Using a poetry wiki: How can the medium support pre-service teachers of English in their professional learning about writing poetry and teaching poetry writing in a digital age?

SUE DYMOKE
University of Leicester, United Kingdom

JANETTE HUGHES
University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada

ABSTRACT: In this paper we report on one aspect of a qualitative study about an online wiki community, which was developed to build collaborative knowledge about poetry among a group of pre-service English teachers. Our paper explores pre-service teachers' experiences of writing in a digital medium and their perceptions of themselves as writers. We focus specifically on the processes of poetry writing (both collaborative and independent) undertaken in this digital medium by two groups of teachers, who were working in contrasting settings in the UK and Canada during their pre-service year. We investigate the affordances (Laurillard, Stratford, Lucklin, Plowman, & Taylor, 2000) that a multimodal, wiki environment offered these teachers for learning about poetry writing and question the impact that these affordances have had both on the teachers' collaborations and the poetry they wrote. In analysing the pre-service teachers' wiki writings we were interested to observe how they shaped themselves as writers and intervened in each other's work in progress within a digital third space. We also wanted to explore how the wiki had supported their professional learning about the teaching of poetry writing during their training year and the implications that this support could have for their own future classroom practice as teachers of writing.

KEYWORDS: Collaboration, digital dialogue, Initial Teacher Education, online community, poetry, poetry pedagogy, professional learning, wiki, writing poetry

In this paper we report on one aspect of a qualitative study about an online wiki community, which was developed to build collaborative knowledge about poetry among a group of pre-service English teachers. Our paper explores pre-service teachers' experiences of writing in a digital medium and their perceptions of themselves as writers. We focus specifically on the processes of poetry writing (both collaborative and independent) undertaken in this digital medium by two groups of teachers, who were working in contrasting settings in the UK and Canada during their pre-service year. We investigate the affordances (Laurillard *et al.,* 2000) that a multimodal, wiki environment offered these teachers for learning about poetry writing and question the impact that these affordances have had both on the teachers' collaborations and the poetry they wrote. In analysing the pre-service teachers' wiki writings, we were interested to observe how they shaped themselves as writers and intervened in each other's work in progress within a digital third space. We also wanted to explore how the wiki had supported their professional learning about the

teaching of poetry writing during their training year and the implications that this support could have for their own future classroom practice as teachers of writing.

Data analysed consists of the draft poems created through the medium of the wiki and the digital dialogue which has evolved through drafting and communication about this writing. Semi-structured questionnaire responses are also explored. Our analysis of the teachers' writing and discussion indicates some ways in which pre-service teachers can develop their digital literacy through collaboration in a wiki. The findings lead to recommendations for further refinements in uses of this social software and conclusions about its potential value as a tool for supporting professional learning in the teaching of poetry writing at an early stage in teachers' careers.

TEACHING POETRY IN A DIGITAL AGE

Teaching poetry has long been recognised as an aspect of the English curriculum which presents specific pedagogic challenges both for pre-service teachers and experienced practitioners in many different international contexts (Mathieson, 1980; Harrison & Gordon, 1983; Benton, 1984; Andrews, 1991; Thompson, 1996; Dymoke, 2000; Hughes, 2008). Evidence suggests that, in England and Wales at least, poetry is the least well-taught part of the English curriculum (Ofsted, 2007). Teachers are said to draw on a limited range of poetry texts in the classroom and to provide few opportunities, especially for primary-school children, to read or write poems which directly connect with their own experiences.

Initial teacher education (ITE) marks a vital stage in developing a teacher's confidence in handling the genre successfully in the classroom. Many pre-service English/Language Arts teachers (training to teach across the 5 to 19 age-range) have very limited experience of writing poetry themselves either at school or in their first degree (Ray, 1999; Dymoke, 2007) and yet, certainly in the UK and Canada, they will be expected to model themselves as writers and readers of poetry and other types of texts in the classroom (see for example the curriculum policy documents Saskatchewan Education, 1998 and Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008).

Although the expectation that the teacher should also be a writer in their classroom is not embedded within curriculum policy documents in all Anglophone nations, the potential impact of teacher-writer on the development of students' composition skills has been a topic for debate internationally for many decades. For example, poet Kenneth Koch's accounts of teaching poetry writing in a New York public school (1970, 1973) and Donald Graves' investigations of young children's writing in New Hampshire and the use of classroom writing conferences (1981, 1983) have both been widely discussed and imitated. Many UK based researchers and poets have commented specifically on the need for teachers to model themselves as both writers and readers of poetry (Stibbs, 1981; Dunn, Styles & Warburton, 1987; Nicholls, 1990; Yates, 1999). Nicholls observes that, "children need to know that adults too, struggle with words" (1990, p. 27). Stibbs sees teachers' encouragement of writing by writing as a moral obligation and a vital element of a child's classroom experience: "Unless teachers do that they are tailor's dummies in a nudist colony – very bad manners" (1981, p. 49.) Yates, who acknowledges the influence of Koch on his own practice,

writes whenever possible with students at the secondary school where he teaches. He comments: "What I write won't necessarily be any good, but that's not important; writing is about taking chances and trying things out" (Yates, 1999, p. 2).

Clearly, those who are new to the teaching profession may not yet have the confidence to struggle, bare all or take such chances. They may well need to be given supported opportunities to take such risks. Research by Dymoke (2000, 2007) concludes that if pre-service teachers are to develop a critical awareness of poetry pedagogy which will sustain them throughout their teaching careers, they need to be given early training opportunities to experiment with creative approaches (including poetry writing activities) which will, in turn, enable them to develop their creative selves.

Furthermore, if pre-service teachers are to enthuse their own students about poetry, then they need to be able to justify and renew its place within English curricula for a digital age. In reporting research on creativity and writing, Grainger, Goouch and Lambirth comment that poems need not be "like caged lions, only some of their qualities, power and beauty... viewed from one perspective" (Grainger *et al.,* 2005, p. 141). The poet Adisa writes: "Poetry is written on paper, but poetry doesn't live there" (2002, p. 128). Both these quotations point to the powerful, dynamic and multimodal nature of poetry which is, in our view, a key justification for its inclusion in a 21st-century curriculum. We only have to think of how poetry is embedded in the rhythms of everyday life through lyrics, tweets and text messages, through street talk, protest rallying calls, football songs and advertising jingles and to consider how it is performed at slams, open-mike events and broadcast on YouTube and accessed through websites like the Poetry Archive (www.poetryarchive.org) to be aware that poetry is a playful, multimodal living medium rather than one which should be stranded forever on the printed page. In addition, as many of these activities show, it can be a collaborative medium – not solely the preserve of the poet in the ivory tower but a genre which can be co-authored, slammed, recorded or filmed by makers working together in the same real or virtual space (see, for example, Gioia, 2004). The wiki project would, we hoped, emphasis the dynamic, multimodal and collaborative potentials of the genre and engage a new cohort of teachers with these.

Our research is informed by theories within the paradigm of "new" literacy studies including the work of Lankshear and Knobel (2003), Knobel and Lankshear (2007), Gee (2004) and Steinkuehler (2005). These are concerned with the literacy practices that develop in different social contexts and the values pertaining to these practices and contexts. We are particularly interested in how digital texts are made, particularly poems, the spaces which their makers occupy, and the affordances which digital communication can provide for construction, reflection, collaboration and display of the self simultaneously as both writer and reader. The word *text* derives from the Latin verb "texere" to weave. Within a digital space, a multimodal text can be woven by many makers who are also users/readers of that text. The text can be spliced or "remixed" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 8) using many different threads and modes. It can be constantly rethreaded, redesigned (New London Group, 1996) and changed by other makers.

Within this collaborative process there is a sense of "relatedness" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 13) in that the people who participate in text-making do so within

"affinity spaces" (Gee, 2004, p. 83) or "a new third space" (Steinkuehler, 2005, p.17). Such spaces exist beyond work and home and are, Gee argues, very different from the space where learning occurs in schools because the relationships between participants are developed primarily through interests rather than contextual factors. Such groupings not only challenge conventional perceptions of where and when text making could occur but they also challenge the identities and relationships of novice/student and expert/teacher.

The use of digital technologies within classroom contexts is developing internationally as many researchers [including Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, (2005), Burn & Durran, (2007)] have shown. New teachers to the profession, in all subject areas, are increasingly expected to have access to and become adept users of digital technology – see, for example, the Professional Standards which have to be met by trainee teachers in England (Training & Development Agency, 2007), the integration of ICTs in the Ontario English Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) and the recognition of "new teaching opportunities" and access issues presented by digital technologies for Australian teachers in *The shape of the Australian curriculum: English* (National Curriculum Board, 2009, p. 15).

However, this does not mean that its use is the only or always the most effective way to promote learning. Teachers should be supported to reflect critically so that they can make informed choices about whether, when and how they should use digital and other forms of technology to engage their own students in learning. They should be able to consider whether the technology merely mirrors pre-existing approaches and aspects of the curriculum or if it adds value to what could be achieved and opens up new opportunities for learning (Hennessey, Ruthven & Brindley, 2003). They should also avoid making assumptions about the level of expertise of their students (Buckingham, 2003). In addition, Lewis reminds us that curricular training alone will not suffice: teachers must engage with "new mindsets, practices and identities" (Lewis, 2007, p. 230) arising from digital technologies if they are to fully understand their potential. The need to support pre-service teachers in developing their understanding of the potential of digital technologies and the issues surrounding their use was one of the key reasons for instigating the wiki project with the pre-service cohort who participated in our research.

Research on the types and quality of opportunities afforded to learners working in many different contexts through use of social software (such as blogs and wikis) is developing apace (see, for example, Doe, 2006; Richardson, 2006; Hauser, 2007; Wheeler & Wheeler, 2009; Davies & Merchant, 2009). We could not, however, locate any research, other than our own, which specifically explores an aspect of poetry teaching. Lamb (2004) observes how the introduction of a wiki can challenge course practices and norms, while Vratulis and Dobson (2008) explore the nature of the social hierarchies and social negotiations which the wiki environment affords for a group of pre-service teachers working together to respond to a set of standards for teachers. Fountain's (2005) overview of literature pertaining to wiki pedagogy points to a number of pedagogical concerns which appear to be particularly relevant to our study, including those focused on knowledge of how to collaborate and/or resistance to collaboration, motivation, creativity and retooling.

In addition, this research is underpinned by theoretical perspectives on the development of pedagogic knowledge: Shulman's (1986) conceptual framework encompassing Subject Matter Content Knowledge, Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Curricular Knowledge; Grossman's (1991) focus on the orientations of pre-service teachers in the US and the role of ITE tutors in aiding their examinations of knowledge and beliefs about their subject and classroom practice; and Gudmundsdottir's (1995) description of the development of "Pedagogically seeking eyes" to reconstruct texts for the purposes of teaching.

WHAT IS A WIKI?

First developed in 1995, Wikis are types of blogs. Their name is derived from "wiki-wiki", a Hawaiian word meaning "quick". Setting up a wiki can be done very quickly. (For an example go to www.pbwiki.com and follow the steps in the "educators" section; you can be underway in 5 minutes.) The affordances offered to wiki users are many and various. They facilitate collaborative composition on-line in ways which surpass what can be achieved in a blog. Individuals can meet within the digital space as members of a wiki community. They can collaborate creatively on composing a digital text and/or directly intervene in digital texts composed by others in order to edit, or even to delete another person's work. They can provide feedback on work in progress, share knowledge or make links between different pages or external resources. Membership of this community can be self-selective, open-ended or (in our case) restricted to a clearly defined group of users. Other readers outside a community can browse the wiki. However, only the participants can make postings or edit each other's work.

The description of the wiki as a "palimpsest" (Fountain, 2005) seems very appropriate, as Wiki pages can be read and revisited at any stage in their development – a feature which facilitates consideration of drafts and interventions. The prime example of a wiki is Wikipedia – an online encyclopaedia containing over 2.2 million articles written and rewritten by strangers all round the world. It is claimed that the nature of Wikipedia and the ways in which its pages are edited have changed dramatically since its first inception (Johnson, 2009). Through her analysis of classroom wikis in the UK and USA, Carrington has identified a set of "core uses for wikis" (Carrington, 2009, p. 73). These are: managing knowledge; building narratives; aggregating resources and adding value to existing text through use of links and glossaries. In the case of the wiki poetry project explored here, our primary concern was with building narratives. However, the project also embraced some of the other uses explored by Carrington.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A poetry wiki was established in September 2007 for use, over the academic year of their training, by a mixed, convenience-sample group of 56 pre-service English and Language Arts postgraduate teachers (age range 22 to 42 years), who were based at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK and Canada and preparing to enter the teaching profession. Four people had some previous experience of using a wiki (for two of these, this experience amounted to use of *Wikipedia*). 52 participants had no

experience, although a substantial number had contributed to social software such as Facebook, MySpace or a VLE (virtual learning environment). One person stated he was "a wiki virgin" and another (also male) said he had never heard of a wiki before his teaching course began. Interestingly, both of these young men became two of the wiki's most active participants. In terms of prior experiences of writing poetry, less than 20% of the pre-service teachers had ever shared draft work with other readers even though approximately 50% of them had some (albeit very limited in most cases) experience of poetry writing. The pre-service teachers' attitudes to poetry and their previous experiences and knowledge of the genre are explored in a second paper arising from this research (Hughes & Dymoke, submitted).

In establishing the wiki we wanted to investigate the affordances it could offer for developing pre-service teachers' skills and confidence in teaching aspects of poetry, in the light of the concerns about teaching the medium identified in previous research on poetry education outlined above. The intention was that the cohort of pre-service teachers would share:

- reflections about the nature of poetry and the way it has been defined by others;
- their own tastes in poetry and how these have been developed;
- first experiences of teaching poetry;
- teaching resources;
- drafts and edits of each others' poetry writing on-line.

In this way, the wiki could support their developing pedagogic knowledge, classroom practice and beliefs about an aspect of the English curriculum. In addition, it would enable them to gain some personal insights into what it was like to compose, share, edit and receive comments on draft poetry. These compositional experiences are the key topic of this paper and reflect a set of experiences that the pre-service teachers would soon begin to initiate for the students in their own classrooms. These intentions and the research focus were explicitly shared with the pre-service teachers from the onset. We also took care to explore ethical issues regarding cyber safety and on-line participation/publication with the teachers and to ensure they had a chance to reflect on the nature of the audience(s) who might read their contributions.

The teachers were placed in mixed UK and Canadian groups, each labelled with the name of a poetic form. Our intention here was solely to make a reference to a recognisable aspect of poetry. However, we quickly learned that these intentions had been misconstrued by a number of students in particular groups who were aghast at the prospect they would have to write sonnets, epics or odes. We had to move quickly to reassure them that this was not the case and vowed that we would use much less inflammatory group headings in future versions of the wiki. The reactions of the students were, however, interesting in themselves because they raised issues for us both about their subject knowledge and their levels of confidence in discussing and writing in certain forms – forms which they themselves would undoubtedly encounter and be required to teach at some point in their careers.

We asked every participant to make at least two postings in response to a series of definitions of poetry so that they at least could see how the wiki environment worked. After that, the teachers were cajoled and encouraged to share work in progress both

within their own group and across groups. They were reminded, via occasional email and in some course sessions, of the wiki's existence rather than, we hoped, made subject to heavy policing. They were also asked to comment on each other's drafts and the ITE tutors also participated regularly in this process. (With a second cohort of pre-service teachers, who commenced in Autumn 2008, these approaches were refined to provide a more structured focus on aspects of pedagogy, with optional tasks. The second cohort also experienced far less intervention by their tutors as we felt our enthusiasm for the wiki in its first year could potentially have had undue influence on the contributions.)

Their perceptions and draft poems were captured through insider research (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003) using a variety of qualitative methods, namely: seminar discussion notes; digital artefacts created and edited by the teachers; comments and written reflections added to the wiki by other participants; post-course surveys. Data was first analysed using independent coding then shared and recoded by both researchers. It has been anonymised to preserve confidentiality. Participants' permissions have been sought and granted for publication of comments and draft work. The two university tutors who set up the wiki also participated in it. The nature of this insider research (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Davies & Merchant, 2007) is not without its problems. In commenting on students' drafts, we were both very conscious of our other roles and experiences as a tutor, assessor, researcher and, in one tutor's case, published poet. We tried to set these aside but, inevitably, they informed our responses and the way other participants reacted to or received them.

FINDINGS

In analysing the pre-service teachers' wiki writings in this article, we are primarily interested in exploring how they created themselves as writers and intervened in each other's work in progress within the digital third space. We also wanted to see how the wiki had supported their professional learning about the teaching of poetry writing and to what extent they had identified its potential as a pedagogical tool for their own future use.

Pre-service teachers as writers

Barton (2005) suggests that participation in wikis might not be suitable for those struggling to find their personal voice and identity in their writing because of the level of personal exposure that this might entail. More recently, Wheeler and Wheeler (2009) assert that "some students could be reluctant to participate if they perceive the need to adapt their writing styles, or open their ideas up to scrutiny from a hidden audience" (p. 4). In our project we were perhaps asking them to do more than adapt their style of writing for, as we have already noted, many of the participants had little or no previous experience of writing poetry. A desire to impress and, conversely, a recognition of the vulnerability of the draft (and the writer) when exposed on screen were both acknowledged in questionnaire responses.

A small number of participants were understandably wary of the blank pages opening up in front of them and, in the early stages, preferred to post comments in the boxes below the blank pages. (When reading the screen, these boxes are less apparent.)

Some participants tentatively stepped on to the ice of a blank page and were guarded in introducing themselves as writers in this third space. They labelled their own work as "little poem" or their "very very rough draft". One student wrote:

> Wow a blank page!....well here goes! These poems are extremely rough extremely not thought out and were merely pushed upon a page or two a while back, if pags [sic] were vengeful I think my time would be up… Anyhow I digress feel free to comment and I'm sorry in advance I'll try and write some light-hearted ones.

Some pre-service teachers responded to the poetry writing aspect of the wiki enthusiastically. A small number became reasonably frequent contributors to different groups in the first term, both to seek readers for their own poems and to share recommendations of poems they liked. They conveyed a sense of playing to the gallery and developing a relationship with a partially known, but predominantly unknown audience. Some began to reflect on themselves as writers and to comment on other people's work. For example, one pre-service teacher commented on her developing creativity and observed: "I seem to struggle over word choices". As the term wore on and placements began, other priorities inevitably began to intervene. One participant, apologising for his absence from the wiki for a while, wrote: "the whole teacher thing has taken over".

Some found this supportive medium gave them confidence to write and share their own poetry for the very first time. One wrote:

> I must confess that this is the first poem I have ever written… I will try and contribute more to this page and to you, my fellow Haikus. I am in awe of "We danced through the ashes" [another poem posted on the site - see below and Appendix I] and I think you have a real talent.

Other participants began to experiment with the multimodality offered by this medium: they pasted images which inspired their writing and hyperlinks to other poetry pages. After writing a haiku sequence, one student created a very powerful film of sounds and images We danced through the ashes which was inspired by his own work of the same name. He wrote:

> I've added a video I made this evening to accompany my poem "We danced through the ashes" (Haiku page). The video isn't me reading my poem. It's actually a visual montage that supports the imagery in the poem. The poem is partly about mediated reality so I've used a free online text to voice synthesiser to mediate for me. I just pasted my poem into it. The synthesis is slightly out in terms of human cadence and I hope this gives the "reading" a creepy quality. Comments welcome.

Some, less successful, work with web-cams was also tried and this remains an area for future development. (In the second year of the project, the Canadian pre-service teachers, who are based at what is known as a "lap-top university" began to experiment more fully with multimodal ways of adding text and sound with new laptops that have built-in webcams, but these resources were not available to the UK cohort.)

Direct intervention into other participants' draft poems (in a public arena) occurred rarely. Fountain (2005) identifies non-interference as a notable feature of on-line collaborative creative work. Nevertheless a number of teachers did make specific suggestions. For example, one said: "I like the way you slipped 'wants' in here. Very nice. Do you think it could stand another?" The extent to which these comments were picked up on and/or acted on was limited with the result that, for the most part, the wiki dialogue about the writing lacks cohesion, appearing stilted and lacking significant development. Some teachers did state an intention to revise their drafts but only a small number actually did this explicitly on line and/or alerted others to the changes they had made. One participant commented:

> thank you so! I had not considered dropping the "like" because it rhymed with "Dyke" and I like the alliteration but it certainly helps to drop it….Lemme know how the rewrite works :-).

Another wrote:

> I think I severely over-used "and" and "the" which I tried to remove. Thanks, A, for the advice to break the lines down, etc. I have done that and I think it describes the sequence and commands of the traffic lights better. B, I also love your suggestion of "pushed", "pulled" and "stretched" actually being manipulated by the text.

Some teachers seldom contributed, choosing to remain silent visitors. However, in a one-year, intensive, initial teacher education course it is evident that pre-service teachers not only have to face many challenges, including confronting the potential terrors of exposure in the classroom, they are also pulled in many directions by pedagogical and curricular demands. For some course members, participation in the wiki and the risks that sharing draft work might entail might not be something they would choose to prioritise at this stage.

Draft poems were usually introduced with some contextual information and sometimes a request for feedback (with direction) or an indication of their intentions for the poem i.e. "I don't think the rhyme is quite right yet… I am aiming for a kind of cat walk, prowling purposefully along." In some cases, a sense of obligation was evident in the introductions. Some teachers began by posting old poems (even those written at primary school) or work in progress from before the project commenced. There was perhaps a sense of security or safety in this kind of approach. Gradually, these contributors moved on to new work.

63 different poems were posted in total. Some teachers wrote 3 or more poems while others chose not to contribute at all to these pages. Many of the poems posted were works in progress, linked to writing workshops held in their HEI or to poems discussed in core course sessions. These included sonnets, poems about paintings, haikus, limericks and poems in other forms such as a bullet-shaped poem. The bullet poem was introduced by its author with reference to a course discussion of "The convergence of the twain" by Thomas Hardy (1976), a poem written after the sinking of the *Titanic,* which describes the twin births and fated collision of iceberg and infamous ship.

> from: "A bullet with a name on it"
>   (lines on a senseless killing)

III

Now follow me sixteen years
To our heroes' first embrace:
Bullet kisses the centre
Of baby-boy's slumbering face.

Object poems, furniture poems, poems using one syllable words and those inspired by "Where I'm from" by George Ella Lyon (1999) were also posted.

Another, different group of somewhat more spontaneous pieces were inspired by the teachers' present situations. These focused on teaching placements, day-to-day travel, lecture topics, content and even, in one case, a Professional Studies lecturer's use of PowerPoint:

Prancing lexus like an anal itch
Slide after slide
Sitting still
As your blunt pedagogy
Smashes over my head
Time after time after time

Five student-teachers posted poems in different groups from their base group searching perhaps for a response from like-minded writers. Interestingly four of these five were males.

Teaching poetry writing and using wikis as a pedagogical tool

In terms of the impact on the participants' poetry writing and teaching of poetry writing post wiki, we can see, through end-of-course questionnaire comments, that teachers felt they grew in confidence through participation (for example: "I now feel confident enough to attempt to write my own poems" and [I am] "less scared… more willing to share"). More student-teachers wished that had got more involved in the wiki during the course or that they had had the confidence to do so.

Both those who did *and* those who did not participate in the wiki, appeared to recognise its potential as a pedagogical tool. One participant commented: "It gave me a great model to model classroom discussions and peer editing online." One of the more confident, UK-based wiki contributors set up a wiki in her second teaching placement and used it very successfully as a tool for sharing story drafts between English lessons. A second confident user returned to the wiki at the very end of her ITE year, to share three new draft poems and to comment on her view of its potential for collaborative creative writing:

I like the idea of drafting and sharing work. It also seems to provide encouragement and facilitates a workshop environment. The digital space is fantastic at allowing people to contribute their work in a way that simply wasn't possible pre-internet/wikis etc…. sharing on wikis/blogs removes the element of self-promotion and makes it become more collaborative – exactly how poetry should be in my opinion...

Both these teachers stated an intention to use wikis in their first teaching posts. They have seen the potential for the medium and the texts that can be created within the digital space it provides. In our view, they have begun to reconstruct the space with Gudmundsdottir's (1995) pedagogical eyes and we will be approaching them, and others in the cohort, later this year to see whether they have followed through with their intentions.

CONCLUSIONS

Learning about poetry writing in a digital age

What have the pre-service teachers learned about poetry writing in a digital age from their participation and how has the wiki supported their professional learning about the teaching of such writing? After analysing their wiki postings, poems and questionnaire responses above, it is evident that some pre-service teachers have begun to write poetry in a variety of poetic forms, to gain confidence in their ability to write poetry and to reflect on themselves as writers. They have witnessed and experimented with methods of intervening in drafts – experiences which could enhance their own creativity, criticality and emerging classroom craft. Some members of the cohort have developed their technological skills in digital and multimodal communication through use of written, visual and sound modes.

However, with only a few exceptions, once composed, many of the poems exist as Grainger *et al.*'s "caged lions" (2005, p. 141) in a digital space. We had hoped that the poetry workshops held in both institutions, together with poems used in core teaching sessions, would have an impact on the nature of the work posted. (The poems used were drawn from a range of forms, styles and modes of performance and included examples of digital poetry.) To some extent these poems did have an impact in that texts in a range of written forms and styles were certainly posted on site. However, the potential, for example, for poems as podcasts or films has not yet been fully recognised. This is not to say that the poems on the site are disappointing poems – far from it – but to acknowledge that the multi-modal affordances offered by the wiki, have not yet been exploited by many of the pre-service teachers at the composition stage.

Affordances and levels of wiki use

Different levels of wiki use emerged. Some pre-service teachers saw the potential of the wiki and began to exploit some of its affordances, particularly those pertaining to collaborative composition. Others glimpsed its potential as a collaborative medium but did not participate in it. They will, perhaps, be less tentative in future about using a wiki in some way. To a certain extent, all of the cohort now have a greater familiarity with a method which potentially can take away some of the fear of sharing drafts. They have witnessed, and in some cases exploited, a means both of making drafting visible and of gaining a wider range of perspectives and feedback on their writing beyond that which would be possible within the constraints of a physical classroom space or an hour long lesson.

The affordances offered by the medium to share poetry texts in progress and to provide feedback to others, rather than its multi-modal affordances, were those most taken up by the pre-service teachers. The reasons for this are difficult to ascertain fully. No doubt they are in part connected with confidence. We should not underestimate the challenge of stepping into a blank digital space and exposing your poetry in its raw verbal state to a supportive but largely unfamiliar audience without also having to use other modes which you may also not be very confident about using. Additionally, there are issues regarding pre-service teachers' own priorities in their initial training year and their access to resources such as webcams and digital video for making multimodal texts. Although the Canadian cohort did have some access to webcams during their wiki work, the majority of the UK pre-service teachers were not so well provided for.

Further developments

We would like to exploit the multimodal affordances of the wiki for composing and teaching poetry more fully. We also intend to explore the use of a wiki with a wider range of written forms in order to enable our student teachers to draw links with other aspects of their developing practice. In this way, perhaps, participants will also take greater ownership of their writing and their on-line identities and collaborate more freely with others, drawing more holistic links and parallels with other aspects of their developing practice as teachers of English. When considering further refinements and uses of this collaborative learning environment for future cohorts of pre-service teachers, we have also become more aware of the need for greater flexibility in the use of the wiki with less imposed groupings and more structured (but optional) tasks so that use and/or occupation of the third space evolves more organically, according to the needs and desires of its participant inhabitants.

In deciding to carry out this research, our own interests in poetry and our recognition of the pedagogic challenges faced by many pre-service teachers with poetry have been key motivating factors. The wiki is potentially a valuable tool for supporting professional learning in the teaching of poetry writing at an early stage in teachers' careers in that it offers a supportive space in which to take creative risks and to witness/try out interventions into creative work. The affordances we have identified appear to have had some impact on the pre-service teachers' developing classroom practice in poetry writing and their own writing of poetry. The long-term impact of the wiki will be better judged when the majority of these, now qualified, teachers have completed at least one full year in the classroom, have developed their own poetry teaching practices further and have made choices about how to embed use of social software and other digital spaces within these.

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APPENDIX 1

<u>We Danced Through the Ashes</u>
We danced through the ashes
Like a smokescreen;
Chemically bonded to the masses.
Felt we weren't as crude as anyone else.
Drew a coup as party crashers.

We had *experienced* falling beats;
Had *experienced* mortar break streets;
So we danced through the wake of the deceased.

A singularity:

I knew we could distill anything.
Compound anything
Or anyone.
Make witches pose for pictures
But that wasn't *me*.

Our twitchings under strobe searchlights
Drew blood from rough touches.
The dry dust clung to wet openings.
Iron horses raised their slick muzzles
And when someone screamed fire,
We never felt the flames.
We were deafened to the shot.

I used the U.V chanelled through wires.
The T.V electrons tubed and transpired
To help the I.V find the vein,
Until my ears rang only of swan song,
But the bullet never came.

We dance through the ashes;
White noise fills the screen.