

## The GlobalDover wiki project

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#### Overview

Working with a large group of boys who were voluble but often reluctant to write, Amanda sought to develop writing skills – including writing styles and writing for different audiences – by building a wiki about schools across the globe and using technology to reach other communities. Students soon became engrossed and created a large number of pages on a wide range of topics. They also accepted suggestions and corrections from their peers and kept each other on task. Students' feedback was an integral part for the project; comments online were more honest than their 'official' feedback to the teacher. The project now moves to the next stage: contacting schools in other towns called Dover around the world.

#### Introduction: the context of the project

Kent is unusual in that it still has grammar schools and Dover Grammar School for Boys (DGSB) is one such selective school on the very south coast of England. Dover is a fascinating town. Steeped in history and centred on the highly successful port, the town is not especially wealthy and is currently bidding for various regeneration projects. The surrounding countryside was badly affected by the closing of the rural mines and whilst the situation has improved, the area has not completely recovered. A reasonable percentage of the boys that attend DGSB fit into the category of 'white working class boys' that so often feature in the press and in government guidelines when it comes to literacy.

This means that there is still quite a broad range of ability within the school. Some pupils are highly motivated but, as everywhere, there are a few who are not as keen. The class that this project focuses on is the top class in Year 8 who, along with the rest of their year, took their SATs early. They are a very able, very voluble class of 34 boys and they can be very enthusiastic if given the chance.

#### Aims of the project

New to teaching and in my first year, I wanted to find ways of using ICT in the teaching of English. I had come from a background in marketing and was used to using all kinds of media to engage with colleagues, businesses, the public and politicians. In particular we had been developing web services when I made the move to teaching. Increasingly the web was not an optional extra but a central component of communication and so it was logically the way to go.

It was at this point that several things combined to create an idea. I had been listening to an American podcast on iTunes called *Teachers Teaching Teachers*. Their use of ICT was amazing and I was desperate to try out some of the ideas. Matt Morris, new to the DGSB Media Department, gave us some CPD training on wikis, blogs and podcasting and around the same time I saw this project and decided to get involved.

## **The teaching target**

Having worked in marketing, I had got used to writing and to writing accurately but it seemed that my pupils were very reluctant to do this. They had grown up on a diet of Bebo and MSN and as such were used to high speed communication with no punctuation, constant abbreviation and (to my eyes) weird spellings. I spent some time learning this method of writing and taught a few lessons explaining that it was good to write in different ways for different occasions or different media. This was interesting but they clearly needed a modern medium in which to really write. This is where the wiki came in. Would building a wiki help with teaching Key Stage 3 pupils to write?

## **Setting up the project.**

Just after SATs, Class 8/1 and I embarked on planning the wiki. A wiki is just a modern name for an encyclopaedia that you build or write yourself and there are a host of websites that will help you build one. I decided to use Wikispaces as it was the one that was demonstrated in the CPD session. It is incredibly easy to get started. All you need is an email address, a username and a password (the last two of which you make up) ([Appendix: 1](#)).

Once 8/1 had brainstormed the sections they wanted to cover, over the weekend I consolidated the ideas and set up the wiki ([Appendix: 2](#)). You set up pages by using the 'New Page' function. The 'Manage Space' section is where you rename your pages and delete them when you discover you've got too many or have inadvertently called them daft things.

Once set up, all the students in the class used their school email addresses to join rather than personal ones. They were told they were not allowed to join any other wikis and a couple that did very quickly got out of them again. I gave the class a clear briefing on Internet safety. One student then dryly queried if it was wrong of him to have posted his mother's credit card details and date of birth on a website and I realised that I was being a bit heavy handed. They knew far more than I had been banking on – they would be fine. They spontaneously used random images for profile pictures rather than real pictures which is something I would ask a class to copy in the future.

The wiki, which is still a work-in-progress, can be found at [www.globaldover.wikispaces.com](http://www.globaldover.wikispaces.com) and we welcome visitors and comments ([Appendix 3](#)). It covers what people from another school, area or country might want to know about life in an English school and DGSB in particular. It also includes a mini guide to living in the UK. As the aim was to encourage writing, students were asked to write their own copy, proof it and amend it. I struggled to resist the urge to interfere but got better at it as time went on. Some sections are still not complete and students are planning to finish them over the Summer.

## **Method: The technical bit**

Having started with ten or so DGSB pages and teams of students working on them, we quickly created more pages on the UK. This arose because the students were writing too fast and were overwriting each other's pages and losing corrections so we needed to reach a situation where there were no more than two people working on any one page. There was some cutting and pasting from the web but on the whole it was noticeable and those who did cut and paste did work on the text as well. Everyone wrote something, most people wrote a reasonable amount and some wrote at length! Some were writing directly onto the wiki and some writing in Word and cutting and pasting it in. One of the most useful exercises was printing the wiki off and getting every one to proof it and then amend it. My year

seven class also spent a lesson critiquing it and writing comments and suggestions – a process the year eights disliked enormously.

The ‘History’ function was invaluable as it meant I could see exactly who was doing what, or not. It also meant that other teachers or parents could see what pupils had written. The ‘Discussion’ facility was not used at first but, following inspiration from Carol Weale from Dane Court Grammar in Broadstairs, I used it for feedback and evaluation on the project. I posted some questions about the project around the wiki and the students commented back. You can look at it and see their comments for yourself. Most interestingly they were more honest in their feedback on the wiki than they had been in their ‘official’ feedback to me. Whether this is because it felt like it was to peers or because it removed the demand characteristics needs further research. Either way it was useful to get some genuine feedback.

### **Key findings**

The best bit has been channelling the enthusiasm for writing that students demonstrate on their Bebo profiles into a school project. It’s been wonderful to see all kinds of students writing about a whole range of topics. It’s been great when they’ve corrected each other and got each other back on task. It’s also been fantastic when they’ve rushed up and said, ‘Shouldn’t we do something on x?’ thinking of a new topic area, or even when they’ve rushed home to show their parents what they’ve been doing.

All in all everyone has enjoyed the freedom to just get on and write. Some students needed more structure to the process and a few wanted less. Everyone wanted to write about their own favourite thing which will be great for a future blogging project but wasn’t quite possible with this one. It was also great for the students to know that the wiki had a real audience. It’s visible to the world but only amendable by the group.

### **Next steps**

The next stage of the project is to get in touch with other schools in other towns called Dover around the world. We have initial contact with six already and a big list of others to contact (a Town Council initiative). We hope to see if they would like to join in and link wikis. Another idea is to link up with the Girls’ Grammar School for a joint project.

I would highly recommend using wikis and blogging in English lessons. As with all things I’m sure students could get bored with it in the end, but for now it is new, exciting, and carries with it an energy and enthusiasm which results in motivated English students. What more could you want?

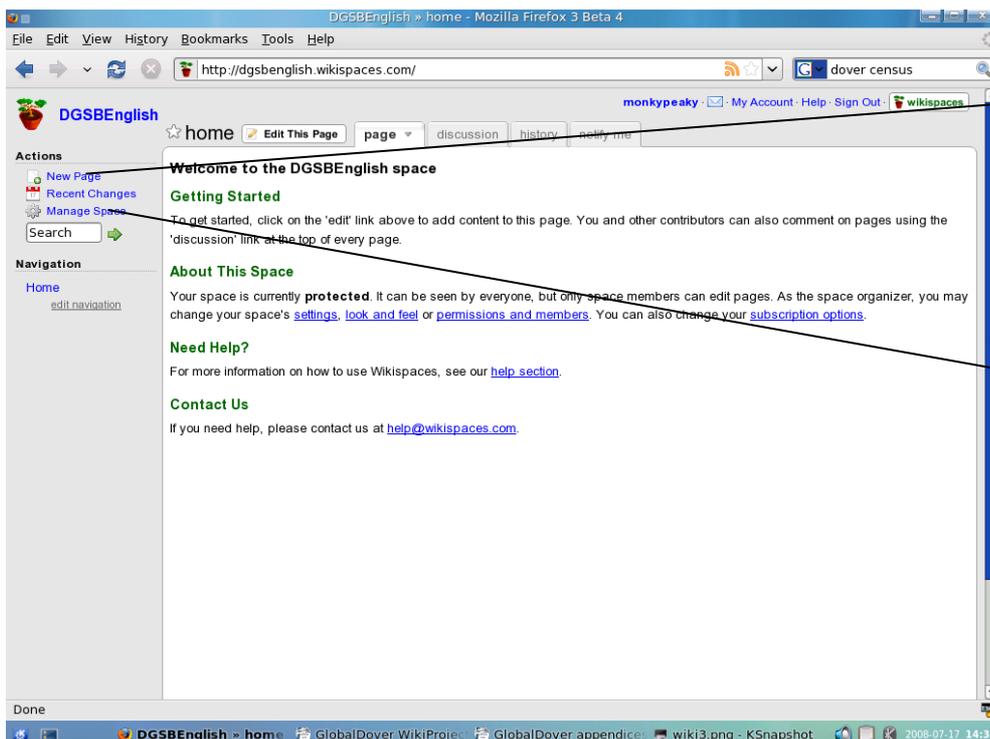
## Appendix: GlobalDover Wikiproject - setting up and using a wiki

### 1 - Setting up a wiki



This is where you create your account

### 2 – An example of a shiny new wiki prior to any content being added.



“New Page” function for setting up your pages.

“Manage Space” function which enables you to change page names, delete them and change the layout of your pages.

### 3 - The GlobalDover Wikiproject home page

All the different pages we created

