A wiki is a collection of Web pages that can be edited by anyone, at any time, from anywhere from a Web browser. Content is posted immediately to the Web, eliminating the need for email distribution with the associated risk of virus transmission. Wikis are able to incorporate text, images, sound and video, creating a high-quality interactive, collaborative Web environment.

The first wiki was developed by Ward Cunningham in 1995. Cunningham took the name from the WikiWiki shuttle bus at the Honolulu airport, which means, "super fast". He describes a wiki as "the simplest online database that could possibly work" (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p.5). The wiki provides efficiency, accessibility and an enormous forum to distribute information.

The possibilities for using wikis as a platform for collaborative projects are limited only by one's imagination and time.

Why Use A Wiki To Support Student Collaboration?

Wikis have recently emerged as a very powerful digital tool for supporting student collaboration. Their flexibility, ease of use and low barrier to entry, makes them equivalent to "digital paper" (Lamb, 2004). Higdon (2005), suggests that wikis allow students to "co-construct meaning in a democratized digital space" (p.1), and Fountain (2005), states that the use of wikis to support collaborative projects helps "promote 'pride of authorship' and ownership in the team's activities" (p.8). Wikis allow tutors and students to engage in collaborative activities that extend well beyond the classroom walls.

More Ideas

A wiki can be used by:

- **Students** to create undertake EBL/PBL activities, online journals, lab books, research notebooks, ePortfolios, and even online textbooks for their own benefit, or for peer or tutor review.
- **Tutors** to communicate with their students and to collaborate on research and writing projects with their peers (e.g. textbooks, articles) through the collection of ideas, papers, timelines, documents, or to study results within a collective digital space.
- **School or departmental personnel, tutors and PGTA** can use a wiki to organize and discuss common course assets such as; syllabi, office hours and assessments, to schedule face-to-face meetings.
- **Conference organizers** as a means of planning, coordinating and implementing events.

Give Me an Example

A wiki was used to provide a learning space for campus based students. Students were immersed in an module which had a key strand based around an enquiry based (EBL), authentic real-world learning scenario. Students (in their groups) took on the role of a professional staff member who had just graduated from the University. The module tutor took on the role of line manager and provided group EBL tasks in the form of a email memo.

The EBL tasks took place over a three week period, with the students supported to undertake the activity in an independent manner. To ensure that students were undertaking their task and to provide support where required, various sub-tasks were required. These included posting agendas and minutes of meetings on the wiki along with To Do Lists, Action and Task Schedule Planners and a working area.

The settings on the wiki meant that students could edit but not permanently delete any work. The wiki provides functionality whereby page versions are kept. These previous versions can be consulted, compared or rolled back at any point. Another useful feature was the ability to have email notification of student's editing the wiki – the frequency could be changed by the end user. This avoided by tutor and student time that can be taken up by logging onto a system to find nothing has changed.

Other Considerations

There are many wikis technologies (PBWiki, Wetpaint etc) available for use for educational purposes that allow tutors to restrict access (if they wish) to their cohort only. If you wish to use an externally hosted Web 2.0 service there are a few things to consider:

- Security of Service Provider
- Confidentiality
- Ownership of data
- Security of data
- Performance Reliability
- Support
- Single sign-on
- Lock-in
- Longevity
- Functional stability
- Data Protection and Freedom of Information
- Accessibility Legislation
- University Regulations (assessment, branding, computing regulations)
- Risk Management

More information is available from the University of Edinburgh's document, "Guidelines for Using External Web 2.0 Services".

Where Can I Go for More Information?

- **Wide Open Spaces: Wikis Ready or Not**
  Lamb, B (2004)
  http://connect.educause.edu/Library/EDUCAUSE+Review/WideOpenSpacesWikisReadyo/40498

- **7 things you should know about… Wikis**
  Educause (2005)
  http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7004.pdf

- **Teaching, Learning, and Other Uses for Wikis in Academia**
  Higdon, J (2005)
  University of Southern California
  http://campustechnology.com/Articles/2005/11/Teaching-Learning-and-Other-Uses-for-Wikis-in-Academia.aspx

- **Wiki Pedagogy**
  Renee Foundation (2005)
  http://www.profetic.org/dossiers/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=110

- **The wiki way: Quick collaboration on the web**
  Leuf, B. and Cunningham, W. (2001). Boston: Addison Wesley

- **Guidelines for Using External Web 2.0 Services**
  University of Edinburgh (2007)
  https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/download/attachments/8716376/GuidelinesForUsingExternalWeb2.0Services-20080801.pdf

- **Your College E-Learning Team**