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WIKIS IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ONLINE
AND FACE-TO-FACE GROUP COLLABORATION AT A PRIVATE LIBERAL
ARTS UNIVERSITY (260 pp.)

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        Wikis are Web-based online software programs that allow any user to add, edit, or

delete content on a Wiki web page. Because of their relative simplicity and their

interactive nature, Wikis are potentially effective tools for online collaborative group

work, a type of activity frequently used in online distance education. This study

examined online Wiki collaboration compared to more conventional face-to-face group

collaboration in higher education.

        The study participants were juniors and seniors taking a senior-level broadcast

communications course. They were divided into two groups, and each group collaborated

on writing reports using both conventional face-to-face collaboration methods and

collaboration using the Wiki function in Moodle course management software. Following

completion of the reports, professional subject matter experts rated the quality of the

reports according to specified content and format criteria. The study's research questions

addressed (1) benefits and obstacles experienced in face-to-face collaboration; (2)

benefits and obstacles experienced in Wiki-based group collaboration; (3) whether there

was a difference between Wiki group collaboration and face-to-face group collaboration

in terms of the quality of the final product; and (4) whether there was a difference in

students' experiences of learning and sense of community after Wiki-based collaboration and face-to-face collaboration assignments.

Results indicated there was no difference in the quality of reports related to the method of collaboration, suggesting that Wikis are an effective collaboration method; face-to-face collaboration is more efficient in terms of communication among group members and is sometimes preferred because it is familiar; Wiki collaboration allowed students to work at their own pace and to easily see the work of other group members; students adapted Wiki capabilities to their previous methods of group work; and there was not a significant difference in students' experiences of learning and community between the two methods. Even though the Wiki software provided the capability, participants did not edit one another's Wiki work unless they had volunteered and were designated by the group to be an editor. Unless they were an editor, individual participants did not feel it was appropriate to change their peers' work.