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# The (Failed) Case of the Winston Society Wikispace: The Challenges and Opportunities of Web 2.0 and Teacher Education

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## Abstract

This article examines the case of the Winston Society, a short-lived wikispace created by a high school English teacher to foster collaborative knowledge-making and social activism among educators. Through an examination of the wiki, questionnaires, and a focal group interview, this paper describes an examination of reasons the *Winston Society* garnered limited uptake among classroom teachers. Scholarship in new literacy studies is then drawn upon to theorize key issues in the study, including teachers' discomfort with digital epistemologies and the potential of online affinity spaces and social media to mediate teachers' professional development, networking, and political activism. The purpose of this paper is to highlight key issues and tensions in this case that may help educators approach Web 2.0 technologies more strategically in other contexts of teacher education.

This article explores the case of the Winston Society, a wikispace launched by high school English teacher Ed Cator (a pseudonym) to provide teachers with their own space to share teaching ideas, construct knowledge collaboratively, and work against NCLB (the *No Child Left Behind Act*) and related educational policies.

In many ways, this wiki embodied many of the trends and commitments of contemporary English education. It was mediated by Web 2.0 technologies and emphasized teacher inquiry, the social construction of knowledge, alternative forms of assessment, social justice, and political action (Alsup, Emig, Pradl, Tremmel, & Yagelski, 2006). The Winston Society also provided a unique and potentially generative context for teacher education, because it was created by teachers and for teachers—a clear departure from more established configurations of teacher education, such as school-based professional development or university-based teacher education programs. In spite of these promising qualities and Ed Cator's initiative, however, the wiki never gained traction among teachers and was more or less dormant within a month of its creation.

Most of the sharing research in English education emphasizes narratives in which teachers tried something innovative and were ultimately successful (Bush, 2000; Dressman, 2000). In contrast, this study examines the failed case of the Winston Society, so that teacher educators might consider some of the tensions, limits, and possibilities that may surround the use of wikis and other Web 2.0 technologies in teacher education.

To be clear, we do not assume that the particular dynamics of this case study are necessarily generalizable to other contexts (Merriam, 1998). At the same time, we found participants' reflections on the failure of the wikispace to be substantive and potentially relevant to other contexts of teacher education, because they resonate with ongoing discussions in the new literacy studies related to the distinctive "ethos stuff" of Web 2.0 technologies, mismatch between school epistemologies and digital epistemologies, and potential relevance of affinity spaces and social media in teacher education (Beach, Anson, Breuch, & Swiss, 2008; Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). This study explores these and related issues, not only to understand the disappointing failure of a potentially rich site for teachers' professional development and political activism, but to recognize some of the potential challenges and opportunities that may accompany the use of Web 2.0 technologies in K-12 schools, university-based teacher education, and even digital spaces created by and for practicing teachers.

### **Introducing the Winston Society**

High school English teacher Ed Cator created the Winston Society wiki in August 2008 at the conclusion of a master's level curriculum course called *Forces Shaping the Curriculum*, taught by author Jory Brass at the University of Cincinnati. This popular summer course explored the larger sociopolitical context of the standards movement, multicultural education, and the historical rise of high-stakes testing. In the final days of the course, Ed and other teachers expressed some interest in extending the class beyond the end of the summer term. As Ed began to write his final course paper, he emailed Jory with a request to skip that paper and instead create a wiki that would allow the class to continue its exploration of progressive and critical multicultural education and also voice their concerns with NCLB-era educational policies. Without waiting for an answer to his email, Ed scrapped his final course paper and instead created the Winston Society wikispace (<http://winsoc.wikispaces.com/>).

The name Winston Society was an allusion to Winston Smith, the protagonist of George Orwell's (1949) classic novel, *1984*. In Ed's view, NCLB and related educational policies mirrored much of the social control and political double-speak made famous by *1984*. The Winston Society—or "Winsoc," in Orwell's *newspeak*—played on these associations in constructing the wiki as a space for classroom teachers to join the likes of Winston Smith and "fight big brother"—that is, work against NCLB and its test-based accountability measures—and cultivate alternative visions for education that involved more progressive

politics and pedagogies. The wiki's home page played with Orwellian language, allusions, and imagery in its invitation to classroom teachers to join the Winston Society:

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* brought us the reaction to generations of progressive educational thinking. It paved the way for the current Ministry of Truth (aka Department of Education) to bring us such newspeak as "NCLB" and "AYP." Heck, George Orwell only missed by one year! On this wikispace, the Winston Society ("winsoc" in newspeak) gathers, in plain view of watchful eyes, to celebrate the spirit of Winston Smith and promote a pedagogy that fosters:

- Probing questions rather than simple, "right" answers
- Conversation rather than instruction
- Multiple perspectives rather than indoctrination
- Transferability rather than "proficiency"
- Collaboration rather than isolation
- Community service rather than self-interest

Ed unveiled the Winston Society wiki to 14 classmates on the last day of the master's course in August 2008 and provided them with an introduction to wikispaces and their use. After the class was officially completed, he sent email invitations to his classmates and Jory to join the Winston Society. Ed then requested the emails of additional teachers who shared the pedagogical or political interests of the Winston Society, which included approximately 10 additional teachers with connections to Jory, including author Storey Mecoli, who registered with the wiki. Within a few days, the Winston Society had registered 15 to 20 users who were mostly comprised of professionally active teachers with 3-10 years of experience or early career teachers with strong academic backgrounds and progressive politics.

To get a general sense of the wiki, see the Winston Society homepage:  
<http://winsoc.wikispaces.com/> (screenshot in Figure 1).

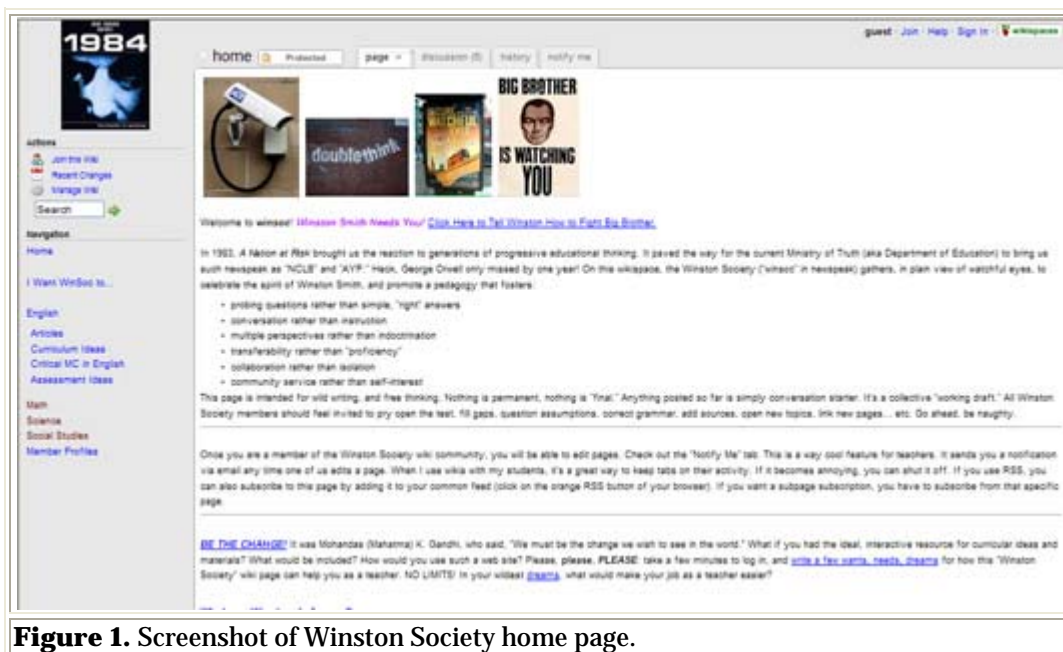


Figure 1. Screenshot of Winston Society home page.

In addition to the intertextual links with *1984*, Ed designed the space with the following features:

- Iconic images of surveillance run across the top of the home page. Underneath these images, Ed wrote a call for teachers to join the Winston Society next to a prominent page link where teachers could express their ideas: "[Click Here to Tell Winston How to Fight Big Brother](#)."
- The middle of the page includes a longer version of the welcome message, followed by an introduction to wikispaces and general suggestions for their use.
- The Navigation menu on the left margin establishes yet another link to a page where teachers are invited to express their desires for the Winston Society, concerns about NCLB, and ideas for fostering more progressive educational practices. The rest of the Navigation bar establishes links to subject-area specific pages where English, math, science, and social studies teachers could share lesson plans, alternative assessment ideas, and suggested readings, as well as collaborate together to create lessons, units, and assessments that were "outside the NCLB box of standards."
- At the bottom of the page, Ed wrote a short paragraph with three more links that not only encouraged, but begged teachers to articulate their visions for the wiki and reconstruct the space to better support their teaching and political activism:

**BE THE CHANGE!** It was Mohandas (Mahatma) K. Gandhi, who said, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world." What if you had the ideal, interactive resource for curricular ideas and materials? What would be included? How would you use such a web site? Please, **please, PLEASE:** take a few minutes to log in, and [write a few wants, needs, dreams](#) for how this "Winston Society" wiki page can help you as a teacher. NO LIMITS! In your wildest [dreams](#), what would make your job as a teacher easier?

Three qualities of the wiki are especially relevant in this article. First, while Ed took the initial lead in constructing the space, the Winston Society clearly offered a collaborative space that distributed expertise and authority among all registered users; all registered users had full editing rights for the wiki, and the space itself repeatedly called for teachers to assert their own ideas, collaborate, and (re)shape the wiki according to their own interests, preferences, and dreams. Second, the Winston Society encouraged teachers' creativity, collaboration, risk taking—and even naughtiness:

This page is intended for wild writing, and free thinking. Nothing is permanent, nothing is "final." Anything posted so far is simply conversation starter. It's a collective "working draft." All Winston Society members should feel invited to pry open the test, fill gaps, question assumptions, correct grammar [sic], add sources, open new topics, link new pages... etc. Go ahead, be naughty.

Third, the space encouraged teachers to assert themselves politically. Consider the prominent invitations for teachers to be change agents in society and their own classrooms: [Click Here to Tell Winston How to Fight Big Brother!](#) and **BE THE CHANGE!** These links took teachers to a page with a prompt that encouraged them to vent their frustrations with the standards and testing regime and suggest strategies for fellow teachers to counteract their constraints on their classrooms:

More than anything, I'd love to hear how other teachers are coping with the onslaught of standards think. It's relentless. Put standards in lesson plans. Put standard-based learning objectives on the board every day. Create regular "short-cycle" exams that check in on those standards . . . The more I soldier on, trying to be a 'good teacher' and meeting the expectations of our school's administrators, the harder it is to stay focused on constructivist teaching methods. What are you seeing? How are you coping?

We both see considerable potential for this kind of wiki and embrace Ed Cator's vision of teachers as professionals, intellectuals, creators, and activists. However, his efforts were largely unsuccessful. Outside of Ed's considerable contributions to the space, only a few other teachers contributed to the wiki over the next few weeks. A few participants updated their member profiles, added minimal content, or requested resources from other English teachers; however, *no one* responded to Ed's multiple requests for teachers to share their concerns about NCLB, create collaborative lessons and units, or share their ideas on how the Winston Society might support their work as teachers or activists. The wiki went completely dormant within a month of its creation.

### **The Study**

As registered users of the Winston Society with scholarly interests in the new literacy studies, we grew curious about the decisive failure of the wiki—even as we were implicated in that failure. An obviously disappointed Ed Cator was also interested in learning why teachers opted not to use the wiki. Within a few weeks, Ed and Jory met for lunch. Ed suggested that Jory should study what happened with the Winston Society to help him improve the space—or create a different kind of collaborative space for teachers. Due to work and family commitments, Ed was not interested in collaborative research, so Jory invited Storey to join him in a case study of the Winston Society. (At the time, Storey was a registered member of the Winston Society, high school English teacher, and part-time graduate student with interests in new literacies and teacher education.) A year after the inception of the Winston Society, we received internal review board (IRB) clearance to approach its registered users to collect data related to their use—or, more accurately, lack of use—of the wiki. Our study started out with two key goals:

- In support of Ed Cator, we hoped that a small, unobtrusive study might revive the wikispace and generate helpful suggestions from teachers on how to improve it. In addition, we hoped to expand membership in the Winston Society by publicizing it through conference presentations and publications. In this sense, our study embodied some elements of action research.
- We also hoped that a case study would help us unpack some of the contributing factors that seemed to work against the establishment of the Winston Society as an alternative context for teachers' professional development and political action. We recognize case studies as contextually specific; at the same time, we anticipated that our case study might identify salient issues surrounding new literacies and Web 2.0 that also could be relevant in other contexts of teacher education.

### **A New Literacies Perspective**

To begin to understand the failed case of the Winston Society, as well as the challenges and opportunities that may accompany the use of wikis in teacher education, we have drawn upon some key constructs associated with the "new literacy studies" (Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Street, 2005). There are multiple, and often competing

perspectives on new literacies in contemporary language and literacy studies (e.g., Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008; Tierney, 2009). In this study, we use the term *new literacies* in what Lankshear and Knobel (2006) called its “paradigmatic” sense and its “ontological” sense.

In a paradigmatic sense, the phrase “the new literacy studies” refers to a range of sociocultural frameworks that have constituted the dominant approaches to language and literacy research since the late 1980s (Beach, Green, Kamil, & Shanahan, 2005; Cushman, Kintgen, Kroll, & Rose, 2001; Dressman, 2007; Gee, 1999, 2009; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Prior to this time, most inquiry into reading, writing, and literacy had been constituted by traditional approaches to linguistic and psychological inquiry that primarily located literacy on the page or in the head.

In opposition to traditional psycholinguistic and cognitive perspectives, the new literacy studies posited that literacy does “not just reside in people’s heads as a set of skills to be learned, nor...reside on paper, captured as texts to be analyzed” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 3). Rather, from a sociocultural perspective, language and literacy are fundamentally social and necessarily linked to ways of participating in social or cultural groups, spaces, communities, or institutions:

The NLS saw literacy as something people did not inside their heads but inside society. It argued that literacy was not primarily a mental phenomenon, but, rather, a sociocultural one. Literacy was a social and cultural achievement—it was about ways of participating in social and cultural groups—not just mental achievement. Thus, literacy needed to be understood and studied in its full range of contexts—not just cognitive—but social, cultural, historical, and institutional, as well. (Gee, 2009, p. 2)

Although many strands of sociocultural theory are associated with the New Literacy Studies, most of this research begins with the assumption that literacy is a matter of social practices (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007; Street, 2005). A social practice perspective recognizes multiple forms of literacy and foregrounds how the meanings and uses of literacy are situated in particular communities, patterned by sociopolitical relationships, and invested with particular norms and values. As Gee (2009) has noted, people do not simply read and write “in general”—they read and write specific sorts of texts in specific ways that are situated in specific contexts and shaped by culturally patterned ways of knowing, being, and doing.

For Lankshear and Knobel (2006), sociocultural notions of literacy as social practice are especially important with respect to new literacies, because they draw attention to the ways that many contemporary literacy practices embody and reproduce relations of collaboration, participation, dispersion, and distributed expertise that are less common in more traditional literacy practices, including those typically sanctioned by K-12 schools.

In an ontological sense, literacies can also be considered new if they are comprised of a qualitatively different nature than conventional forms of literacy (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). In particular, Lankshear and Knobel explained, literacies may be considered ontologically new in terms of their “technical stuff” and “ethos stuff.” By new technical stuff, the researchers referred to post-typographic texts that are made up of “screens and pixels rather than paper and type, digital code rather than material print, seamlessly multimodal rather than distinct process text, image, sound, etc.” (p. 25).

Some notions of new literacies stop here; for Lankshear and Knobel, however, it was not solely technology or post-typographic forms of textuality that marked certain literacy practices as new. More importantly, literacies could also be considered ontologically new in terms of their ethos stuff if they involve social practices that are “more participatory, collaborative, and distributed—and less published, individuated, and author-centric” than those of conventional literacies (p. 25). In other words,

the more a literacy practice privileges participation over publishing, distributed expertise over centralized expertise, collective intelligence over individualized possessive intelligence, collaboration over individuated authorship, dispersion over scarcity, sharing over ownership, experimentation over “normalization”, innovation and evolution over stability and fixity, creative-innovative rule breaking over generic purity and policing, Phase 2 automation over Phase I automation, relationship over information broadcast, and so on, the more we should regard it as a “new” literacy. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 60)

As we will show, these distinctions have considerable explanatory power in the case of the Winston Society. For one, the Winston Society wiki not only exemplified the technical stuff of Web 2.0, but also its ethos stuff. For example, the wiki’s English language arts page exemplified the norms of collaboration, participation, distributed expertise, experimentation, and creative-innovative rule breaking that Lankshear and Knobel associated with the distinctive social practices of Web 2.0:

Welcome English teachers! Here is an asynchronous common planning space for all language arts professionals who wish to explore outside the NCLB box of standards. Sure, the NCTE standards and most state standards are relatively...open to customization, but that’s not quite saying that they are committed to a 21st century definition of “text,” a truly progressive approach to learning or assessment, or a critical multicultural definition of knowledge. So let’s establish our own definitions and rules. This page is intended for wild writing and free thinking. Nothing is permanent. Nothing is “final.” It’s a collective “working draft.” All Winston Society members should feel invited to pry open the test, fill gaps, question assumptions, correct grammar [sic], add sources, open new topics, link new pages... etc.

Briefly, the wiki embodied new norms of collaboration, collective ownership, and distributed expertise by offering English teachers a common space where they could produce and revise “a collective working draft” that explored the teaching and learning of the English language arts. Ed’s explicit statements of intent clearly exemplify new norms of participatory knowledge-making marked by a preference for “experimentation over ‘normalization’, innovation and evolution over stability and fixity, creative-innovative rule breaking over generic purity and policing” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 60).

Interestingly, the Winston Society offered a provocative challenge to “generic purity and policing” in English education because it did not locate English teachers’ professional knowledge “within the box of NCLB standards”—or the boxes of National Council of Teachers of English / International Reading Association Standards (NCTE/IRA, 1996) or English education research (e.g., Alsup et al., 2006; Brass, 2009). From Ed’s view, these normative expressions of the English language arts fell short of a truly progressive education, 21st century notions of textuality, and a critical multicultural view of knowledge. In contrast, the Winston Society was constructed as a space for classroom teachers to “establish our own definitions and rules,” practice “wild writing and free thinking,” and “pry open the test, fill gaps, and question assumptions” in the NCLB era of content area standards and high stakes standardized tests.

Finally, Lankshear and Knobel's (2006) distinction between the technical stuff and ethos stuff of Web 2.0 also sheds light on teachers' reasons for not interacting with or through the Winston Society. Some teachers expressed questions or concerns about navigating the technical stuff of the wikispace, such as adding links or creating new tabs and buttons; however, most teachers' comments emphasized their lack of experience or discomfort with the ethos stuff of wikis, such as revising other teachers' ideas in a collaborative environment. These findings not only point to several challenges (and opportunities) associated with the use of wikis and related Web 2.0 technologies in teacher education, but also the limited epistemic roles that traditionally have been made available to teachers in teacher education, K-12 schools, and educational reforms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Popkewitz, 1994).

### **Study Design, Data Collection, and Data Analysis**

In this article, we approached the short lifespan of the Winston Society as a bounded case that can be examined through a case study methodology (Merriam, 1998). Given its spontaneous creation and short duration, we did not have the opportunity to study the Winston Society formally during its formation in August and September 2008; instead, we began the study several months later with the prompting of Ed Cator and the approval of our university's IRB. To reconstruct the life of the wiki and capture participants' retrospective explanations of the Winston Society's failure, we considered three forms of data:

- *The Wiki.* We examined archived versions of the Winston Society from August-September 2008 as well as the wiki's logs of participants' logins, revisions, and additions to the wikispace.
- *Questionnaires.* To collect teachers' reflections on their use of the Winston Society, we created and emailed a short questionnaire to all registered users of the wiki that asked them to share the following: their visions for the wiki, their familiarity with wikis and Web 2.0, their own use of the wiki, their participation in related social networks (e.g., education, political activism), and their suggestions for improving the wiki or creating an alternative space that would benefit them as classroom teachers.
- *Supplementary Data.* We also considered four forms of supplementary data: personal communications, course artifacts, artifacts that indexed participants' use of other social media (e.g., Facebook, Yahoo!), and a follow-up conversation with a subset of participants who identified strongly with a teacher book club but not the Winston Society.

Our analysis of the questionnaire responses and supplementary artifacts began with open coding procedures associated with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, we grouped similar responses together to establish thematic categories derived from participants' own words. This method generated seven categories for why participants did not use the wiki and six categories that summarized participants' suggestions for improving the wiki.

At this point, however, we recognized how most comments seemed to map easily onto Lankshear and Knobel's (2006) distinctions between the technical stuff and ethos stuff of Web 2.0 technologies; thus, we then combined several of these initial categories to flesh out what many teachers identified as important disconnects between the Winston Society and the ways of knowing, being, interacting, and doing they had experienced in K-12 schools and university-based teacher education. Table 1 shows how our open codes aligned at many points with Lankshear and Knobel's more developed framework of new literacies:



**Table 1**  
Codes Developed for Teacher Responses

Thematic Categories[a]	Lack of Knowledge Concerning Wikis and Web 2.0
Disconnects with Wiki's Technical Stuff	<p>Participants expected information instead of collaboration.</p> <p>Participants wanted more information on how to add graphics and buttons to the wiki.</p>
Disconnects with Wiki's Ethos Stuff	<p>Discomfort taking on the role of expert within the wiki.</p> <p>Reluctance to modify others' ideas and wiki content.</p> <p>Lack of connection with other participants or preference for face-to-face interactions.</p> <p>Discomfort with public nature of wikis (privacy, surveillance).</p>
[a]Themes not accounted for in Lankshear & Knobel (2006): Time as an issue and lack of activity on the wiki.	

The remainder of this article explores these issues to make sense of the disappointing case of the Winston Society and the potential challenges and opportunities associated with the use of wikis and related Web 2.0 technologies in teacher education.

### Making Sense of the Failure of the Winston Society Wiki

In examining themes that arose around participants' decisions not to use the wiki, we were not surprised to see the pragmatic concern of shortage of time surface. Our participants, like many teachers, are extremely busy people. Some mentioned the overwhelming nature of being new to the profession; others struggled with balancing their jobs as teachers and the demands of being graduate students or parents. However, lack of time alone does not provide a sufficient explanation for teachers' disengagement with the Winston Society. After all, several participants made time to join a teacher reading group or pursue their professional and political interests in other digital environments during the time period we studied. If time alone is insufficient in describing teachers' reluctance to engage with the wiki, what other factors led them to disregard it?

The technical stuff of the Winston Society was also a concern for some teachers. Several participants had limited experience with wikis and expressed some hesitation around the relatively unfamiliar demands of a digitally mediated site. Thus, one participant suggested that a brief video tutorial on wikispaces may have been useful; another teacher proposed that more explicit instruction about graphics and adding buttons would be welcome. This finding suggests that more technology support may have helped establish the Winston Society among this particular group of teachers.

However, although our data analysis suggested that teachers' concerns about time and the technical stuff of wikis were relevant in this study, most of our themes pointed toward teachers' uneasiness with the ethos stuff of the Winston Society. Most teachers' comments suggested that they were not familiar or comfortable with social practices in

education that were more participatory, collaborative, and distributed and less published, individuated, and author centric. Thus, the more dynamic and collaborative aspects of the wiki did not fit participants' conceptions of what they could or should do in this sort of space as teachers and activists.

For example, the Winston Society repeatedly courted and extolled more distributed, less-centralized conceptions of professional knowledge and expertise. However, many of the participants expressed their discomfort with taking on the role of expert in education. Participants seemed to fear that by posting their opinions and knowledge on the wiki, they were projecting a kind of expertise with which they did not feel comfortable owning. As one participant noted, "I believe that I have a lot more to learn about these issues myself. As a result, I don't feel that my postings and/or blogs would be very insightful."

In addition to this more general aversion to taking on the role of expert, several participants did not seem to view the Winston Society as an appropriate venue to challenge one another or build upon one another's ideas. Instead of seeing expertise as something that was distributed and could be built together, they seemed to see it as something that was already established and should be solidified before being published for others to see. In particular, the idea of revising, challenging, or building on other teachers' ideas seemed to violate established norms of teachers' autonomy (as in Lortie, 1974) and individual authorship. Responding to the questionnaire as a research participant, teacher educator, and former teacher, Jory wrote that teacher education often espouses a commitment to constructivism, but in his experience most teachers have had limited opportunities to participate in practices of collaborative knowledge-making or collective authorship:

I've often found that teachers tend to work more privately and are hesitant to revise, delete, or modify each others' ideas; some of my colleagues in teacher education have said the same thing about wikis—some teachers may *add* content, but it takes a huge effort for them to *modify or revise* existing content (e.g., make knowledge collaboratively).

Participants in the study also expressed concerns about cultivating relationships in online spaces. Several comments suggested that teachers recognized how wikis could foster "relationships over information broadcast" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 25). They also indicated a sense of disconnection from the people on the site or noted that they preferred face-to-face relationships over online relationships. In the words of one participant, "The impersonal nature (for me) of online sites made it hard for me to be as invested as I am when I'm engaged in a personal conversation." Participants may have been less willing or able to forge more-connected relationships in an online setting. This apprehension may be unfortunate as full participation in contemporary personal, social, economic, and civic life may increasingly hinge on individuals' abilities to negotiate new media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996) and likely favors individuals who can move between conventional and digital epistemologies, successfully gain or structure attention, construct relationships, and innovate in social contexts with largely emergent rules and procedures (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

Last, participants were nervous about the public nature of the Winston Society. Given their experience with social media, many participants recognized how Web 2.0 technologies enabled the rapid dispersion of knowledge across different social networks; however, participants also recognized potential risks in their educational views and practices being publically accessible and potentially dispersed to wider networks of people. As one participant confessed,

To be honest, I feel uncomfortable posting any material on the internet...While I enjoy perusing the information and exploring different sites, I obtain no satisfaction from supplying my own input. The mode of communication that I prefer is e-mail. For example, when I find a particular website that provides valuable information, I will e-mail the website address to my friends.

This comment embodies a mindset that Lankshear and Knobel (2006) associated with Web 1.0, not 2.0. At the same time, participants who were both inexperienced and experienced with Web 2.0 expressed concerns about privacy and surveillance, especially in the punitive environment of NCLB. For instance, one participant admitted she was anxious that anything she contributed to the wiki could be traced back to her; another worried that he could potentially post something that might get him fired. In short, the Winston Society encouraged creative, innovative rule breaking and wild thinking, and it also sought to promote progressive pedagogies and politics “in plain view of watchful eyes.” However, these were potential risks that not all participants were willing to embrace. Even Ed Cator, the Winston Society’s creator, acknowledged this aspect: “I have to confess that in the current economic climate anything that might seem subversive is probably too scary.”

### **The Challenges and Opportunities of Web 2.0 in Teacher Education**

If these analytical distinctions and research findings are at all justified, our case study suggests that many of the potential challenges, tensions, and opportunities associated with the use of Web 2.0 technologies in teacher education may hinge on teachers’ and teacher educators’ negotiating the distinctive ethos stuff of new literacies. That is, the key issue with new literacies is not simply the presence of new technology, but the more collaborative, participatory, distributed, and experimental ways of knowing, being, interacting, and doing that are embodied in social practices mediated by wikis and related Web 2.0 technologies (Beach et al., 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Myers, 2006). In many ways, Ed Cator framed the wiki in a way that exemplified many of the social practices of Web 2.0; however, given dominant orientations to teacher education in universities and K-12 schools, many teachers and teacher educators may have little experience with collaborative practices that involve distributed participation and expertise and flexible norms for social interaction that are relatively open to improvisation, if not (“naughty”) subversions of the status quo. Thus, if teacher education is to make more productive use of new literacies—and not simply dress up old educational practices in “digital drag” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006)—classroom teachers and teacher educators will need support to navigate digital epistemologies and their distinctive ethos stuff.

Along these lines, our study data pointed to at least three alternative directions for the use of new literacies in teacher education—helping teachers negotiate the social-epistemic disconnects between wikis and more traditional spaces of teacher education, realizing the potential of more tightly defined professional communities or online affinity spaces (Gee, 2004), and utilizing different Web 2.0 technologies, such as social media like Facebook, in support of teachers’ professional networking and political activism.

### **The Challenge of Wikis: Negotiating Conventional vs. Digital Epistemologies**

In this particular case study, the Winston Society wiki was not well aligned with teachers’ experiences with and expectations for teacher education. In some cases, participants wanted to approach the wiki as a source of information, not collaboration—or wanted the wiki to mediate more traditional, less collaborative kinds of social interactions among teachers, such as sharing lesson ideas or classroom anecdotes (as in Bush, 2000;

Dressman, 2000; Stock, 2001). Both beginning teachers and experienced, professionally active teachers expressed concerns about taking up the role of educational expert and more collaborative roles where they could revise, challenge, or extend other teachers' ideas. This response may have been a function of most participants in this case having matriculated through a traditional teacher education program influenced by a largely normative-technicist discourse of teaching, assessment, and management (Gore & Parkes, 2008). At the same time, teachers' discomfort with participatory knowledge making, collaborative authorship, distributed expertise, and flexible norms for social interaction may point more broadly to the historically narrow construction of teaching and teacher education in the United States.

For more than a century, teacher education in the US has emphasized a practically oriented acquisition of information and skills and devalued an intellectual focus; thus, teachers' working conditions have not provided opportunities for genuine intellectual training or systematic reflection (Popkewitz, 1994, p. 4). Along these lines, the organizational structure of K-12 schools has worked against teachers having meaningful, sustained opportunities to collaborate with other teachers and adults; further, many egalitarian norms within the teaching profession work against teachers standing out or questioning the classroom practices of other teachers (Lortie, 1974). In short, the dominant configurations of teaching and teacher education generally work against teachers taking up positions of professional expertise and collaborative knowledge-making—even before considering the challenge of post-typographic texts and digital epistemologies.

The emergence of new digital epistemologies only exacerbates the perennial challenge of teachers taking up serious epistemic roles in education. In our case, teachers and a teacher educator were not only hesitant to assume the position of expert in the wikispace, they were not especially comfortable with new digital epistemologies that replace traditional notions of truth with an emphasis on knowing how to construct knowledge collaboratively, gain or structure attention, invent new rules and conventions, or innovate successfully in contexts where there are few or no established rules (as also found by Knobel & Lankshear, 2006). As someone familiar with many social practices of Web 2.0, Ed Cator seemed to recognize the value and place of "wild thinking, creating one's own definitions and rules...being 'naughty'...and constructing knowledge" with other teachers across time and space; however, this study, coupled with published and anecdotal evidence in teacher education, suggests that many preservice teachers, practicing teachers, and even doctoral students in teacher education have had limited opportunities for professional collaboration or serious epistemic roles in education—especially in school-based professional development and university-based teacher education.

Thus, one implication of this case study is that some teachers may need considerable support to navigate the technical stuff of Web 2.0 and—more importantly—the distinctive ways of knowing, being, and doing that are constitutively linked with new digital epistemologies. This might mean, for example, that teachers (and teacher educators) should be encouraged to experiment with different identities and social practices in a range of digital environments and sites of popular culture (Myers, 2006). It might also mean that teacher educators may need to push teachers not only to add links and content to wikis, but edit and revise others' work to experience more participatory knowledge-making, collective authorship, and distributed expertise. By providing teachers with opportunities and support to negotiate different social-epistemic roles through wikis and related Web 2.0 tools, they may develop a more situated and robust knowledge of digital epistemologies and a much better sense of the social construction of knowledge more generally.

## **Professional Communities and Affinity Spaces**

Several comments also suggested that teachers did not have a strong connection with other people on the site. To use one respondent's phrase, the Winston Society may have been a cool idea, but it could also come across as an "inside joke," especially for teachers who were not enrolled in the master's course with Ed. In short, most of the Winston Society's 15-20 users may have been professionally active teachers, but the wiki may not have constituted a tight enough community or narrow enough area of interest to create or support a dynamic community of educators and activists.

Teachers offered two, somewhat divergent suggestions to improve the wiki's capacity to foster more social interaction. On one hand, some teachers suggested that digital spaces may be more productive if they were situated in social groups where participants already had established relationships and some shared interests. For example, some participants speculated that a wiki may work in their teacher book club because participants knew and trusted each other. On the other hand, some teachers suggested that wikis might be more successful if they were organized around a more tightly defined area of shared interest. For example, one participant noted that she could see herself participating extensively in an online space organized around LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and questioning) issues in education—but not the Winston Society, which targeted a relatively wide range of educational interests that spanned all grade levels and all subject areas.

Along these lines, participants familiar with the work of James Gee (2004) suggested that the Winston Society could be reconfigured as an affinity space. According to Gee (2004), affinity spaces are not centered on people's relationships with others, but on a shared interest or idea that organizes people's social interactions and action: "What people have an affinity with (or for) in an affinity space is not first and foremost the other people using the space, but the endeavor or interest around which [it] is organized" (Gee, 2004, p. 84).

Importantly, affinity spaces entail a great deal of choice, negotiable participation, and a range of social roles for participants, regardless of their backgrounds. Typically, affinity spaces emphasize a common endeavor to center the group's interactions, allow experts and newcomers areas where they can share space, acknowledge that interaction and collaboration may change the content of the space, encourage both specialized and broad knowledge, value dispersed knowledge, know that participation has many avenues, and encourage participants to take on leadership roles and to use leaders as resources (Gee, 2004).

In many respects, the Winston Society valued the dispersion of knowledge and invited collaboration and social interactions that could potentially change the space. At the same time, it failed to unite its participants by establishing a clearly defined community of teachers or interest-based affinity space. The Winston Society combined a number of potentially distinct areas of interest: critiques of NCLB, constructivist pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, collaborative lessons in English, math, social studies, and science in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. Thus, Ed's commendable efforts to be inclusive may have led to the construction of a relatively diffused space that was too broad to support productive collaborations or professional networking among like-minded teachers.

Perhaps by narrowing the wiki's scope to a more identifiable professional community or specific issue—such as antisexist and LGBTQ issues in education *or* new literacies in high school English classrooms *or* resistance to NCLB—a Winston-like wiki may have

attracted, created, or fostered a more identifiable community of educators or activists. In short, a less inclusive space may have been more conducive to meeting specific interests and fostering a sort of professional community that, while not tailored to all teachers, may have been pertinent and vibrant for some teachers.

### **Professional Networking and Activism Through Social Media**

In addition to their knowledge of affinity spaces (Gee, 2004), several teachers also acknowledged their preference for social media, especially Facebook, over wikis. In this study, participants may have been relatively inexperienced and uncomfortable with norms of collaborative knowledge and distributed experience (e.g., wikis), but most participated to some degree in social networking (e.g., Facebook) or at least logged in regularly to Yahoo! for email, news, and so forth. Many accounts of new literacies define wikis and social media as key technologies of Web 2.0; however, while wikis and social media may share some of the same technical stuff and ethos stuff, Facebook and related social utilities seem less equipped than wikis to mediate collaborative knowledge-meaning than sustaining or building social networks and facilitating rapid dispersion of information across social groups (Beach et al., 2008).

The inverse is also true—wikis may be able to mediate social relationships and the rapid dispersion of knowledge to some degree, but the scope and popularity of social utilities like Facebook or My Space make them more viable spaces for professional networking and the exchange of news, current events, and opinion pieces, including editorials and blogs. In this particular case study at least, teachers seemed more interested in building or maintaining relationships and exchanging information than constructing knowledge collaboratively and often anonymously; thus, it was social media, not wikis, that constituted the Web 2.0 technology that was more aligned with participants' expectations and preferences for professional development and political activism.

Therefore, participants suggested several potential advantages of using social media in teacher education. Importantly, social media, such as Facebook, were already part of the social fabric of many teachers' daily lives; thus, whereas some users experienced the Winston Society as a relatively artificial add-on to their professional lives, most participants already had integrated social media into their daily routines and social relationships. In this sense, social media like Facebook could offer important starting points for Web 2.0 in teacher education, because many teachers not only may know much of the technology, but also the social practices associated with online social networking.

As a case in point, several registered users of the Winston Society failed to interact through the wiki, but they did interact with each other (including us) through social media. For example, several English teachers in the study regularly circulated education-related content through Facebook via status updates or links to newspaper or magazine articles, their own blogs, or published blogs from education writers like Mike Rose, Alfie Kohn, and Susan Ohanian. These stories and perspectives could not only circulate rapidly through teachers' personal social networks, but also travel across the social networks of other educators and activists through the feeds, blogs, links, and tags of their Facebook friends-connections.

In addition, we documented instances in this study where participants joined new professional communities or participated in political action causes they accessed through their social media networks. During a recent weeklong period, for example, teachers and teacher educators in our own Facebook networks have circulated news articles and education blogs that evaluate mayoral and gubernatorial candidates' education platforms, provided links to media coverage of K-12 teachers and students engaged in political

activism, promoted or joined progressive education organizations like Rethinking Schools, and enlisted other educators in the “Teacher Letters to Obama” political action campaign and public opposition to the antipublic education documentary, *Waiting for Superman*.

It may be useful for teachers and teacher educators to wrestle with the affordances and limitations of wikis and social media—and important differences between them. On one hand, since teachers’ work lives often leave little time for professional reading and professional community, social media may serve important functions by providing teachers with quick access to current events in education and crucial access to professional communities or political action campaigns that otherwise might not be available through their local schools, communities, or teacher education programs.

On the other hand, wikis may not be closely aligned with many teachers’ experiences with and expectations for teacher education, but they also mediate practices of participatory knowledge-making, collaborative authorship, and distributed expertise that may offer teachers more serious epistemic roles in teaching and teacher education—as well as access to many ways of knowing, being, interacting, and doing associated with meaningful participation in early 21st-century personal, social, economic, cyber, and civic life (Alsop et al., 2006; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

We recognize important limitations of this study. Given the short lifespan of the Winston Society, we were working with a relatively small number of participants and smaller data set than many qualitative studies in teacher education. In addition, we recognize that all case studies are necessarily situated in a way that may or may not have relevance to other contexts. At the same time, many of the tensions and themes that emerged in this study seem to point to perennial concerns with respect to teacher knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Lortie, 1974; Popkewitz, 1994)—concerns that may be exacerbated by the emergence of new ways of being, doing, interacting, and knowing associated with new literacies, digital epistemologies, and Web 2.0 (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

The case of the Winston Society suggests that in some cases the biggest challenges associated with wikis and Web 2.0 in teacher education may be more epistemological than technological. For the participants in our study, at least, the technological demands of the Winston Society were seemingly less threatening than participating in social practices that emphasized more participatory and collaborative knowledge-making, distributed expertise, and less published and individuated kinds of authorship.

In particular, several teachers were noticeably uncomfortable with the prospect of modifying or extending other teachers’ ideas in a collaborative space. These may be important tensions to pursue through additional inquiry, especially in English education programs that have approached wikis and related Web 2.0 technologies in more substantial, programmatic, and strategic ways (e.g., Heintz, Borsheim, Caughlan, Juzwik, & Sherry, 2010). These issues also have implications for teacher education. On one hand, our study suggests that if teacher education is to make more productive use of wikis, educators not only may need technological support, but—more importantly—opportunities and support to explore collaborative knowledge-making and collective authorship with other educators and move between conventional epistemologies and digital epistemologies. On the other hand, teachers’ recommendations also point to the largely untapped potential of affinity spaces and social media, not wikis, to develop and extend teachers’ professional networks as well as their educational and political interests and commitments.

To conclude, the field of English education tends to emphasize success stories, not case studies of innovative ideas that failed (Bush, 2000; Dressman, 2000). However, these norms of the field can draw attention away from many of the contextual challenges of teaching and teacher education. In this study, we have explored teachers' disengagement with a potentially powerful wiki to help teacher educators recognize not only the opportunities but the challenges and tensions that may be associated with use of wikis and Web 2.0 technologies in K-12 schools, university-based teacher education, and even digital spaces created by and for practicing teachers.

Our goal is not to dissuade teachers and teacher educators from integrating wikis and Web 2.0 technologies into teacher education. Quite the opposite, we hope that we have highlighted relevant scholarship and salient themes in our case study that may help Ed Cator and like-minded colleagues in K-12 schools and universities to approach wikis and Web 2.0 more strategically. In our view, wikis and related Web 2.0 technologies may play an important role in constructing new spaces of teacher education where, in the spirit of the Winston Society, teachers can begin to "establish their own definitions and rules" and "collective working drafts"—and maybe even be a little "naughty."

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