

## Open complementing closed - PLE and LMS - why, what for and how?

**Jo Murray:** Welcome to *The Knowledge Tree*, Everyone. Today we are discussing personal learning environments (PLE) and learning management systems (LMS) and their relative roles, with six leaders in teaching and learning using technology. So let's welcome our participants.

**James Farmer:** Thanks very much Jo. My name is James Farmer. I am the founder of Edublogs and also Edublogs Premium. I spent quite a lot of time as a lecturer in education design at Deakin University here in Melbourne, Australia where I remain, and I currently slice up my time between Edublogs and working as the online community editor at [theage.com.au](http://theage.com.au).

**Clint Smith:** Thanks Jo. Clint Smith, I am from eWorks in Melbourne working in the Vocational and Educational Training System. eWorks is the manager of the statewide learning management system called the TAFE Virtual Campus and there are a range of services around that, mostly to do with professional development of teachers and change management, towards the uptake of the technologies. My background is in instructional design and teaching and I have done researching. I have also operated as a consultant for a number of years in related fields.

**Ewan McIntosh:** Hi, My name is Ewan McIntosh. I work for Learning and Teaching Scotland, which is the national education agency in Scotland and I am in charge of basically trying to get more social media used in schools to help improve learning, where that is possible, and I also work as a consultant for BBC, Channel 4, the British Council and various teaching organisations and the Scottish Executive which is a bit like, our government if you like, the civil service.

**Peter Higgs:** I am Peter Higgins. I work for TAFE Tasmania as the Manager of Learning Technology. I do have an instructional design background as well as a teaching background, but I currently manage the learning management system and a number of other systems that support that in TAFE Tasmania. That includes The Learning Edge which assists teachers in the acquisition of learning objects and the design of their content. It also allows them to recontextualise learning objects. As much as I will probably focus on learning management systems, I do have a soft spot in my heart for the PLEs or personal learning sites and it will be interesting to hear how the discussion goes. Thank you.

**Brad Beach:** My name is Brad Beach and I work for Gipps TAFE in Victoria, Australia. My role at the institute is Manager of Innovation and Organisational Development. As part of that role I manage all of the e-learning activities within the Institute which ranges from solely online courses, blended courses, some courses in learning management systems, some courses outside, some commercial and some government funded programs. So quite a broad range of e-learning activities that we are involved in.

**Frankie Forsyth:** Hi Everybody. It is Frankie Forsyth here. I work in my own private registered training organisation in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia. I am mainly involved in facilitation online. I am working with clients to get them up and running in the online environment, whether that be through learning management systems or personal learning environments, and to expose them to some of the tools and ways of working that can increase productivity for them and their clients and make it possible for them to work online as efficiently and in as much of a fun and good learning way, if you like to put it that way, as possible.

**Jo Murray:** And back to me. My name is Jo Murray. I am the editor of *The Knowledge Tree*, but I am also a registered training organisation director, along with Frankie, and I am very interested in this nexus between learning management systems and social computing

because I work with teachers in professional development and I am keen to find ways for these two sorts of technologies to come together. We are just going to go back now to James and ask you James to perhaps tell us a little bit about [your article](#), but just before we do that perhaps we had better define what we think a personal learning environment is, so Ewan would you like to give us an impression about what you think a personal learning environment might incorporate.

**Ewan McIntosh:** I think it is fortunate you're asking about personal learning environments instead of virtual learning environments or learning management systems because those last two we don't really use at all in Scotland. There are very few examples of where people use virtual learning environments or learning management systems in education in Scotland. That is, we don't use centrally controlled hierarchical ways of dispensing information to students outside the classroom. So when we talk about personal learning environment that is actually something which we are perhaps getting more used to bypassing some of the stuff that the rest of you have maybe worked your way through. Whether that is a good or bad thing I am not sure.

For me a personal learning environment is where the platform for learning outside the classroom belongs to the student, not to the institution. It's where it is highly personalisable. That does not mean it is individualised, but for me it means that it is the individual choosing which elements are most important for them. It is elements they think are fun for their learning, that they enjoy learning with and if you look at my personal learning environment you might not think it is a great way for learning, because it doesn't suit you and that is what makes them quite tricky I think to define, because what I define as a personal learning environment will be seen as highly unusable and unuser-friendly for someone who is used to something else or who prefers learning in a slightly more structured way for example.

I think that is relatively clear just because it is a wonderfully vague answer.

**Frankie Forsyth:** Okay so Peter, give us a description of what your view on learning management system is. Go ahead please Peter.

**Peter Higgs:** Thanks Frankie. A learning management system is a system that generally a larger your organisation, but not denying smaller organisations, to invest in to put in place to actually manage content, but also manage a learner's interaction with that content and provides opportunities for drop boxes for assignments and a whole range of learning activities. A learning management system can also branch out to some of the PLE or personal learning environment type activities and a teacher can actually monitor that. Probably the biggest advantage of a learning management system for vocational education and training in Australia is that it does track and provide evidence for audits that are conducted to ensure that AQTF requirements are being met to a degree that tends to satisfy auditors at this stage. Whether that will be the case when the new conditions of AQTF come in or not, I am not sure. It also allows, particularly with the more contemporary types of workplace learning and training that are being undertaken at the moment... (and I do say contemporary 'tongue in cheek' being a past trade person myself, who learnt both on the job and at a trade school many, many years ago and the person I learned that from had also been involved in the same apprenticeship scheme, that went back many, many years in Adelaide so workplace learning and assessment is certainly not something that is new or contemporary as they are making out to be).

However, we can integrate that with a learning management system and provide the integration and recording of students' interaction and activities with a learning management system. So from that larger organisation perspective it is a very useful tool, not just from a teaching and learning perspective, but also from audits and tracking

requirements and at times in a teacher's life, people become very, very busy and that automated tracking process is quite important and I am not denying the fact that with some forms of personal learning environments that same tracking can be put in place, but it appears to me at this stage that it does take extra effort from the teacher involved.

I would also like to just raise from my own perspective that I am very interested in pursuing vocational education and training, in this interview that we are having at the moment, with regard to the trade areas because of the main focus that appears to be confronting us with skill shortages.

**Jo Murray:** Great thanks Peter. That was quite an interesting view on learning management systems. I just wanted to clarify for people listening, when Peter was talking about the AQTF, he meant the Australian Quality Training Framework which is our regulations around how learning is provided. So getting just back to the issue of personal learning environments and learning management systems and how they might work together, can I come back to you James and ask you to give us a quick gist of [your recent article](#) about using social computing software for some of the things that people use learning management systems for.

**James Farmer:** Yeah certainly Jo, more than happy to and thanks again for inviting me to the session and it is really great to hear your perspectives, Peter, Ewan. I think Ewan you live in a bit of a dream land to me. I am actually not kidding you, there was a wonderful study done a few years back by a Scandinavian fellow, whose name escapes me at the moment, who came over and looked in Australia and what systems were being used in online learning in Australia and found I think over 90 per cent of higher education institutions that he visited and surveyed, this goes certainly into double figures, with the possibility of 22-24 institutions, over 90 per cent using Blackboard™ or WebCT™ which to me the quintessential learning management systems. But at the same time I wouldn't necessarily say that there isn't a role for them. As Peter says, they are important for tracking and they are important for auditing things. It is important to have a solid content management way of collecting material and delivering material to your students, but my main issue in this, and I suppose this is something that probably a lot of you as panelists aren't going to disagree with me on, but I will say it anyway.. and my main issue is that too often, far too often, this is seen as being the critical aspect of online learning, online teaching and learning where too often we jump down this transmissive laneway where people are seeing articles and content and the learning objects, dare I say it, thrust upon them, expected to go away and learn from them and come back and probably perform some sort of online quiz...and yes that may be a component of learning, but to me it's not the most important component of learning. It is actually a very insignificant component of learning, and communication and interaction and the social aspects are far more critical and far more important.

I like to think about personal and learning environments as a...and online learning environments as a whole as being a lot like towns, or if you will a lot like buildings. We use different architecture, we have different types of town planning for different sorts of experiences and different sorts of environments we want. We build lecture theatres like lecture theatres so people can lecture in them, we build collaborative workshop rooms like workshop rooms, boardrooms have tables in them, and this is the same as the online environment.

All too often we ignore the fact that different environments and different tools are necessary in order for us to be able to communicate effectively in different contexts, and discussion boards do have a role, but you can't make them do everything. Blogs do have a role, but you can't make them do everything, although I'm about to go on and say that you can make them do a little bit more than they currently do. Voice chats like this have a role,

but again they can't do everything. You need a whole suite of these tools, but what you need importantly at the bottom of it is what Garrison Anderson calls social presence. You need the ability for the people who are participating in this conversation to project themselves as real people, to be able to establish themselves and have ownership over what they say, how they say it and how they do it.

They need to have environments which they can subvert in their own way, they can design in their own way as Ewan said, platforms which belong to the students which are personalised. Once you are able to do that, once you are able to have an identity on line and once you are able to link this identity into these different environments, these different rooms, the different parts of the city on which you are interacting, then you are able to be truly feel ownership of the environment that you are in, you are able to truly communicate with other people and really I think blogs are the first step. They are not the answer, yet, but they are the first step, in the right direction of this type of personal presence. We have touched on it with ePortfolios, we have touched on it with blogs as they are and ideas of home journaling and some of the ways we use them for communication, but the idea of teachers and students having their own environments which they can subvert however they want which they can use as Ewan says, as their own platforms which belong to them which they can personalise and which they can choose what elements and aspects and which they can then take and use to represent themselves in other contexts such as discussion boards or such as traditional learning management systems or such as town environments or such as conversational environments like this.

Well that personal presence really is critical and that is something that I am exploring all the time in terms of how blogs can provide that.

**Jo Murray:** Thanks James. I am thinking it might be good to get some feedback from some of the other participants about the article you have written and the ideas that you have just expressed to us again then, so Clint would you be able to give us your feedback on that for a start.

**Clint Smith:** Yes Jo. I think the thing we keep coming back to all the time and we have played with it earlier in the interview is the context in which we are working and the type of learning and the type of institutions that we are working with and so on which mightily condition what our views are. I've a few things to say. One is that the learning management systems as we understand them in the vocational system here are not necessarily a distance delivery tool. They are an on campus tool as well and as I think James rightly points out, they have got a role in the content management and when you are in the vocational field the content is not negligible, it is an issue there is a lot of convergent knowledge in the trades training particularly and in a lot of other areas where there is a body of knowledge which is part of the conveyant thing. There are a range of pedagogies wrapped around the best way to do that.

But the fact is that you have got one advantage is that there is an agreed level of content at the middle of that universe. It is in Australia as we know it is wrapped around national standards to formalise that. That is a great advantage because it means that the learning outcomes at one end of the country are much the same and have been agreed to be the same, the teaching pathway to getting there is completely individual and I happen to think that is a really good way to organise the system. It gets into some bureaucratic difficulties with the standards and the over assessment of them and so on, which we won't go into, but if you have got a learning management system which provides a large number of teachers in your institute with that facility, in a fairly easily learnable way, the biggest problem I have with the social computing thrust is, that looking at our system, it is always going to be a small minority of the teachers and I will be interested if Ewan is in a system

where all the teachers are using those tools well that would be quite a different experience than the one that we have.

It simply means that you are going to be working with a group of innovators, you are going to be talking to people who join the online communities and so on. Where on the ground we are working with an ageing workforce, a workforce which has got very low ICT skills and doesn't really see the business case for e-learning in many of its forms, so it is the change management process that you are involved in. The learning management system is a business solution to that. It is setting in a sense a base line of access for individuals to get access to their course wear and materials digitally and I think that is the sort of starting point, it makes sense to do that.. to make that available at that level... then the individual teachers will choose to use the extra tools, the collaborative tools and so on, to move over into the distance learning mode and the fully online type delivery and that gives you a ground for your innovators and your leading teachers, but I suppose I see the two working together. The one provides a business base which manages the content, which provides a basic level of e-learning in that sense and then you can work on your innovators and change management processes to extend the repertoire and the kind of repertoire that is directed to ... we have a site based on some research a couple of years ago called 'designing e-learning' which shows some case studies of a range of blended facilitated learning. Several of them use learning management systems, one or two don't. They use a range of other tools, they use a range of delivery options and the best solutions we think are when you have got those full range of options available to teachers, you've got a healthy skill development program and you've got a healthy, well, a commercial sense of what the value of e-learning is to delivering vocational training.

**Jo Murray:** Thanks very much Clint. I would like to hear Ewan, how you see it sitting outside the vocational system or as you mentioned earlier in a system where maybe learning management systems as we know them in Australia are not used that much. What would your responses be to James's initial argument and then Clint's response?

**Ewan McIntosh:** I think for me the frustration is perhaps that I don't really have a huge deal of work of interest in what is going on in the higher education sector, because in terms of learning management systems yeah the higher education sector uses it, but for the vast majority of learners, the ones in our schools, they won't see a learning management system. They will go through their entire school career here without using it. And I guess that is the same pretty much all over the world. What I am concerned about is we have actually got the learning management system, a virtual learning environment that is going to be put into the national internet called 'Glow' in Scotland (<http://glowscotland.org.uk>) and this means that every school from primary, early years right up through secondary, will have the same virtual learning environment as every other school in the country and they will have the same collaborative tools.

Now what I like about Clint's point here is that yes, it provides a base level that everyone should be able to understand and that our local, what we call 'Glow mentors', they are basically colleagues who are employed or given the extra time to help lead our slightly less e-confident teachers in using this, for us, new way of working in their teaching and learning. What I am worried about is that this is, rather than setting a minimum bar which we then encourage people to excel beyond, I think what we might find is that that is seen as the top bar, that this is the thing that people are being asked to aspire to and that their more exciting work messy admittedly, more complex, but ultimately I think more interesting way of learning through social media, through personal learning environments, is just going to get lost, because people have an easy option that has got a national stamp of approval on it and everyone will stick to, in my opinion, a rather low minimum level or other low bar and I hope it doesn't work out that way. I think in East Lothian which is an authority I work with very closely, we have managed to get the kind of balance that James alludes

to, where we will be ready and waiting for the learning management system, a virtual learning environment, but we have already set about work with a WordPress multi-User installation with suitable plug-ins if you like and we also try to bring that together on the web site (<http://www.edubuzz.org>) which uses things like Pageflakes to aggregate as much of that information that is relevant to our learners and to our teachers... and this is more messy, it is maybe more difficult for people to get straight away, but the net result has been absolutely phenomenal.

We have now got a fifth of our teachers reflecting on their professional work in their classrooms on blogs, at least once a week. We don't see that in any other local authority in Scotland. I don't think necessarily that an LMS or VLE is going to inspire teachers and learners as much as the social media does. Why? Because it is a closed intranet, it is a closed network and most LMS and most VLEs tend to be closed and encourage this inwardly looking world instead of an outwardly looking world, so if you want to take a peak at it, it is at [edubuzz.org](http://edubuzz.org).

**James Farmer:** Yes knocking there quickly Ewan, I think I agree with you a lot. I have been in my teaching experience working with people in the higher education and lower K-12 sectors are people, they want the simple option, they want the easy option, they want the quizzes, they want the tests, they want the material and they want the way to present it and that is largely what we give them, because that is, when we do our surveys is what they ask for and that is a tragedy in my book. We talk about ...allowing people to personalise environments and use them in their own way and the like, but there is definitely a Big Brother thing here going on as well.

I am really keen that environments like edublogs and like the ones that Ewan is talking actually encourage teachers and guide teachers and push teachers into doing different, interesting things.

**Jo Murray:** Thanks James. We will just go to Brad I think, now let's hear what you have got to say on it all, Brad, because we haven't heard from you yet.

**Brad Beach:** Thank you, Jo. Look I have been listening to this interview with great interest and I think people are raising a number of really good points. At the risk of going over some of what has already been said I guess from my perspective it really does depend on what is the purpose that you are planning to use this e-learning solution to do and that will help to determine what are the best tools that you need to use including whether or not you use a learning management system or a personal learning environment, but probably just very quickly, I think from my experience in the vocational sector, if we were providing an e-learning solution for industry which is often about compliance, than a PLE is not the type of environment that you would want that to occur in, you would want it to occur in a learning management system so that you could actually be recording that information and giving them a mechanism for managing, if you like, HR requirements as opposed to delivery of nationally accredited vocational competencies in an online environment...that might be more suited to a PLE but still under auditing requirements you might need a learning management system.

One of the things that in my mind about which one, or how do you make the decision between them, is often related to level of the qualification or the experience of the person. The very nature of personal learning environments suggests that students are capable and have the appropriate skills to actually choose and pull in the information they require in order to achieve a certain learning outcome and I am not entirely sure that that is actually the case for the majority of vocational education students. I am thinking of the 45 year old woman who may have raised a family and is now returning to the workforce, who may not have been in a schooling environment for 20 or 30 years, so I am not sure of the freedom

of PLE, a personal learning environment, offers that person is going to be accepted and usable, I think those people are looking for some direction.

That again can change so if we were talking about delivering at advanced diploma level or indeed talking about higher education. The only thing I would comment on is there is a question in my mind around the role of personal learning environments and that social community connectedness. One of the things that I truly believe that content in an e-learning environment isn't just what the teacher puts up for the students to read. It actually is about the interaction between the students and content is created by discussion and that is a critical aspect. Now a learning management system actually allows you to centralise that discussion and so everyone is actually able to see it and participate in the one and single discussion.

If discussion is going to be spread over a number of personal learning environments then you start to actually have individuals owning spaces and potentially owning or having some sort of presence or control or at least perceived control by other participants within discussion that occurs in an individual's personal learning environment, whereas the discussion that occurs in a learning management system can be seen by the participants to be owned by the teacher and not by individual students. Now I am not advocating that students should see the teacher as the owner, but it does mean that the students are all playing on a level playing field.

I guess there is another question in my mind and I agree with the need to have social interaction. I guess there is a question though when we talk about this social software or social aspects and we refer to some technologies that allow us to do that, perhaps we are actually talking about collective environments. A personal learning environment is more about the collection of information that an individual likes, or is looking for and I am not sure of the degree of actual interaction and communication which would be the more social aspect, so for me the jury is still out on which platform, you really need to know where your target audience is in order to choose the most appropriate combination of those tools.

**Ewan McIntosh:** I think it is an interesting notion though you need the LMS or VLE to centralise your conversation when it is on the personal learning environment, because I just think it is possible to centralise elements of the conversation. There is a lot of repetition in the various discussions of what has been learned and it is possible to summarise. If you cover enough of the ground, you will see what the main arguments are. I've had nearly 300 posts this morning from various educators around the world and I zapped through them and there were effectively two arguments, I was actually interested in that I thought were important, that were actually talked about by a lot of people. So I think it can be centralised somewhere. That doesn't have to be on a learning management system, but that said, I don't want to come across as someone who is saying it has to be either personal learning environments or if it is learning management systems/VLEs, because I think, again, that personal learning environments for educators are quite easy to master when it comes to just reflecting on classroom practice. I think it is a much bigger learning curve involving 30 or 180 students in that process as well. Whereas with a virtual learning environment or learning management system, because so much information has been sucked through in a standardised way, it is therefore much easier for the teacher to initiate some kind of learning through that medium. My problem with the virtual learning environment-LMS is that by... the pay-off, if you like, for having that standardised information is that you end up with a system which pretends that one size of learning fits all and I don't think that is true. I am sure you don't think that is true. It is basically the comprehensive system, but with setting in a virtual learning environment, when I would prefer to see some comprehensive style learning in personalised personal learning environments.

**James Farmer:** Sorry to butt in there very briefly but I would like to.. in a friendly but slightly confrontational way... take issue with this idea of centralised conversations and the value of centralised conversations. To me a centralised conversation almost always invariably means in a form of bulletin board. I would like to contend very very strongly that bulletin boards work well for support forums, for like types of software or perhaps you can even drop in and talk about games and hints, but if you are looking sort of conversations, the sort of interaction, the sort of engagement with social and with each other that we are looking for in genuine learning environments, bulletin boards just don't cut it.

**Brad Beach:** I'll respond to that...I agree that bulletin boards don't entirely cut it is if you are wanting social aspects of that discussion and debate. I think if you are wanting heavy reflectiveness then the discussion boards work for that, but I guess it is probable, I think there are other, if you are talking about discussion that was occurring in a synchronous environment in a perhaps a virtual world type of environment, something that is social. I am not sure where the social aspect is where someone is able to decide what parts of the discussion they will and won't participate in. That is more about individuals deciding what parts of the discussion they want to have interaction in, and that's fine, if it is actually about a personal learning journey, and if you have got to actually sophisticated enough in their learning practice and understanding the way learning styles then that works quite well. My concern is I am not sure how many students have been able to master the skills to operate effectively in that environment. I think there are a number of students who don't have those skills and that's why they need a central point that has discussion, that is guided to try and maximise the number of people that are involved in that discussion.

I think there is a big, a real danger that we can presume that students will know how they would like to interact in that discussion, in terms of having an understanding of what the actual goals of the curriculum are. I guess that is one of the issues in my mind.

**Peter Higgs:** Peter here. Look I agree with much of what is being said, apart from the fact that when we are dealing with vocation education and training students, particularly in the Certificate I through to Certificate III levels, I don't think the majority are ready for what you are talking about in the communication facilities that you are also identifying and that is one of the real difficulties, and I would like to see some hard stats that would tell me that vocational education and training and I am talking of trades, plumbers, bricklayers, hairdressers, all of those types of areas, the readiness of those students to engage in a form of communication is very difficult for us to put into words. The people we are talking about are learners by seeing and doing. They are not necessarily learners by talking and analysing what is talked about and coming up with their own take on what is being put in front of them there and one of the reasons I raised this point is that one of the real challenges we face, in vocational education and training today, is the upskilling of the workforce and we need to find an answer to this and I don't think a PLE is the answer for that cohort of students.

**Ewan McIntosh:** I think you are spot on Peter because there is that element of ... if you are a plumber or a joiner you kind of have to do it. What we find in East Lothian we have got a lot of learners who will be those plumbers and joiners and make far more money than some of us doing so as well. What we find with them, we have opened up the access to create blogs if you want to, and it's not an enforced thing, some teachers get entire classes to do it, but some of our best student blogs, some of the ones I enjoy dipping in to, are kids who have hated writing and given this medium because they all have Bebo pages or MSN spaces type personal pages for them the medium is attractive and they enjoy talking about what we have done. But I also think a lot of the student blogs that are held up as examples of personal learning environments are a little bit wishy washy, there is not

much substance to them and it is difficult for teachers of hard graft if you like to see where the promise in that could be.

The interesting thing is when you get students teaching each other, so if they are joiners why are they not creating their own joinery website where, in the medium of a blog, for example, which brings together the best Internet sources for finding out how to do particular cuts, which has them showing why you are going to pay them \$40-\$50 call-out fee because the work they are doing is truly expert, so you get them using their mobile phones to video the work that they are doing, you get your plumbers to use their digital camera to show how to fix simple joints without calling them out and the next time you have a big disaster, you will be calling that plumber out and it is not just about learning, but it is also about entrepreneurial skills, so I can see plumbers and joiners for example go out and use their personal learning environment as a marketing tool when they have finished formal education.

**Frankie Forsyth:** Thanks Ewan, it is Frankie here. I have been sitting back listening to the debate with great interest and to me it is really about where your learners are at and if you have a situation where your learners are comfortable with PLEs and learn to work that way then I think it is an ideal situation to have them use that. Where you have learners who are not so skilled in that area then, by all means, I think we should be using it as a bit of an interim measure in exposing them to how they work and the more that people are using the personal learning environments and using them effectively, that we can point to, the better it is then for them to see how it can work and how it can work for them. But I do think that in the interim having some sort of a base, if you like, for those who don't have the knowledge or the interest to do it, still falls back into some form of learning management system and whether that is open or closed is a decision I think that the organisation that is running it can make. So, for example you can have them in Moodle which is an open learning management, open source learning management system, you can make a space with open areas closed as you like, which does break down the barriers of the, the organisational barriers, that many people think are a disadvantage of a learning management system, but for example one of the courses we ran recently we offered for people to either post their reflective practice into their own individual blogs or the discussion forums within Moodle, and it was about a 50-50 split. Those who had blogs who wanted to explore them, used them, those who didn't and were comfortable with the discussion forums used those, but what we did do was we said that everybody had to go to the blogs in order to comment on those who were using them, and that's what I mean by having some sort of an interim situation.

**James Farmer:** Can I also nip in and give I suppose a sort of a slight summary here of a few things that Clint and Brad and Peter said. These things are the importance of content, the body of knowledge, the base, compliance, auditing, the management, information, all these things came through to me and I've been sitting here thinking to myself, yes, you are quite right, there is obviously a lot more if you will kind of stock information when it comes to something like plumbing because it has techniques and structures etc but say if you were talking about a humanities subject like psychology for example, there's probably a few psychologists out there who would argue with me, I think Ewan might be one actually in a past life....

The way that I am thinking about this conversation is going is actually that it is not so much about content. We are talking about content in terms of reference. We are talking about content in terms of material... and I would like to take this back to real life and I would like to imagine that you have got a classroom and you ..so you are doing plumbing or you are doing joinery or you are doing bricklaying, how is this ...how do people learn?, how does this information transmitted?, how do people work?, how do good teachers do it? and how do the not so good teachers do it?, and we have to admit there are some not so good

teachers. I, in the past, have been a not so good teacher, and probably will be in the future.

But I think the good teachers are the people who are engaging them with problems, with ideas, with challenges, with things that you can talk about and things that you can discuss and like Ewan said, an issue of how do you use a web site to teach other students? how do you get this across to them? how do you get students teaching students? what do you have with this particular house and this design? how would you approach it? how would you go at it? what if the owner tells you to 'f' off after two days? how do you put that in context? on any particular problem that might come up.

It is about discussion, it is about communication, it is about interaction. That to me is really good learning and yes we need information, yes we need the reference material, but you know what? and possibly this is not the most best place to be dishing stuff onto the old learning toolkits, these largish toolkits, which the TAFE people have put together, which I have to say have put a lot of work in. More often than not I look at them and I think these aren't like learning or teaching and learning toolkits, these are reference materials, these are the kind of things that you want someone to have on a portable device and to be able to look at. These aren't learning things, nobody, nobody sits there, no matter how good the multimedia, no matter how promising the task, on their own in front of the computer and learns to think about what..., OK not nobody, but the vast majority of people don't, and that is something I see as the kind of dichotomy that we have got going on there. I'll... I'll shut up now.

**Brad Beach:** Look I couldn't agree more with you that content is actually generated by their discussion interaction. That is absolutely what it is all about and I guess one of my philosophies is with the e-learning environment is looking at what is the best way to do it face to face? and it really is about that discussion that you absolutely highlighted, but I guess if I picture a face to face classroom I don't picture a teacher who is saying to students 'you can choose, not to listen to some of this and choose to listen to some of that or only talk to those two or three people, because they are of interest to you', yet there is an encouragement on the leader or teacher or facilitator's role to actually get those students involved in as much of that discussion as possible, whether the student is interested in it or not, because in general it informs their overall thinking and that is one of the things that when I talked about the centralised discussion, that is one of the benefits of it, allowing students to actually segregate the discussion and therefore being able to choose what they think they will or won't listen to, does make things difficult.

**Frankie Forsyth:** Okay, so I would like to come in and wind it up because I am conscious that we are running out of time and I don't know about the other panel members, but I could certainly talk about this for quite some time to come, so what I would like to do is just to say from my point of view what I am hearing is that people are talking and panel members have been talking about the importance of the purpose of what you are doing, the context, before you make some choices about how you do it, the readiness of learners and the readiness of teachers are some of the influencing factors and the need for some kind of an interim mix perhaps, where we can encourage people to stretch their wings, if you like, and to try different ways of doing it and to encourage learners to teach and learn from each other in whatever they are actually doing, whether it is a learning management system they are working in, or a personal learning environment and I guess finally in that sense that practice makes it possible, possible for learners to see the possibilities of personal learning environments.

And at that point I would like to remind everyone that Ewan's next entry, if you like, into the Australian vocational education area, is to present in the June event which is coming on which is a live event on E-trends and that is going to be on Tuesday 19 June and at this

stage it is likely to be at around about 8 o'clock Eastern Standard Time, so if anyone is listening and would like to come and hear a little bit more from Ewan McIntosh, please do come and join us with that event. Thanks very much folks.

**Jo Murray:** So just to wind up I would like to thank everybody for participating. We look forward to hearing some of the comments that come up in *The Knowledge Tree* blog and just see where we can take this discussion from here. I am sure it is not over yet. Thank you so much for coming in Everybody, especially Ewan from Scotland and I look forward to seeing you again in the June event and thank you.

## Useful Links

<http://www.edubuzz.org>

<http://www.glowscotland.co.uk/>

Ewan's favourite blogging plumber:

<http://sprinklerdoc.wordpress>

An example of PageFlakes used to provide a localised PLE – at the moment Ewan's capturing one for each school cluster:

<http://www.pageflakes.com/edubuzz>

June online event - E-trends - Ewan will focus on:

Podcasting, YouTube and how these audio/video media can be used in effective ways with students.

Tue 19 June 8:00 PM (Canberra EST, Australia) =  
Tuesday 19 June 11:00 AM \* (Daylight Saving time, Edinburgh, UK)

For direct links visit <http://networksevents.flexiblelearning.net.au>