From personal to social: learning environments that work

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Standardised institutional VLEs are rapidly falling short in meeting the demands of a networked society. Web 2.0 and social networks are proving to offer a more personalized, open environment for students to learn formally as they are already doing informally. How can we as teachers enhance the digital skills of our students to promote a more effective, meaningful learning?

Teacher and institution centered platforms clearly need to be enhanced with student-centered environments. Social networking tools like youtube, wikipedia, facebook, ning or blogger allow our students to manage their learning environment on their own terms and to be more conscious of their progress. At the same time, all these tools are intrinsically collaborative at heart. Spaces to share, comment and remix information which will eventually become individual knowledge. By handing out the management of the learning tools, learners are endorsed with the opportunity to build their learning path more actively, suiting one's needs and demands in time.

The use of the social networks as teaching platforms not only takes into account the students interests but also include something that motivates them in a great deal. PLEs help to promote an open attitude from students towards communicating and exchanging knowledge, and contribute to establish ties among other networks.

Ples require from students to establish connections and parameters for dissemination and collaboration. In this sense, it can be pointed out that the metacognitive process that entails the use of personal learning environments allows the students to be much more conscious of the resources and tools they use and which of them will facilitate them valid strategies along the process of lifelong learning.

The aim of this paper is to show how the personalization of learning has become an important focus of attention over the last few years and the implications that it has to all stakeholders in providing a new learning culture. We'd like to share some examples of our teaching practice with our students and discuss the strategies to implement effective learning environments both at a Higher Education and Secondary Education level.