Demystifying Personal Learning Environments: A Systems perspective

Abstract:-

Acampora (2011) argues that e-learning systems do not provide any means to support internal content production processes, relying instead on commercial courseware like Moodle, BlackBoard, etc. These 'Learning Management Systems' (LMS) were seen to be nothing more than launch pads for third party content that the organization would purchase or outsource. The current generation of e-learning products were never designed to help organizations collect, organize, manage, maintain, reuse, and target instructional content. These products are just seen as content repositories and data sources by their creators and users respectively (e.g. teacher and students).

The learning process is optimum when it is assisted and personalized. In the olden days the wealthy engaged tutors for their children, who thus received efficient personalized education. Computers are the potential survivors of the education system because they can be used to personalized learning. They can be stretched to design our learning according to our knowledge and needs, record the progress we make and tell us if any thought process is wrong so that it can be corrected (Alonso, 2005). Bennett et al.,(2012) and Junco(2012) points out Web 2.0's emphasis on active participation, user generation of content and collaboration that seems to fit well with the kinds of creative and critical activities associated with higher education, with the ways students learn through exposure to multiple perspectives, and with the communication and teamwork skills graduates wants to develop.

Learning is a process the student undergoes within a given learning environment. The infusion of technology in such an environment should be grounded in strong design principles, which are developed systemically and theoretically, keeping the learner and the process the learner goes through at the centre. Hence it could be argued that the systemic learning design could be used as a process of integrating technology into the learning process. Systemic learning design of the learning environment could help eliminate some of the criticism of web 2.0 based distributed learning systems used within educational settings alongside traditional centralized learning management systems.

Current uses are still too focused on content delivery and act as data repositories on the assumption that every student learns in the same way and uses the technology in the same manner. The proposed approach underpinned by systems thinking theories would help to understand and map some of the learning processes involved. This would also enable practitioners to address issues such as at what level, how and where, appropriate technologies can be introduced within a teacher-centric or a learner-centric setting via the use of process modelling.

Keywords : systems thinking, personal learning environment, process modelling