

Katarzyna Pekała

Institute of Education
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Gdańsk
Gdańsk, Poland
E-Mail: pekala@gmx.net

Discourse on 'marginalisation' and 'social work' in Wikipedia

Wikipedia is an 'open' multilingual Internet-based encyclopaedia that can be edited by everyone. As there is no traditional peer-review process, not only experts, but also laymen become its co-authors. Created spontaneously and collectively, Wikipedia is one of the most frequently visited web pages in the Internet. Not only is Wikipedia a repository of 'common' knowledge, but it is also used as a reference book, as it reflects the spectrum of knowledge in many fields. This paper will address the problem of uncertainty and changeability of knowledge, and ambiguities of participation in knowledge production in Wikipedia. The empirical research aims to look at how key terms of social work are defined in Wikipedia. The main question is what kind of discourse on 'marginalisation' and 'social work' is produced there. Thus, it is worth investigating how knowledge on these issues is constructed. In respect to this, research will concentrate not only on the structure and content of articles, but also on the connections between related terms. This study should also shed light on the editorial process, and on mechanisms of legitimisation of knowledge in Wikipedia. In the course of this research, the method of discourse analysis will be used. In order to ask about possible cultural differences, three language editions of Wikipedia will be analysed: the English, German and Polish one. Investigations will focus on regularities and inconsistencies on four levels: of articles; of connections between them; of discussion pages, where temporary versions of articles are negotiated; and of connections between articles and related discussion pages. The starting point of the investigation will be two terms: 'marginalisation' and 'social work'. Firstly, the structure and the content of articles will be explored, separately for each language edition. Secondly, research will follow hyperlinks that send from analysed articles to articles on related issues. Then the structure and the content of these 'secondary' articles will be addressed. Thirdly, the history pages and discussion pages of selected articles will be studied, in order to encapsulate evolution of the content of articles and co-authors' arguments in negotiating the temporary versions of articles. Finally, the content and structure of analysed articles in three language editions of Wikipedia will be compared, and the possible differences in patterns of collaboration between authors will be discussed.