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# LuKe: The challenge of integrating bottom-up wiki working environments in contexts of academic learning

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## Abstract

In this abstract, the author proposes a poster presentation on the challenges faced by wiki system developers when trying to integrate bottom-up structure wiki-based working and learning environments in contexts of academic learning.

These contexts are characterized by

- the desire of learners to have all necessary information readily at hand
- students only regarding work as “worthy to be done” if it translates directly into credit points in their study curriculum
- a lack of know-how about using basic web technologies other than consumption-style surfing in many of the concerned groups and individuals

Empirical setting is the digital learning and working environment LuKe, which is being established at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology at the University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

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## **Introduction**

The process of learning is in some contexts understood to be a social process that is self-driven and self-organized (Lave & Wenger 1991). However, in terms of online learning environments, a common criticism voiced by both experts and teaching users is a lack of flexibility (Moser 2008). This results in the potential that could be allowing the social process of learning to run self-controlled getting lost.

In the light of these reflections and of the growing impact of Bachelor and Master programmes and their consequences for practical aspects of teaching, learning and the student's attitude to putting effort into that process, the Frankfurt Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology has been looking for new and practicable ways to use wiki-based learning environments. These aim to enhance the learning process by creating new chances for social interaction and self-organization.

## **Empirical setting: The digital learning environment LuKe**

In order to establish a digital learning environment in a learning context that is characterized by the absence of formulae and mathematical definitions and a high relevance of text-based discourse, the underlying system has to fulfill these special needs. LuKe is an approach by the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology at Goethe University Frankfurt to create a platform that is especially designed for use in all aspects of curricular and co-curricular activities around its bachelor and master programmes. Through in-house management and development, it seamlessly

integrates with the teaching and learning conditions, starring the following key aspects:

- providing teaching personnel with a flexible platform to extend presence and paper based learning while promoting, however not absolutely pressing for extensive use of new technologies
- attracting students to design and build their own learning environment, supported by underlying technology (this includes learning-by-doing challenges regarding the technological aspects)
- allowing for study administration and documentation of achievements to be directly and effectively linked with the teaching context to reduce resulting non-topic administration workload

On the technical side, a manually coded html portal and a combination of a TWiki setup with custom php scripts and several open source components such as a moodle framework are used.

The poster presentation will focus on the following key aspects and questions around the outlined issue, referring to systems used and research carried out at the Frankfurt Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology, Goethe University.

### **Integrating a wiki based platform into conventional methods of academic teaching**

Jaques & Salmon 2007 propose a five step model illustrating the stages of introducing students to online learning environments and promoting involvement with the platform. Based on experiences from LuKe, the poster will show how in the area of sociological and cultural studies that are not directly related to usage and discussion of technology, the stages of "access and motivation" and the effective initiation of a process of "online socialisation" add additional challenges to the content-related goals of teaching. In praxis, this leads to bottom-up systems being regarded as top-down sites where students place no effort in actively collaborating on the platform.

### **Don't believe the wiki!**

Key difference and critical point of integrating bottom-up wiki-based systems in academic learning contexts is the fact that all information within has to be assessed in relation to its context of generation: Teams of students or single students who used, collected and assessed other sources in order to compile what can be found as the "wiki's content". Where is the balance between creating awareness for these circumstances vs. creating an institutional review mechanism? How can awareness for the collaborative nature of wiki environments and its implications of content to be found within be created? Another aspect along this is to reduce what Ilyes et al 2012 found to be "a fear of empty space": In order for bottom-up concepts to work when compiling content, the overall appearance of the wiki's flexibility has to be one of positive openness, not

of borderless challenge. How can this be achieved, keeping in mind the spectrum of available resources?

### **Knowing wiki isn't bad for you!**

When bachelor and master programmes were introduced in Germany, they created a general impression of relevance in studying being indicated by the fact that for learning about a certain topic, people can receive credit points in the context of their studies. The fact that in order to fully access and use wiki-based learning environments, extra effort is needed to familiarize oneself with the way the system works and the general "philosophy" behind it, creates a barrier to motivate students to explore these systems, as these efforts usually don't directly translate into credit points. Traxler (2009) suggests that a generally positive attitude towards web based applications supports the openness of students for digital learning technologies. This can be translated into saying that people are more likely to effectively and willingly use e-learning platforms when they already have acquired related cultural capital. The same applies to digital working and communication platforms they might encounter in their professional career after completing their study: Having already acquired and extended their cultural capital on acting and interacting in digital content-focused discourses, students will have a better standing in the workplace.

### **What's not on paper, doesn't count ?!**

A central aspect of academic learning is the reliability that is expected in the context of documenting learning

efforts and success – and in the consequence of that the issuing of certificates of academic achievements. Trentin 2009 suggests a method of measuring individual efforts in collaborative environments by using calculation and quantitative analysis methods. However, certain aspects like individual feedbacking and student counselling may require qualitative approaches at this point: In which ways can wiki-based environments allow for teachers and supervisors to effectively track individual students progress according to the contributions she or he makes to a fluid and transitional collection of information in a bottom-up system? In that context, Macdonald 2003 suggests that in order to assess products of online effort, not only the content-centered product, but also the use of soft skills to reach that product have to be included. Certainly this appears plausible given the fact that online learning efforts are not yet standard way of academic study, but how can this concept be integrated into everyday teaching in academic contexts?

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