

The Illawarra Institute's Virtual Learning Environment Journey

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Overview

What would be the ideal technology solution for TAFE Illawarra Institute to achieve the goals of increased flexibility, personalised learning and collaboration with industry?

This was the question asked by the Institute's Innovation Working Party in 2008. The Institute Teaching & Learning Initiatives (TLI) team began exploring technologies and software for a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) that would meet our business requirements, in particular the Moodle Learning Management System.

This activity coincided with the TAFE eLearning Systems investigations for a TAFE-wide Virtual Learning Environment.

As part of the TAFE wide project Institute's were asked to collaborate on writing the business requirements to define what the ideal Virtual Learning Environment should provide from a teaching and learning point of view. From this process a number of criteria were identified:

- Automatic enrolment of students within courses.
- Rapid development of courses with intuitive pedagogically-based learning design.
- Teachers to store a range multimedia; videos, photos, audio .mp3s which they can use to collate evidence against competencies for recognition and assessment
- Student learning activity tracking, activity log.
- Student management of assessment and feedback/marks – assessment drop-box
- Class collaboration with tools such as forums, chat, wiki's/blog's.
- Learning Reference Repository (LRR) integration to enable direct linking to resources and eliminate duplication; with the functionality to upload and/or reference resources, select publishing levels; search by keyword/tag/category; search external sites and other repositories.
- Support across DET/Institute.
- Scalable solutions to meet needs into the future (5 years).

Online Learning Delivery Solution

Moodle was presented to Illawarra Institute teachers as a trial on an externally hosted site; the decision to go with Moodle was made due to teacher's positive feedback, ease of use, minimal training requirements, and the potential to achieve the stated business requirements. Moodle was also developed with constructivist pedagogical principles that actively engage the learner with an activity based approach. In addition Sydney and North Coast Institutes had already successfully implemented Moodle and the opportunity was there to collaborate and learn from their experience.

Combining other tools with the Moodle LMS was seen as being an important part of the Illawarra Institute's Virtual Learning Environment providing flexibility and choice of teaching methods for student interaction. Teachers are already using Web 2.0 tools such as Blog's and Wiki's to connect with, communicate and publish student media. A 'Wordpress' Blog and 'Wikispaces' Private Label Wiki were chosen as part of the Illawarra Institute's VLE solution due to their popularity, the feedback from students, who are already using these types of tools on the internet in their personal life, has been very positive. To preview these Illawarra Institute VLE Tools go to:

- Moodle (iiLearn) install <http://learn.illawarra.tafensw.edu.au>
- Private Label (iiWiki) Wikispaces - <http://iiwiki.edu.au>
- Hosted (iiBlog) Wordpress install - <http://blog.illawarra.tafensw.edu.au>

Authoring Content and Storing of Resources

A key change in the Illawarra Institute's VLE approach has been the separating of Moodle Learning activities from content and underpinning knowledge, i.e. the teacher develops their sequence of learning activities in Moodle then links to content. Resources can be either uploaded as files to a repository with a website link or developed as content in Media Wiki.

Inspired by the success of the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, the Illawarra Institute incorporated MediaWiki (called 'iiResources') into the VLE suite of tools. Here teachers write their Unit content embed videos and pod-casts and link to LRR resource files and other websites. This enables easy reuse of the content pages across multiple Moodle, Wikispaces, blog-based courses as well as enabling easy collaboration between writers and maintaining concurrency of content.

The Illawarra Institute has also established a domain in the Learning Reference Repository (LRR) provided by the Center for Learning Innovation (CLI). The CLI has also helped through providing LRR resources and staff support. The LRR enables teachers to add descriptive metadata when they upload their resource files, the files can then be searched for by others and easily reused. The Institute's Repository server has a terabyte of storage (1000 Gigabytes) for all manner of files. Go to:

- Mediawiki (iiResources) - <http://wiki.illawarra.tafensw.edu.au>
- Learning Reference Repository - <http://lrr.cli.det.nsw.edu.au>

Web Conferencing and Capability Development

The ability to communicate in real time via web conferencing is a key part of the Illawarra Institute's Virtual Learning Environment and backs up the pedagogical approach to actively engage students and construct learning activities. Adobe Connect (supported by TAFE eLearning Systems) is being successfully used by teachers to deliver their classes online in real time, all that is needed is a USB headset and web cam to utilise video and audio communication. Time2Share, a weekly showcase and discussion session in Adobe Connect has also been successful in enabling teacher's to share information on 'how to' use the VLE tools.

- Adobe Connect (iiWebConf) go to <http://webconf.det.nsw.edu.au>
- Time2Share - <http://learnspace.iiwiki.edu.au/Time2Share>

Administration and Guidelines

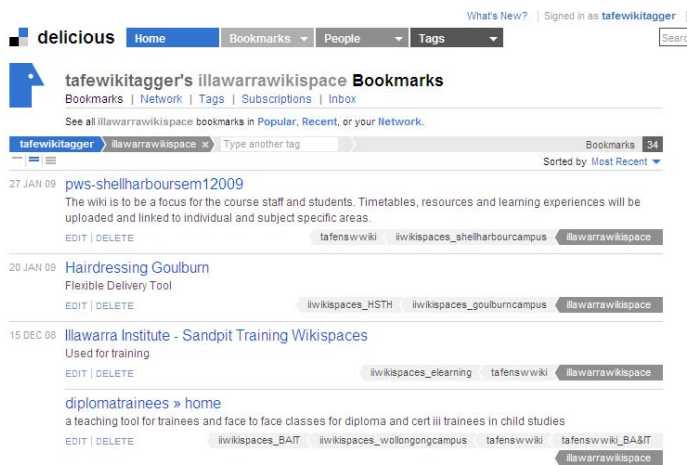
Providing reliable response to teacher requests for a new Blog, Wiki or Moodle Course is of utmost importance so the Institute has online request forms to manage workflow. This is built using the Web 2.0 application Zoho Creator. The teacher fills in their details and an email request is automatically sent to the Teaching & Learning Initiatives. Once the site has been created the Head Teacher gets an automated email to keep them in the loop on the technologies being used and the capability development needs of their

electricaltrades.iiwiki.edu.au'."/>

teachers.

Several Institutes are participating in a tagging process to classify and record Wikispaces and blogs created by teachers using the Social Bookmarking tool <http://del.icio.us>

The system (designed by Jo Kay and Stephan Ridgway) enables effective tagging which allows for aggregation of wikispaces and blog links for participating TAFE NSW Institutes.



The screenshot shows a Delicious bookmarks page for the user 'tafewikitagger'. The page title is 'tafewikitagger's illawarrawikispace Bookmarks'. The user is signed in as 'tafewikitagger'. The page displays a list of bookmarks for the tag 'illawarrawikispace', sorted by 'Most Recent'. The bookmarks are:

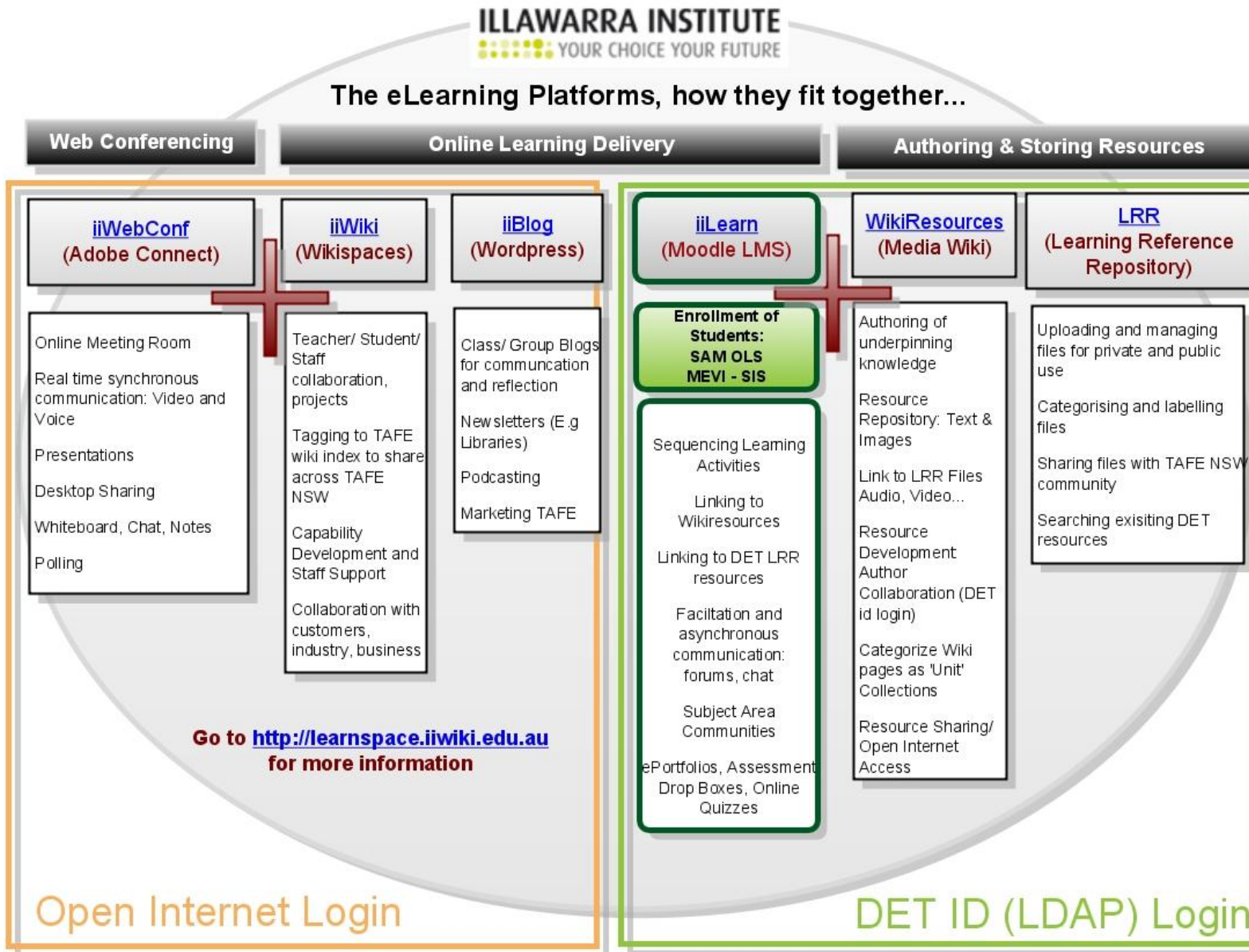
- 27 JAN 09** [pws-shellharbourse12009](#)
The wiki is to be a focus for the course staff and students. Timetables, resources and learning experiences will be uploaded and linked to individual and subject specific areas.
Tags: tafenswwiki, iwikipaces_shellharbourcampus, illawarrawikispace
- 20 JAN 09** [Hairdressing Goulburn](#)
Flexible Delivery Tool
Tags: iwikipaces_HSTH, iwikipaces_goulburncampus, illawarrawikispace
- 15 DEC 08** [Illawarra Institute - Sandpit Training Wikispaces](#)
Used for training
Tags: iwikipaces_learning, tafenswwiki, illawarrawikispace

Below the last bookmark, there is a link to [diplomatrainees » home](#) with a description: 'a teaching tool for trainees and face to face classes for diploma and cert iii trainees in child studies'. Tags for this link include iwikipaces_BAIT, iwikipaces_wollongongcampus, tafenswwiki, and tafenswwiki_BA&IT.

One of the major successes of the Illawarra Institute and TAFE NSW 'Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Project' has been the closer ties, collaboration and sharing of knowledge between Institutes. The Illawarra Institute is part of the newly created Moodle User Group (MUG) where VLE Administration techniques can be shared and showcased to peers. Go to <http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/fln/index.php/MUG> for more information.

Diagram: The eLearning Platforms, how they fit together...

Blending these VLE online delivery tools into one elearning package offers potential for a vast array of pedagogical teaching approaches as well as use for corporate work and marketing of TAFE in the community. <http://www.glify.com/publish/1515058/> - this diagram outlines the potential uses...



Screenshots: Look and feel, a seamless user experience

A key part of the success in merging multiple platforms into one VLE solution is consistency in the look and feel for a seamless better user experience. Joanna Kay was contracted to develop the look and feel consistent with the Institute's existing branding standards and customise a series of beautiful and visually interesting themes for Moodle, Wordpress and the Wiki's that represent the Institute, the Faculties and Corporate Services colours.

The screenshot displays a web page with a consistent green and white color scheme. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for #Wiki, #Learn, #Blog, #WebConf, #Resources, and #Email. The main header features the Illawarra TAFE logo and a decorative graphic of yellow circles and lines. Below the header, the page title is "Illawarra > Industrial Painting". The left sidebar contains several menu sections: "iiWiki Tools" with a search box, "iiWiki Management" with links for Home, Guidelines, and Help, "iiLearnspace" with a Staff Support Network link, and "Illawarra Faculties" with links for Business, Arts & Information Technology, General Education & Access Programs, Human Services, Tourism & Hospitality, and Trades & Technology. The main content area is titled "iiWiki" and includes a "PAGE DISCUSSION" link. The text describes the iiWiki software and provides a link to Faculty iiWiki's. Below the text is a video player showing a hand pointing to the word "WIKI" written on a whiteboard. The right sidebar contains a "Topic outline" section with a sub-section for "Introduction" and a video player showing a person in a yellow hard hat working on a wall. Below the video is a welcome message for the Wollongong TAFE, Illawarra Institute course and a list of topics to be learned.

Wikispaces

Moodle

Where to next in 2009?

For the year 2009 the Teaching and Learning Initiatives has a number of key projects on the burner, the primary aim is to further the adoption of the Virtual Learning Environment by staff across the Institute. These projects will be supported with capability development strategies including mentoring and professional learning networks. Here are some of the projects:

- Flexible Learning at Illawarra Project (FL@IP) - <http://blog.illawarra.tafensw.edu.au/flip>:
- 'Walk the Talk' resources for teachers new to elearning – A collaborative project with the CLI to develop a series of online Moodle Units and resources to introduce teacher on teaching with technology:
 - Coordinate and facilitate distance-based learning,
 - Develop innovative ideas at work,
 - Design and develop learning strategies,
 - Communicate electronically
- Integration of the Moodle LMS with the Learning reference Repository <http://www.cli.nsw.edu.au/cli/focus/psystems/lrr.shtm>. - A collaborative project with the Center for Learning Innovation - CLI
- Developing the Institutes VLE Staff Support Network further through initiatives such as Time to Share staff presentations <http://learnspace.iwiki.edu.au/Time2Share> and F2F cross campus Technology Camps <http://learnspace.iwiki.edu.au/TLIcamp>, Also publishing a series of wiki activity sheets for the VLE and a variety of Web 2.0 tools in particular utilising existing resources from North Coast Institute . - http://wiki.illawarra.tafensw.edu.au/wiki/index.php?title=Category:How_To
- Subscribing to a commercial Web 2.0 Video blogging service for publishing Digital Stories and Point of View Instructional video with Illawarra Institute branding.
- Continue to collaborate with other Institutes through, FLNW with TELS and CLI in particular to consolidate documentation and administration processes go to the FLNW wiki for more information. http://wiki.tafensw.edu.au/fln/index.php/Main_Page
- Transfer of existing courses, content and resources into Moodle and Media Wiki.

Contact:

Do you have any ideas for improvement? Have you a Time2Share presentation you would like to do? The Teaching and Learning Initiatives team invites feedback from other Institutes and ideas on collaboration opportunities to develop resources in the VLE.

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Photo: Illawarra Institute, Teaching and Learning Initiatives VLE Team: L-R, Steven Parker, Jayne Bachelor and Vicki Marchant

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- Joanna Kay – <http://jokay.com.au>