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VLE VERSUS PLE: PROSPECTS FOR SELF-EDUCATION

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The rapid growth of technologies caused by intensification of international communication resulted in increased Internet connectivity and spread of mobile communication devices which can access the global network. The changing technologies turned out to be a key driver in educational change. On-line learning environment can be used to the advantage of educational institutions to train professionals who will be successful and skillful workers in their professional area. According to the surveys there is a great demand for creative-thinking, problem-solving and personal development skills in the modern world. With the view to develop ability to independent learning, the concept of virtual learning environment was introduced to the educational system.

The well-known Virtual Learning Environment systems, Moodle and LMS allow the university to provide access of students to educational materials, to carry out monitoring of students' progress within this environment and to assess their knowledge. The teacher is the person who monitors the educational process and sets the target activity. The main advantages of VLE are standardization, manageability and functionality [2]. Using virtual environment resources students can develop skills to work on the Internet, skills of online written communication, and the ability to arrange a discussion in the virtual space. The work with the virtual learning environment greatly simplifies implementation of cooperation principle in the educational process, e.g. provides conditions for group educational and cognitive activity of students, offers team research projects that train the student in special forms of communication (for example, through forums), etc.

It should be noted, that the characteristic feature of Virtual Learning Environments is that they are rather simple for the learner to use and allow each student to choose the most convenient time to prepare for classes, thus the students create their own learning environment [1]. One more concept which is connected with the idea of students' own learning environment has emerged in education recently. In our everyday life we use different software tools for instant messaging, file sharing, social networking, and blogging. However, it is not just the appeal of communication which is drawing young people to these technologies. They are keen on using the Internet since it enables them to create, to share ideas, to join groups, to publish findings, and thus, to create their own identities. Slowly people are discovering new uses of the social technologies for learning. We learn throughout our lives, in all kinds of different setting and contexts. Most of this learning does not come from formal educational programmes [3]. This way Personal Learning Environment (PLE), which accumulates a set of different social services, is formed.

This environment can be represented as zones (or circles) that are placed at different levels depending on the degree of reliability of the information we collect using PLE tools (Fig.1). If we divide this imaginary space into levels, then at the first level there will be those applications that students start on their personal computer desks. At the next level there are tools through which information is delivered to the student by acquaintances, friends, and other close people. At the higher level there are the tools through which information arrives to the student from the friends of his friends. The last level is represented by the entire Internet, in which the information which student finds, for example, with the help of different search systems, is published.

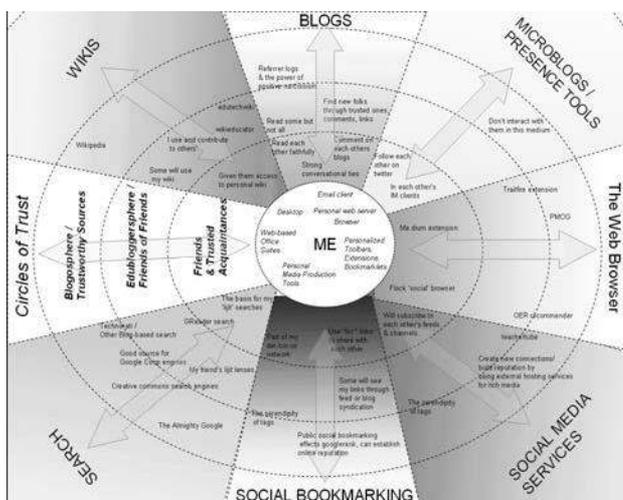


Fig. 1. PLE in terms of zones or circles of "trust" (Scott Leslie's PLE diagram. Retrieved from <https://iteachu.uaf.edu/online-training/manage-classrooms/personal-learning-environment/>)

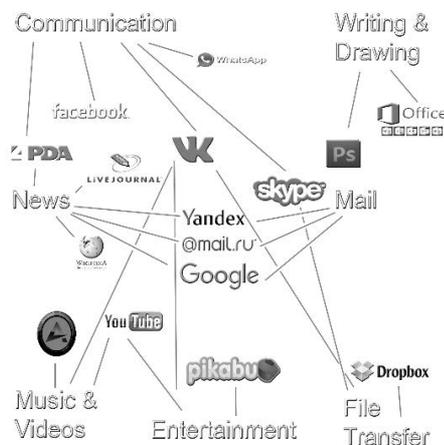


Fig. 2. A TPU student's PLE network diagram

The main difference of PLE from VLE is that the student manages the process of his learning by himself. The student creates an environment in which learning takes place continuously and which is available to access everywhere. The knowledge, which he gets, is distributed among many people, thus increasing the efficiency of learning; the environment itself is a collection of many resources and services, rather than a structured system. In general, PLE is a set of tools and resources that enable students to realize and solve a variety of training tasks related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills development.

Personal Learning Environment provides more responsibility and more independence for learners. It could allow a learner to configure and develop a learning environment to suit and enable his own style of learning. Therefore, in each case the model will be unique. For example, the analysis has revealed an average student's (group 2D51) PLE diagram which is given in Figure 2. It shows that most students use Facebook, PDA, VK, Skype, WirelessApp for communication; Youtube, Pikabu – for entertainment; Ps and Word Office – for writing and drawing, thus formal learning is also involved; at the same time we see that social VK software is actively used for communication, entertainment, and as a transfer of video, music and files. This network has a really random and peculiar structure.

Internet technologies are developed very rapidly, providing many new tools, which are very reliable and easy to use. New devices, applications change our culture and society, educational system, expanding private learning environment. Moreover, people want to design their own personal space where they can access favourite and useful sites, feeds, bookmarks and photo-sharing etc. Life and work are interrelated and the profile of a PLE changes constantly. There are a lot of potential tools that you could add to a PLE. It is not suggesting that all of these tools need to be used, tools are added as people identify a need and as their experience and knowledge in the use of these tools grows and develops [4].

PLE design usually involves several stages [5]. A learner establishes personal goals for learning. They can deal with professional and personal interests. In developing a PLE the learner participates actively and performs the three key functions. He collects and selects relevant content, resources into a meaningful collection in a virtual space, He constructs and creatively develops new knowledge and understanding. This could be done through blogs, Slideshare presentations, Wikis etc. Learning always involves communicating and sharing with others. Another phase in a PLE is collaborating, working with other people to create new knowledge through digital objects, documents, etc. The learner should start slow, it takes time to learn a new application and build and develop content and resources. Moreover, since it takes time to develop and grow an effective PLE, a learner has to spend some time each week for this activity. Furthermore, it is advisable to create a diagram of the PLE (Fig. 2). The purpose of the diagram is to provide a framework for learning goals, identify tools and provide a digital footprint and record of the PLE. This way the learner manages to take control over his learning. The purposeful development of Personal Learning Environment makes the learner realize his immediate goals and develop new communication, technical and personal skills, and acquire new knowledge using different devices and interfaces on his own.

PLEs are dynamic, they change and adapt to learning needs and goals. This feature makes it a convenient tool for professionals to update their occupational skills and knowledge or to learn new occupational competences throughout their work-life. The necessity of continuous learning in the work place is due to the fact that technologies are being developed faster and they are put into the operation sooner since the production process is facilitated by computer controlled facilities. The employee is constantly experiencing the stress of becoming dismissed because of occupational incompetence.

PLE provides the learner support to set targets and manage his own learning content, and independently choose services and tools suitable to his style, thus taking control over his learning process which turns out to be continuous, since new targets and goal are constantly established. Consequently, the idea of PLE implies that the learner is involved into lifelong self-education process, which actually helps him to stay relevant in changing conditions of social life.

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