

**NET Cambridge 2016 400-600 words**

**Core paper**

**Research**

**Student engagement and experience**

**Structured headings for research presentation abstracts**

- Background, including underpinning literature and, wherever possible, the international relevance of the research
- Aim(s) and/or research question(s)/research hypothesis(es)
- Research methodology/research design, any ethical issues, and methods of data collection and analysis
- Key findings and recommendation
- abstracts for core papers and theme papers must:
  - be submitted under one of the three new categories
  - be relevant to the theme you indicate the abstract is applicable to
  - be written using the structured headings in the relevant downloadable Word template document
  - include up to five key words that will enable reviewers to confirm the fit to your chosen theme
  - list three bullet points that indicate how your work contributes to knowledge development in the selected theme

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- **Research**
- **Core Paper**
- **Student Engagement and Experience**
  
- **Key words**
  - **Personal Learning Environment**
  - **Student experience**
  - **Learning environment**

- **Qualitative research**
- **International Study**

**Contributions to Knowledge in this theme:**

- **Student's understandings of PLEs are broader than previously reported**
- **PLEs are multifactorial and complex**
- **PLEs need to be personally significant to be effective**

**Understanding the ecology of the Personally Significant Learning Environment (PSLE): one year on.**

**Background:** Personal learning environments (PLE) have been shown to be critical in how students negotiate, manage and experience their learning. Understandings of PLEs are largely restricted by narrow definitions that focus on technology alone. The idea of a PLE is often conflated with virtual learning environments (VLEs). In this presentation, we draw on empirical findings from an international study that spanned four countries. Our findings will be of interest to students, educators, researchers and institutions and will facilitate a more in depth understanding of how to support students to create appropriate PLEs for effectively managing their own learning.

**Aims:** The study aim was to provide in-depth insights into how undergraduate students of nursing manage and experience learning through a range of formal and informal components that comprise the PLE. It is a longitudinal mixed-method study that incorporates two key phases. The first phase will be the focus of this presentation.

**Research design:** The first phase comprised a series of focus groups held at each of four institutions in Australia, England, Scotland, Hong Kong and Canada. Ethical approval was obtained at each individual study site. Recruitment at each site was through student emails, flyers and invitations on eLearning sites. Inclusion criteria were that students needed to be enrolled in an undergraduate degree leading to a nurse registration.

An important ethical consideration was that students understood that participation or non-participation would not impact relationships with their academic institutions or study outcomes. Nominal group techniques were used in the focus groups together with providing visual representations of their PLE in the form of a sketch or conceptual map. The themed sticky notes and visual representations were photographed and stored for subsequent analysis. Data were analyzed independently by researchers at each site. This initial analysis was at the broadest level of abstraction in order to identify main emerging categories. Via a series of meetings through voice over IP (VoIP) technologies, investigators were able to employ a process of triangulation to provide and reach a consensus regarding commonalities that appeared from focus groups.

**Key Findings:** Eight groups comprising a total of 46 students took part in focus groups across the four sites. The findings from the focus groups generated a range of different types of data that were organized into three major themes; technologies, learning modalities and influencing factors.

Technologies included physical items such as; devices; computers; books; journals; newspapers; and furniture; and virtual technology such as; software; applications; and internet resources.

PLEs are influenced by individual learning preferences and the learning contexts that students find themselves in. Participants described how the ways they were expected to learn at university, did not always suit their personal learning preferences. Understanding their own learning style was important to enable an effective PLE and customising learning to suit personal preferences was seen as important.

An individual's PLE is impacted by external, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. A PLE is influenced by these factors both individually, and by the interplay between the factors. External factors included the physical, built aspects of the environment and the learner's ambient environment.

Intrapersonal factors included attitudes, beliefs, preferences and emotions. Interpersonal factors such as how, when and where participants engaged with others also played a significant role in their PLE.

Findings suggest a broader understanding of the term personal learning environment than currently exists. Their PLE was relational and comprised a space with personal meaning and significance to the learner - in support of their educational goals.

Current definitions of PLE do not capture the broader understanding identified by this study, we therefore propose a new term: **personally significant learning environment**.