Prepared to support “Wiki-Repair: A Design for ARG-Based Collaborative Learning” Roundtable discussion at HERDSA 2026. Pre-print copy.

WebWiki: A collaborative wiki-repair learning experience

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Abstract

In 2026, across higher education, the impact of generative AI and LLMs on teaching, learning, and assessment is ever-present. This project works within the context of a single unit of study to redesign an assessment around an active alternate-reality game which foregrounds interactive constructivist learning while mitigating some of the vulnerabilities to AI generation presented by typical written assignments. By embedding a conceptual-repair assessment task within a fictional narrative experience, we hope to engage students in the construction of their own knowledge about digital and internet-connected media. Students will be presented with a ‘hacked’ wiki which they are tasked to repair, while navigating the competing priorities of fictional characters and the real-world positions they are designed to represent, all while engaging with their peers to develop responses to fundamental questions about internet technology, culture, and society.

This paper describes the initial design phase of a proposed new student assessment experience in a first-semester undergraduate unit of study (class). This work is undertaken in the context of a university-wide consideration of the impact of AI on the assessment of learning, as well as a keen interest in effective, active pedagogy in a broadly constructivist paradigm. The project team consists of three lecturers at Curtin University in Perth, Australia. The unit convenor, Adam Ruch provides domain expertise in digital media and internet studies, while Craig Sims and Katie Kumasaka provide specialist expertise in learning with digital technologies and outcomes assessment. All three share an interest in teaching and learning with technology, active learning, and authentic assessment of student learning. Broadly speaking, this project seeks to enact an active, constructivist approach to pedagogy as suggested by, for example, Lave and Wenger (1991) and influenced by a games-based learning approach inspired by Lee Sheldon (2020). The aim is to create an interactive experience embedded in a digitally focused context in which students are immersed in the technologies and social structures that make up the material outcomes of the unit. The project therefore proposes an alternate-reality game in which students engage with fictional characters while redeveloping a wiki resource relevant to the unit materials. Students will literally (re)construct their knowledge about computer technology, the Internet, and digital culture through a team-based, playful experience.

The Situation – Project Context

Unit Goals / Outcomes

The relevant unit is a first-year humanities class situated within the Digital and Social Media stream within Curtin's School of Media, Creative Arts, and Social Inquiry. NETS1001 Web Communications is an introductory internet studies unit which helps build students' technical understanding of the internet and related technologies, with a focus on the social interactions and communications affordances of the World Wide Web. The formal unit learning outcomes are:

1) explain the basic technical foundations of the Internet and related technologies as they apply to communication, collaboration and media creation;
2) demonstrate understanding of key concepts in Internet communication, especially relating to identity;
3) relate conceptual understandings to practical implementation of communication online;
4) use various Internet applications for communication, collaboration and media.

Existing Assessment

The assessment item (student assignment) relevant to the current project is the first task, which at present is a simple, five-question quiz requiring short paragraph answers. For example, the questions include: “What is the relationship between the Internet and the World Wide Web?” and “What are three purported differences between the World Wide Web as it first emerged and the more recent Web 2.0?” Students are expected to write approximately 150 words per answer, with explicit reference to key texts that make up the reading list in the first few weeks of the unit. The questions are answered outside of class time and submitted to the LMS in week four or five of the semester.

Generative AI and Modality

Two other assessment items exist in the unit: a typical research essay assignment, and a practical “Web Presence” exercise. The third assessment requires students to develop a distributed identity across several social / digital media platforms that converge on a central node. (The assessment design is inspired by work including Zizi Papacharissi (2010), Jose van Dijck (2013), Jill Walker-Rettberg (2014), and Tama Leaver et al. (2020) among others.) This assessment has delivered the practical experience highlighted in Outcomes 3 and 4. The WebWiki project seeks to bring that practical experience forward, so that students are immersed in the hands-on element of this unit more consistently across the study period.

While the existing Q&A assessment has been successful in encouraging students to confront some of their own vaguely understood assumptions about basic terminology (the Internet or the Web, for example), this type of assessment is particularly vulnerable in the contemporary educational environment. The current generation of LLM software is capable of drafting convincing answers to straight-forward questions of this nature which undermines the effectiveness of this assignment as assessment of (or for) learning. As we shall discuss more below, neither class nor university policy permitting or forbidding the use of AI on a given assignment is sufficient in this moment. Rather than make what Thomas Corbin et. al. (2025) have termed either “declarative” or “discursive” changes, this project aims at a more fundamental, “structural” change to the assessment item. This is not only in response to the present of AI, but as will be shown, reflects a range of pedagogical improvements.

Another key contextual factor affecting this project is the wide range of unit delivery modes for this unit. In addition to traditional, in-person lecture-and-tutorial delivery on site at the Perth campus, this unit is taught in similar traditional formats at offshore sites, is delivered online in parallel to the Perth schedule, and online in an independent mode through Open Universities Australia. While in some cases, the teaching faculty overlap (the lecturers and

tutors for the Perth site may also teach the parallel online section), they generally do not. The study period calendars are also widely dispersed. In Perth, the unit runs in both semesters, while OUA runs sections across several of the four study periods per year, for instance. The repeatability of this assessment experience is, therefore, an important design consideration. Furthermore, the significant difference in engagement patterns with on campus and online students must be accommodated by all assessment tasks. The WebWiki project is no exception in that regard.

With some of the above constraints in mind, the fact that this unit is explicitly focused on digital communications tools that function natively on the Internet works to our advantage. In this sense, introducing students to a collaborative content management system such as a wiki is not only a convenient solution to the dynamic schedule and distributed student population problem, but is also clearly aligned with the unit outcomes themselves. Because wikis are a "practical implementation of communication online," using a wiki can, in and of itself, be a relevant learning experience for students in this unit.

Pedagogical Perspective

Motivation and Engagement

Engagement has emerged as a crucial concept across a broad range of education and pedagogy research. From the foundational work of Kuh (2009), Tinto (1997), or Astin (1984) through to specialised applications in game-based learning research such as Gillespie (2022) or Lauricella and Edmunds (2022), a student's engagement remains central to pedagogical design practices. Engagement is crucial to a student's overall success: "Student engagement represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college," (Kuh, 2009, p. 683). In his summary, Kuh points out the range of activities identified by previous scholars which can collectively be bundled together as different types or modes of engagement. These included Astin's (1984) formulation of "involvement" and Pace's descriptions such as "studying, interacting with their peers and teachers about substantive matters, applying their learning to concrete situations and tasks in different contexts, and so forth," (Kuh, 2009, p. 684).

Coupled with that engagement, we highlight the notion of motivation—that is, a student must be motivated *to* engage, and to remain engaged, with whatever the learning material or experience is. Kuh explicitly includes this in the conclusion to the definition of engagement provided above: "*and* what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities," (2009, p. 683, italics original). This reminder keeps the student centred in pedagogical design, in which educational experiences must first induce or entice a student to engage before the activities' teaching potential is relevant. As we shall see below, game design is a highly human-centric design discipline which foregrounds numerous ways of

motivating players to engage, and remain engaged, with the challenging mechanics of gameplay. While a certain degree of 'fun' or attractive, eye-catching graphics might come to mind first, the appeal of a well-designed game does not rest on these motivations alone. As we shall see, there is significant crossover between compelling game design and effective pedagogical design, especially in terms of learning in context and social reinforcement.

Collaborative, Active Learning – Constructivist Frame

Mollie Dollinger and Juuso Henrik Nieminen frame the impact of Generative AI on higher education as a "catalyst for reimagining assessment practices" (Dollinger & Nieminen, 2026, p. 3). We would be remiss in not acknowledging part that GenAI systems played in the motivation of our own project, including the "Two-Lane" approach (Liu & Bridgeman, 2023) to securing assessment documented in research and university policy. By moving from an unsupervised written exercise towards a collaborative and partially in-class project, this new assessment design certainly responds to some of the issues raised in these AI-centric discussions. However, this project is not only a defensive tactical response to the introduction of these AI systems.

As Dollinger and Nieminen point out, the real opportunity exists within the paradigmatic questioning of assessment of learning as a practice. Without ever invoking the term, several passages in Dollinger and Nieminen's article seem to point towards a constructivist mindset compatible with the foundational work by Lave and Wenger (1991). For example: "Perhaps the most pervasive, and most harmful, myth underpinning many current assessment practices is that the most valid understanding of students' knowledge is that which resides neatly within an individual," (Dollinger & Nieminen, 2026, p. 5). The authors go on to describe the considerable measures undertaken to "ensure assessment represents the skills and competencies of individuals, not groups or communities," (Dollinger & Nieminen, 2026, p. 5). They also point out explicitly that "knowledge can also be seen as inherently social/distributed; constructed through complex interactions between people, tools, contexts, and methods," (Dollinger & Nieminen, 2026, p. 5). Clearly this perspective is aligned with Lave and Wenger's which "emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing," (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 50). So, while AI systems may provide a useful catalyst for our project, useful solutions to those challenges may in fact be available in existing pedagogical perspectives.

Game Based-Learning

Taking the constructivist approach as a broad paradigm for teaching and learning, game-based learning (GBL) offers a method for developing learning experiences that prioritizes

many of the principles outlined above. As thoroughly discussed by Plass et al. (2015, p. 259), game-based learning refers to “game play with defined learning outcomes” and is distinct from “gamification” of learning through its more foundational approach. Their example is that a gamified math exercise might award points or badges for completing a set of typical mathematical problems, but a game-based learning experience “would involve redesigning the homework activities, using artificial conflict and rules of play, to make them more interesting and engaging” (Plass et al., 2015, p. 259). That is, gamification is usually applied to a task that users/players are obligated to perform, using extrinsic game-shaped rewards such as points to motivate engagement in that otherwise uninteresting activity. Game-based learning, on the other hand, prioritizes an interesting and intrinsically engaging experience that is also targeted at certain pedagogical outcomes.

Plass et al. also point out that in GBL research, the game in question is often assumed to be digital, even if this is not always the case (Plass et al., 2015, p. 259). Indeed, in a more recent review of the literature, Niamboue Bado begins their discussion by outlining the continued growth of the videogame industry (Bado, 2022, p. 936). Certainly, in this project, digital platforms are a central component of the game experience, but the game here is unlikely to be classified as a videogame. Instead, this experience falls into the category of alternate-reality games.

Although invariably supported by digital communications channels and technologies, ARGs are not videogames. According to Jeffrey Kim et al., the “[t]wo features of a successful ARG are a compelling storyline and collaborative game play. In [an ARG], a plotline is narrated and delivered through multiple communication channels, including Web pages, email messages, phone calls, and print-based mailings. Gamers use them to track the story’s progress,” (Kim et al., 2008, p. 38). Instead of using convincing computer graphics and real-time action to immerse the player in a virtual world, the design of an ARG uses digital (and sometimes non-digital) technology to advance a compelling story via playful game mechanics in the player’s real world. Instead of realistic graphics, other realistic elements are leveraged such as websites, emails, screen captured images, and similar material are developed to create believable fiction to motivate play. Crucially, though, ARGs can also leverage actual real-world material to advance the story. For example, a fictional character could send an email describing the importance of internet privacy that refers to the real-world Electronic Frontiers Foundation. Players could then visit the real EFF website to learn about that organization and their agenda. Because the gameplay occurs within real-world platforms like the web browser, there is little barrier between the fictional material and the real world.

Similarly, ARGs encourage real-world collaboration between the players. “The collaborative nature of game play is another important ARG feature. Game players construct their own means of interacting through Web-based discussion boards, email messages, and real-world gatherings. Through this interaction, players communicate with one another, share their knowledge, offer interpretations of the storyline, and gather the information necessary to progress toward the game’s conclusion,” (Kim et al., 2008, p. 38). Successful ARGs build momentum among the player base, relying on the social interaction that develops as like-minded players seek and provide support in solving puzzles or interpreting clues. In this context, a group of collaborating individuals is literally constructing the knowledge that resolves a fictional mystery.

From Theory to Practice: Experience Design

The literature above helps to define the paradigm and high-level goals we have for designing a learning experience that reflects the beneficial design elements of games, particularly of an ARG. These perspectives are not, however, design manuals. To provide some guidance towards the actual development of a (manageable) ARG, we have turned to two primary sources: Lee Sheldon (2020, 2021) and Yu-kai Chou (2016). While the vocabulary used varies, both authors begin at the foundational level of activity design which aligns more closely with what Plass et al. described as game-based learning rather than “gamification”. Sheldon’s work provides theoretical background as well as edited versions of his game design documentation that describe entire courses guided by extensive online ARG experiences. His background as a television writer is evident in his style and dedication to compelling stories and production processes. Chou’s work is centered on an 8-part framework “octalysis” which provides strong design-oriented guidance for development of intrinsically motivating experiences (as well as outlining the drawbacks associated with relying on risky “black hat” motivators).

The design goals are therefore to create a learning experience that follows the general contours of the ARGs developed by Sheldon (2020), utilizing some of the motivational and mechanical characteristics described by Chou (2016), while integrating the cognitive, motivational, affective, and socio-cultural elements described by Plass et al. (2015). Finally, as we will discuss below, the experience itself should be assessed through the student’s learning outcomes and against recognized game-based learning instruments.

Narrative Frame

In the wiki-repair experience, students will take on the role of a team of researchers and authors who have accepted a short-term, grant-funded position at a small, non-profit organization which maintains an online repository of educational material about the internet. In teams of six to eight, students will receive an email from a fictional character

who is charged with managing the team. The task is to repair a hacked and corrupted wiki by replacing, adding, updating and otherwise rejuvenating the “WebWiki” wiki. The fictional manager will provide access to a real wiki platform and provide some initial guidance on what kind of material to review—that material is, of course, the learning material otherwise known as a ‘reading list’ for the unit.

Shortly after their first engagement, students will begin receiving emails from other fictional characters who seek to influence the work of the student group. Two characters will, in the text of their emails and through linking to further reading material, present alternate, competing visions of what the internet “is” and how it should be described on the WebWiki wiki. Students will be free to choose from the range of resources suggested by the three different characters, but will have to discuss and debate which of the resources they will use to recreate and repair the WebWiki wiki.

Over the course of the short experience (five weeks), the drama will unfold between the three characters and the student groups in which further decisions will be made. In the climax, the original WebWiki employee will be cut off, and the students will have to choose whether to hand over their login credentials to the site’s new owner or remove the password protection. The choice represents a key dialectic understanding of the internet and web-based knowledge as private property or public good.

Technical Requirements

The WebWiki Experience follows the general outlines of an ARG by utilizing live, web-based services such as a wiki platform (Mediawiki) and email services to communicate directly with the student-players. The WebWiki wiki will be deployed in several instances, meaning at any given moment, several copies of the wiki will exist on a single web server. Each team will have access to one wiki for the duration of the game.

Email services will be utilized by teaching staff to correspond with the students. The email addresses, written tone, and formatting are designed to express different characters. For instance, the initial WebWiki employee will have an @WebWiki email account and address the players in a friendly, collegial manner. The other characters will use different domains, including an @proton.me account to demonstrate the anonymizing capabilities of certain services.

This ARG design does not require extensive videogame programming or art asset design.

Learning Objectives and Assessment

At an administrative assessment design level, this experience targets all four of the unit learning outcomes. As compared to the earlier short-answer quiz, this experience

incorporates the authentic use of a wiki platform as well as the opportunity to analyze the source of emails (via domain searches for example) in a way that the written responses to questions did not. In their groups, students will be required to construct answers to similar kinds of questions, as content development for wiki pages about the internet and web technology, so they will encounter much of the same basic questions as in the previous assignment.

This experience is explicitly designed to motivate students by contextualizing the use of knowledge about the internet into realistic role-play situation in which their decision-making will matter. This connects the general constructivist perspective on learning-in-context with the particular facility that games have for creating that "semiotic domain" in which the students learn to maneuver (Gee, 2007). For example, one of the texts found on the reading list for this unit is Purdy (2009), and is an examination of writing on Wikipedia. The study examines the collaborative nature of public writing on Wikipedia, which "asks us to reexamine our expectations for the stability of research materials and who should participate in public knowledge making," and:

> Wikis and other Web 2.0 technologies make more visible the complex, rich, messy processes usually kept behind the closed doors of the academy. Far from diminishing scholarly work, these technologies can illuminate the value of writing in processes of developing knowledge. (Purdy, 2009, p. 352)

Purdy's perspective above characterizes a reasonable "learning outcome" that students would learn by reading it in the article, or, as this experiment hopes, by actually carrying out the collaborative process of writing material into a wiki. Students will, literally, co-construct a wiki entry about a number of different topics by reviewing different perspectives and discussing the conflict, overlap, and other comparisons together. They will, we hope, actually experience some of that messy, interpersonal work that goes into the production of any published piece of knowledge, in the microcosm of this unit.

The drama of the game seeks to create a tension between positions on what the internet "is" and what it is "for" through the perspectives offered by each of the fictional characters. Students will be required to discuss their understandings of those characters' motivations and the significance of the reading material they share as groups. Through discussion, the groups will formulate a consensus before posting material to the wiki. As another contrasting example, one of the foundational texts that defined "Web 2.0" was written by Tim O'Reilly (2005) as a product of a clearly commercially-oriented "Web 2.0 Conference" in San Francisco. Many scholars welcomed Web 2.0 as a model of a more "social" web, despite these commercial origins (Jenkins, 2006; Rettberg, 2014). On the other hand, Jose Van Dijck and David Nieborg (2009) or Andrew Keen (2007) provide a

much more critical interpretation of Web 2.0. In this ARG, these readings can be presented by each of our three main characters as evidence for their perspective on what the WebWiki, and by extension the entire internet, is and is for. The students will be required to incorporate some kind of academic support for their wiki article entries, and must therefore decide as a group how to proceed.

We anticipate that different groups will come to different conclusions, so a comparison between groups will form a final denouement to the ARG. Student groups will be allowed to access the wiki sites created by their peers and discuss what choices they made and why. Finally, each individual student will submit a reflective piece to the LMS, outlining their understanding of key concepts as a way to assess individual learning.

Project Outcomes Assessment

The assessment of this project will comprise two parts: the first is a simple comparison of the assignment outcomes between the cohort of students who participate in this ARG experience and a sample of previous student submissions to the equivalent assignment. This comparison will attempt to track the students' understanding of key issues around the internet, the world wide web, Web 2.0 and related social and technical issues that frame the unit.

The second element of assessment will be a formal survey based on the egame flow instrument developed by Fu et. al (2009). The egame flow model follows research concerning game-based learning such as Prensky (2006) and Kiili (2005) which are in turn reliant on the foundational concept of "flow" as described by Csikszentmihalyi (2009). The model contains eight dimensions that describe the various characteristics of the game that either motivate or prevent enjoyable engagement with the game. These dimensions are further broken into forty-two individual items, which is likely too many to include in a single survey in this case. The survey also presumes a fully digital experience, so some of the questions that focus on specific digital features can be excluded.

The egame flow instrument does focus on student experience, motivation, enjoyment and pleasure, which aligns well with the student-centric aims of this project. Specific elements such as Challenge, Immersion, and Autonomy (Fu et al., 2009, p. 105) reflect important aspects of satisfying game experiences (cf. Ermi & Mäyrä, 2005) while also corresponding to important pedagogical aims. In particular, the tool nominates Social Interaction, which an ARG relies on quite heavily as a game mechanic, and a constructivist perspective takes as foundational.

Future Work – the Pilot

Work has begun on developing the experience itself. The aim is to deliver the ARG within the Web Communications unit in Semester 1 of 2027. The schedule suggests that the experience will run for the first third of the semester. Teaching faculty will work within the typical weekly semester schedule in which the game is introduced in the first week of semester, then the various plot-advancing emails will be delivered on a weekly basis. Students will either attend classes in person or online. The in-person students will discuss in their groups along with their tutor to decide how to respond to the challenges. Groups will be encouraged to develop draft entries for the wiki itself during class time. Online students will participate asynchronously, using the LMS discussion forums and other collaborative tools to facilitate their participation.

The student survey will be delivered approximately halfway through the semester—after grades for this assignment experience are recorded and returned to students, but before the end of the teaching period. While we of course hope for a strong set of valid results, we must also avoid any conflict of interest around the return of student assessment results in this project.

Finally, the actual results of student learning experience will be documented and presented in future publications, which will provide further validation and refinement of this kind of approach to teaching and learning.

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