

VLE and Training – position paper 24 June 2012

This paper is for internal WMUK circulation only.

Executive summary

This document is not about implementation of the VLE (which is the subject of another one), but the context. It is designed to address the situation that obtains at present. There are several concurrent initiatives in the fields of training and outreach, in the rather complex context of five layers of involvement (Board, Education subcommittee, Martin Poulter and Jon Davies with a budget and operational control backed by office staff, training activists, and the WMUK community at large with various strands of opinion). The virtual learning environment (VLE) to be run under an e-learning system (Moodle) has to be integrated into, and has to work to integrate, the wider training system.

ModuleWiki is a working title for the VLE as implemented. “Wikimodule”, besides being a hashtag, is jargon for the type of wiki+online module system intended for implementation, abstracted from factors particular to WMUK.

There is plenty to worry about. Overviews are given and some proposals that imply costs. Abbreviations and jargon are in the Glossary

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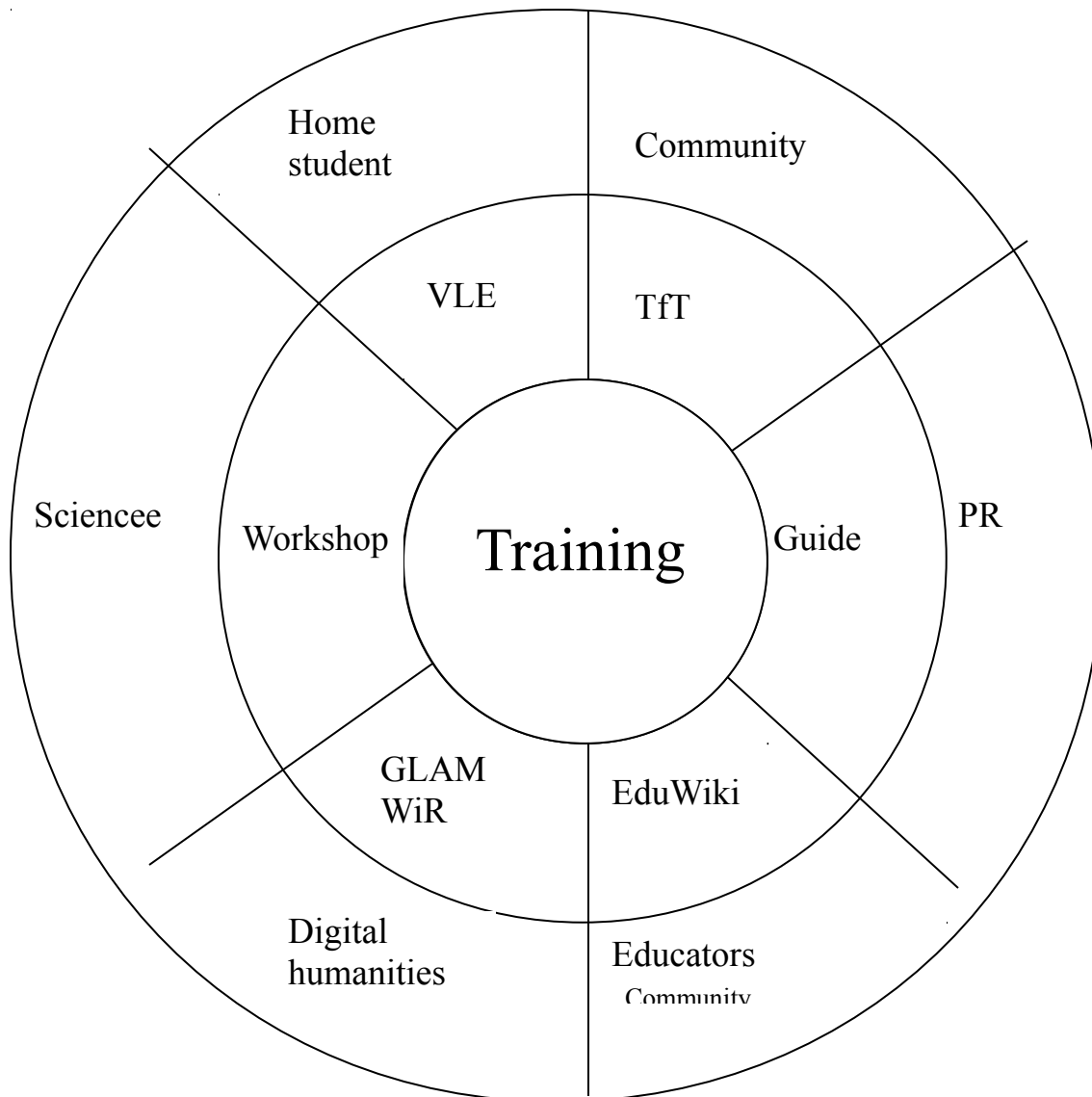
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Consistency of approach

It should go without saying that training matters will proceed better if there is a consistent underlying approach, modified and adapted to context.

It's complicated



This is already a complex diagram (and it is more important to master the content than worry about the format ...)

The VLE project has to support all the other efforts in an appropriate fashion. It also must be provided with content conceived of in a global fashion, for all readers of English. Small example: it should not use Commonwealth spelling as imposed standard, but instead use a module metadata field to fix Commonwealth or American spelling.

Priorities

Training material can be roughly divided up as (not exhaustive or mutually exclusive) types:

- (a) designed to make better editors of those already editing, or intending to edit, Wikipedia;
- (b) designed to assist readers of Wikipedia;
- (c) aimed at other Wikimedia projects;
- (d) general knowledge of WMUK, WMF etc. for outreach.

Of these (a) is the obvious priority: strengthen the WP editing community. Other prioritization is much less evident.

As far as the VLE is concerned, the material initially sought will mostly be (a). Perhaps the outcome will be rightly judged by trained editors having a better experience on WP. But there is some ground common to (a) and (b) or (c), at least. For example, evaluating an article relates to (b), but going over material related to it (the tips or DREWS acronym from “How Wikipedia Works”, for example) could be very helpful to new editors. Seeing what is wrong or suspect with an existing article is in some ways a better direction in early editing than “think of a topic”. For another example, knowledge of Commons is a direct help in finding images to add to an article (via Commons categories). For some people also (and this is much less known) Wikisource can provide first draft material from public domain reference works.

There will also be outreach material available to the VLE. It can obviously act as a clearing house for activists and trainers in that area; and can be a timely way of sharing new ideas and directions. This is not an end in itself, but would be supporting those who may be training in exactly the same context where they do outreach work pure and simple. So no artificial division should be imposed on submissions.

On the other hand, the basic structure module/good module/featured module, with modules required to be at least good to be available in the student view, implies a distinction on grounds of quality. “Moodle backstage” will be the working area for account holders, with plenty of modules remaining as raw material.

Probably we shall emerge with the outcome that the main priority in implementation is usability in student view, and in content is quality (good and featured) modules that work.

Critique of existing English Wikipedia onsite training

Classification	Insider take	External take	Comment
A	Sandboxing	Drafting and preview are on offer.	“Sandbox” is traditional wiki jargon. WYSIWIG editing is on the way.
R	Open editing means anyone can learn by viewing diffs. That is, article edit histories can be scanned; the contributions of any editor can be reviewed; and source wikitext is visible and can be copied out or imitated.	In traditional terms, “learning by sitting next to Nelly” is on offer.	Those who are quick on the uptake can learn basic wikisyntax by looking at the source for short and simple articles. Complex features such as templates are not very accessible in this way.
T	Help namespace and Wikipedia namespace page probably cover the essentials.	These “manual” pages are not written as accessible instructions. Much of the style is of the <i>aide memoire</i> for the expert who already knows it, and where to look. In other words the manual pages are rather too like encyclopedia pages.	There is an existing WMF initiative to work over the Help namespace.
P	?No coherent view. Things like “Tip of the Day” and cheatsheets are not well supported by the community.	Would like simple guides (though at the level of social interactions this may be too naïve).	<i>Wikipedia for Dummies</i> is a nice idea but limited; and books on Wikipedia don’t sell well.

Global audience

There is a global English-reading audience to address. That includes three significant groups outside Europe, North America and Australasia: namely the Indian subcontinent, sub-Saharan Africa, and the tech diaspora (e.g. anyone anywhere who reads English because Unix requires it). As a factor in implementation it should be borne in mind that real penetration of the putative VLE may depend on a mobile phone version (doubly off-topic in this document, which is about strategic issues in the here-and-now).

Factors in addressing this audience include:

- * house style designed for readability;
- * self-conscious choice of teaching methods.

Proposals (current crop)

- * Strengthen line P of the table above by buying in training material on coaching and mentoring (and the nuances of advising on top of “learning by sitting next to Nelly”).
- * Run a VLE workshop to bring the community into closer contact with both teaching methods as an area of study, and the premises of TtT.
- * Take the PR Guide as a case study, and pull it apart in terms of an online course; also as a workshop series.
- * Special modules as eye-catching online quizzes. A leading candidate would be a killer test “So You Think You Know about International Copyright?”

All these imply budget allocations.

Glossary

*** *Digital humanities***

Buzz phrase from academia. Traditional historical, linguistic and philosophical disciplines taught to the iPhone generation. See for example

http://humanexperience.stanford.edu/digital_humanities

*** *EduWiki***

WMUK conference 5-6 September 2012

http://uk.wikimedia.org/wiki/EduWiki_Conference_2012

*** *GLAM***

Wikimedia jargon for outreach to institutions in the cultural sector.

*** *Moodle***

Free-source online course management system. See

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moodle>

*** *PR Guide***

http://uk.wikimedia.org/wiki/Draft_best_practice_guidelines_for_PR

*** *TfT***

WMUK Training for Trainers

http://uk.wikimedia.org/wiki/Train_the_Trainers_event

*** *VLE***

Virtual learning environment, otherwise known as e-learning platform.

*** *WiR***

Wikipedian in Residence

*** *WMF***

Wikimedia Foundation