EDITORIAL

Personal Learning Environments

This special issue is the result of a workshop that took place in June 2007 to explore the concept of the Personal Learning Environment (PLE). The workshop was part of a project funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the Higher and Further Education Funding Councils in the UK and undertaken by the University of Bolton to define and elaborate on the concept of the PLE, to propose a model for establishing the functionality entailed within the concept, and to suggest what the elements of a PLE might be.

In the process of the exploration and bringing forth of a new category of learning technology it has been necessary to examine our understanding of technology, as well as providing an account of the problem that the education system sets out to solve. The paper by Johnson and Liber discusses how insights from cybernetics can illuminate how PLEs may provide a way in which learners can take upon themselves some of the functions that educational organizations have traditionally managed, and why the conditions may be right for this type of technological intervention. Wilson’s paper proposes the use of a pattern language to describe the functionality required by PLEs, and reflects on the challenges in using this approach. Following on from these theoretical perspectives, van Harmelen describes four prototypes that he argues fit within the category of PLE tools, while Severance, Hardin and Whyte describe the challenges that the PLE concept offers to traditional Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) developers and the particular approach they have taken to incorporate a more personalized model within the Sakai VLE.

In their contribution Powell, Tindal and Millwood describe how a personalized approach was central to their thinking in the design and delivery of the Ultraversity degree programme at Anglia Ruskin University, and demonstrate how a PLE is not a system like a VLE, but is rather an aggregation of personal and institutional tools that provide a way of managing the increasing complexity of resources and facilities available on the web in the pursuance of their learning aims. Finally Vogten et al. describe how PLE ideas have informed the TENCompetence project and their design of the tools and systems to be developed to create a new infrastructure for lifelong learning in Europe.

We hope that this special edition contributes to the growing discourse around personalized learning and the role of technology, and will help those seeking to shape a new generation of learning technologies in their design and application.

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