PBwiki: WEB 2.0 TOOL for COLLABORATION

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We, as language teachers, often assign our students some tasks or activities requiring them to work with a partner or in groups, and naturally, most of the time they complain about not having the opportunity to come together since they live far away from each other or cannot find a place to work together. Unfortunately, I have now the same problem in the course I am teaching this semester and most of the students do not want to deal with activities requiring them to work in pairs or groups. I did not want to tell my students that "this is the way it should be" and I provided a solution to them. The solution was to use the PBWIKI webpage for collaboration if they have difficulty in getting together and providing feedback to each other and not to my surprise, it has been welcomed by many students and they have been very happy to benefit from such a tool.

In this "A word from a techie" article, using non-technical language and being simple as much as possible, basic information will be provided as to setting up a PBwiki page, editing and changing the content, as well as adding Google gadgets. However, before I go into details, I think it will be useful to go over the term "wiki" in general.

Wikis

The term wiki, as it is often used, is "a collaborative web space, consisting of a number of pages that can be edited by any user" (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007, p. 86). The name itself is based on the Hawaiian term, "wiki wiki", which means "quick" or "super-fast" and it, no doubt, deserves to be called as is. The best-known wiki is undoubtedly Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), which is an online encyclopedia that can be edited by anyone.

The following are some of the main characteristics of a wiki page:

- ➢ Easy-setup (almost no technical knowledge, just a little practice - try the features and see).
- ➢ Dynamic (visitors and/or anyone authorized can change/add/delete content- more than just one author)
- ➢ Like an online word processing (without knowing any HTML or formatting codes - functions are similar to those of word processing software)
- ➢ Non-linear structure (pages that can be linked back or forward)
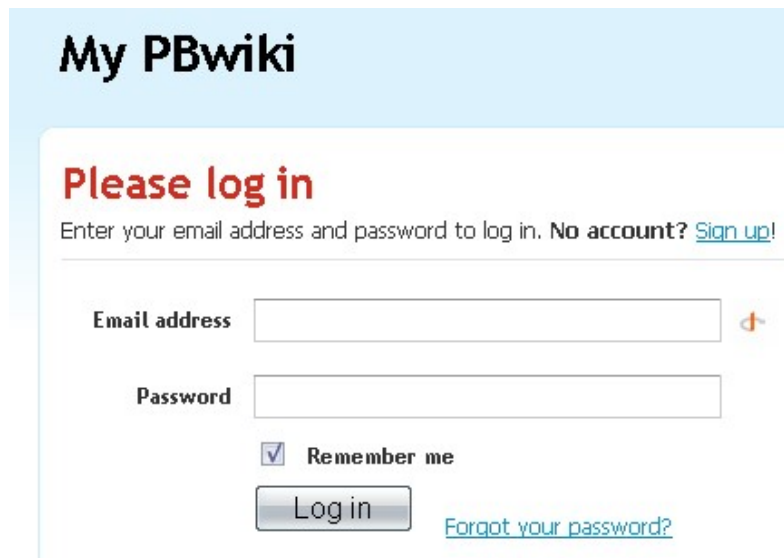- ➢ Easy tracking (changes/deletions done by any author)
- ➢ Adding media (pictures, videos etc.)

While going over these features, one can easily notice that wikis have a lot to offer regarding language teaching and especially the writing skill. It is worth noting that wikis are quite better than blogs, which are static web pages and allow only one author to add/change/delete content.

PBwiki

PBwiki (http://www.pbwiki.com) provides especially educators with the easiest way to collaborate with their colleagues or students through the internet. With the help of Pbwiki, unlimited pages and unlimited revisions including Google gadgets, YouTube videos, slideshows, and files (10 MB is free) can be easily published. Setting up a wiki is "as easy as a peanut butter sandwich", which can be prepared in minutes". All required is just a computer with a browser, connection to the Internet and an enthusiastic educator/learner with fresh ideas. PBwiki is currently working on their new version with better features (PBwiki 2.0).

How to set up a wiki page on PBWIKI

Once the browser pointed to the PBWIKI (http://www.pbwiki.com), the following screen (Figure 1) will appear, prompting to give e-mail address and the password. Since this is the first time that the page has been visited, the "Sign up" link will be clicked on to create an account.

Figure 1

The next step will be filling in the required information for the account (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Once the required fields have been filled in, the e-mail address and password provided will be used to log to the site (Figure 3).

Figure 3

The next screen will be "my PBwiki" including home, profile and e-mail. Information (such as name, location etc.) be changed in the profile section and also the e-mail address in the Email section (Figure-4).

Figure 4

On this screen also is there the link "create a new wiki". Through this link, the wiki will be created (Figure 5).

Figure 5

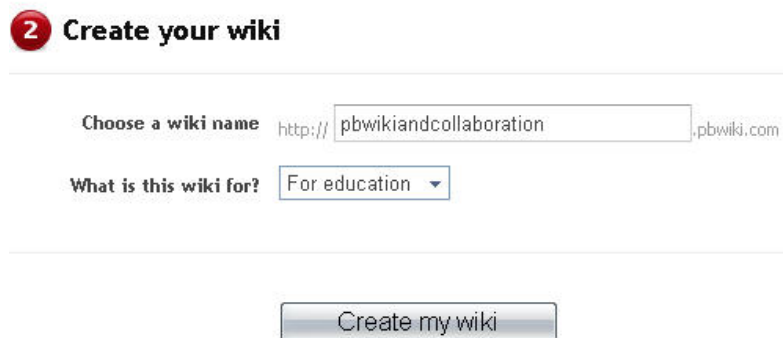With the link "Create a new wiki" being clicked on, a new page will appear, asking for the wiki name and its purpose. After the name is chosen (if already used, try a new one), the link "create my wiki" will be clicked on (Figure -6).

Figure 6

A new page will appear, saying that a new wiki is ready. Here, some settings are provided. The first is related to whether the wiki newly created is private or public. If it is intended to be open to anyone (anyone can read the wiki), select the option "yes, make my wiki public", if not, leave it as is (in this way, only people who have the wiki invite key can read and change the wiki). The second is related to the invite key. It is simply a password which allows the people (who have the key) to have write access on the wiki (Figure 7).

Figure 7

After the terms of service have been agreed to and the link "next: choose wiki features" has been clicked on, a new screen will appear, providing the features. Here, if the free version ia used, the link "no thanks, just take me to my wiki" will be clicked on (Figure-8).

Figure 8

The newly created wiki will appear, having the title of the name provided (Figure 9). The next steps, the most important ones, will be editing, changing and adding pages.
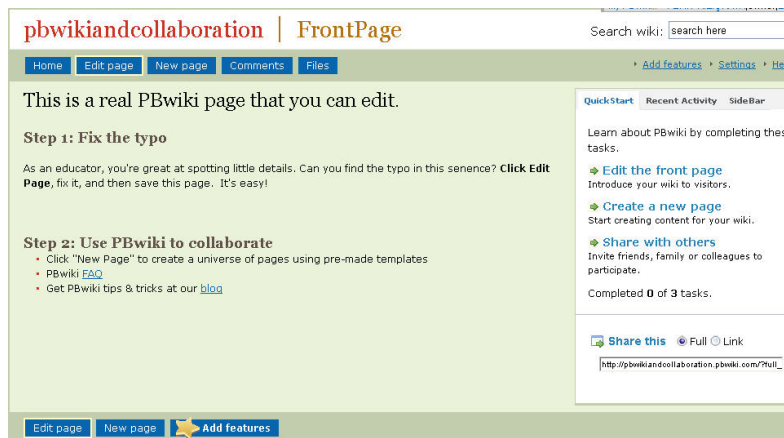
Figure 9

Editing Pages

On the front page, some menu items provided (only to the one who is the owner of the wiki and those who have the write access): home, edit page, new page, comments and files, respectively (Figure 10).
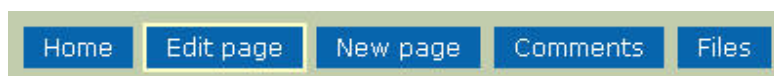

Figure 10

In order to edit the front page, the item "Edit page" is to be clicked on and the following screen (with the word-processing like options and structure) appears (Figure 11). Here, any text can be entered, formatted, made bold/italic without dealing with html codes. Once formatting and adding text is finished, all one needs to do is click on the button "Save" which is towards the end of the page. The same steps will be followed for any new page: and .

This is a real PBwiki page that you can edit.

Step 1: Fix the typo

As an educator, you're great at spotting little details. Can you find the typo in this senence? **Click Edit Page**, fix it, and then save this page. It's easy!

Step 2: Use PBwiki to collaborate
- Click "New Page" to create a universe of pages using pre-made templates
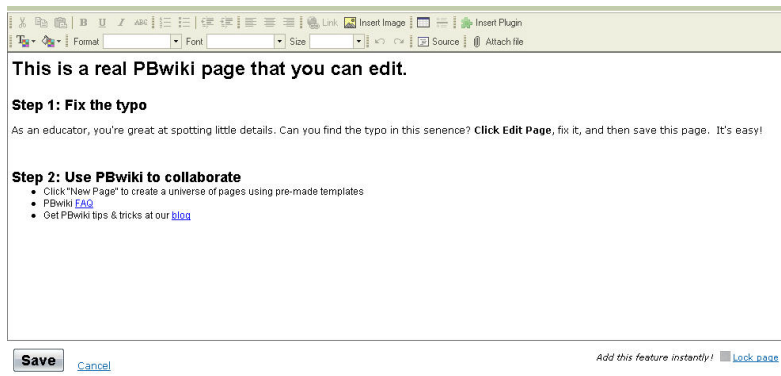- PBwiki FAQ
- Get PBwiki tips & tricks at our blog

Figure 11

Adding new pages

Adding new pages can be done in two ways. The first one is to click on the "New page" item in the menu above the front page. A pop-up window will appear, asking for the name of the page and the template if it will be used (Figure 12). Once the required information is entered and/or chosen and the link "create new page" is clicked on, the new page will come up, ready to be edited. Using the editor, new content can be inserted to the newly created page.

Home Files

Name your new page:

Would you like to apply a template?

● No template

Pbwikiandcollaboration templates:

Did you know? Any page on this wiki tagged with 'template' will appear here.

PBwiki templates:

○ Classroom

○ Course syllabus

○ Group project

Create new page

Figure 12

The second way to create a new page is to use the "link" button while the page is in "edit" mode. The 🔗 Link button is chosen from the editor, which makes the pop-up window appear as in Figure 13. By selecting the "Wiki Page" from the "Link Type" and choosing the "new page" from the "link to wiki page", typing the page name and the link text (the underlined text which will point to the new page), a new page will be created and be ready to edit.
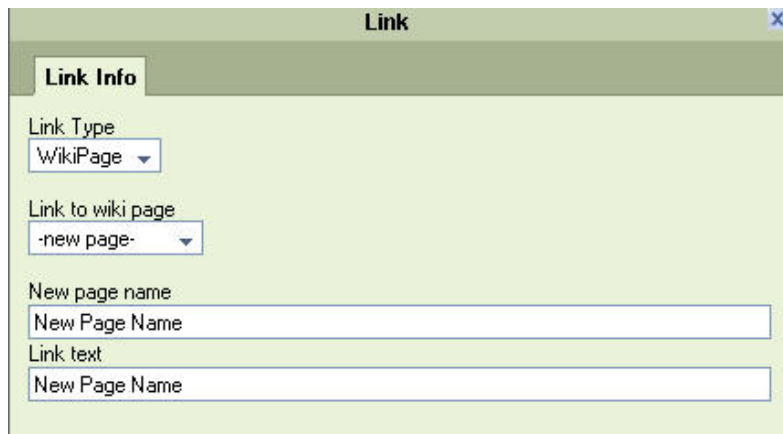

Figure 13

Adding Google gadgets/pictures/videos

While the page is in "edit" mode, clicking on Insert plug-in will make the plug-ins appear (Figure-14).
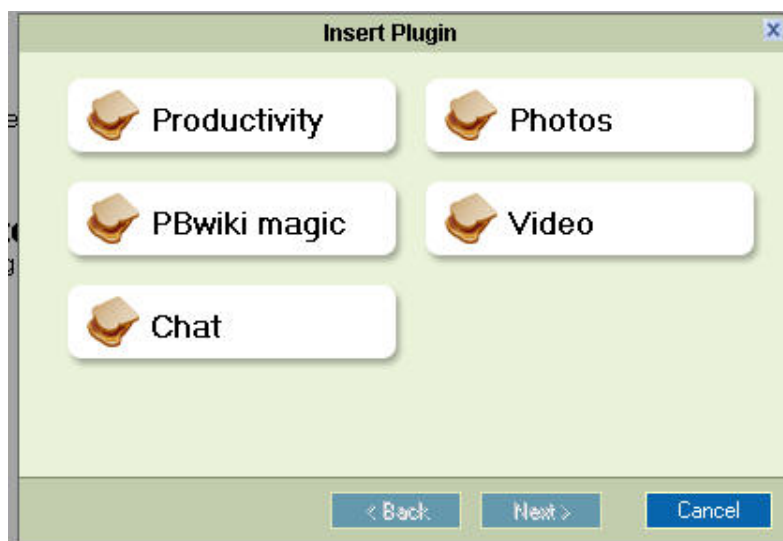
Figure 14

Through these plug-ins, a YouTube video or one's own video, calendar, calendar etc. can be inserted into the place chosen in the page (using a table is always suggested while inserting the plug-in) (Figure-15).
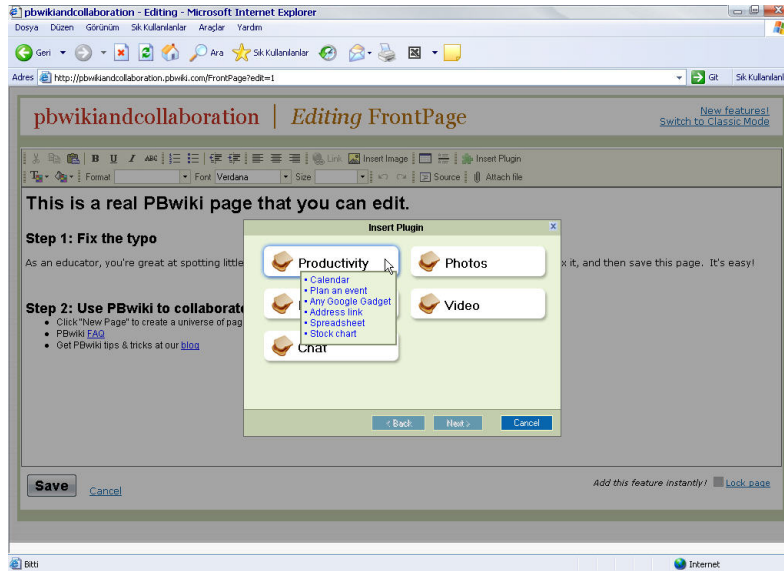

Figure 15

Restoring an earlier version of a page

In order to retrieve an earlier version of a page (any accidental deletion of a page or any version of a page), the "history" link can be clicked on and several versions of the page can be seen and any page can be restored to any previous version (Figures 16 & 17).

Figure 16

Figure 17

Features such as PDF and Slideshows

The wiki page also provides features to create a PDF version of a page or electronic portfolios of the wiki (creating a PDF version or a slideshow of all the pages created). In order to create PDF files, slideshows, and more than these, the links at the bottom of the page (Save page as PDF, Portfolios- Create PDFs, slideshows, more) can be used (Figure 18).

Figure-18

Invitation Key/Public or Private Access

In order to make the wiki public or private and change the Invitation Key, "Settings" link (on the right top of the page) can be used. Also, on the settings page, some other information (editor, skins, templates, time/date, users, sharing etc.) can be changed (Figure 19).

Figure 19

How to use a wiki with your students

The features (more will be added soon) of a wiki can provide us with several ideas to apply to language learning. The following are just examples. The use of wikis, no doubt, depends very much on educators' creativity and enthusiasm.

➤ Building a database of phrasal verbs with meaning and examples (students in pairs or groups can add meaning and examples to the list)

➤ A journal of work done in class (Most of the students create invaluable projects and most of the time only the teacher is the one who reads them. Putting them online and getting feedback from other students through comments will help the learners play an active role in class and have the opportunity to see what their classmates are doing, as well.)

➤ Writing a joint story (Students in pairs or groups can add new sentences to a story and create their own joint story. Grammatical and/meaning mistakes can be corrected by the students themselves, which will make writing more enjoyable and a game-like activity.

➤ Famous people (Students can choose famous people in their country or in the world and write about their life – some can write about his/her early childhood, education, professional work et. The information written can be checked by the other students and any misleading information (this can be also done on purpose) can be checked and corrected by other students.)

PBwiki does really lend itself to collaborative writing and open to any fresh idea. For examples, please refer to Dudeney and Hockly (2007) for a lesson with a wiki page or the web pages in the references section.

References

Dudeney, G. & Hockly, N. (2007). *How to Teach English with Technology*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Selected sites offering free wikis

- PBwiki (http://www.pbwiki.com)
- Wikihost (http://www.wikihost.org)
- MediaWiki (http://www.mediawiki.org)
- Wiki Spaces (http://www.wikispaces.com)

Other resources on what a wiki is and its possible uses in education

- http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI0626.pdf
- http://edwiki.org/mw/index.php/Design_Patterns_for_EduWikis
- http://www.wiki.org/wiki.cgi?WhatIsWiki
- http://teachereducation.org.uk/mod/forum/discuss.php?d=152
- http://wikis.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php/Wikis_in_Writing_Education_Research
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki
- http://educationalwikis.wikispaces.com/space/showimage/Welcome+to+the+world+of+wikis.pdf