

The Pedagogies of PDP: a paper by John Peters

The National Action Research Network (NARN, 2007-10) funded by the Higher Education Academy sought to draw out and make more explicit some of the many pedagogies of personal development planning (PDP) in HE, in order to strengthen the evidence base on what works to support effective student PDP [Peters, 2010]. Coffield *et al* [2004] suggest that '*what is needed in the UK now is a theory of pedagogy for post 16 learning.*' The NARN project was based, in part, on a fundamental disagreement with Coffield about whether such a monolithic FE/HE pedagogy is feasible or valuable. Effective teaching is situated practice; shaped by many variables including disciplinary differences, specific setting, student diversity, expectations and intended outcomes. However, we do share Coffield's concern that FE/HE pedagogies are often implicit and untheorised; an issue that can give rise to confusion of purpose, ill-founded practice and disjunctions of personal values with professional actions. In promoting public discussion of the pedagogies of PDP we therefore aim to promote reflection amongst PDP practitioners and prompt theoretically-informed improvement of PDP practice.

The NARN project was built on awareness that there are many pedagogies of PDP. The national policy documentation provides a broad definition of PDP and indications of its purposes and claimed benefits [QAA, 2001 & 2009]. However, it only relates PDP to a very broad pedagogic model of personalised but supported experiential learning, and allows explicitly institutions to decide upon their own ways of implementing and supporting student PDP. This has given HEIs permission to develop PDP practice in diverse ways, with very different strategic emphasis, using professionals from very different backgrounds adopting different means, using varied tools and with major variations in avowed purpose. Hence the NARN project agreed with Clegg's [2004] criticism of the Gough *et al* [2003] systematic review that research should not focus on controlled experimental testing of idealised fragments of PDP-related activity, but on the gathering, sharing and exploration of rich, situated examples of PDP practice.

The QAA guidelines may not have much to say explicitly about the pedagogy of PDP but much is implied. The nearest they come to espousing a pedagogy is that of experiential learning. Kolb's experiential learning cycle is referenced but the diagrammatic version provided in the guidelines is significantly different in focus and language, to the extent that it does not map onto Kolb's stages but appears closer to reflective learning cycles of the type proposed by Gibbs [1988] and Johns [1994]. While it may borrow implicitly from these, it places less emphasis on reflection at the heart of the activity; giving it only equal weight with planning, goal setting, monitoring and evidence collection. Moreover, the text emphasises key variations from experiential learning because of the importance it places on guidance for all this activity from 'tutors, peers or significant others'. In this it is calling broadly on concepts from social constructivism [Vygotsky, 1978] and scaffolded learning [Bruner, 1978].

PDP draws on theories from cognitive psychology and the humanist tradition because these both place an emphasis on the learner and their learning at the heart of the educational process. Thus, PDP emphasises the person-centred [Rogers, 1983] nature of education, seeking to place authority and control over what a student learns, how they learn it, why they learn it and how they present that learning with the student themselves. This means adopting pedagogic practices which provide the support, encouragement and tools necessary for students to develop their self-efficacy [Bandura, 1997], self-regulation [Zimmerman, 2000] and intentionality [Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989]. The focus, then, is on developing the skills, attributes and qualities of mind, Newman's 'acquired illumination and inward endowment' [1852]. As more recent contributions have indicated, these attributes still lie at the heart of 'being and becoming' [Barnett, 2000] a graduate in the post-modern, super-complex lifeworld of

the 21st Century [Jackson and Ward, 2004]. By promoting a move away from content-based models and placing students at the centre of learning, PDP has the potential to transform the HE experience [Broadfoot, 2006].

The pedagogic practices of PDP are, therefore, those that promote student-centred learning, critical thinking and the development in students of greater awareness of themselves. Such practices include:

1. Self-awareness raising – activities which seek explicitly to encourage self-evaluation; introspection; thinking about personal values; beliefs characteristics; capabilities and drivers; exploration of existing abilities; learning styles and approaches to learning.
2. Target setting and planning – activities which focus on the student's own aims and goals for their learning and life. Exploring the realities of their situation and raising awareness of the opportunities it offers. Establishing the next steps towards their ultimate ideal in terms of study choices, degree, further learning, career development and life-choices.
3. Reflection – activities which provide time to pause, think and be their own 'critical friend'; to review progress and revisit values, goals and achievements; promoting thinking skills and the adoption of a critical, informed stance towards ourselves and others.
4. Self-advocacy – activities that capture and practice the articulation of achievements through a range of media to a range of audiences; providing opportunities to test ideas, values and personal positions; developing self-efficacy and the skills to argue their position.

Together these are activities that promote self-actualisation and the linking of self-awareness to purposeful action. The means by which these practices are supported can vary greatly across settings but can include:

- Career management education – placing HE learning in the wider setting of career development, and learning about the skills needed to forge a successful career beyond HE.
- Collaborative learning – working together to hone our understanding of ourselves and others.
- Debates – formally taking a considered position, defending it and critiquing alternatives.
- Discussions – informal practice at articulating one's values, ideas, position and attributes.
- e-Portfolios – developing and collating personal records of activity and achievement, and learning to present these to a variety of audiences.
- Enquiry-based learning – learning through student-led research and discovery activities.
- Group work – opportunity to discuss ideas and values with peers in a safe learning environment.
- Interviews and vivas – opportunities to develop self-presentation and the defence of ideas.
- Personal tutorials – structured conversations with a tutor which explore strengths and weaknesses, tackle issues, clarify goals and set personal targets.
- Questionnaires and audits – tools for exploring attitudes and approaches or capturing learning.
- Self-directed learning materials – structured learning activities which allow students the opportunity to engage with these issues in their own time and at their own pace.
- Student presentations – a formal opportunity to practice the oral and visual delivery of a reasoned personal position and to think about the skills involved.
- Study skills programmes – helping to draw out and develop the transferable skills needed for, and practiced through, HE study, and to engage in thinking about thinking [meta-cognition].

- Work-based learning – identifying links between theory and practice, formal education and the workplace and the opportunity to reflect on the transferability of learning.
- Writing exercises – capturing learning, presenting our own personal narrative, effectively communicating values, ideas and abilities to others.

The curriculum models which might be used to combine these or relate them to the existing curriculum are discussed elsewhere [QAA, 2009 and Atlay, 2009]. However, whatever the model, PDP activities often provide the opportunity for double-loop learning [Argyris and Schön, 1974] where opportunity is consciously created for individuals to step outside their usual disciplinary learning and reflect on what they are learning, how they are learning it and why they are learning it.

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