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From Wiki Pedagogy to Platformed Collaboration: Revisiting Collaborative Digital Writing in Technical Communication Through a Decolonial Lens

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Introduction

There is something worth pausing over in the optimism of Jennifer Bracken Scott's 2011 article "Teaching Technical Communication with Wikis." Scott wrote at a moment when educators across composition and technical communication were genuinely excited about what Web 2.0 platforms could do, including, giving students real audiences, sharing ownership of documents, and a visible record of their collaborative process. Wikis, in her telling, were democratic almost by nature. They were free to use, easy to learn, and built on the principle that anyone could contribute. For a field that had long been working to move students away from solitary, instructor-directed writing, wikis looked like the technology that might finally put collaboration at the center of the classroom, where it belonged.

That excitement was not misplaced. Scott identified real pedagogical affordances, and her observations about student accountability, iterative revision, shared authorship, and public audience still hold up. But the digital landscape she was writing about has changed substantially and so has the field's ability to ask harder questions about it. Wikis have not disappeared, especially in Wikipedia-based writing assignments and course-based knowledge-building projects, but they no longer occupy the same privileged place in classroom collaboration that they did in the Web 2.0 moment. Much of the everyday collaborative writing once imagined through wiki assignments now happens in Google Docs, Microsoft 365, Notion, learning-management-system discussion spaces, and other proprietary platforms. That shift matters because these platforms do not simply replace wikis as more convenient tools. They change the institutional, economic, and epistemological conditions under which students collaborate.

This article therefore uses wiki pedagogy in a specific sense. I do not treat all collaborative platforms as the same genre, nor do I use Wikipedia as a stand-in for every wiki. By wiki pedagogy, I mean the pedagogical tradition in technical communication and composition that used collaboratively editable, revision-tracked, web-based writing spaces to teach shared authorship, public documentation, recursive revision, and audience awareness. That tradition included Wikipedia assignments, course wikis hosted through tools such as PBworks and Wikispaces, and locally designed collaborative knowledge projects. Wikipedia remains important because it is the most visible and heavily studied wiki-based knowledge community, but it is also a specific encyclopedic genre with explicit policies about verifiability, no original research,

and neutral point of view. Those policies should be understood on their own terms, not flattened into claims about all wikis. At the same time, the migration of many classroom collaborations from wikis to proprietary word-processing platforms invites a larger question: what happens to the promises of wiki pedagogy when its values are carried into platforms built for different institutional purposes?

The invitation to revisit earlier conversations in the field makes this a useful moment to return to Scott's contribution. Revisiting, in this article, does not mean correcting Scott from the vantage point of hindsight. It means asking what her framework still gives us and what it cannot fully answer under contemporary conditions. The core question is no longer simply whether collaborative web writing helps students practice technical communication. It is also whether the platforms, assessment practices, and epistemologies through which collaboration is organized reproduce the exclusions that technical communication scholarship has increasingly learned to name.

I read Scott's article through two intersecting lenses. The first is platform politics, that is, the ways that collaborative digital tools, however useful they may be, are never neutral conduits for writing but are shaped by commercial interests, surveillance architectures, interface defaults, and design choices that encode assumptions about knowledge, labor, and participation. The second lens is decolonial and feminist pedagogy— a body of scholarship developed with particular focus in technical communication by scholars including, Haas (2007), Jones, Moore, Walton (2016), Gonzales (2018) that asks instructors to examine the epistemological commitments embedded in their pedagogical choices. These two lenses belong together because platforms do not only organize data; they organize whose knowledge becomes visible, whose labor is counted, and whose ways of collaborating are treated as professionally legitimate. A platform-capitalism critique helps us see the institutional and economic arrangements behind classroom tools. A decolonial and feminist critique helps us ask how those arrangements distribute recognition, risk, and authority unevenly across students. Together, they move wiki pedagogy from a celebration of participation to a more careful account of participation's conditions.

The article proceeds in four movements. First, I situate Scott's framework within the Web 2.0 optimism of its moment and identify the collaborative learning traditions that made wiki assignments attractive in technical communication classrooms. Second, I distinguish wiki-based writing environments from later proprietary collaborative platforms and examine what this shift reveals about the political economy of classroom technology. Third, I apply decolonial and feminist frameworks to collaborative writing pedagogy, with particular attention to linguistic plurality, invisible labor, and the epistemological limits of consensus-based document production. Finally, I offer five pedagogical principles for instructors who want to teach collaborative digital writing in ways that remain practically usable while becoming more ethically and historically serious.

Scott's Framework and the Limits of Web 2.0 Optimism

Scott's article built its case on a convergence of collaborative learning theory and practical accessibility. On the theoretical side, it drew from a long composition tradition that had argued against the idea of writing as a solitary act. Bruffee (1984), for example, framed collaborative learning as a way of helping students enter disciplinary "conversations" through peer exchange, a shift he called "a process of reacculturation" (p. 649) rather than a simple transfer of information. Trimbur (1989) complicated the language of consensus by warning that collaboration can suppress difference when agreement becomes the only valued outcome, arguing instead that consensus properly understood is "a powerful instrument for students to generate differences" (p. 603) rather than a mechanism for silencing them. These frameworks did not simply ask students to divide tasks. They treated knowledge as socially produced, revision as dialogic, and the classroom as a space where students could learn by negotiating meaning with one another. Wiki technology seemed to give those ideas a visible architecture. The ability to see who had written what, to watch a document develop through an edit history, and to coordinate with peers around a shared structure made process legible rather than hiding collaboration behind a polished final product.
Scott was right that this mattered. Making the process of collaborative writing visible is a genuine pedagogical advance, particularly in technical communication courses where students are often asked to produce manuals, guides, documentation sets, and other genres that approximate workplace collaboration. A wiki made the document feel alive. It allowed students to revise one another's work, link across pages, preserve prior versions, and understand writing as an iterative practice rather than a single submission. These were not incidental features. They helped students see technical communication as a social and procedural activity.

The practical case rested on access. Wikis offered instructors and students a relatively low-cost way to publish real content to real audiences. Students without access to expensive design software could practice document management and public-facing writing through a simple browser interface. The distance between "write a memo for a hypothetical client" and "publish a document that actual people can find and read" is the distance between practice and practice that matters. In 2011, this distinction carried real pedagogical weight. Web-based publication helped instructors move technical communication away from purely simulated contexts and toward more consequential, audience-oriented work.

What Scott's framework could not yet fully account for was the epistemological infrastructure of the platforms it celebrated. The open-source wiki tradition grew from specific cultural and ideological roots, including, the free software movement, hacker culture, and a particular strain of techno-libertarian optimism that often treated openness of code, openness of access, and openness of knowledge as if they naturally reinforced one another. Those roots shaped what many wiki environments valued. They valued visible edits over invisible coordination. They valued attributable contribution over relational labor. They often valued consensus over the coexistence of multiple, potentially conflicting perspectives.

Wikipedia, the most visible instantiation of wiki culture, had already received serious critical attention by the time Scott wrote. Reagle (2010) offered a rich account of Wikipedia's collaborative culture while also surfacing tensions between its egalitarian aspirations and its patterns of participation. Later research sharpened those tensions. To illustrate, Gruwell (2015), through interviews with women Wikipedia editors, argued that Wikipedia's epistemological standards and community practices often disadvantaged contributors whose knowledge did not already appear in forms recognized by the platform. Yet Wikipedia also requires careful genre-specific treatment. Its demand for secondary sources and its prohibition on original research is not arbitrary platform quirks; they follow from its self-understanding as an encyclopedia. A critique of Wikipedia's epistemology should therefore acknowledge that its policies are coherent within an encyclopedic genre while still asking what happens when that genre's standards are treated as a general model for collaborative knowledge production in classrooms.

This distinction is important for wiki pedagogy. Course wikis do not have to reproduce Wikipedia's policies. A student-built documentation wiki, a community resource wiki, or a class knowledge base may have very different rules about evidence, authority, authorship, and lived experience. Still, Wikipedia's prominence has shaped how many instructors and students imagine collaborative online writing: as a process of incremental edits, visible revision histories, citation-backed claims, and negotiated consensus. Those habits are pedagogically useful, but they are not entirely neutral. They privilege some ways of knowing and participating over others.

Selber's (2004) framework of multiliteracies helps identify the issue. Digital literacy in writing classrooms must move beyond the functional ability to operate a tool. Functional literacy is important because students need to know how to edit, link, comment, and manage versions. Critical literacy requires students need to understand tools as cultural artifacts shaped by institutions, histories, and values. Rhetorical literacy is relevant here, as well, because students need to make deliberate choices within and against those systems, for example, adapting a platform to a situation, recognizing when its defaults distort the work, and deciding when another tool or genre would better serve an audience. A functionally literate student knows how to use a wiki. A critically literate student knows to ask what the wiki's design encodes about knowledge, authority, and contribution. A rhetorically literate student can decide how to use, resist, redesign, or supplement that wiki in response to the needs of a community. Scott's work remains generative because it foregrounds the functional and collaborative possibilities of wikis. The scholarship of the past decade gives us the language to extend that framework toward critical and rhetorical engagement.

From Wikis to Proprietary Platforms: The Political Economy of Classroom Tools

The shift from wikis to proprietary collaborative platforms should not be treated as a simple software update. Wikis, Wikipedia assignments, Google Docs, Microsoft 365, and Notion all support collaborative writing, but they do so through different genres, architectures, ownership structures, and assumptions about work. A wiki is typically

organized as a networked set of pages whose revision history records collective knowledge-building over time. A real-time collaborative word processor is typically organized around a document file that multiple people can edit synchronously, often within an institutional account system. A project management platform such as Notion organizes collaboration through databases, templates, permissions, and workspaces. These differences matter pedagogically because each platform teaches students, often quietly, what collaboration is supposed to look like.

In 2011, using a course wiki was often imagined as a choice to work outside the most familiar commercial systems. Wikis such as PBworks and Wikispaces offered educational accounts and made web publication seem more accessible than it had been before. Even when these tools were not fully open source, they were frequently framed through Web 2.0 ideals of participation, openness, and shared authorship. The situation now is different. Most collaborative writing in educational contexts happens through products owned by some of the largest technology companies in the world. Google Docs is convenient, powerful, and widely available, but it is also part of an ecosystem whose business model depends on data collection, account integration, and platform lock-in. Microsoft 365 and Notion operate through different models, but they too embed classroom writing within corporate infrastructures.

Gillespie's analysis of platform governance is useful here. In "The Relevance of Algorithms" (2014), he argues that platforms often present themselves as neutral conduits while actively shaping communication through algorithmic systems, design affordances, data practices, and terms of service; even the most mundane classroom tool is, in his terms, "producing and certifying knowledge" (p. 167) rather than simply transmitting it. The apparent neutrality of a platform is itself an ideological achievement. When Google Docs presents itself simply as a tool for writing, it performs this kind of neutrality. The design choice to make comments threaded, to make suggestions accept-or-reject decisions, or to give some users ownership and others limited access, and to treat a resolved comment as a completed unit of work does not present itself as a theory of collaboration. It presents itself as the obvious way collaboration works. Gillespie's point is that this naturalization is where the ideology resides.

Noble's Algorithms of Oppression (2018) adds another layer. She demonstrates that the design choices of major technology platforms can encode racial and gender hierarchies even when those systems appear merely technical, a phenomenon she terms "technological redlining" (p. 1) to capture how systems that look neutral quietly sort and disadvantage users along familiar lines of race and gender. This insight matters for collaborative writing pedagogy because classroom platforms are not built from nowhere. They are designed in professional and corporate cultures with their own assumptions about productivity, documentation, ownership, and communication. When instructors assign tools built for those environments, they import some of those assumptions into the classroom. This does not mean instructors should refuse to use them. It means the use of these platforms should become part of the curriculum rather than an invisible condition of the curriculum.

Three concerns deserve particular emphasis in technical communication pedagogy. The first is surveillance asymmetry. Proprietary collaborative tools log activity in ways that are rarely disclosed to users in terms they can practically evaluate. A student using a cloud-based collaborative platform for a graded assignment has, in effect, been enrolled in a data environment whose terms they did not meaningfully negotiate. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, offers some protections for student education records in the United States, but it was not designed for the current architecture of cloud-based educational technology. Its relevance to behavioral data, keystroke activity, revision patterns, and co-authorship networks remains difficult for ordinary users to evaluate. The ethical issue is not simply whether a tool is legally compliant. It is whether students can meaningfully consent to the data arrangements that participation requires.

The second concern is access, which looks different now than it did when course wikis were the dominant model of web-based collaboration. Many earlier wiki platforms ran adequately on slower connections and older hardware. Real-time collaborative editing does not always do so. Latency problems, synchronization failures, device limitations, and browser instability can make collaborative work uneven in ways that are easy for instructors to misread as lack of preparation or weak participation. What looks like a pedagogical level playing field may be tilted along familiar axes of class, geography, disability, language, and institutional access. This is not an argument against using contemporary platforms; it is an argument for designing assignments that acknowledge the unequal conditions under which students use them.

The third concern is epistemological. Proprietary collaborative platforms are organized around a particular model of how documents get made: individual contributions are tracked, attributed, commented on, accepted, rejected, and eventually accumulated into a unified text. Revision moves toward a settled version. Comments are discrete, addressable, and resolvable. This model is often useful, especially in professional documentation work, but it is not universal and not politically neutral. It reflects workplace cultures organized around accountability, productivity, ownership, and version control. Selber, to some extent, asks instructors to make such assumptions visible. Teaching students to use these platforms without teaching them to interrogate those values leaves them with functional literacy but not critical or rhetorical literacy.

The field's relative silence around platform capitalism is itself worth noting. Technical communication has long studied tools, documentation systems, usability, and workplace writing, but it has often approached classroom platforms as practical supports rather than as political-economic actors. At the same time, decolonial and feminist technical communication scholarship has deeply examined power, access, positionality, and marginalization. Bringing platform studies into conversation with that scholarship does not import an unrelated concern into the field. It clarifies how tools participate in the very power relations that social justice-oriented technical communication has already taught us to analyze.

Decolonial and Feminist Frameworks: Rethinking the Collaborative Writing Classroom

The past two decades have seen a sustained effort within technical communication scholarship to bring decolonial, feminist, and social justice frameworks to bear on the field's core assumptions. It has reshaped graduate curricula, influenced research methods, and produced scholarship that is now widely cited across composition and professional communication. For collaborative digital writing, its central lesson is that participation is not the same thing as justice. A platform may invite everyone to contribute while still defining contribution in ways that recognize some forms of knowledge and labor more readily than others.

The thread that most directly addresses digital tools and knowledge production runs from Haas's "Wampum as Hypertext" (2007) through Gonzales's Sites of Translation (2018). Haas's argument is deceptively simple but radical in its implications. She opens by naming the problem directly: the "'history' of hypertext is a Western frontier story" (p. 82), one that erases the practices it quietly repeats. Including the concept of hypertext, with its logic of linking, nonlinear navigation, and multimodal meaning-making, is not an invention of Western digital culture. Wampum belts functioned as hypertextual knowledge systems long before the internet existed. Lenape, Haudenosaunee, and other Indigenous communities developed sophisticated practices for encoding, transmitting, and interpreting complex information across multiple media and contexts. Western digital culture did not invent such practices; it rearticulated them in a different material infrastructure and then often forgot that it was rearticulating.

In "A Land-Based Digital Design Rhetoric," Arola (2018) argues for understanding digital composing as situated in relationships to place rather than as a disembodied activity occurring solely within technological interfaces. Her account challenges the tendency to treat digital spaces as detached from the material and cultural relations that make them possible. Relatedly, in "Composing as Culturing: An American Indian Approach to Digital Ethics," Arola (2018) frames composing and designing as practices that culture people into particular relations and values. For collaborative digital writing, this means that the platform is not the only thing that needs critical attention; instructors must also ask what relations to place, memory, community, and responsibility are being reproduced through the act of composing.

For wiki pedagogy, the implications are significant. If the collaborative digital writing classroom treats open-source wiki culture or contemporary platform conventions as the natural form of collaborative knowledge production, it reproduces the epistemological erasure Haas describes. It positions students whose knowledge traditions do not look like edit histories, formal citations, resolved comments, and unified final documents as deficient rather than as bearers of sophisticated practices that the dominant framework cannot see. This plays out in concrete classroom moments: in the student whose knowledge of a community practice is difficult to cite from a published secondary source; in the student whose preferred mode of collaboration involves oral negotiation before textual production; in the student who understands a technical concept through a heritage language that English renders imprecisely.

Gonzales's scholarship on multilingual technical communication gives this concern empirical and methodological grounding. In Sites of Translation (2018), she studies the intellectual labor performed by multilingual communicators as they translate information for their communities. This labor involves not just linguistic conversion but rhetorical negotiation across cultures, worldviews, and contexts. It is active invention rather than passive transfer. Crucially, such labor is often made invisible in academic and professional contexts that only recognize English-language, textually traceable, citation-backed contributions as legitimate intellectual work. A collaborative writing classroom that assigns English-language platforms and assesses contribution primarily through tracked text edits is structurally limited in what it can see.

Jones's (2016) call for a social justice orientation in technical communication pedagogy, and the framework Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) develop in Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn (2019) provide the broader conceptual architecture for this analysis. Jones argues that technical communicators should move beyond a neutral facilitation stance toward an advocate orientation that asks how communication practices can amplify the agency of marginalized communities or reinforce their exclusion. Their attention to positionality, privilege, and power asks instructors to examine not only what they teach but also the assumptions they carry into the classroom about who is teaching, who is being taught, and what kinds of knowledge are already present before instruction begins.

Gruwell's research on Wikipedia applies these concerns to a concrete collaborative digital platform. Her interviews with women Wikipedia editors reveal how formal epistemological standards, especially the preference for published secondary sources and the exclusion of personal experience from article content, can disadvantage contributors whose knowledge comes from embodied practice, community membership, and lived experience. Because the platform minimizes what editors must disclose about themselves, Gruwell notes, "it is difficult to discern who these users are" (p. 121), which lets an illusion of interchangeable, standpoint-free contribution stand in for genuine inclusion. Again, this critique does not require dismissing Wikipedia's encyclopedic genre. An encyclopedia has reasons for requiring verifiability. The pedagogical problem emerges when instructors treat the standards of that genre as if they were general standards for all collaborative knowledge-making. Students may learn to translate their knowledge into forms the platform recognizes, but the translation labor itself remains unacknowledged.

The same pattern appears in classroom collaboration more broadly. Any environment that measures contribution through traceable text production while remaining blind to organizational, translational, relational, and interpretive labor will reproduce uneven recognition. In technical communication classrooms, group projects are common, and contribution is often assessed through final artifacts, revision histories, or peer reports that privilege visible output. Yet the work that makes collaboration possible frequently includes scheduling meetings, mediating conflict, clarifying expectations, translating disciplinary language, maintaining group morale, and connecting the project to community needs. Labor studies and feminist research on work have long shown that

such coordination and care labor is often rendered invisible even when it is essential (Corbin & Strauss, 1993; Star & Strauss, 1999). Inoue's (2019) labor-based grading scholarship also offers a useful pedagogical bridge here because it asks instructors to value the conditions and processes of learning rather than only the polished product. For collaborative writing, that means assessing the labor of collaboration itself, not only the final document.

One more dimension deserves attention is that the model of knowledge embedded in many collaborative writing tools. Most platforms are organized around convergence. Comments get resolved, contradictions get reconciled, thus the document moves toward a stable and singular final form. This is often appropriate in professional documentation, where users need clarity and consistency. But it is not culturally universal, and it is not always the best model for learning. Many knowledge traditions value the coexistence of multiple perspectives rather than their resolution into consensus. Vetter and McDowell (2021) make this point clearly in relation to Wikipedia's neutral point of view policy: neutrality presents itself as an epistemological virtue, but it depends on assumptions about what knowledge is and how disagreement should be managed. Wikipedia functions for students as more than a site of learning. Through careful, responsible engagement with the platform, and particularly through grappling with the Neutral Point of View policy, students gain critical purchase on how influence operates and how representations mediate our understanding of the world (McDowell and Vetter, 2022). Technical communication pedagogy can teach students to produce unified documents while also helping them understand that unity is a rhetorical choice, not the natural endpoint of all collaboration.

Five Principles for a Revised Pedagogical Framework

What follows is not a prescriptive curriculum but a set of principles for instructors who want to teach collaborative digital writing in ways that take seriously both Scott's insights and the scholarly conversation that has developed since her article appeared. These principles can apply to wiki assignments, Wikipedia-based projects, Google Docs collaborations, shared documentation spaces, or other platformed writing environments. Their purpose is not to tell instructors which tool to use. Their purpose is to make the tool, the labor, and the epistemology of collaboration visible.

Principle 1: Teach Platforms as Arguments, Not Tools

The most fundamental shift this framework requires is also the simplest to state: instructors should treat the platforms they assign as objects of rhetorical analysis rather than as neutral infrastructure. This does not mean abandoning proprietary platforms or romanticizing earlier wikis as pure alternatives. It means building into any assignment a critical examination of the platform's design, ownership, data practices, and epistemological commitments. Selber's three-part framework of functional, critical, and rhetorical digital literacy offers a useful scaffold. Selber is careful to note that functional skill is "necessary if not sufficient" (p. 33) on its own; it is a floor, not a ceiling. A

functionally literate student knows how to edit a wiki page or comment in Google Docs. A critically literate student understands that the interface reflects institutional values and interests. A rhetorically literate student can decide how to use the platform strategically, when to resist its defaults, and when another medium would better serve the writing situation.

In practice, this might mean asking students to read a platform's help documentation, community guidelines, or terms of service alongside their first collaborative writing assignment. In a Wikipedia assignment, students might examine the community portal, student training modules, or policies on verifiability and no original research as genre instruction rather than treating them as neutral rules. In a Google Docs assignment, students might compare owner, editor, commenter, and viewer roles and ask what model of authority those roles assume. In a Notion or Microsoft 365 assignment, they might analyze how templates, databases, and permission structures shape what becomes visible as work. Jones's advocate orientation makes a lot of sense in this context because professionals who can read the politics of their tools are better equipped to serve clients and communities whose interests may not align with the interests of the platform's designers.

Arola's land-based digital design rhetoric strengthens this approach by reminding instructors that interface analysis should not stop at what a screen permits users to do. Digital design is also situated in material relations among people, places, histories, and cultural practices. A platform can, therefore, be analyzed not only for its permissions and affordances but also for the kinds of relationships it makes easier to imagine, sustain, or ignore.

Principle 2: Expand the Definition of Collaborative Contribution

Any assessment framework that measures contribution primarily through tracked text edits will undervalue the labor that makes collaborative writing possible. This is not a minor grading issue. It is a structural feature of many platforms, and it reinforces existing patterns of whose intellectual labor is counted and whose is not. Gruwell's findings about Wikipedia are compatible here because the platform can count edits while failing to count the translation, negotiation, mentoring, and community maintenance that make those edits possible.

A revised assessment framework should include structured self-assessments that ask students to account for the full range of their contributions, peer evaluations that name specific forms of non-textual labor, and reflection assignments that ask groups to examine how the division of labor emerged. Instructors can explicitly value project management, meeting facilitation, multilingual mediation, accessibility checking, conflict resolution, source evaluation, and audience research as collaborative contributions. This approach connects naturally with labor-based grading scholarship, particularly Inoue's (2019) argument that assessment can become more equitable when it values labor, process, and reflection rather than only proximity to a dominant standard. For technical communication, the point is also professional. Technical communicators often

work in team environments where stakeholder coordination, cross-functional translation, accessibility advocacy, and project management are as important as sentence-level production. A classroom assessment model that cannot see this work prepares students for a narrower profession than the one many will enter.

Principle 3: Design for Linguistic and Epistemological Plurality

Most collaborative writing assignments in technical communication courses are implicitly designed for native English speakers working within Western professional communication conventions. This is not always intentional, but structural as it is built into platforms, rubrics, assignment prompts, and models of successful writing. Gonzales (2018) makes clear that multilingual communicators bring intellectual resources to collaborative writing that are not less sophisticated than those of monolingual English speakers. They are differently sophisticated, organized around translation, code-switching, and the negotiation of meaning across cultural contexts.
Designing for linguistic plurality means allowing multilingual drafting in the collaborative process before English-language revision when appropriate; naming translation and code-switching as rhetorical skills rather than deficits; and building rubrics that assess audience awareness, usability, ethical decision-making, and communicative effectiveness rather than conformity to a single standard of academic English. More ambitiously, it might mean designing projects whose final products can take forms other than unified English-language documents: multilingual guides, community-facing materials in languages other than English, or comparative analyses of how different rhetorical traditions approach a shared technical communication problem. Haas's broader point is that technical communication pedagogy has something to learn, not merely something to offer, from knowledge traditions outside the Western canon. Designing assignments that create space for this learning is one way to act on that insight.

Principle 4: Center Consent, Credit, and Care

Collaborative writing assignments involve forms of consent that instructors rarely address explicitly. Students who contribute to shared documents share their intellectual labor, rhetorical choices, revision histories, and sometimes aspects of their personal experience or identity. When assignments are published publicly, as many wiki-based projects encourage, that sharing extends beyond the classroom with consequences that are difficult to anticipate. Students from marginalized communities may face risks when their writing becomes publicly visible; harassment, misrecognition, unwanted exposure, or pressure to represent a community to which others assign them.

Instructors should be explicit about what will happen with collaborative work: where it will be stored, who will be able to see it, how long it will remain available, and what rights students retain over their contributions. Where assignments involve personal narrative, community knowledge, or lived experience, instructors should create genuine alternatives rather than nominal opt-outs. They should not design their pedagogical

goals in ways that require students from marginalized communities to perform their difference for an audience that may not share their stakes. Walton, Moore, and Jones describe reflexive attention to positionality as central to ethical practice in technical communication research and teaching. That principle extends naturally to classroom collaboration.

Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods (Lockett et al., 2021) brings together antiracist and decolonial approaches to questions of embodiment, institutional critique, multimodality, materiality, and public digital literacies. Lockett's chapter on Black Twitter, specifically, demonstrates how marginalized publics use digital platforms rhetorically while also negotiating the racialized structures that shape visibility, circulation, and participation. This chapter complicates the idea that making a platform available automatically creates an equitable collaborative space. Students do not enter digital writing environments with identical histories, relationships to technology, or levels of rhetorical power; they enter spaces already structured by racial, cultural, and institutional conditions.

Care also means attending to the relational labor that collaboration requires. Groups need time to establish trust, negotiate working styles, and address conflict before they can write together effectively. Assignments that treat collaboration as a technical matter of dividing tasks and assembling outputs miss this labor. They typically produce worse documents and worse learning. The care work of collaboration should be named, practiced, and assessed, not treated as the responsibility of whoever in the group happens to do it by default.

Principle 5: Situate Digital Tools in Their Histories

None of the tool's instructors assign emerged from nowhere. They have organizational, cultural, and economic genealogies that shape what they can and cannot do. The open-source wiki tradition carries the intellectual inheritance of free software philosophy, with its commitments to transparency, meritocracy, and the belief that openness of code can support openness of knowledge. Wikipedia carries the history of encyclopedic writing, community moderation, volunteer labor, and formalized content policies. Google Docs carries the inheritance of enterprise software development, cloud computing, and data-driven platform ecosystems. Notion contains the logic of templates, databases, productivity culture, and workspace management. These histories matter because they continue to shape how collaboration feels, what it rewards, and what it hides.

Teaching students to situate tools historically is one of the most durable things a technical communication course can do. Trends in platforms change quickly; the capacity to ask about a tool's history, values, and interests does not. Following Haas's provocation in "Wampum as Hypertext," this historical situating should include non-Western traditions of collaborative knowledge production: forms of collective authorship, knowledge maintenance, oral transmission, material memory, and community-based information management that exist outside the Western digital humanities tradition. Students who learn to see their tools' histories are also students who can begin to

imagine alternatives: different tools, different conventions, and different models of what collaborative writing might be for.

Lockett et al. similarly demonstrate why technological histories must be read alongside histories of race, embodiment, and public discourse. Their attention to public digital literacies shows that digital spaces are not simply containers into which users bring preexisting identities; they are sites where racialized identities, publics, and forms of knowledge are negotiated and contested. For students, then, situating a platform historically should include asking whose histories are represented in its design, whose forms of public participation it recognizes, and whose rhetorical practices have been treated as peripheral or illegible.

Conclusion

Scott's article ends on a note of invitation. Having laid out the pedagogical and practical case for wikis, she encourages instructors to experiment, adapt the framework to their contexts, and share what they learn. That spirit of experimentation and shared reflection remains exactly right. What this article adds is a set of questions that the scholarship of the past decade and a half have made difficult to avoid.

The collaborative writing classroom is not politically neutral. The platforms instructors assign is not neutral. The model of collaborative contribution built into assessment rubrics is not neutral. The assumption that a unified English-language document is the natural goal of collaborative technical writing is based on neutrality, either. None of these choices is automatically wrong. Many are defensible and often necessary. But they need to be made consciously, with attention to whose values they serve and whose they marginalize.

This argument also clarifies why wikis still matter even when many instructors no longer assign traditional course wikis. Wiki pedagogy named a hope that remains important: that students could learn technical communication by building knowledge together, revising in public or semi-public spaces, and taking responsibility for shared documents. The question now is how to carry that hope into platformed collaborative environments without repeating the old assumption that participation automatically equals democracy. The field needs a vocabulary that can distinguish among wikis, Wikipedia assignments, and proprietary collaborative platforms while still tracing how the pedagogical promises of one era migrate into the tools of another.

None of these amounts to a case against platforms, multilingual students, Wikipedia, or Western digital tools; it is a case for looking at each clearly enough to see what it asks of the people who use it. Taken together, Gillespie, Gonzales, Gruwell, and Haas invite technical communication instructors to teach collaborative platforms as rhetorical, historical, and political artifacts.

Scott invited us to see wikis as opportunities. The scholarship that has accumulated since she wrote invites us to see them, and the platforms that have partially displaced

them, as arguments: arguments about knowledge, collaboration, labor, authority, and whose ways of working deserve to be encoded in the tools we share. Teaching students to read those arguments critically, to use tools with their eyes open, and to recognize the collaborative writing classroom as a site where the field's commitments to equity, access, and epistemic justice are either practiced or quietly abandoned is what a revised wiki pedagogy, updated for the present moment, might look like.

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