



NRC-CNRC

*Institute for
Information
Technology*

A Conversation With Stephen Downes

**Stephen Downes
BCEd Online Annual Conference
Vancouver, Canada
April 20, 2006**



National Research
Council Canada

Conseil national
de recherches Canada

Canada

“Education is simply society's
expression of the meaningful life.”

<http://www.downes.ca/cgi-bin/page.cgi?post=33993&format=full>

a non-democratic society is one in which individuals' possibilities are imposed on them, whether by social custom, economic necessity or political fiat, and in which the development of the individual's critical and reflective capacities is at best ignored and at worst suppressed.

Society for the Advancement of American
Philosophy

Educational Policy Statement

[http://www.american-
philosophy.org/statement.pdf](http://www.american-philosophy.org/statement.pdf)

- **“We decided to bypass the schools”**
 - Deborah Schwartz, MOMA.

(http://www.nmc.org/events/2005fallregional/nmc_prensky_yale.ppt)

It's a clash of ideas...

- you can be a hero
- history is in your hands

It's empowerment – learn, master, control, lead...

The ESP Game

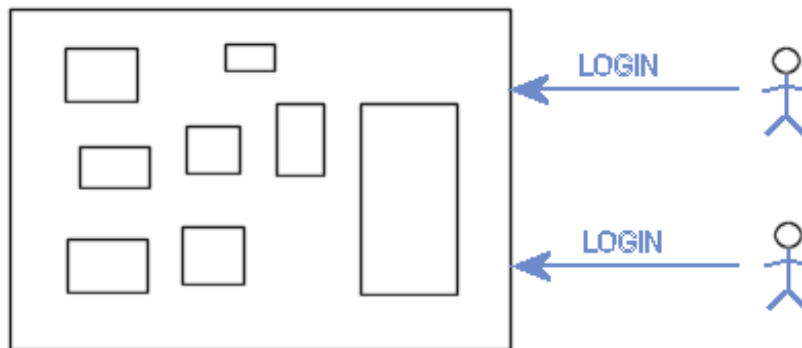
- The point here is: it is people doing something for themselves – *people* tagging images, rather than indexers or librarians

What are these values? Here's my take...

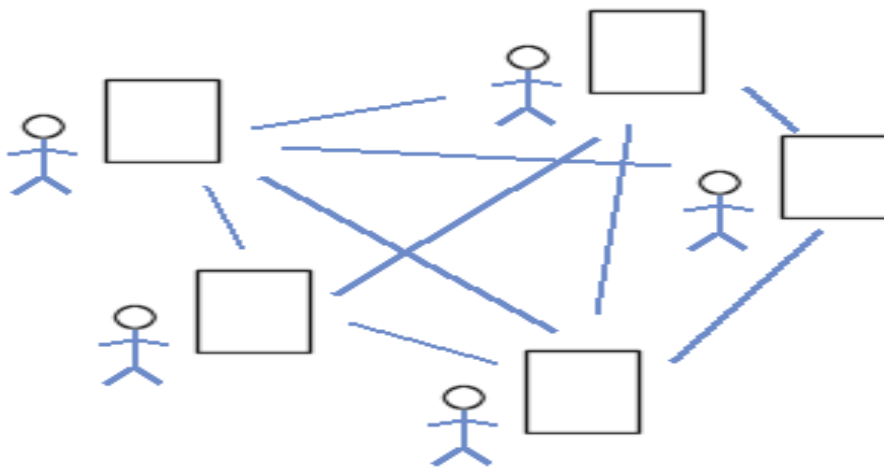
- Autonomy
- Interaction
- Openness
- Diversity

Two Models of Online Environments

- **Centralized**



- **Distributed**



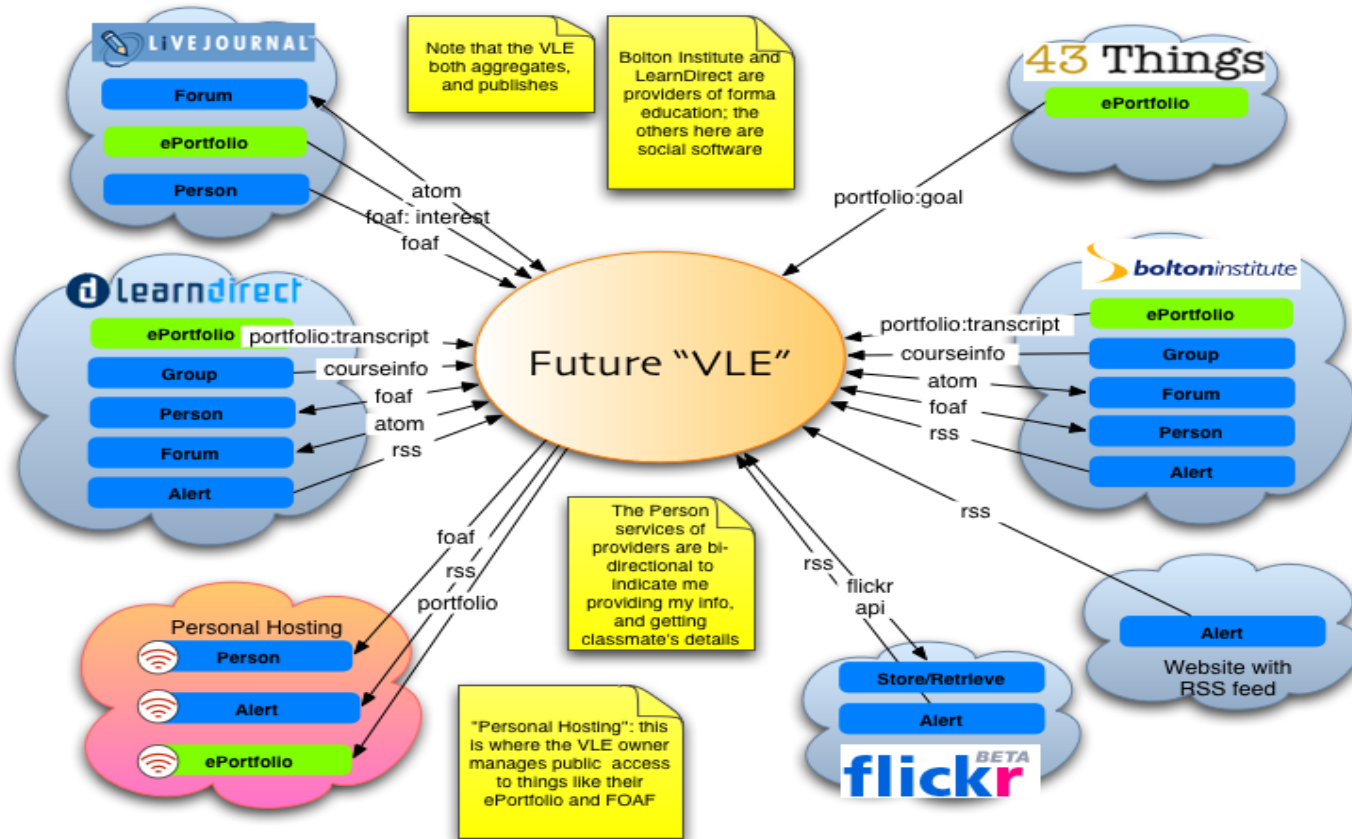
Centralized Environments

- **Before the web, the centralized model was all we had (examples include CompuServe, Prodigy)**
- **On the web, centralized models include site-based services such as Yahoo!**
- **Most (all?) college and university services are offered using the centralized model**
- **But centralized environments are static, inflexible, expensive**

Distributed Environments

- **The World Wide Web is an example of a distributed environment**
- **Resources, access are *not* centralized, but scattered around the world:**
 - Resources, in the form of a network of connected (via DNS) web servers
 - Access, in the form of a network of connected (via DNS) internet service providers
 - Users, in the form of individualized and connected (via HTTP) web browsers
- **The big issue – integration – that is, making different systems work together**

The Distributed Design Model



Scott Wilson..

Content Authoring and Delivery

- Numerous content authoring systems on the web...
- Weblogs – blogger.com wordpress.org
- Content Management Systems – Drupal, PostNuke, Plone, Scoop, and many more...
- Audio – Audacity – and audioblogs.com – and Podcasting
- Digital imagery and video – and let's not forget Flickr

Organize, Syndicate Sequence, Deliver

- **Aggregation of content metadata – RSS and Atom, OPML, FOAF, even DC and LOM**
- **Aggregators – NewsGator, Bloglines**
- **Aggregation services – Technorati, Blogdex, PubSub**
- **More coming – the Semantic Social Network**

Identity and Authorization

- A raft of centralized (or Federated) approaches – from Microsoft Passport to Liberty to Shibboleth
- Also various locking and encryption systems
- But *nobody wants these*
- Distributed DRM – Creative Commons, ODRL...
- Distributed Identification management – Sxip, LID...

Chatting, Phoning, Conferencing

- Numerous open source bulletin board systems and chat rooms exist, usually attached to the aforementioned content management systems such as Drupal
- Your students use this, even if you don't: ICQ, AIM, YIM, and some even use MSN Messenger
- Audioconferencing? Try Skype... <http://www.skype.com/>
- Or NetworkEducationWare... <http://netlab.gmu.edu/NEW/>
- Videoconferencing? Built into AIM...

Collaboration...

- One word: wiki
- Others, of course:
- Hula: http://hula-project.org/Hula_Server
- Much more info: <http://sohodojo.com/techsig/>

The Upshot...

- E-Learning has been grounded in centralized systems
- But these centralized systems, such as the LMS, are like a dysfunctional crutch...
- There's *so much* going on out there... you have to leave the cocoon and *experience* the web..
- Stop trying to do online what you do in the clarroom... it's a *different* world online...
- ... and you are no longer in control...
- ... and that's a *good* thing.

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