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Personal learning environment within the lecture room: a contribution from the halls of childhood education degree

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Abstract

The growth of Internet has led to the development of new systems of teaching and learning, which have gone hand in hand in the field of higher education with the arrival of the new curricula demanding a new view in the university education. In this paper we give some hints of what the personal learning environments are and their relationship with the university education. In order to carry out this, we show the design of a PLE developed by the students of second course of Childhood Education Degree from the University of Cordova, within the dynamics of the degree itself, allowing the link of its contents to the curriculum of the new syllabus.

Keywords: Personal learning environment; university students; university; Internet; training

1. Introduction

Personal learning environments in the field of higher education are today understood as the usage of several technological tools combination, promoting, on the one hand, self-regulation and, on the other hand, collaborative and cooperative learning among students (Valtonen, Hacklin, Dillon, Vesisenaho, Kukkonen & Hietanene, 2011). In fact, this is an aspect which is taking a greater importance in the methodological designs of recent years.

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The PLE try to overcome the current Learning Management Systems (LMS) and traditional Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), because although these were tools helping the teacher, the students and the institution in the development of teaching and learning, the spontaneous students' participation –aspect which has risen in value over the implementation of the new syllabus-, were very limited (Dabbagh &Kitsantas, 2011). The differences between them are dormant: those who show symmetrical relations allowing simultaneous coordination between various contents, are open and diverse, whereas these have asymmetrical relations, control standards and their coordination is linked to a specific content, etc. (Wilson, Liber, Johnson, Beaivioir, Sharples, & Milligan, 2006).

We must be aware that today, through the incorporation of ICT into university teaching, we are working for and in places known as *wordspace*. Then, according to our opinion, PLE has become for them a vital tool, since we start from the notion that they turn into a foundation helping the students in their learning process. It works in collaborative/cooperative networks, where all individuals know who knows what, trying to encourage in this way the continuous exchange of information and visibility of the actions carried out by each student from his individuality or educational reality.

Castañeda and Adell (2011, p.18) define the PLE as a set of tools, information sources, connections and activities that each person uses assiduously in order to learn. In our opinion, this conceptualization is based largely on the tools named as 2.0, born under the umbrella of the Internet development. If we pay attention to the classification made by Castaño, Maíz, Palacio and Domingo (2008) and the perspective provided by Cabero, Llorente and Barroso (2010), the PLE are a combination of technology and the visions people have of them. Therefore, we are getting closer to a teaching/educational perspective of them, which will help us to supplement the conceptualization provided by Castañeda and Adell (2011), as it will be "a set of learning tools, services and devices collected from diverse backgrounds and environments to be used by the students" (Rodríguez, 2013, p.9).

Some authors such as Martindale and Dowdy (2010) and Möditscher (2010) are committed to the incorporation of the PLE in classroom dynamics, because, according to them, they encourage raising the EHEA, which is the ability to work in a collaborative-cooperative way, both among teachers, among students themselves and between teachers and students. Anyway, the PLE are something more than simple technological tools: they are an attitude and some values towards the learning process, and they are interpersonal relationships established between individuals, helping to generate knowledge.

Apart from this, there is another line of work where we can find studies such as the one carried out by Lybensky (2006), who notes that the PLE are actually the sum of the virtual learning environments and electronic portfolios or e-portfolio (Barberá, Gewerc & Rodríguez, 2009). Their characteristics features are that they are tools of an unlimited variety, they are affordable for all subjects, they are open to continuous interaction, to exchange and connection, they are focused on the student, time is not a barrier and forums have contents managed through simple tools. In fact, all these characteristics define the PLE. However, beyond the advantages and drawbacks having the combination of both lines of work, the benefits on the usage of PLE exceed their limitations (see Table 1), as e-portfolio has a limited duration in the case of students, since its life only lasts the time linked to the subject itself.

Table 1. Advantages and limitations of the educational PLE. Source: Cabero, Barroso & Llorente (2010, p.30).

Advantages	Drawbacks
The student is an active player in the process of learning, acquiring the control of the action.	Scarce pedagogical development of training activities using them.
They are easy and friendly to build, manage and cope on them.	Need for basic and advanced training times in technology.
The student is the author and property rights fell on him.	Scarce institution control over them.
Increase of social presence.	
Environments open to interaction and relationships with people.	
Student-centred.	