

Social Constructivism Meets Social Media: The Case for Collaborative Learning in the Ethics Classroom

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What would you do differently in teaching ethics if you knew that you would be held accountable for the ethical decisions of your graduates?

As educators, it is our moral responsibility to ensure that what we teach and how we teach it are based on a *solid* and *shared* understanding of the ethical requirements of our professional discipline(s) and perhaps even more important, how we can inculcate those attitudes of moral responsibility in young adults who come to the classroom with well-grounded, if not well-understood, moral values.

In the beginning

The problem

The problem faced by educators teaching ethics in public communication continues to be three-fold: finding consensus on what to teach, how best to teach it and how to evaluate the outcomes.

The opportunity

Finding a new way to conceptualize ethics content and pedagogy given the ubiquity of social media tools.

A theoretical basis

What to teach

- **Moral imagination** has been defined as "the ability to step out of our present ways of thinking, evaluate those mind sets, and develop or adopt new ways of thinking, acting and evaluating our decisions processes and behavior" (Werhane, p. 404).
- Failure to behave ethically results from the failure of one or more of the following: **ethical sensitivity, moral judgment, ethical decision-making, ethical action** (Rest, 1982).
- **Thesis:** cultivating moral imagination can be both a process and an outcome in ethics education.

How to teach it

- **Challenge:** to move beyond traditional approaches of teaching ethical theory and presenting case studies
- **Constructivism** is based on the concept that meaning is constructed by the individual learner rather than provided by a teacher (Parker & Chao, 2007).
- Constructivism as a pedagogical approach enhances problem-solving capabilities by focusing on the learning environment (Vygotsky, 1986).
- **Social constructivism** as a pedagogical approach is based on the premise that learning is enhanced by activities that permit construction of new knowledge in an environment that enhances **social interaction**.
- As a teaching tool, **peer review** has been found to positively affect students' awareness of what & how they are learning, their attitudes toward their learning and their performance (Richer, 1992; Xiao & Lucking, 2008).
- Peer review provides for social interaction/ social media permits online peer review.

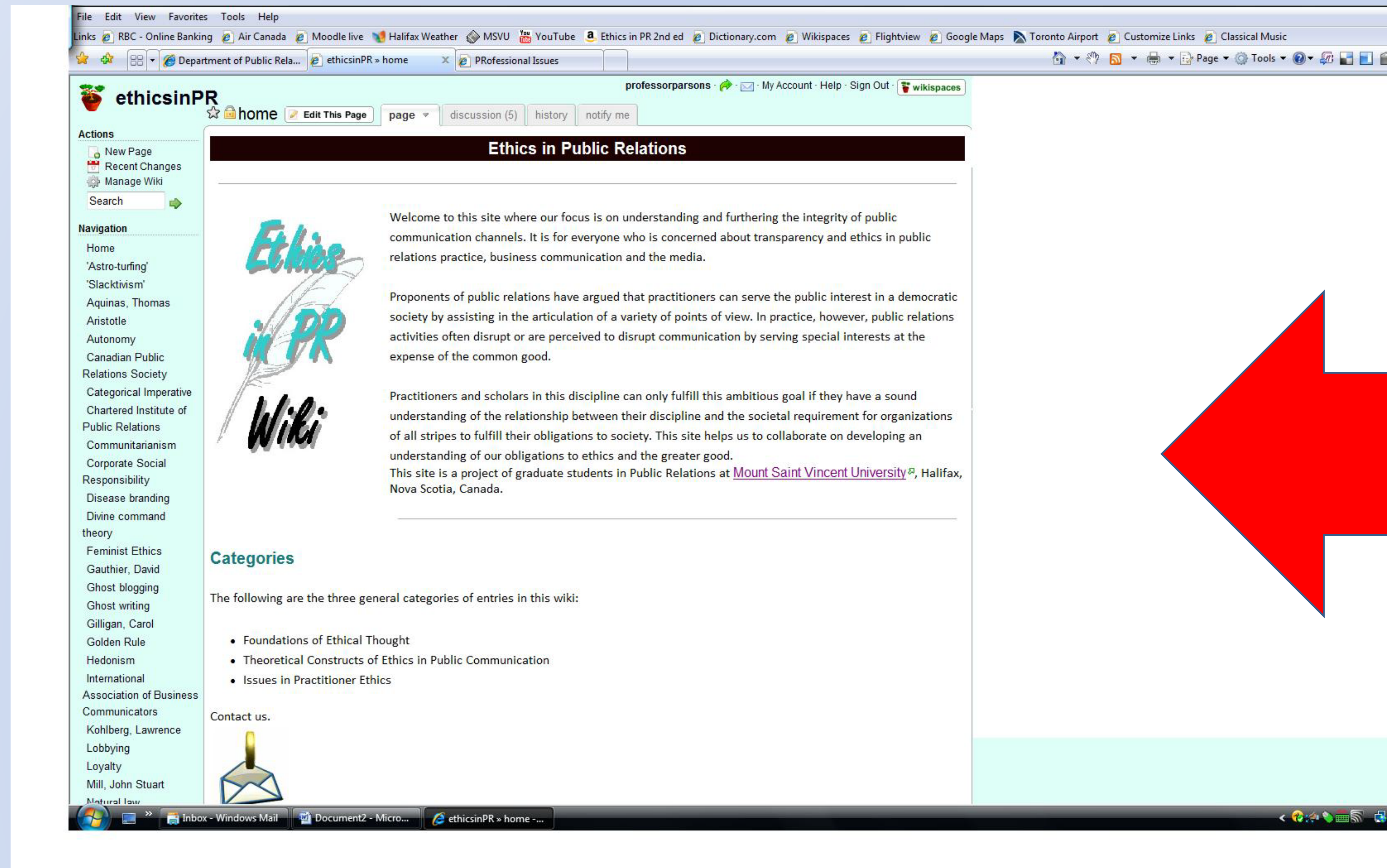
New tools of the trade

The project

- Focused on knowledge construction that allows students to learn through active collaboration.
- Students negotiate for topics and are required to create pages on the wiki.
- Students are invited to edit pages created by their peers.
- The students leave a legacy for future students and practitioners on a public wiki.

Why a wiki...

- "...a web page that nobody would own and that anyone could edit..." (Evans, 2006).
- Wikis can be used for knowledge construction, development of critical thinking, and contextual application.
- Wikis invite (demand) peer review.
- A wiki creates a community of practice.



Creating a learning community for ethics in public communication

Research questions for the future

1. To what extent does the collaborative model enhance moral imagination?
2. Does the collaborative model for teaching improve ethical decision-making?
3. How do the various social media tools compare to one another in their ability to assist student with developing moral imagination?
4. To what extent would social constructivism itself provide a framework for ethical decision-making in public communication practices?
5. How can you widen the collaborative effort? How can you use social media tools to collaborate with other students in far-away colleges and universities thus adding another dimension to both social interaction and peer review?