7 Three Links: Be Bold, Assume Good Faith, and There Are No Firm Rules

Rebecca Thorndike-Breeze, Cecelia A. Musselman, and Amy Carleton

Three members of the Working Wikipedia Collaborative reflect on how three Wikipedia principles manifest in their own collaboration and self-understanding.

Three links in what? Over five years of working closely together, we see these three central Wikipedia values as three links in a virtual chain-mail mesh that protects against despair, fake news, and cynicism. Overstatement? Perhaps. Wikipedia is a utopian project, aiming to be a comprehensive encyclopedia in all branches of knowledge. And we acknowledge that, like all utopias, Wikipedia and working in the Wikipedia community have a dark underside. But the community also shines with a powerful light, one seen in the stories of our lives and the connections we have forged.

The Working Wikipedia Collaborative is a group of scholars, teachers, archivists, and librarians working with Wikipedia in higher education in the Boston area—all women, some rogues, and all convinced of the educational and societal value of the Wikipedia project. Three of us share our stories in this chapter, but these are just a part of the work the collaborative has done together—workshops (local, national, and global), presentations, in-class orientations, cross-institutional visits, publications, edit-a-thons, mentoring circles, and elevator pitches. Collaborative members are active sharers in the participatory and collaborative knowledge-creation movement that some have come to call Wikiworld.

We always write *as* the Working Wikipedia Collaborative, but each of our origin stories is unique and strongly shaped by working with and on Wikipedia. For us, working with the encyclopedia and its community has been a valuable forging ground, shaping each of us into links in a wide-reaching mesh of personal and professional connections. In the stories that follow, we highlight three links in that mesh, showing the origins of our collaborative projects and tracking our experience of how Wikipedia has grown.

Rebecca—Be Bold

I met my best friend Nicole back in 2002 at the university bookstore as we both lined up to buy the assigned texts for our first semester of graduate school. The very first thing I ever said to her was, "I am not really good enough to be here."

OK, that's not what I said, exactly. It was more like, "I was a broadcasting major, so I'm not sure how I got into this MA [master of arts] program in English."

Nicole has reminded me of this moment several times over the last seventeen years—while I earned my PhD in literature, when I struck out in my search for a tenure-track job, and when I carved a place for myself teaching writing, rhetoric, and professional communication at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She brings it up because even after all that, I would still find ways to downplay or undercut my intelligence and abilities, just like I did in 2002. And just like it was then, any time I downplay my worth I always turn out to actually have the goods. "You'd start off in class discussion saying, 'I'm just a broadcasting major.…' and then follow that up with a totally on point analysis of the piece we were discussing." Her point is that I am *so* good enough to be here.

Graduate school is a well-documented breeding ground for impostor syndrome, and I had a head start, given my decision to change my career trajectory completely. I have felt like an impostor in many different ways throughout my career, and to this day I am not immune. In fact, since I became a member of the Wikipedia community, I regularly put myself in situations that cause momentary flare-ups of impostor syndrome. I do that because I've come to believe very strongly that despite the vastness of all the things I don't yet know how to do, I can rely on my strengths and those of my collaborators to support me as I learn and to achieve things I never could have alone. Wikipedia itself is evidence of the great benefits of pushing ourselves beyond our comfortable wheelhouses of expertise. My time with the Working Wikipedia Collaborative has made very clear that, beyond my scholarship and teaching, I have valuable leadership skills that can help advance the Wikipedia movement and can make positive contributions elsewhere. My key contribution to the Wikipedia movement has been to co-organize a series of live Wikipedia editing events (also known as "edit-a-thons") that are focused on diversifying the content and editorship of Wikipedia by training first-time contributors.[1] Though I experienced some intense impostor syndrome as I learned Wikipedia's guidelines and tried to teach them to others, doing this work showed me the great value of the other qualities I brought with me—namely, the strong public speaking, project management, and leadership abilities I had been cultivating all my life through years of service-oriented collaborative work. It was easy to overlook these qualities because they permeated all facets of my life, including thirteen years of girl-scouting service projects, my work producing student radio shows in college, and collaborating with fellow grad students to reinvent the graduate student organization in my PhD program. Learning and working alongside my friends in the Working Wikipedia Collaborative helped me to see the gifts I'd always had that I'd failed to recognize throughout years of scholarly work. And together we saw the power of Wikipedia's exhortation to "be bold," both at work and in life.

Be bold. It's not a simple direction to follow, especially for women, people of color, LGBTQIA, and other marginalized groups. That's why it is so inspiring when these folks can be bold in the face of overwhelming yet commonplace resistance and rejection—both insidious and overt. For me, as a woman, "Be bold" means setting aside the lifetime of "what ifs" and "you can'ts" that I've been trained to internalize and transform into a baseline of self-doubt. Not just "What if they reject my work?," but also "what if I annoy the wrong person and they start harassing me? Or worse … ?" The fresh perspective on my strengths that I found with the Working Wikipedia Collaborative helped me to be bold anyway. Here's my story.

In 2014, I quit my national search for a tenure-track job as a literature professor and instead sought full-time, permanent employment in the Boston area. I was fortunate to find a secure, non-tenure-track teaching position in MIT's Comparative Media Studies/Writing department. I was happy to get this job because it meant that I could build on the decade-plus of teaching experience I'd amassed throughout graduate school and as an adjunct instructor on the job market. Many PhDs graduating after the 2008 economic collapse were forced to totally reinvent themselves, sometimes taking near-entry-level positions. I was grateful that I didn't need to hit the reset button at age thirty-five.

But I was also pretty frustrated. I didn't have to totally reset, but I did need to recalibrate. I have great stores of knowledge about realist and modernist literature and humanistic inquiry, but in my new role the material that once comprised the all-consuming focus of my life was relegated to the sidelines. I felt like my literary scholarship was demoted to near-hobby status. Publications or conferences in that field would not count for much in my case for retention and promotion because literary studies was not what I was hired to teach. I began learning how to channel my scholarly impulses in my new field of rhetoric and composition—usually in collaboration with peers. I reached out to fellow instructors and friends from graduate school because moving into a new scholarly arena was too scary to do alone. I had no idea what the culture or expectations were, and my post-PhD experience so far had been one plagued by confusion and insecurity. At that time, I needed friends around me as a buffer, or I wasn't going to get anywhere.

Meanwhile, I found myself drawing strength from the punk-DIY sensibility of drummer Janet Weiss, of the rock bands Quasi, Sleater-Kinney, and Wild Flag. Weiss is one of the most respected drummers in the business, and her collaborations are wide-ranging.[2] Her body of work is informed by her strong "rebellious" sense that the work itself is what matters most, not status or money.[3] As I left traditional academia behind and sought to figure out what my work should be, I was inspired by Weiss's fierce independence and looked for opportunities to put my scholarly abilities to use in a way that was open and free to all. Serendipitously, it was also around this time that I found out about a five-day intensive Wikipedia class that focused on Wikipedia's gender gap to be held at MIT and run by Maia Weinstock—science writer, Wikipedian, and overall badass.

For years in my writing classes, I taught students how to begin their research with Wikipedia, and the previous spring we had a fascinating class discussion about Amanda Filipacchi's *New York Times* piece on how Wikipedia editors had removed some authors who happened to be women, including Filipacchi, from the "authors" category, adding them instead to the "women authors" category.[4] I wanted to know more about this and other issues related to gender in the maintenance of Wikipedia and to see if I could help in some way. That class taught me so much, both about the deep complexities of systemic bias—see part III, especially chapter 21—and concrete strategies for crafting new Wikipedia articles. (My first article was a stub for British comics creator Suzy Varty, which has since been expanded by other contributors.) Once I had a grasp of the diversity gaps in Wikipedia—not just the gender gap but major gaps of information about and related to LGBTQIA people, people of color, topics relevant to the global South, and a broad range of academic topics—I saw the potential of classroom Wikipedia projects, both to invigorate the teaching of writing and to enhance the quality of free knowledge for all. In other words, I realized that working with Wikipedia could be a punk-DIY approach to the field of rhetoric and composition.

I turned to friends and colleagues I knew who were also interested in improving the quality of Wikipedia's diversity of information. Back in 2012, Cecelia Musselman was the first person ever to show me how college-level writing instruction could effectively incorporate Wikipedia writing assignments, and so in April 2015, I more or less cornered her on the subway after a regional conference on engaging practices in the college writing classroom. She had just given a presentation on how she developed a service-learning unit in her class through Wikipedia assignments, and I wanted to collaborate with her somehow. As luck would have it, Cecelia and her frequent collaborator, Northeastern University librarian Amanda Rust, were looking for opportunities to present their educational work with Wikipedia from both an instructor and a librarian's perspective, and Cecelia invited me to get involved. For this new project, I reached out to MIT Collections Archivist Greta Kuriger Suiter, who I had met at Maia Weinstock's Wikipedia intensive class and who was already organizing Wikipedia edit-a-thons that brought participants into the MIT archives. And I also recruited Amy Carleton, a friend from my PhD program, a colleague in my program at MIT, and an innovative thinker and teacher. Together, the five of us formed the Working Wikipedia Collaborative, and my crash course in becoming a Wikipedian began. Since then, our group has explored how university libraries, communities, and classrooms can work together with Wikipedia to enhance understanding of collaborative practices, consensus making, and digital citizenship across institutions while also improving Wikipedia article quality.[5]

This experience was eye-opening. Not only did we observe enhanced collaboration, critical thinking, and productivity in our students, but we experienced a radical shift in the way we work together. For the Working Wikipedia Collaborative itself, this revolution took the form of eighteen workshops and conference presentations in the year 2016—far more academic work than any one of us could have accomplished alone. And since then, this collaborative energy has spread to our individual initiatives, with Wikipedia, our institutions, and our own creative projects. Regardless of whether it's our group's project or an individual one, the Working Wikipedia Collaborative remains a major source of moral and practical support.

Yet throughout this time I struggled with impostor syndrome, anxiety, and stage fright. Every presentation or workshop made me feel as though I barely knew what I was talking about; this feeling also permeated my teaching. In my new role at MIT teaching writing, rhetoric, and professional communication to engineering students, I was almost continuously learning new material as I taught it. The sense of shifting sands this created often left me feeling like a stand-up comic who was dying on stage, complete with flop sweat and a pit in my stomach.

I vividly recall a heart-to-heart I had with Amy Carleton about this unshakable impostor syndrome and lack of confidence, despite frequent feedback from audience members and students that my work and teaching were not just competent but engaging and sometimes even inspiring. Funnily enough, this conversation took place at the Marriott bar, just after we had finished our all-day workshop on teaching college writing with Wikipedia at the 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication. We'd been working hard to prepare for this event for the better part of a year; it was our big debut as the Working Wikipedia Collaborative. We were energized from the discussions we had with participants and by the projects we helped participants to begin to plan for their upcoming classes. And yet, in waves throughout the day, I was rocked by anxiety.

Amy and I talked about Katty Kay and Claire Shipman's work on confidence disparities between men and women—particularly their reporting of a consensus among a broad range of successful women that, despite years of hard work, they didn't really deserve their success—as well as women's reluctance to speak up and take risks in their lives and careers.[6] As alarming as these findings were to me, I was glad to know that I wasn't alone in my bewildering lack of confidence.

With Amy, Cecelia, and the other Working Wikipedia Collaborative members by my side throughout this crash course in being bold, I have established a persistent sense of confidence as well as a new perspective on impostor syndrome. First, even at my most confident, my anxiety isn't going anywhere. But through the support of my collaborators and the genuine enthusiasm we all bring to every event, I have learned to discern and focus on the excitement I feel about the work, which is embedded in the anxiety. This approach consistently leads to more engaging presentations and lessons. Further, I fully embrace the fact that, for me, it is easier—and it is *better*—to be bold in collaboration with others. Even when I'm flying solo at conferences and teaching classes, I like to leave space for audiences and students to share their existing knowledge. This way, they can let me know what they want from their time with me and how I can match what I've prepared to what they need. And making space for audiences and students to share their knowledge can transform conventional academic spaces into more collaborative ones where audiences and students can enrich each other's learning experiences as well as lend presenters and instructors insight.

My link in the chain is a story about how learning Wikipedia's collaborative culture alongside some badass women has influenced my life in a meaningful way, both within and beyond Wikipedia. This is a story about how learning to be a Wikipedian helped me to heal from the emotional and psychological distress caused by our current state of academic precarity. And it's a story about how lining up to address Wikipedia's gender gap by becoming a Wikipedian helped me overcome my lifelong, socially conditioned insecurities about my worthiness to enter new domains and make contributions.

Cecelia—Assume Good Faith

In October 2006, I was teaching a revamped section of Honors Advanced Writing at Northeastern University (NU). My colleague David had overhauled the course, and we were running an experiment—he teaches one section of the course and I teach another, both using his new assignments. We talked wrinkles and successes while hustling to class one day. I confessed that I was having a problem with our reference document assignment. The only encyclopedia my students had ever used was Wikipedia! How could they write the kind of encyclopedia article our assignment asked for?

David shrugged, "So, have them write Wikipedia articles," and dashed into class.

I'm a bit literal and at the time, David was the director of our Advanced Writing in the Disciplines program; it never occurred to me that he might be kidding. I walked straight into class and offered my students the option to work on Wikipedia articles. One hundred percent of them signed on. And why wouldn't they? At that time, everyone was convinced (despite evidence to the contrary) that the encyclopedia wasn't reliable. Most students had been barred from using it for schoolwork in high school (and most still are—thirteen years later) even though they were active users of the encyclopedia. My NU students had access to a good university library. Surely we could find the information needed to build new articles! Looking back, our mix of blind skepticism and bravado is breathtaking—what was I thinking, adding this sort of new, untested assignment in the middle of a term?

I contacted one of our librarians (Amanda Rust, also a collaborative member) to see what she knew about Wikipedia. We quickly found long talk page threads bemoaning the amateurish efforts of undergraduate students. Some editors advocated banning students from whole topic areas. Other Wikipedians were less polite. But others were feeling their way toward a stance I share—students are early stage content experts with access to paywalled information in scholarly publications in academic libraries across the world. As such, they are a vast and powerful resource.

But behind this was an uneasy situation. I didn't trust Wikipedia with my students and Wikipedia didn't really trust students—or any other sort of academic.

I devised a work-around to distance my students from potentially unwelcoming Wikipedians and preserve student privacy but still have them practice writing in Wikipedia's neutral, carefully sourced, encyclopedic way. Students would choose an article that was not yet in the encyclopedia or an article that only existed in stub form, and they would work on the article *entirely offline* in a word processing document. I encouraged students who really wanted to post their articles to the live encyclopedia to do so for extra credit. Students embraced this method; they avoided having to tackle the editing intricacies and technology of the encyclopedia, their academic work stayed safely private, and Wikipedia didn't seem to notice.

But this felt too limiting exactly because it shielded students from important challenges. And it missed the point of writing for Wikipedia—contributing to this vast collaborative effort. And Wikipedia did notice. Fortunately, my school was changing—experiential education grew from a motivation for the university's cooperative program, in which students spend a semester at a time working outside the university in their major fields, to a major part of the university-wide curriculum. The growing co-op and service-learning programs meant that students were out working in communities and corporations. Their work could not be private, and so classroom-based courses were granted greater latitude for asking students to work publicly as well.

The next term I had students create Wikipedia accounts and set up sandboxes in which to work. It was the best of both worlds! We got access to all of Wikipedia's editing tools, and our work remained in relatively private on our own sandbox pages. This worked well enough for a while. About a third of every group chose to publish their articles to Wikipedia for the public.

In rapid succession, several students found that their articles had been scooped out of their sandboxes by editors who patrolled user pages for particular keywords and then published these articles to the encyclopedia; several other students posted their articles and revealed their university affiliation on their user page; one student ran afoul of the medical editors for using research reports as sources instead of reviews; another student inadvertently committed a copyright violation; the Wikipedia Education Program was formed; and my library contact turned into a Wikipedia Campus Ambassador! As I guided students through the assignment each term, I was growing increasingly uncomfortable that we were using Wikipedia in a rather unequal way—we got more from it than it did from us. Each of these incidents could be expanded to a longer story (or cautionary tale), but here, looking back on Wikipedia's growth over twenty years, the important thing was that this all happened over the course of a single academic year. Wikipedia was changing fast.

My early interactions with Wikipedians were testy and defensive. During these early years, it felt like editors first assumed bad faith on the part of all students and gave some pretty presumptuous directions to me as an instructor ("Copyedit" my students work? No, that's not what writing instructors do). My students and I could see that the encyclopedia was home to a number of bad articles—inaccurate, incomplete, plagiarized—but a number of my students using credible, peer-reviewed research reports were chastised by editors for not using good enough sources. These editors would explain criticisms in a cryptic string of acronyms: NPOV, no OR, MEDPRI. Articles that are near total plagiarisms persist to this day (I keep my favorites a secret because they're great teaching tools). Why did the editors we encountered focus on student "bad" behavior when students were acting according to one of Wikipedia's own core principles—good faith? Wikipedia editors are driven by a great passion to devote their time, energy, and expertise to Wikipedia—a passion that claimed to value neutrality and evidence—but from 2006 to 2010, we seemed to be encountering an irrational stereotyping of all students as bumblers or vandals.

Amanda, our campus ambassador, was patient, kind, and persistent. Over the last ten years, we've developed an "Intro to Wikipedia" class session for all of my courses. We introduce students to article organization, talk pages, revision histories, the location of appropriate sources, and responsible source use—as defined by Wikipedia. Students dig around in the encyclopedia, watching how the community works toward resolving differences and improving articles and discussing infamous edit wars, conduct articles, and article rankings. From 2010 to 2015, more and more students posted their articles and edited existing ones instead of working solely in their sandboxes. One of my courses was designated a service-learning course because students would be contributing to something that the Service-Learning program at NU considered to be a public good—the first time that any course got that designation for contributing to a virtual community. Students frequently characterized their Wikipedia work as "real world writing" on course evaluations. When asked by my colleague Neal Lerner about their most meaningful writing project in college, several students named their Wikipedia project.[7] Seeing these results in teaching evaluations, my colleagues began asking me how to incorporate Wikipedia into their writing courses.

And Wikipedia was changing, too. By creating the Wikipedia Education Program in 2010, the Wikimedia Foundation had taken the clear stance that universities were a source of both new editors and vast amounts of information. I started to see (but not participate in) Wikipedia community discussions where editors were puzzling out how to use student contributions without undermining the quality of the encyclopedia instead of just complaining about them. Even the medical editors started to come around. Many of my students have gotten very patient medical editor help in getting their references right, deciding what new findings might actually be worth putting in the encyclopedia, or figuring out technical problems.

Still, I was a "rogue" instructor, not yet acting in partnership with the Education Program, which had by then become the Wiki Education Foundation ("Wiki Ed," described in chapter 20). I made an account but didn't edit for many of the same reasons Rebecca talks about—fear of other editors, fear of stepping on toes, of not being an expert. Soon after creating my account, editor Davy2000 reached out to welcome me (it was his twenty-first birthday!) and we had a friendly chat about his hometown and my interests and how I could better help students work with the encyclopedia.

In late summer of 2015, Wiki Ed contacted me: Would I be interested in testing the newest version of their Dashboard (course management platform)? Of course! The Dashboard allows me to assign each student an article and peer review partners, follow their work, set a timeline of milestones to meet, and get a statistical overview of what each student and the whole class have done.

The combined charm offensive worked. I've taught with the Dashboard ever since. Does this sound like a "you will be assimilated" Borg narrative? Yes, it feels that way to me, too. When faced with the Dashboard that will tell me every edit a student makes and exactly how much they have contributed (with time stamps down to the second), I feel uneasy. Is that level of surveillance necessary for student learning? Or student contributing? I recognize that it allows me to intervene with the two or three students each term who truly struggle to get work done. This level of student surveillance is for me uncomfortably the norm across many course management platforms. But it feels out of step with the assumption of good faith.

Wikipedia continues to change. By the time Wiki Ed reached out to me, the encyclopedia had a greater overall accuracy than the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vandalized articles had an average fix time of thirty minutes, aided by bots and page patrols looking for potential vandalism. The community had begun formulating procedures for managing harassment and bullying but only had mixed success. Many editors—prompted by repeated publications in *The Telegraph*, *MIT Technology Review*, *BBC*, and *The Atlantic*, among others—began to recognize the stark gender imbalances in both the editing community and in article topics. Wikipedia was growing up.

My relationship with Wikipedia has come a long way from its testy beginnings. Today, if I teach a course without a Wikipedia project, I feel that my students are missing out. Students love the "real world writing"—and I love their unshaken view of Wikipedia as "real." Students recognize that their Wikipedia contributions will reach far more readers than anything else they might publish. Wikipedia, Wiki Ed, and I have settled into a partnership that allows students to learn many things: critical thinking, how to evaluate sources, how to summarize for a broad audience, how to step out of US-centric ways of writing and perceiving. Perhaps more importantly, Wikipedia has become a powerful forger of global authors. Every semester produces several students who are bitten by the Wikipedia bug—the promise of a global audience, the opportunity to improve coverage of underrepresented groups of people, the ability to add knowledge that they extract from our university library. From a whole new article on neuromorality to sorting out the taxonomy of a single black coral species, I see my students' good-faith efforts filling gaps in the encyclopedia. The Dashboard tells me that, since Fall 2015, I have taught twenty-four courses with 336 students who have added fifty-two articles, edited 486 articles, and uploaded fifty-seven images to the Wikimedia Commons. These articles have been viewed seventy-two million times. I couldn't provide my students with a wider audience any other way.

And my colleague David? We met at a conference two years ago. I told him I'd taken his advice on having students write for Wikipedia. He looked puzzled. "I was kidding!" he said.

Amy—There Are No Firm Rules

The first semester of my PhD program also coincided with another first: my first experience as an instructor-of-record for a college writing class as part of my scholarship award. I had spent the weeks leading up to the term preparing my syllabus with care; it included a balance of scholarly essays, literary texts, and even a film. In my naïveté, I thought I was prepared for anything. Now, after nearly two decades of teaching experience, I know that nothing is predictable. Exhibit A: that first week, a student raised her hand and when I called on her (expecting a question about that day's reading, an excerpt from Paulo Freire's "The Banking Concept of Education" essay from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) she instead cocked her head and asked, "So, we are all wondering: *how old are you anyway?*"

My face flushed and I was more than a bit flustered as I stammered out something akin to "old enough to teach this class," though I was only a few years her senior, a fact that my nerves did not project. Even as I left class that day feeling flutters of insecurity, I also had a firm resolve: from that point forward, I would hold fast to a system of rules to assert some kind of teacherly authority. I wanted my students to recognize me as the one in charge, not as a peer. The fact that I set this intention only moments after discussing this passage from Freire's text, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people—they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress," was a bit ironic. But my mind was made up.

So while I espoused the virtues of open learning and the value of democratizing education—something I supported, at least in theory—in practice, I became rigid and more and more inflexible, approaching classroom discussion as if it were a script: posing a question and then waiting for the "right" answer. And if students didn't answer, instead of reframing the question and giving them some time to process, consider, and respond—I would quickly move on to the next question on my list as if I were facilitating a literary quiz bowl for course credit.

My manner of assessing written work was no less formulaic. Grammar, format, citations—I ticked these things off on rubrics and wrote in the margins, working from more of a deficit model of assessment than looking for positives and developing skills such as evidence of flexible, critical thinking, synthesis, and creativity. And though I knew intrinsically that this was wrong, it was the only model I knew. It was how *I* had learned, after all. Teacher imparts "wisdom" and student(s) perform it back through reflection. This purely transactional model was stultifying but it had its affordances—it kept order. Like anything else in life with the appearance of stability, however, it was only a matter of time before my assumptions were challenged—and ultimately upended.

I blame it on The Internet.

That semester marked many firsts—including my first encounter with Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that was quickly eclipsing the utility of the Microsoft Encarta CD-ROMs that were de rigueur in the early 2000s (and most certainly the vintage multivolume set of *World Book* encyclopedias that I had inherited from my stepfather). About a month into the term, when I realized that students were using the website as a go-to place for information rather than heading to the library per my request, I reprinted my syllabus with the addition of this line: "**WIKIPEDIA IS NOT A VALID SOURCE**." And yes, it was in all caps and bold. Students argued that Wikipedia was accessible and expedient, I countered that it was unstable and unreliable. Period. And for a time, I "won" that debate.

As I grew as a thinker in my graduate work, however, I realized this model of classroom management and intellectual close-mindedness was not sustainable. For starters, my graduate seminars were different—people exchanged ideas and debated long-standing interpretations of canonical texts. Professors, experts who had quite actually "written the book" on x, y, or z, were open and encouraging of these new readings and perspectives. And when I read an essay from Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt, wherein he asserts that culture "gestures toward what appear to be opposite things: constraint and mobility," I started to think about that within the context of intellectual culture. While there are *some* constraints (or frameworks) that can reinforce certain behaviors and modes of performance, they can also afford access and encourage dialogue—that is, (intellectual) mobility. I would like to say that my shift was as sudden and dramatic, but it happened gradually and in stages. And first, I had to learn a lesson—from one of my students.

When B. came to me complaining that he was unable to find good scholarly sources for a research paper he was writing on Brazilian folk music (including genres like *tropicália* and *sertanejo*), I was skeptical. Of course one could find anything in scholarly academic databases, right? (LOL.) There were some Wikipedia articles, though, that could be useful, he said—though he knew my position on using the encyclopedia. He was right, though—Wikipedia was a place where these genres and subgenres of indigenous music were being discussed, so I agreed. And this actually was a lightbulb moment for me—while scholarly databases may contain multitudes, they often exclude many topics, figures, and conversations that fall below the radar of (largely white male) privilege. This was an important lesson.

The next term I deleted the moratorium on Wikipedia from my syllabi and instead incorporated discussion of the reference source into our classroom conversations about source reliability, veracity, and accessibility. And within a few years, my students had moved beyond performing critical assessments of Wikipedia articles to writing their own articles. To date, these students have contributed nearly two hundred thousand words to the English-language edition, including a diverse range of robust articles, from introduction to electromagnetism, to the Pittsburgh water crisis, to tissue engineering of heart valves, to the international entrepreneur rule, just to mention a few. This work has opened up conversations about everything from racial bias (much of Black History is left out of the encyclopedia due to the dominant demographics of its editor base—largely white, millennial males) to gender bias (less than 15 percent of biographical content on

Wikipedia is focused on women) and information access. My students (and I!) have come to see participating in the Wikipedia community as a form of social justice work where the only prerequisite is open-mindedness. This is a “rule” I can get behind.

A postscript: This March, I arrived in Berlin for Wikimedia Summit 2019, an annual conference event where Wikimedians from around the world convene to discuss holistic strategy initiatives for the organization, a nonprofit that oversees multiple open knowledge projects—the most recognizable of these being Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia (and fifth most visited website in the world). The central question with which participants grappled this year was what Wikimedia’s knowledge ecosystem will look like in 2030. A tall order, for sure. But for over three days, we talked and planned in working groups tied to diversity, accessibility, and labor equity. Amidst all of the intellectual heavy lifting were moments of laughter, shared meals, an international candy table, and a late-night nightclub dance party where we danced late into the night to a DJ setlist crowdsourced by community members that was as diverse as the conference’s attendees.

Now, as an active community member, the uniqueness of the culture is something I confess that I often take for granted. But this time, I saw it through new eyes. My music-industry boyfriend—whose only experience with Wikimedia to date had been as an end user of Wikipedia—could barely contain his amazement at seeing a diverse group of individuals from over one hundred countries united with the sole purpose of improving and diversifying informational content to educate the world’s population—for free. Weeks later, back in the United States, we attended a jazz concert with a Grammy-award-winning recording artist, and he introduced me backstage by saying I “worked for Wikipedia.” *Not really*, I corrected—*I am a volunteer, part of the community*. The artist and his bandmates were intrigued (though first they wanted me to correct some factual inaccuracies on their respective Wikipedia pages!) by this notion of an open information collective where people collaborate freely simply because they are committed to democratizing knowledge. As I spent the next half hour evangelizing about Wikipedia, I confess that I experienced another lightbulb moment—I had truly become an open education advocate, not just in theory, but finally, in practice.

It may have taken a while, but I’d like to think Paulo Freire would be proud.

> The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.
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> —Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968)

Conclusion

The Working Wikipedia Collaborative now operates in a space easily recognizable as what scholars Juah Suoranta and Tere Vadén call "Wikiworld."[8] We work collaboratively on presentations and publications; we share our work freely among our colleagues. We see our students working to create knowledge in other spaces, particularly in social media spaces, in ways that parallel the collaboration and sharing in Wikipedia. While a drawing of our collaborations and influences might appear chaotic, we are clearly working as links in a worldwide mesh of contributors and users.

When a skeptical student asks, "Why would anyone ever do this (work on Wikipedia)?" we have a nuanced, persuasive answer: we know that Wikipedians do what they do because they are committed to the common goal of free information for all. We've also seen firsthand that people become Wikipedians and continue to work as Wikipedians for their own, sometimes quite personal reasons. And we see that, as Wikipedia continues to grow and to grow up, the community is learning to accommodate some messier motivations, to grapple with matters of representation and access that challenge all knowledge-creation projects, to recognize that acting boldly and in good faith need some tempering with rules, and to recognize that for this global project to continue, the rules must also continue to grow and change. We hope that the Wikipedia community continues to challenge their own preconceptions, to push back against bias and exclusion, and to hold fast to their goal of being a global encyclopedia. Perhaps most importantly, as Wikipedia turns twenty, we see the power of a few idealistic values in creating the largest encyclopedia ever.

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Wikipedia @ 20

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Edited by: Joseph Reagle, Jackie Koerner

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