PERSONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Proposal Deadline: October 1st, 2009

Editor

Michael Thomas Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years centralized virtual learning environments (VLE) - alternatively referred to as course management systems (CMS) or learning management systems (LMS) - have emerged in educational institutions around the world. Though intended for use by educators and students, commercially available applications such as Blackboard and WebCT, have often been imposed as top-down solutions, more useful it seems to administrators than those engaged in the day-to-day activities of teaching and learning. While VLEs have become staple elements in the delivery of e-learning, distance learning and face-to-face learning, they have also been often opposed as systems whose real purpose is to control educational activity rather than foster it.

In opposition to VLEs, personal learning environments (PLE) have been increasingly advocated as a decentralized alternative, thereby offering students the opportunity to have greater control of their own learning and goal setting. PLEs are often connected with a group of personal tools associated with one particular learner thus supporting a more learner-centric and constructivist approach to learning. With the advent of Web 2.0 applications, many of the characteristics of PLEs have seemingly been realized, such as enabling learners to communicate more easily with one another, manage the process of learning more effectively, and take a larger stake in the ownership of content. When stated in these terms, it is difficult to oppose the intent to place the learner and his/her unique needs at the center of the educational process, rather than assuming that learners must always adhere to an inherited educational system. Given the emergence of so-called digital natives, advocates of PLEs argue that we are closer than ever to being able to realize a form of rich personalized learning as the students currently entering schools and universities are already familiar with their own group of web-based social networking and communication tools.

As desirable as this may appear, the current prominence of personalized learning is nevertheless fraught with a number of technological, pedagogical and cultural issues that must be addressed. These include providing solutions to support a large group of users with a multiplicity of different tools at their disposable; balancing student choice and learner centrism with institutional standards for assessment, quality assurance and instructor expertise; and enabling the use of common tools for

communication, collaboration and the shared construction of knowledge.

Advocacy of personalized learning and personal learning environments is in danger of being supported by the same kind of rhetoric of 'educational transformation' evident in the history of learning technologies, from educational radio and television to interactive whiteboards. Pushed forward by government policy makers in search of something 'new' rather than learning technologies based on sound pedagogy and educational research, the philosophy of personalized learning risks repeating the same errors and aporias.

This edited collection aims to be one of the first to address the context of personal learning environments and personalized learning in a Web 2.0 context, by considering the opportunities as well as the obstacles to their development. The book aims to publish high quality research-based chapters as well as reflective and visionary perspectives on issues surrounding the introduction of PLEs in educational institutions. It attempts to interrogate the key assumptions behind personalized learning environments and present recommendations that will make the book relevant to policymakers, administrators and educators in general, and those in learning technologies and curriculum design in particular.

CHAPTER PROPOSALS

Chapter proposals are being sought for the first section of the book (6-10 chapters). Chapters should focus on a substantive area of pedagogy related to the use of PLEs in education. Completed chapters should be between 6,000 - 8,500 words in length, and fully referenced following APA style guidelines. Possible subject areas to be addressed by the chapters include but are not limited to the following:

(i). VLEs vs PLEs (or next generation personal VLEs)
(ii). Developing a PLE

(iii). PLEs in open and distance learning
(iv). Student-centered learning and PLEs
(v). Centralization vs decentralization of learning technologies and online resources
(vi). A literature survey on VLEs/PLEs in education
(vii). PLEs and mobile learning
(viii). The use of PLEs and the implications for teaching and learning
(ix). Administering PLEs in education, consideration of security, technical, cultural/pedagogical and maintenance issues
(x). Open source and VLEs/PLEs

Proposals on other topics in addition to those listed are of course welcomed.

CASE STUDIES PROPOSALS

The second section of the book includes 5-10 case studies that develop and compliment the themes of the first section of the book by exploring instructors' practical experiences.

All of the case studies are organized according to a similar format thus enabling comparison. Case studies represent first-hand accounts from those involved directly in the projects described. The case studies should be based on research done with PLEs in the last four years. Each case study should address the following sections where appropriate:

(i). the context of the project
(ii). the rationale of the project
(iii). the teaching and learning aims and objectives of the project
(iv). the technology infrastructure
(v). the evaluation and assessment criteria used
(vi). the learning outcomes and findings of the project
(vii). future implications of the project (institutional, for teaching, for learning, for professional development)

The final word-length of each case study is expected to be in the range of 3,500 – 6,000 words

SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL

Please send a 1-2 page proposal outlining the main features of your proposed chapter or case study and how it is relevant for the collection. Proposals should be sent as MS Word documents by email to: Michael Thomas, at: <michael.thomas@gmx.co.uk>. The deadline for the receipt of a proposal is October 1st, 2009. The subject line of the email should read, "PLE Chapter/Case Study Proposal."

All proposals should include the following information:

(i). Full name and title of the author(s)
(ii). Professional status (Teacher, Lecturer, Professor etc.)
(iii). Professional affiliation (Name of your educational institution)
(iv). Professional address
Department
Employer
Country
Phone/Fax
Email addresses

(v). Please attach a short biographical statement of each author (max. 150 words).

All proposals will be vetted and returned to the authors within 2 weeks of receipt with appropriate feedback.

The first draft of the chapters and case studies is due on or before February 20th, 2010. All submitted papers will be subject to a refereed process of peer review.

Authors of accepted proposals will be sent further guidelines for the development of their chapter or case study. Prospective authors may submit more than one chapter and/or case study proposal. However, only one chapter and case study can be accepted per author.

The book has attracted interest from a number of educational publishers and it is expected to be published in 2010/11.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Michael Thomas Ph.D. is Professor of Language Learning Technologies at Nagoya University of Commerce & Business in Japan. He is editor of the *International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments*. His research interests are in digital literacies and Web 2.0, digital technologies and TESOL education, the Internet and society, and the philosophy of language. He is author of *The Reception of Derrida: Translation and Transformation* (2006), editor of *Handbook of Research on Web 2.0 and Second Language Learning* (2009), and co-editor of *Interactive Whiteboards for Education: Theory, Research and Practice* (in press) and *Task-Based Language Teaching and Technology* (forthcoming 2010).

FURTHER INFORMATION

More information about the book may be found at the following website as the project develops:

<http://wirelessready.nucba.ac.jp/PLEbook.pdf>