certainly, as an encyclopedia, it is not fundamentally different from other encyclopedias and is not meant to be a scholarly source. However, when our students, "digital natives," conduct research, their instinct is to turn to the Internet, and they find Wikipedia sites. Instead of simply banning these tools, I believe that we need to investigate ways to embrace tools of Web 2.0, use them in meaningful ways, and educate ourselves and our students about various ways to contribute to and use them. Though I certainly understand educators' concerns about embracing Wikipedia, using it may provide opportunity to teach students (and

³ However, it can still be viewed on the Wikipedia history page for Art Education http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Art_education&diff=prev&oldid=284466441
ourselves) critical thinking skills that we can use to evaluate different types of texts. Thus, we need to learn how to evaluate Web 2.0 texts, how to understand the perspective of the person writing the article (or the people writing the Wikipedia entry), and how to consider conflicting ideas.

Conclusions

Often, when I conduct a Google search, a Wikipedia hit is the first one on the list. Because of this, it is extremely important that we, as a field, pay attention to how we are represented (or not represented) on Wikipedia. I am far from the first to notice that the content on Wikipedia, that is labeled neutral, actually contains the perspectives of the authors. However, with Wikipedia, unlike past media, we as a field can begin to shape the information that is contained on this information source. As of late May 2009, when I Google the term “visual culture,” the Wikipedia page is the first hit. The only information on this page, about art education, relates to a graduate program that offers a degree in art education and visual culture. Thus, I close with a call to my colleagues in public schools, universities, museums, and arts organizations to become active on Wikipedia, to edit the pages on art, art education, visual culture, service-learning, social justice, interdisciplinary curriculum, museum education, Web 2.0, etc. There are many ways that art educators could involve their students in creating knowledge on Wikipedia. For an assignment in a history of art education class, students could write about different movements in the history of art education, post them on Wikipedia, and then edit (on Wikipedia) the sections that their classmates created. Additionally, the depth and breadth of the contributions of women and people of color to the field of art education are largely absent from the Art Education Wikipedia page, in its current state. This may be something that the various caucuses within NAEA could address to ensure that the wide range
of ideas about art education and the important contributions of a variety of art educators are represented in this public place. There are many topics within our field that do not have Wikipedia entries, yet. For instance, at this time (May 2009), there are no Wikipedia pages on arts-based research or multicultural art education. In addition, there is little to no art education information on the pages of these related topics: service-learning, critical thinking, interdisciplinary curriculum. As these pages stand now, they are woefully inadequate and do not represent the liveliness, tensions, possibilities, complexities, and other ways of being wise in our field. It's up to us to create who we are and want to be via the tools of Web 2.0, and Wikipedia may be one place where we can experiment with creating a modern text.
References


