What is a wiki?

A wiki is a collection of webpages that can be modified by anyone who has been given access to it. Some wikis are open to anyone with a web connection - others are tightly controlled by small project teams. Wikis enable groups to collaborate online - contributors can add and edit pages to the wiki and view changes made by other users and roll back to previous versions. Contributors do not need to know how to write web pages as the editing is usually done with a simple editor which allows basic text formatting, inserting images, uploading documents and creating hyperlinks to other websites and resources.
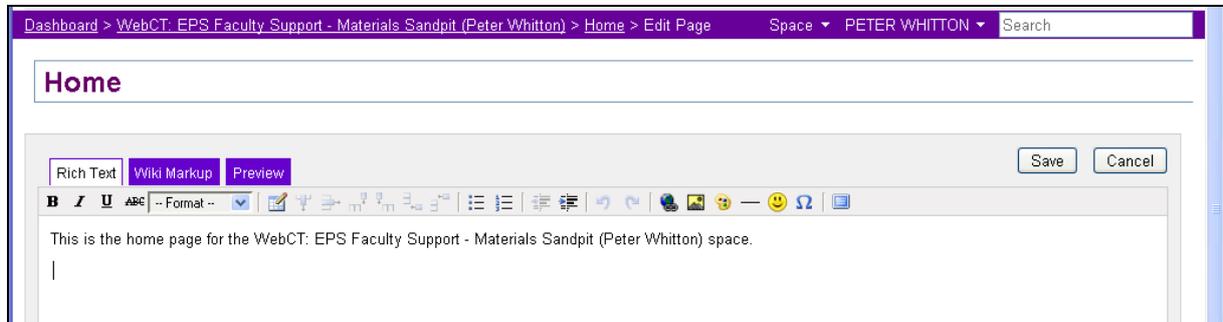

Figure 1: Confluence wiki editing interface (The University of Manchester)

Why use a wiki?

Wikis can be used to facilitate group study or team projects giving students a platform to learn valuable collaborative writing and editing skills. Wikis emphasise the pre-eminence of content creation over content consumption and the collaborative production of knowledge (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007) although Lund and Smordal (2006) found that learners preferred to go on creating extensions indefinitely rather than rewriting or editing their own or a classmate's contribution.. Wikis are particularly useful where group member are contributing at different times of day and from geographically dispersed locations (distance learners). Wikis can be considered ongoing resources, students can be allowed to see what previous cohorts had produced for an assignment, and add their own information or even correct that which is already there. As members add to and edit the wikis pages, they act as a repository of the shared knowledge of the members of the wiki with the knowledge base growing over time (Godwin-Jones, 2003).

How are wikis used in education?

 Wikis provide a medium for storing, organising and reformulating the ideas that are contributed by each community member (Jonassen, Howland, Marra & Crismond, 2008) they have been used in exercises where students are asked to critique different aspects of a piece of literature an art work or historical document to online environments that allow researchers to collaborate on academic papers with peers from other faculties, schools and institutions.

Where can I get a wiki?

There are many free and inexpensive wikis, such as PBwiki, Wetpaint, and Wikispaces. At the University of Manchester we use the Confluence wiki system which is linked to our Blackboard VLE system.

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