

A New Virtual Learning Environment

The Now

No one would argue with the fact that we are in the middle of an era of great technological change.

Advancements in telecommunications technology in particular have transformed the way in which we conceive of educational environments and the possibilities which exist for the transfer of knowledge, skills and values.

All education systems are instituting projects that seek to leverage emerging telecommunications infrastructure and are examining the way in which the implementation of new online systems and environments can advance learning and teaching pedagogy. The national commitment to the Learning Federation's current project which is developing digital learning objects for the K-12 sector is also testament to the recognised power of the Internet to potentially add value to curriculum delivery.

All of this also speaks to the following trends that are driving developments in ICT -

A convergence of standards for both web applications and content;

The growing need to deliver educational materials into the classroom via the Internet and to explore remote course delivery;

An increase in the use and complexity of metadata standards for content indexing, discovery, and sharing;

The growth in the use of portal based XML applications;

The growth in the use of interoperable web services which herald the need for extensible web application frameworks.

The Not Yet

One of the challenges faced by education systems over the next decade will be the need to overcome the central barriers to broad adoption of the new Internet technologies by classroom teachers.

These barriers include:

The limited access to online computers within classrooms.

The limitations in bandwidth at many schools.

The need for professional development of teachers in ICT.

The lack of time teachers have for adopting any new process/application.

In recognising these barriers to adoption any education system intending to enhance Internet based curriculum delivery needs to provide teachers with easy access to online educational content and tools that can be structured for use with their classes. While some teachers have been able to take advantage of corporate/tertiary style Learning Management Systems to deliver online learning experiences, (particularly in the area of remote course delivery), the large majority of teachers find such tools too cumbersome and time consuming for use as an adjunct to their normal face-to-face teaching. myinternet Limited have been conscious of these barriers and have been conducting research into the utilisation of the Internet by teachers. The result has been the development of a unique Virtual Learning Environment suitable for the K-12 sector - myclasses.

The myclasses Virtual Learning Environment

myclasses has been founded upon the three pillars of myinternet software development strategy -

- 1) Each online activity must take less time, NOT more, than related offline activity.
- 2) Online tools MUST augment teacher guided activities: NOT seek to replace them.
- 3) DON'T attempt to do online that which is better done offline.

The myclasses solution has been developed to enable teachers to search for, assemble and deliver resources and instructional context to students through an online mechanism and to make this easier than current offline practice.

A Content Delivery Cycle

myclasses provides a flexible set of tools to enhance the discovery, management, and delivery of online resources as well as enabling teachers to define online activity and collaborative processes for classes. It is a K-12 appropriate Virtual Learning Environment providing Class Pages, Learning Object viewers, collaboration tools, and e-Learning Folios. myclasses also provides a content repository for the storage and management of learning objects and other educational resources sourced within a deployment or from external resource databases.

Search

The teacher uses the federated search facility and associated metadata (i.e. Category, Audience, Source, etc) to find resources most suited to the activity.

Assemble

From the list of related resources the teacher then chooses the suitable items and adds them to a container (e-Learning Folio) for class activities.

Deliver

The e-Learning Folio appears within the Class Pages it has been made available to and the resources are then available to students ready for use.

myclasses is suitable for use by any teacher wishing to deliver online resources and educational experiences to students. It fills the gap between the oftentimes haphazard and inefficient use of the Internet within schools and the growing utilisation of full Learning Management Systems for remote course delivery. In particular, through its ease of use, myclasses caters for the majority of teachers whose level of ICT literacy might otherwise prevent them from utilising online materials with classes of students.

As with all myinternet software, myclasses is delivered through a centrally hosted ASP model without the need for local hardware or applications.

Further information concerning myclasses is available. Link to our web site at <http://www.myinternet.com.au> or contact info@myinternet.com.au

The Web Supplement at www.ecawa.asn.au contains diagrams to compliment this article.