

Team 3 – Collaborative Writing Paper

There are a variety of tools with which one can collaborate on a writing project. Although no tools guarantees that the experience of creating a collaborative piece of writing will be pleasant, there are many tools that enable users to interact with each other in more diverse and meaningful ways. In this paper, we will describe three tools, list the pros and cons for each of them, provide some insight as to the values of the features which each tool offers, and propose new features that would be beneficial for future collaborative writing tools (see Appendix A).

Google Sites is a simple, practically code-less application that allows users to generate simple web pages. Although the sites can be customized (or basically even built from scratch), it is most common to use one of the many provided templates or themes when creating one's own webpage. The point is that Google Sites are not for the web developer, but rather for the layman who wants to create a web page. For the collaborative processes of groups because it means that the work product does not have to be a flat, static document. Rather, a page can have many users and is fully capable of having multimedia data embedded into it. A prime example of this effort is Mrs. Kliegman's 'Survivor MD' site (2011). It includes several wikis and other resources, contains multimedia effects, and was assembled collaboratively by a class of 5th graders.

Google Docs and its application in the classroom is introduced by Google as:

"Google Docs is a free, Web-based word processing, presentations and spreadsheets program. Unlike desktop software, Google Docs lets people create web-based documents, presentations and spreadsheets that anyone in the group can update from his/her own computer, even at the same time. Instead of emailing around files and having to deal with

the confusion and extra work involved in managing different file versions and manually aggregating input from others, anyone in the group can edit the document online from anywhere” (Google, Using Google Docs in the Classroom).

Google Docs also includes collaborative revision tools that allow users to compare the different revisions of a document (Google, Collaborative Revision with Google Docs). Tania Jordan lists several suggestions in a blog entry dedicated to using Google Docs for collaborative writing, including adding comments to a document, using the built-in chat feature to communicate with other contributors about the document, and how to finalize the revisions into a finished document (Jordan, 2009). Files can also be created in a view-only mode that does not allow modifications; this is useful for distributing instructions or course (Adams, 2008).

When Godwin-Jones wrote his article in 2003, he distinguished "first-generation web" tools (such as discussion forums, chat rooms, and instant messaging) from "second-generation web" tools (such as blogs and wikis). He states that "...wikis are intensely collaborative...The goal of wiki sites is to become a shared repository of knowledge..." (p. 16). Yaden and Blaine (2007) note that the tools available within wikis resemble word processing programs.

In conclusion, Arivananthan (2009) distinguished among collaborative writing tools based upon their optimal usage. Specifically, "Wikis are worth using when you want to build a body of knowledge online", whereas "Google Docs is best used when you have one document requiring input from others" whereas "Google Sites is perfect for all non-techies out there who need an online collaborative environment to write, share and collect different types of information in one place, while maintaining a semblance of order".

Appendix A

| | Google Docs | Google Sites | Sakai Wiki |
|-------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <i>Fundamental features</i> | Includes key word processing tools, such as selecting font types, font sizes, bold, underline, and tables. Can add and delete content, as well as add comments on existing content. All changes are saved in history. | Create a web page without coding. Embed multimedia. Allows multiple people to have “edit” access to the website. | Includes key word processing tools, such as selecting font types, font sizes, bold, underline, and tables. Can add and delete content. All changes are saved in history. |
| <i>Similarities</i> | Allows all users to view and change the work product. Resembles a word processing program to users. | Allows all users with access to view and change the work product. | Allows all users to view and change the work product. Resembles a word processing program to users. |
| <i>Differences</i> | Allows more than one user to make changes to a document simultaneously. | Allows more than one user to make changes to a document simultaneously and sequentially. The final product is a “live” web page or site, rather than a single document. | Allows users to makes changes to a document sequentially. |
| <i>Effective features</i> | Documents can be organized into folders. Documents can also be created for view-only access. | Websites are stylized to look professional and appealing. Sites can organize information in a hierarchical structure. Sites can be multimedia and link to other “live” content. | Can create multiple pages of content which link to each other. Can also organize pages into folders. |
| <i>Ideas for new features</i> | Google is constantly adding new features and functions to Google Docs. | Sites should make be more user-friendly for people with disabilities. Create a “print to document” option so web pages will format to an 8-1/2 by 11 inches PDF file. | Allow for multiple users to edit document simultaneously. Either use standard HTML coding or allow formatting through menu-driven commands. |

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