# Anatomy of a PLE

Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) do exactly what they say on the can - they are personal to each individual, created by them, owned by them, used by them within their lifelong learning. Originally a counterpoint to the institutional Managed Learning Environment (iMLE or 'VLE'), PLEs are becoming a much talked about concept, and were the prime focus of the recently held PLE Conference [http://pleconference.citilab.eu/] in Cornella, Barcelona. Delegates at the conference could not agree whether PLEs should remain the sole domain of the learner, or whether in some way they could be incorporated into institutional infrastructures. Some argued strongly for sole student ownership, vehemently opposed to any institutional meddling in a personal learning environment. Others held the position that PLEs should have some insitutional provision incorporated within them. Still others thought that PLEs should be part of the institutional infrastructure, brought within the protective envelope of the university fire wall. Many located themselves in middle ground positions. My personal view is that students own and create their PLE but that the iMLE also has something to offer them, even though it is highly problematic in its current form. I am arguing that many students tend to avoid using the iMLE because they either find it difficult to use, or irrelevant to their daily learning needs. It is a clash of concepts, no bridge seems possible, and the problem appears to be intractable.
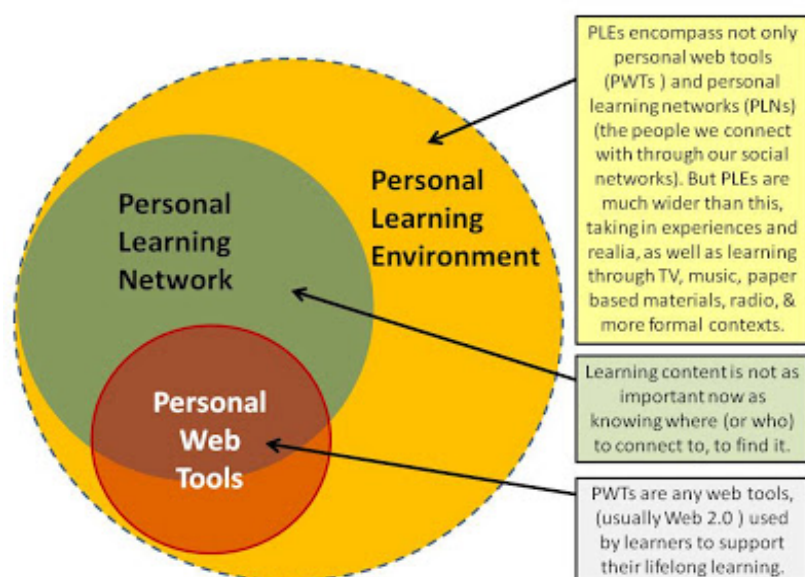
[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_p0M9IDN4_TM/TDmp-M7V3oI/AAAAAAAABaY/s4Sv6eCdytQ/s1600/PLE+anatomy.jpg] I have been working with Manish Malik [http://cloudworks.ac.uk/user/view/1731] (University of Portsmouth) for some time now to try to reconceptualise PLEs, so that they are locatable within both informal and formal learning contexts. At the Barcelona PLE Conference we

unveiled our ideas in a position paper, which we also share here on this blog. In previous posts [http://steve-wheeler.blogspot.com/2009/08/two-fingered-salute.html] I have argued provocatively that institutional VLEs present a number of problems for individual learners, not least the walled garden effect, which presents a great barrier to student freedom and creativity. I have played devil's advocate, role playing at high profile events [http://steve-wheeler.blogspot.com/2009/06/another-nail-in-coffin.html] to promote debate, engaging fruitfully with many knowledgeable peers, and in the process I have had some great fun. Now it's time to change direction a little and challenge the unhelpful binary of PLE versus VLE.

Firstly, we need to understand the true nature of the PLE - its anatomy. What does a PLE look like? What are its essential components? How does it differ from institutionally provided systems? Is there any common ground, and if so, how can this be harnessed? All these questions and more are yet to be answered, but in our view, the PLE is wider than the Web tools students use to create, find, organise and share content. It is also wider than the Personal Learning Network (PLN) of people and content that each of us generates when we learn informally or in formal contexts. This is represented in the first slide above.
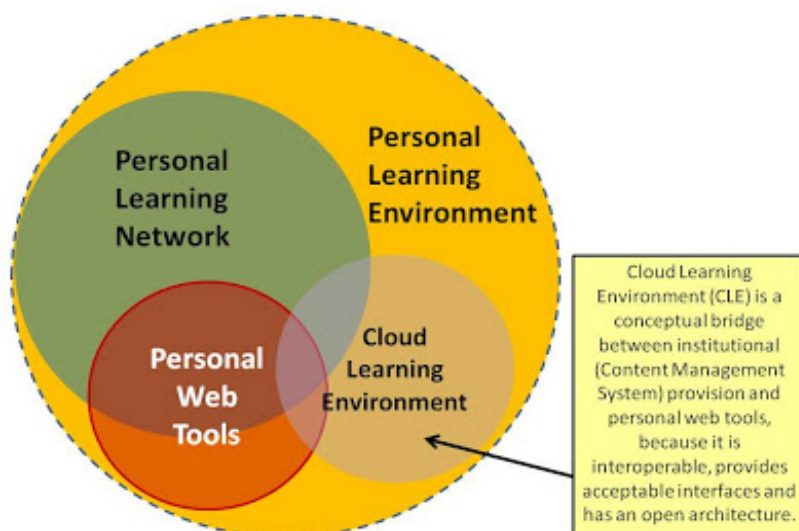
[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_p0M9IDN4_TM/TDmqK_u1ZGI/AAAAAAAABag/UMpeQCo-h4I/s1600/CLE+Concept.jpg] In this representation of the PLE, we try take a more consiliatory perspective beyond the unhelpful binary discourse of 'PLE vs VLE'. We propose a hybrid approach. Essentially, we argue that students require structure and scaffolding when they first venture into digital learning environments. *No-one is a digital native*, no matter how much the Prensky theory is talked up. Yet the average institutional Managed Learning Environment is by nature dull, uninspiring and difficult to navigate. Web 2.0 tools (Cloud Learning Environment) are more attractive, easier to use and free, but are unprotected and vulnerable. Further, the

content sent to the application ends up becoming the 'property' of the Internet company and is difficult to delete, a target for data mining. Whilst CLEs will not fully address all of the tensions between iMLEs and PLEs, we argue that they provide a tentative bridge to provide the best of both worlds in terms of affordances and interoperability. We would be very interested to hear your views on this proposal. Tomorrow: Physiology of a PLE [http://steve-wheeler.blogspot.com/2010/07/physiology-of-ple.html]

Related posts

Response to Anatomy of a PLE [http://www.masmithers.com/2010/07/11/response-to-anatomy-of-a-ple/] : Mark Smithers

The Dichotomies in Personal Learning Environments [http://ictlogy.net/20100712-the-dichotomies-in-personal-learning-environments-and-institutions/] : Ismael Pena-Lopez

Mapping the PLE Sphere [http://ictlogy.net/20100715-mapping-the-ple-sphere/] : Ismael Pena-Lopez

The ILE and FLE in Harmony [http://ryan2point0.wordpress.com/] : Ryan Tracey

Posted 11th July 2010 by Steve Wheeler

Labels: MLE, Manish Malik, VLE, PLE, personal learning, #ple_bcn