Social Software, Personal Learning Environments and Lifelong Competence Development

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The background
We are at present undergoing a deep and prolonged industrial revolution based on digital technologies.
The reform and reshaping of social systems and institutions has tended to lag behind in periods of rapid technological change.
Profound innovations in technology tend to be reflected in older paradigms
for example the ‘virtual classroom’ or the ‘Virtual Learning Environment’
The challenge
It is not the development of technology per se which poses such a challenge to education systems and educational institutions.
but the changing ways in which people are using technologies to communicate and to learn and the accompanying social effect of such use
My Space and Bebo
Web logs
Flickr, Second Life
forming and participating in on-line social networks and communities
The reaction of education systems and institutions to the rise of social networking has been at best bewilderment, at worst downright hostility.
a refusal to engage in these issues risks school becoming increasingly irrelevant to the everyday lives of many young people
and particularly irrelevant to the ways in which they communicate and share knowledge
Web 2.0 allows young people to be active co-creators of knowledge
We have to review the industrial schooling model including the organisation of institutions and pedagogy and curriculum
It is not just young people who use social software for learning
Social software is widely used in the workplace for informal learning
Most informal learning is learner driven, problem based, or motivated by interest.
Google is the most used e-learning application
most learning is unaccredited
people learn through legitimate peripheral participation
Knowing is ... located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artefacts of that practice, and the social organization...of communities of practice

Lave and Wenger, 1991
Lurking is a means of becoming integrated in distributed communities of practice
In such communities of practice formal learning materials are seldom used
We have ignored the vast potential of freely available ‘objects’ of all kinds for learning purposes.
changes in the way in which we learn and develop new competences is a challenge to our traditional subject organisation
And although most countries have adopted a rhetoric of lifelong learning, there is little sign that education systems have sufficiently changed to facilitate such a movement.
The answers?
How can we support lifelong competence development?
Personal Learning Environments have the potential to meet such a challenge
PLEs are not another substantiation of educational technology but a new approach to learning.
A response to pedagogic approaches which require that learner’s e-learning systems need to be under the control of the learners themselves.
and recognise the needs of life-long learners for a system that provides a standard interface to different institutions’ e-learning systems, and that allows portfolio information to be maintained across institutions.
Learning is now seen as multi episodic, with individuals spending occasional periods of formal education and training throughout their working life.
PLE are based on the idea that learning will take place in different contexts and situations and will not be provided by a single learning provider.
the idea of a Personal Learning Environment recognises that learning is continuing and seeks to provide tools to support that learning
It also recognises the role of the individual in organising their own learning.
PLEs can help in the recognition of informal learning
PLEs can develop on the potential of services oriented architectures for dispersed and networked forms of learning and knowledge development.
“the heart of the concept of the PLE is that it is a tool that allows a learner (or anyone) to engage in a distributed environment consisting of a network of people, services and resources. It is not just Web 2.0, but it is certainly Web 2.0 in the sense that it is (in the broadest sense possible) a read-write application.”

Stephen Downes, 2006
The promise of Personal Learning Environments could be to extend access to educational technology to everyone who wishes to organise their own learning.
The ‘pedagogy’ behind the PLE – if it could be still called that – is that it offers a portal to the world, through which learners can explore and create, according to their own interests and directions, interacting at all times with their friends and community.
New forms of learning are based on trying things and action, rather than on more abstract knowledge.
the PLE will challenge the existing education systems and institution
Policies to support the development and implementation of PLEs
encouraging and supporting the development of communities of practice and engagement in those communities
decisions over funding and support need to be taken as close to practice as possible
a broader understanding of digital literacy and its integration within the curriculum
recognise different forms and contexts of learning
the development and adoption of new pedagogies
the co-shaping of technologies bringing together techies and teachers, enterprises and institutions
Thanks for Listening