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### Personal Learning Environments

“A PLE is a collection of social software applications the learner has collected that are useful for his or her own specific needs.” (Schaffert & Hilzensauer, 2008) PLEs are often described as “Web 2.0” technologies that help learners take control over what they are learning and how they learn. Examples of PLEs are blogs, wikis, twitter, facebook, and etc. These PLEs are considered client-based (PLEX) and web-based (facebook). From my reading, I have found three main points to consider; why use a PLE, how PLEs compare to LMS, and what challenges learners need to face to implement PLEs. The majority of what a student learns can be seen outside of the classroom. This is why PLEs are important to encourage and reinforce students’ learning.

Since the PLE, the Internet has become less of a search engine and more of social interaction for many people. Learners can now have a place to write and communicate about their learning experiences and opinions. They can find out what other’s suggestions and/or their opinions are too. The learner is the teacher and there is no one managing his or her thought process or procedures in which they learn. “The central line of reasoning for the use of PLEs is the value of learner-centered instruction.” (Martindale & Dowdy, p.183) In my graduate class we were talking about the importance of inquiry based learning. PLEs are a perfect example of how the learner takes control of their learning and uses it to guide them to better understandings through their own means of learning.

LMS (Learning Management System) are used to track students and guide them in their learning. Some companies, as well as universities, use LMS to track their employees and report on whether or not they have completed specific tasks (e.g. training). One main focus of LMS is that every learner experiences content in exactly the same way. LMSs are more teacher/professor or employer controlled, then the student. Teachers and employers set the bar and guide the learning. LMSs are not open to everyone and often times require access to see any information provided. As apposed to LMSs, PLEs provided student with a sense of personal gains and ownership of their learning outside of the classroom. Since PLEs are rapidly evolving, it is hard for LMS and others to keep up.

One of the biggest concerns for the implementation of PLEs is integrating them with LMSs. The implementation of PLEs will depend on the definition of the type of PLE. Since PLEs are comprised of different social software, one must be able to manage and navigate them. PLEs users must continue to learn and re-learn aspects of Web 2.0 applications to be successful with the software. “To operate within the environment, the user must manage a number of different dispositions and skills required for different interfaces.” (Johnson, 2006) PLEs are going to have to find a way to coincide with other technologies in order for them to be successfully integrated.

The general idea behind PLEs is community. It's a place for a learner to vent, explore, and learn from themselves and others. In my opinion, I think we will continue to see more and more PLEs. I believe that learners will take the next step and continue to learn the skills needed to navigate and explore PLEs. If we continue to learn and grow, then PLEs will continue to exist.

Reference:

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