Wikis as shared learning experience in the diverse classroom

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Wikis as shared learning experience in the diverse classroom

**Context**
The graduate program in American Studies attracts a high degree of international students – some years more than 20% of the student body. Furthermore, the class is divided by students with a background in American Studies and those with backgrounds in other academic disciplines.

**Problem**
The course Theory and Method introduces students to central topics within the field of American Studies. Students from diverse backgrounds, and thus with different qualifications, makes it challenging for the teacher to achieve the purpose of the course – to show students the parallels between different topics and themes in American Studies.

**Goals**
1) To create a resource summarizing central topics in American Studies, for the future use of both new and experienced students – thus promoting integration among diverse students.
2) To have students consistently identify trends and parallels within the field, across topics and texts.

**Project**
Students to create an online encyclopedia for central topics and themes in American Studies

**PART I**
First 8 weeks
8 groups write about 8 central topics
Groups of 3-4, created by students themselves
Written outside class

**PART II**
After 8 weeks
Teacher creates new groups
Mixed according to both academic and national background

**PART III**
Last 4 weeks
New groups give feedback on wikis
Update wikis with readings from last 4 weeks
Written in class

**Student evaluations**
95% found the wikis useful
85% found it easier to identify trends and parallels across topics
80% found working in assigned groups useful

**Teacher evaluation**
Many students from non-Danish and non-American Studies backgrounds specifically noted that the wikis allowed them to “catch up” in a safe learning space. While some wiki entries at first lacked the requested overview of the topics, they were considerably improved during the feedback process. Thus it can be concluded that the wikis not only served as a tool of social integration, but it also developed the students’ ability to identify trends and parallels over the course of the semester.