

## GUEST EDITORIAL PREFACE

# Special Issue from the Personal Learning Environments 2011 Conference

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This special edition of the Journal of Personal Learning Environments feature papers presented at the Second Personal Learning Environments Conference, held in Southampton, UK in July 2011.

It follows on from the IJVPLE 4(3) copy of the journal which featured papers from the first PLE conference, held in Barcelona in July the previous year.

At that conference PLEs were a largely new and unexplored concept. Much effort and discussion was expended in trying to arrive at a common definition of a PLE, in debating the dichotomy between technological and pedagogy approaches and constructs to developing Personal Learning Environments, and the role of PLEs in institutional strategies.

Further discussions focused on the impact and affordance of Web 2.0 and social software on developing PLEs.

In only one year the debate moved forward. Earlier concerns – for instance over a tension between pedagogic and technical developments – appeared less irreconcilable with the majority of participants agreeing that a PLE can be seen as a pedagogical approach with many implications for the learning processes, underpinned by a ‘hard’ technological base. Such a technological concept can benefit from the affordances of technologies, as well as from the emergent social dynamics of new pedagogic scenarios.

We also agreed on the need to continue thinking around practices for enriching the learning process through transparent dynamics that build on, at the same time, the potential of formal and non formal relationships, the contexts of schools and companies, the focus on learning and knowledge, and so on. In this process, attempts to invent new acronyms to

differentiate contexts (of PLE components, or tools), often at only a theoretical level, add little extra-value to the previous analysis.

However, there was an evident concern about the implementation PLEs of in real learning contexts. This was seen as more than just a question of implementing a specific tool or suite of tools. Even when there is an agreement on the importance of tools for learning—especially Web 2.0 tools - the main issue remained of how to develop and implement a new understanding about how learning takes place.

The main concern about the development of PLEs was the practical pedagogical implication of their adoption in different contexts, especially when taking into account a more interdisciplinary perspective. It included considerations of pedagogy, didactics, technology, institutional issues and the many factors that configure the complex system of tensions that are the most common framework in which we talk about learning and education.

As evidence of these concerns, we include on this special issue five papers that offer interesting and complementary approaches to those topics.

Firstly, is the paper “*Exploring the possibilities of an Institutional PLE in higher education: Integration of a VLE and an E-Portfolios System*”, by Jesús Salinas, Victoria Marín and Catalina Escandell, from the Universitat de les Illes Balears (Spain). This paper presents a first approach to the process of PLE adoption by students in Higher Education in Spain. The paper explores how teaching methodologies building on established pedagogies and technologies—such as the e-portfolios—interplays in the dynamic of creating, enriching and maintaining a PLE as a key part of the learning process. It goes on to look at how this dynamic of PLE creation could be helpful for teachers to motivate and support processes of meaningful learning for individuals and groups.

The second paper included on this issue, “*Training Academicians to Develop Personalized Learning Environments and Student Engagement (PLEaSE)*”, by Raja Maznah Raja Hussain, Huey Zher Ng from the University

of Malaya, Malaysia, tackle a very difficult question. The paper examines how to train and motivate university teachers and lecturers with the purpose of developing personalized perspectives practice in the teaching and learning. At the same time they support teachers in becoming active learners through the design of their own learning project. The authors believe that through teachers becoming active learners they will develop a better understanding of the importance of their teaching practices, promoting more active student involvement in the design of learning.

The paper, “*PLEs in higher education: exploring the transference of Web 2.0 social affordances*”, by Oskar Casquero, Javier Portillo, Ramón Ovelar, Jesús Romo and Manuel Benito, from the Universidad del País Vasco in Portugal, explores how the development of iPLEs (technology enhanced learning environments for formal education organized around the use of different Web 2.0 tools) could be more effective than the classical VLEs for creating “participatory and community-centered” learning models, particularly in Higher Education. Rather than focusing on definitions of PLEs, the authors look at how combining the personal and professional, as well as the formal and non formal worlds, could provide students new opportunities to work and learn collaboratively.

The fourth contribution, “*Personal Learning Environments in the workplace: An exploratory study into the key business decision factors*”, by Arunangsu Chatterjee and Effie Lai-Chong Law, University of Leicester, Alexander Mikroyannidis, Open University and Glyn Owen and Karen Velasco, British Institute of Learning and Development, UK, examines the importance of business factors in promoting the adoption of PLEs in the workplace.

They look at the relationship between the investment in such a new approach to training and the outcomes for a company and the results that a company, including *the perceived cost-effectiveness*, and *the perceived effort-expectancy*. Other business factors important for adoption include *the compatibility with existing systems*, *leadership's attitude towards*

*change, strategic alignment, IT Support, and line Managers*. Finally, the authors examine more personal factors that influence the workers supporting for adoption, including *Social Networks* and *learning culture*.

The final paper in this issue, “*Personal Knowledge Integrators*”, by David C. White, from the University of Auckland in New Zealand, is the most technologically focused contribution. It examines the concept and development of a *Knower*, understood as a tool to integrate a personal learning environment. Nevertheless, even this approach is far from technophile, emphasising the fundamental role of a personal approach to self-learning and the need to developing technology that could help learners to integrate their learning resources and experiences from different daily work and learning practices and environments.

Taken together, these papers reveal the spirit of the PLE Conference: interdisciplinary collaboration, discussion and exploration with a strong focus on teaching and learning in different contexts.

We wish want to continue an in-depth exploration of PLEs. We know that we need more and better methodological approaches for more profound research around the subject.

We aspire to gain more information about ‘how to do’ PLEs and what they mean for learners. We are still trying to understand the processes of building, managing and maintaining a PLE.

These issues amongst others will be our main focus of research and study for future PLE conferences. We hope we can continue advancing and sharing this work.

We would like to thank all those who participated actively in the PLE Conference. The intensive discussions and the immersive environment of thinking that took place during the conference provided an opportunity to consider the future of education, technologies, and personal learning environments.

We want also to thank to the authors and reviewers of the papers included on this special issue for their contribution and to Michael Thomas for allowing us the opportunity to publish this edition of the Journal of PLEs.

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