

Editorial

Rob Ward, Director, the Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA)

In this issue we've opted to provide a flavour of some of the material presented at the recent International Seminar into Researching and Evaluating PDP and e-portfolio. Partly this reflects feedback that suggests developing the 'evidence base' to support the effective implementation of PDP represents a key issue for practitioners; partly our understanding that many more would have been interested in attending the event than were able to.

The choice of 'fit for purpose and context' methodologies is clearly important here, as Megan Lawton's and Pam Irwin's contributions both emphasise. And the contributions of others reflect a rich range of approaches - both qualitative and quantitative - and of emphases. Hence Dominic Micklewright's contribution seeks to test the applicability of theory while that of Holger Andersson and colleagues is rooted firmly in the tradition of 'evaluation as illumination'. Rob Johnson reinforces the importance of local relevance for practice, whilst, in supporting professional development, Linda Hodgkinson and Chris Dillon emphasise the importance of moving beyond the local context through an explicit emphasis upon transferability in order to *'enable students to use PDP processes routinely both within the HE curriculum and in the workplace'*.

Chris Murray and Neil Currant - who also highlight perceived relevance in the initial engagement of learners - offer a conceptual model of e-portfolio usage while also emphasising that *'once the transition to usage has been made, the role of the 'feedback provider' is pivotal in determining the shape of the relationship enjoyed by the learner'*. This is echoed in the context of the trainee solicitor by the importance of one-to-one support in supporting reflective thinking in the cross-sectoral Project described by Patricia McKellar. Julie Hughes adds to this by emphasising the potential of the electronic medium in particular to support an iterative relationship between learner and record, allowing reframing, re-evaluation and further development of personal narrative.

Such a perspective is reinforced by Carina Buckley's contribution, which echoes concern with the construction of biography and identity and also emphasises the importance of self awareness and an increasing sense of engagement with PDP through the student life cycle. Hanno van Keulen reminds us - as the seminar itself reminded us - that PDP is not only a UK phenomenon, and that some of the lessons of implementation elsewhere are remarkably similar to our own. Here we

are in the world of pedagogy and curriculum organisation, far from the micro level of individual student perceptions. But the importance of learner ownership and relevance continues to shine through.

Finally, and by no means least, the contributions of Sarah Wilson-Medhurst and Wendy Clark both draw attention to the potential of research and investigation to generate further questions. We are on *'a long, long road, with many a winding turn'*, as Graham Nash sang in the 1960s. In all of that, of course, it's important to remind ourselves how far we have come!

If this edition has served to 'whet your appetite' for more detail in respect of these and other contributions to the seminar, a fuller range of material presented in seminars and workshops can be found at <http://www.recordingachievement.org/special/default.asp> If you are already undertaking your own research and evaluation we'd be delighted to hear from you. And whether you are a current or intending researcher or evaluator, then watch out for more details in the near future of the Researching and Evaluating toolkit John Peters has been developing. In the meantime, a happy festive period to all our readers!

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Can a systems thinking approach using Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) be used to research PDP?

Megan Lawton

The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT)

University of Wolverhampton

Introduction

This is a very brief overview of a research methodology that is used in work-based learning that has potential for researching Personal Development Planning (PDP). If this whets your appetite then read Checkland, P. and Scholes, J. (1990) *Soft Systems Methodology in Action* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.)

What is SSM?

Systems thinking and Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) were developed in the 1970s from a hard-system engineering background to describe and analyse what were perceived as soft situations such as organisational structures and working relationships. Checkland's (1990) theoretical framework for SSM sets out a seven-stage process that includes many ingredients of action research including data collection techniques. However, key to SSM is the analysis of the problem prior to any implementation of change. SSM uses discussion, debate, drawing, concept maps and moves between the real world and systems/ideal world to develop purposeful activity that is both culturally feasible and desirable before any transformation is implemented.

Why Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)?

As a member of a Central Department, my contact with students is through an invitation to work with subject staff in the classroom. I have a duty of care and a responsibility to those staff as part of the community of practice around PDP. Taking an action research approach could damage not only my relationship with members of the teaching staff but also affect the student view of the lecturers' teaching if there was a perception that I had identified a problem that needed fixing. All too often Central Departments can and are accused of not working in the real world. Costley and Gibbs (2006) raise the role of a worker/researcher's involvement in 'real-world' consideration of our interaction with others. My perception of PDP and that of teaching staff can be very different, and with SSM those differences can be discussed and articulated through mapping and drawing. As Costley and Gibbs (2006) state, 'The researcher, already working within the community of practice where the research is to take place, is bound to do this from an existing and particular point of view or ideology.' However, as the interpretation of that particular view point or ideology can be very different and equally valuable, SSM respects those differences.

Conclusion

Systems thinking and SSM are valid and useful ways to research complex issues. PDP is about relationships,

change, cause and effect, reflection, etc. SSM can cope with these 'soft' areas in a systematic, analytical way. SSM values and recognises different views and perspectives, giving room for an ideal model to be developed, but then places this in a real world context. It asks what is culturally feasible and desirable before any transformation of change is implemented. If you haven't come across SSM before then take a look – you might be impressed.

If you would like to discuss anything you've read here further then please contact Megan Lawton at M.J.Lawton@wlv.ac.uk

References

Checkland, P. and Scholes, J. (1990) *Soft Systems Methodology in Action* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.)

Costley, C. and Gibbs, P. (2006). 'Researching others: care as an ethic for practitioner researchers.' *Studies in Higher Education* **31**(1): 89-98.



Supporting and Evaluating Personal Development Planning in a Work-based Project via a Capstone Portfolio.

Pamela Irwin, Development Manager – Learning Innovation, Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance

Although the power of e-portfolios to enhance personal and professional development in the workplace is increasingly acknowledged (Edwards, 2005), and mirrors recent formal recognition of the relationship of portfolios with continuing professional development in healthcare (Health Professions Council, 2006), the concomitant evidence base remains oriented towards models of best practice (Baume, 2003) rather than in-depth analyses and evaluation (Johnson, 2006).

This research discontinuity is addressed through a comprehensive work-based learning project that actively drives the acquisition of transferable and higher learning skills through real world situations. The project is predicated on a sequential, cumulative process that reflects classic work project phases (Scope, Investigation, Analysis and Report), informed by individual/professional learning needs and/or requirements of the workplace.

By linking theory with practice and integrating the three stands of engagement (learner, employer and higher education institution), the project demands relevant

and timely student support and information, advice and guidance [IAG], innovative teaching and learning strategies, and stimulates creative, authentic assessment products such as feasibility studies and cost benefit/effectiveness analyses. A capstone e-portfolio (Labissiere and Reynolds, 2004) is the overarching educational outcome. It also serves as a curricula feedback loop and toolkit for continuing personal and professional development.

Each phase of the project and concomitant e-portfolio is supported, monitored and evaluated via a flexible and responsive combination of technologies to complement 'trusted sources' and facilitate new collaborative work environments (Straub, 2005).

Evaluation of the project incorporates both processes and outcomes and is underpinned by three intersecting methodologies (participatory action research, a systems approach to analysis, and research based practice) to provide a rich and dynamic platform of findings. A tripartite matrix allows the perspectives of the learner, employer and higher education institution to be cross referenced against the input, throughput and output stages of the project processes. In addition, critical intersection points provide an evaluative 'snapshot' of the project, especially in the context of outcomes related to personal and professional planning and the companion portfolio. These transition points also create an opportunity to map progress against current research evidence and subsequently inform any procedural modifications related to the next phase.

The intersecting elements of this evaluative process simultaneously enhance its methodological rigour and robustness, and contribute to its flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness to participant feedback and best practice – in effect, meeting the criteria for level three – 'impact' – of evaluation (Veitch, 2005).

Selected references:

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Edwards, G. (2005) *Connecting PDP to employer needs and the world of work*. York: Higher Education Academy

Health Professions Council. (2006) *Continuing professional development*. Retrieved 14 November, 2006 from <http://www.hpc-uk.org/registrants/cpd/>

Johnson, M. (2006) JISC briefing event to support the workshops for the HE in FE programme: *The MANSLE project Manchester self-directed learning and e-portfolios: building on experiences to guide new projects*. Leeds: Joint Information Systems Committee [JISC]

Labissiere, Y. and Reynolds, C. (2004) *Using electronic portfolios as a pedagogical practice to enhance student learning*. Retrieved 14 November, 2006 from <http://www.doiit.gmu.edu/inventio/articlepopup.asp?plD=fall04&slD=reynolds>

Straub, R. (2005) Proceedings from EDEN Conference. *Sustaining employability – WIEN Innovation in lifelong learning*. Helsinki: European Distance and E-Learning Network [EDEN]

Veitch, C. (2005) Proceedings from the Remote Allied Health Education Workshop. *Systematic measures that are appropriate, realistic and timely*. Alice Springs, Australia.

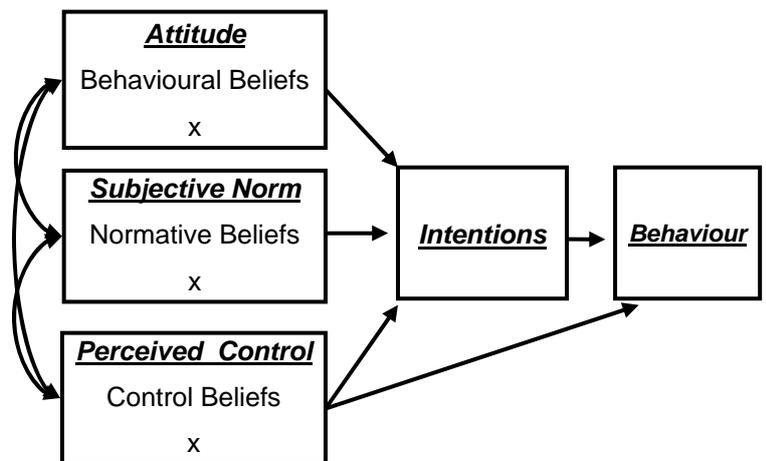
Student Intentions in Personal Development Planning

Dr. Dominic Micklewright, University of Essex.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour and Personal Development Planning

The purpose of this study was to test the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980, Ajzen 1985) in the context of personal development planning (PDP). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposes that certain types of behaviour, such as PDP, can be predicted based upon a person's intentions. According to the TPB there are three antecedents to behavioural intentions which are attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. An attitude is a positive, neutral or negative belief about a particular behaviour. For example, 'PDP improves employability' is a positive attitude about PDP. A subjective norm is an individual's perceived belief about whether significant others would want them to engage in the behaviour. For example, 'Potential employers will expect me to have engaged in PDP' is a subjective norm. Perceived behavioural control represents an individual's feelings about the degree of control they have over the target behaviour. For example, 'I do not have sufficient computer access to regularly update my e-portfolio'. In the TPB, perceived behavioural control is also thought to directly influence behaviour. The TPB is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980, Ajzen 1985).



Note: Straight lines with an arrow at one end indicate a cause and effect relationship. Curved lines with arrows at both ends indicate an association without any cause and effect specified.

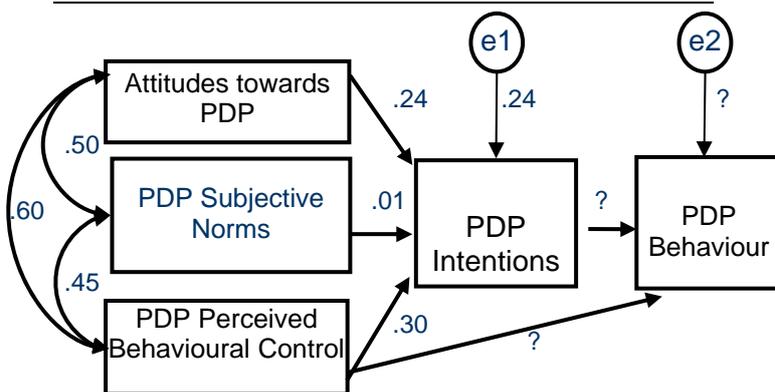
Questionnaire Development

Modal salient attitudes, subjective norms and perceptions of control were identified from a review of the PDP literature and the content analysis of unstructured interviews that were conducted with 18 randomly selected sports science undergraduate students. Based upon this information a questionnaire (PDP-Q) was constructed to measure PDP attitudes, subjective norms, perceptions of control and intentions. The initial questionnaire consisted of 51 items with a 5-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire responses of 220 sport science undergraduate students were analysed using factor analysis to produce a more concise PDP-Q consisting of 18-items.

Path Analysis of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and PDP

Path analysis, which involves applying regression techniques to estimate associations and causes between variables, was conducted using PDP-Q responses to test the TPB. Significant associations were detected between attitudes and subjective norms ($r = .50, p < .05$), attitudes and perceived behavioural control ($r = .60, p < .05$) and subjective norms and perceived behavioural control ($r = .45, p < .05$). 24% of the variation PDP intentions was found to be due to PDP attitudes ($r = .24, p < .05$), 1% of the variation PDP intentions was found to be due to PDP subjective norms ($r = .01, p > .05$), 30% of the variation PDP intentions was found to be due to perceived behavioural control ($r = .30, p < .05$), and 24% of the variation PDP intentions was found to be due to unknown factors not specified in the model ($r = .24, p < .05$). The results of the path analysis are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Path Analysis Results of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and PDP.



Note: Standardized residual values are shown. e1 is an estimate of variation in PDP intentions and e2 is an estimate of variation in PDP behaviour due to factors (unknown) which are not specified in the model. ? = those aspects of the TPB which have yet to be tested.

Conclusions

The results indicate that PDP attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control are all moderately positively correlated. In other words, those who tend to have positive attitudes towards PDP are also likely to have favourable subject norms and perceptions of behavioural control. However, the results also show that attitudes and perceived behavioural control have a much greater

influence upon PDP intentions than subjective norms. These findings are useful since they suggest that, in order to get students to form the intent to engage with PDP, we ought to look for ways to promote positive attitudes and perceptions of control among students towards PDP. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that actual participation in PDP will automatically occur once the intent to do so has been formed. This is because other behavioural intentions may take priority over PDP in competing for students' limited time and resources. Further work is therefore needed to explore how to convert PDP intentions into actual PDP behaviour.

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Acknowledgements

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PDP Evaluation: Giving students a say.

Holger Andersson, Stephen Gomez, Karen Croker and David Lush, University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol.

We used an electronic portfolio system to trial PDP with science undergraduates. Engagement with PDP was voluntary, carried no credit and was unsupported by personal tutoring. Unsurprisingly, engagement was minimal. Students were made aware of the importance of interacting with their e-PDP in Induction Week and there was on-line support. To inform and improve our provision of PDP, we undertook an extensive evaluation of student attitudes and perceptions through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. Data-gathering was conducted by one of the authors (HA) – who is an undergraduate student – so as to encourage other students be more honest in their responses during interviews and focus groups.

The students provided a major insight into our PDP provision and their comments speak for themselves.

What does PDP mean to you?

It means developing yourself.

How you can plan and organise yourself for your future career.

A way of keeping a record of what you've done and your aims.

Find your weaknesses, so that you can overcome them.

Students seem to understand the importance of PDP though they did not engage in it.

If PDP an important aspect of your time in HE?

. . . not only in HE, but in the rest of your life as well.

Yes, I plan to go into a . . . profession, so I believe it's really important.

Yeah, in a way. It's not my top priority at the moment. . .not enough time.

I'd rather do my coursework.

. . . only suitable for students in their final year who don't know what they will be doing after graduation.

It's good to keep a record of what you are doing as you are doing it [as it's difficult to list things you've learned at a later date]

Do you make much use of the Faculty's PDP system?

The answer in most cases was 'no' and one student said . . . *It would probably be better suited for use in the final year when you're looking for a job.*

If you did engage with PDP how would it benefit you?

There isn't enough time to talk to tutors one-on-one, so a system like this could be used for this purpose.

It helps define your different skills.

Why didn't you use the system?

Too little time [to work on the portfolio]!

I might do it if it were compulsory

Sometimes you need someone to tell you that this is what is there, but if no one has told you, it's difficult.

It hasn't been advertised.

"So much information in the first [Induction] week that I forgot about it completely until now."

What are the links between PDP and employability?

It gives a prospective employer a good impression if you present your skills using a system like this.

If you can back up your claims with evidence, you will be more credible.

You can show you've got the skills you claim you have, and you've got the feedback to back it up.

Our evaluation was more extensive than outlined here. Feel free to contact us for more information at profile@uwe.ac.uk.



Winning Hearts and Minds: An Implementation and Evaluation Toolkit

Robert Johnson, University of Warwick

It is one year since the QAA pledged that PDP (Personal Development Planning) would be implemented across the UK HEIs along with transcripts of students' records. At Warwick, after a Pilot Study, which was evaluated in April 2005, we opted for the creation of a bespoke philosophy to tailor PDP to each department's preferences based on 21 approaches to PDP and subject needs. In addition, we created 'Warwick Blogs' as a space for the recording, reflecting and sharing of ideas. In addition, we created a raft of supporting materials, and dovetailed PDP with a skills programme, postgraduate training agenda, and specific accredited modules for Careers and the Students Union.

I would recommend the 'tailoring' of PDP to each department through individual consultation with every department. The important point here, in terms of evaluation, is that the institution has to meet the needs of each subject area by identifying where they have gaps and problems – and offering PDP as one of several solutions. Only by these means can centrally co-ordinated initiatives hope to win the 'hearts and minds' of the practitioners.

Since Warwick has a 'bespoke system' then it follows that some variety of ways of monitoring and evaluating PDP is also required. We have to face the fact that very different styles of learning, and teaching, are going to impact on the personal development of students. If we are able to introduce more 'research-led learning', properly supported and guided, we are likely to see a parallel growth in students opting for personal development planning.

Interestingly enough, students sampled so far have often seen PDP as part of their general development intellectually. This suggests that the departmentally 'embedded' nature of PDP was the right strategy. However, this means that those acquiring information had to be mindful of the discipline-specific vocabulary. When asked about PDP, some students seemed non-plussed, but expressed enthusiasm for their rituals of recording, reflective thinking and planning.

The numbers of students accessing the PDP website to acquire downloads was very high in 2005–06. We should be clear that recording in itself, even in blogs, isn't necessarily 'learning': it is the revisiting, reworking and reflection that are important. This has to be done by the student, but our staff should be able and willing to draw out, or assist the student, to articulate their findings. To make the process 'real', we should insist that the student 'plans' as a result of their reflections. Whilst this clearly happens in the academic sphere, the mechanisms for students to do this in terms of their future direction and non-academic life, are weaker. I would like to see a clear junction between, say,

blogging, and planning. One of the ways this could be achieved is to develop further the on-line process of recording and projecting skills as a 'training needs [self]analysis'.

Disseminating clear and reassuring information has been crucial but it has to happen at both departmental and institutional level and that requires good co-ordination. It is also true that endorsement from managers, both middle and senior, is critical.

www.go.warwick.ac.uk/pdp

PDP processes to enhance employability and professional development

Linda Hodgkinson and Chris Dillon, the Open University

The skills and processes that describe PDP offer students a route map for their own skill development in HE and beyond. New graduates are likely to find themselves in an environment in which they are expected to learn new skills quickly and informally. However, our work with HE students and staff indicates that the skills developed through PDP are often confined to particular activities and that, more generally, within the curriculum there is little or no integration of these skills and processes. Thus, our work has focused on strategies that enable students to use PDP processes routinely both within the HE curriculum and in the workplace.

A framework for learning

Students worked with us on applying these processes as they developed skills, assessed their own performance and made judgements about what they needed to do to improve. The defining components of the process are:

- Developing a strategy: *identifying current capabilities and setting targets to improve skills in specific areas; devising strategies and identifying resources and feedback to develop skills.*
- Monitoring progress: *implementing the strategy for improvement, managing time effectively, monitoring and critically reflecting on progress, adapting the strategy to overcome difficulties.*
- Presenting results: *being able to select and reflect on evidence to demonstrate skills, understanding requirements of audience and presenting work appropriately, and being able to articulate knowledge and skills clearly to others.*
- Evaluating the strategy: *evaluating overall skills development and the effectiveness of the strategy for improvement, identifying strengths and weaknesses of the approach, and ways to move forward and further improve.*

Of course, skills development rarely follows such a neat linear process; students are encouraged to adapt the approach to suit their own needs. However,

working through and discussing these steps offers students a way of thinking about what does and does not work for them.

The above approach has been adapted to deliver training for NHS Laboratory Quality Managers as part of their professional development. The framework supports a complex mix of outcomes that incorporate national and professional standards as well as local protocols. The result is an innovative approach to work-related learning with individuals negotiating their learning to support their own development and meet the requirements of their organisation.

Summary

PDP is becoming an integral part of professional development. As HE focuses more on employability there are benefits both to individuals and employers in recognising the value of a developmental framework. Current workplace demands expect graduates to be able to learn from their work environment, and understand and use a variety of assessment methods including self and peer assessment, product completion, and appraisal of a product so as to develop and manage their careers.

The emphasis is on learners being able to use PDP skills and processes for their own development at work to identify, analyse and articulate what they need to do to improve their performance. It is this 'meta-skills' approach that crosses the divide between the HE curriculum and the workplace by giving learners the tools to learn and make connections with experiences, skills and knowledge they have gained in different situations.



Models of E-portfolio Engagement

Christopher Murray, University of Leeds

Neil Currant, University of Bradford and LeedsMet University

Since July 2005 the Enhancing Learner Progression (ELP) JISC funded project has, through the use of two distinct e-portfolio tools, been assisting students in FE with PDP and their applications to university. One tool offers students access to a module providing them with UCAS points; another provides access to a subject-specific careers education module designed to

increase awareness and knowledge of themselves and the careers they are interested in applying for.

One of the main research outcomes of the project has been the creation of two distinct developing models of learner engagement with the e-portfolio process. It is hoped that the experiences of the project will be able to inform and assist other practitioners who are considering implementing e-portfolio into their own curricula.

E-Portfolio Centred

The e-portfolio centred model (Murray 2006, Currant 2006) offers practitioners the view of engagement as a journey through the stages of e-portfolio usage. The stages of engagement are identified as Enabling, Initial, Learning, Sustained and Output.

Usage throughout the first three stages of the model is supported by external factors such as technical design, feedback and relevance. The later 3 stages of the model are concerned primarily with outputs: reflection, self analysis and pedagogical patterns. Creating the environment for the early stages leads to engagement and the desirable outcomes of the latter. A revision of the earlier model also attempts to consider the type of learning that occurs within the stages. Using the categorisation of deep, surface and strategic (Entwistle *et al* 2000), the hypothesis of the paradigm enables learners to engage at different levels at each of the stages.

Learner Centred

A second model of engagement explores the relationship between the user and the e-portfolio (Murray 2006) but places the learner at the centre of the discussion. From an analysis of e-portfolio usage, distinct types of engagement can be identified. These behaviours can be classified as Non-use, Reader, Tentative, Selective and Continuous. The factors which shape these behaviours are both external and inherent to the learner. Common themes of feedback, design of the tool, attitude of the institution to technology reappear and are supplemented with inherent factors such as relevance, learners attitude to the use of technology and gender. Relevance, and, in turn, assessment plays a large role in the type of engagement enjoyed by the learner. Compared with voluntary users, there are an equal number of continuous users, smaller numbers of non-users but a larger number of strategic users. Feedback and relevance exert strong influences in determining behaviour. However, the axiom relating continuous use to deep learning is an area requiring further empirical evidence and discussion.

Conclusion

Both models illustrate that relevance plays a large role in the initial engagement stages but once the transition to usage has been made, the role of the 'feedback provider' is pivotal in determining the shape of the relationship enjoyed by the learner. Their 'ownership' of the process is paramount.

For further information:

<http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/tqeg/resources/eportfolios/elp.php>

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/medicine/meu/elp/index.html>

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<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/medicine/meu/elp/pubs/Oxford1.pdf> (accessed 9/11/06)

E-Portfolios within Professional Training

Patricia McKellar, UK Centre for Legal Education, University of Warwick, and

Karen Barton, Glasgow Graduate School of Law, University of Strathclyde

In many professions the use of portfolios is now commonplace as routes to qualification, revalidation or continuing practice. The benefits of portfolios for professional development include their capacity to look at technical development over time, reflect on and demonstrate progress, and support the integration of work-based learning and assessment. E-portfolios give students in professional subjects the ability to look back and consider the consequences of their actions and to develop their meta cognitive skills, encouraging them to become more intuitive and thus build identity, character and values.

The JISC/HEA Distributed E-Learning Fund (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/3897.htm> accessed 11 November) has supported a project to consider the use of e-portfolios in the legal profession. There are a few good examples of portfolios in use within some law subjects at undergraduate level: see, for example, the case studies in *Developing Reflective Practice*.

(<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/reflection/index.html> accessed 11 November) The project will consider whether there is a place for e-portfolios within the legal profession, and a professional qualification. Are there any specific issues about legal practice that need to be considered? Do e-portfolios provide an additional dimension to vocational legal education and training that is currently missing, or are they just more work and a passing fad?

There are three pilot projects within the study: Glasgow Graduate School of Law at Strathclyde University, Oxford Institute of Legal Practice, and the University of Westminster. Each was chosen to reflect different aspects of legal education and implementation of e-portfolios, for example post/under graduate, bespoke /proprietary VLE, bespoke e-portfolio/bolted on e-portfolio etc.

The project at Glasgow is the most advanced and lessons learned here will be incorporated into the other projects. In this project a number of solicitor firms have been piloting a portfolio with their current trainees. At the same time volunteers on the Diploma in Legal Practice Course (the equivalent of the LPC) were also recruited to pilot an e-portfolio – including all the students who had already secured a traineeship with one of the partner training firms and who could then be followed up in the next phase of the project. The second phase of the project started in September 2006 and involves the introduction of e-portfolios (Pebblepad) which are being designed for use by legal firms for the first time.

Early project findings drawn from feedback from the students and trainee solicitors includes:

- keep the specification of the portfolio clear and simple,
- understand the difficult issues with collation of evidence by the users,
- give guidance and examples,
- use and train mentors,
- support conversation and peer support,
- regular reviews and feedback sessions.

The project team underestimated the lack of knowledge that exists in the legal profession about the use of reflection as a professional and personal development tool. They have been encouraged, however, by the responses on the Diploma project, where one-to-one support is providing direct benefits to students. The project team will continue to monitor and review over the remainder of the project, and feel confident that the results will provide useful information to inform the other projects in the study, and the legal profession in the UK, on the use of e-portfolios in professional groupings (<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/interact/lili/2006/index.html> (accessed 11 November)).



Eportfolio storytelling as 'everyday theorising'. Exploring professional learning narratives, digital 'becoming' and blogging as transformative socio-cultural spaces.

Julie Hughes, University of Wolverhampton

It's not beginnings and endings that count, but middles. Things and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle, that's where you have to get to work, that's where everything unfolds. (Deleuze 1995: 161)

I am an eportfolio learner and teacher. I work in a School of Education using the e-portfolio with students from FD to M level CPD. I have just introduced the eportfolio to my 3rd cohort.

This past year I have had a wonderful time exploring the blog tool within our e-portfolio system. The focus of this paper is a consideration of how an e-portfolio community-shared blog might support transitions into employment through creative multimedia dialogic reflective writing, thereby generating new professional knowledge. The research data/stories were drawn from a PGCE group who completed their course in May 2006; they are still blogging. In fact, in September 2006 there were 109 posts despite the group being in their first qualified teaching roles

My research effectively grew out of the middle ground of being an e-portfolio teacher/researcher and from fantastic interactions with eportfolio learners during the past two years. This is a wonderfully messy and fluid place to be at this point in e-portfolio practice and research. I feel that we have an opportunity at this stage to challenge some traditional models and modes of research and to suggest new paradigms more suited for 21st century learning and research. Kincheloe & Berry (2004:2) suggest bricolage as methodology as:

The (bricoleur) views research methods actively rather than passively, meaning that we actively construct our research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the 'correct' universally applicable methodologies.

To frame our research stories we should also consider what Yancey and Weiser (1997:11) urged almost a decade ago on our role within this 'collective portfolio performance.'

Rather than our learning on (e)portfolios proceeding as a spiral, then, we might think of it as developing in waves, with one wave of practice preparing the

next wave of theorizing about that practice, with an intermediate wave extending new practice. By such reflective 'wave action' is knowledge created. A knowledge that is responsive to and incorporates 'felt sense', a knowledge that is grounded in reflective analysis, a knowledge that always turns to practice as a source for knowing.

The 'felt senseness' of this community builds upon the professional narratives of becoming (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger et al. 2005) shared by new teachers in a landscape such as eportfolio.

And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories. (Rushdie 1990: 73)

The telling and sharing of stories in a forum such as a weblog allows the teacher/researcher to position the eportfolio as a lens through which to view the possibilities for situated, engaged learning. This work offers an interesting extension of the community model by exploring how communities and technologies may shape each other.

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Designing an evidence-informed PDP environment to develop learner biographies

Carina Buckley, University of Portsmouth

We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves

(Giddens 1991: 75)

PDP is a 'technology of the self' (Clegg 2004: 288), a means by which individuals can construct their biographies: the integration and interaction of social class, gender, age, sexuality, and so on, which forms the basis for each learner's unique 'knowing' (Clegg 1999: 175). PDP and self-identity therefore reinforce each other, as they contribute to and develop from each learner's biography (Giddens 1991: 53).

The PDU in context

Foundation Direct's professional development unit (PDU) at the University of Portsmouth cultivates a deep, rich learning space in which Foundation degree students can explore and connect their learning, working and personal identities. Since identity is socially and culturally informed (Giddens 1991: 55), each person's learner identity, and therefore their approach to PDP, will be different. To examine demographic-based approaches to PDP, 400 students were questioned on satisfaction with their degree, with PDP, and their confidence as a learner. In total 96 questionnaires were returned, across a range of degrees, ages and year groups.

Results

Early results suggest patterns in student response. Paramedics are generally dissatisfied with the relevance of PDP to work based and university-related learning, possibly due to an uncomfortable transition between a highly skilled and fast-paced workplace and academic reflection.

Females are generally more confident and positive about PDP than males, but this may be due to a sex division in courses taken: Learning Support and Early Years are almost exclusively populated by women, whereas the majority of students taking Police Studies and Paramedic science – skills-based courses – are men.

The youngest age group (18-24) seems to have been socialised into the culture of higher education, consistently seeing the benefits of PDP, which they may already have encountered at school. They also consider themselves to be confident, independent and questioning learners, although they are equally keen to be told how to complete assignments.

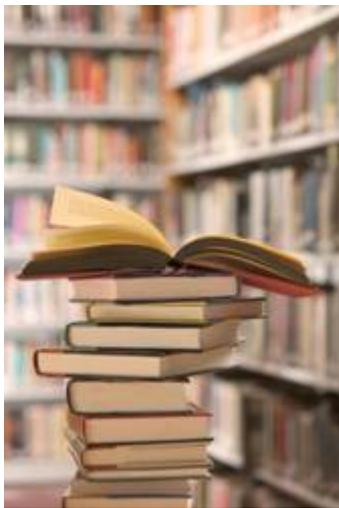
Most strikingly, satisfaction with degree and PDP increases as students move from the first year into the third year, suggesting the establishment of a firm learning identity that is much more comfortable with the demands and expectations of

both university life and how it interacts with the workplace.

What does this tell us?

Several factors help determine a learner's connection with their course and with PDP. The most significant factor here is the difference in attitude between first years and third years, regardless of age, degree or gender. This suggests that student identity develops over the degree, integrating 'learner' into each student's biography. In this case, the PDU has the potential to help establish a particular type of learner identity.

The central motivator for the construction and reconstruction of identity is self-awareness (Adams and Marshall 1996: 434), and with this knowledge Foundation Direct will be able to provide a supportive, flexible environment in which learners can develop their learning biographies and find out what they want to make of themselves.



PDP portfolios in Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Hanno van Keulen, Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

Utrecht University, a large and fairly traditional (but highly successful) research university in The Netherlands, embraced the concept of personal development and planning portfolios in the aftermath of the Bologna agreements. Five-year HE programmes without much freedom or choice were changed into three year bachelor programmes with much more freedom of choice, an active learning philosophy and an emphasis on generic academic skills, followed by two-year master programmes dedicated to the development of discipline-specific research and professional skills.

Bachelors with freedom of choice meant the need to reflect and plan, so it was thought. Moreover, academic skills like critical thinking, presenting, or writing, are not an overnight affair to be dealt with within ten week courses but need careful nourishing over several years.

The PDP portfolio was born and fully implemented as a mandatory component in 2002 with surprisingly little resistance from staff, given the fact that many Schools had been experimenting idiosyncratically with reflection, academic skills and academic development in ways that suited their own discipline specific needs. Then a few interesting things happened.

On the technological frontier, it took several more years to smoothly accommodate some 26,000 students and their countless tutors in cyberspace. (Systems are stable right now.) Meanwhile, students found out that freedom of choice in a traditional research university is not always the kind of thing that keeps you awake during the night: 'Shall I opt for Quantum Mechanics II or choose Nanotechnology?' Academic skills tended to be graded within courses anyway, so there was little need to reflect and plan them for more than once a fortnight. Portfolios were little more than paperclipped course certificates.

Tutors found out that tutoring is complicated and that their efforts were not really compensated by the system. Is the PDP portfolio a failure, then? Not quite so. As an integral part of the radical educational change that took place over the last six years it has accomplished its role. Bachelor and Master courses have been established, as well as generic academic skills and flexibility. The Vice-Chancellor has decreed that PDP portfolios are no longer compulsory, and, hey, variety is back again! The Biologists focus strongly on professional skills like working in the laboratory, Theology focuses on critical thinking, Teacher Education uses portfolios to supervise classroom assignments, Medicine uses portfolios to assess clinical reasoning skills, and so on. So right now, we have personal development and planning portfolios, academic skills development portfolios, and assessment of professional skills portfolios.

Technological innovations like streaming video and mobile learning devices are introduced if these techniques are appropriate. Some students start weblogs instead of adopting the fixed format (Blackboard). The strain of the diktat 'thou shalt reflect' has been relieved. And yes, not all 26,000 students have become dedicated portfolio addicts. But has there ever been a successful one-size-fits-all approach in higher education?

Evaluating the impact of personal development planning on students' self-efficacy

Sarah Wilson-Medhurst, London Metropolitan University

Introduction

Personal development planning is about managing one's self-development. Effective personal development planning requires that the individual believes in their self-management capabilities. This self-efficacy or '... the belief in one's

capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations' (Bandura, 1995, p.2) influences the choices we make, the effort we put forth, how long we persist in challenging situations, and how we feel (Bandura, 1995).

One element of successful personal development planning, particularly as the student advances through their studies, is career planning. Certain PDP-related teaching interventions can assist with this process including supporting the development of the career choice competencies of accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future, and problem solving.

This short article discusses a pilot study at London Metropolitan University involving the author and colleagues Gary Pheiffer and David Andrew. The pilot sought to develop a questionnaire to assess the impact of PDP-related teaching interventions on students' general and career decision-making self-efficacy. The questionnaire used career decision self-efficacy, locus of control, and initial clarity of goals as key variables. A five-point Likert scale was used for self-efficacy items.

The student sample

The pilot involved two second year undergraduate student cohorts, one studying Business Information Technology (BIT) and the other Psychology. At London Metropolitan University personal development planning and employability development is part of the undergraduate core curriculum. It was the second year subject-specific employability module that was the focus of this pilot. Students were given the pre-module questionnaire in week 1 and the post-module questionnaire in week 11. Around forty BIT students completed the questionnaires and around fifty Psychology students.

The results of the pilot

Both cohorts showed a small average increase in career decision self-efficacy ratings. To get an indication of whether this post-module upward trend was statistically significant a T-test was used on the Likert scale responses. This analysis did not find the improvements to be statistically significant. Additionally no significant differences were found for course, gender or hours worked.

Analysis and future work

These results may have arisen for a variety of reasons. One is that the students in the pilot were second years, studying fairly vocational subjects, and they were reporting fairly high initial self-efficacy in career decision-making. Given this high initial score, it may be that they were unlikely to increase scores significantly. This analysis could be tested by including fewer vocational courses and students at an earlier stage in their studies.

Another explanation is that these results indicate that the PDP-related teaching interventions on these modules could be better targeted to support the development of self-efficacy beliefs.

A linking point is that a factor analysis of the pilot questionnaire identified questions that were predictive of career decision self-efficacy scores. In the future could similar questions be used to help identify those who most need support?

If you would like to discuss this work further, please contact Sarah Wilson-Medhurst at s.wilson-medhurst@londonmet.ac.uk

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PDP and e-portfolios: evaluating the effect on the quality of student learning

Wendy Clark, Northumbria University

This short article outlines a project carried out during 2005–2006 with 95 first-year students in the Business Information Systems subject area of Northumbria University.

Background

It is widely accepted that both PDP and the portfolio concept can support reflection, help students understand and plan their own learning, and provide a rich picture of their development and skills achieved – the 'mirror, map and sonnet' of Diez (1994).

Engagement with PDP can have a beneficial effect on student achievement, as shown recently by Peters' (2006) research, but student resistance to 'extra', non-assessed work is well known. For this reason, it was decided in 2003 to integrate PDP into a first year study and professional skills module, in which the students assemble a portfolio to demonstrate their skills and competencies. The portfolio contributes 50% of the summative assessment of the module, a traditional year-end examination the other 50%. The e-portfolio, supplied by the Blackboard VLE, was introduced in 2005–06, and proved a strong motivator for students, and a flexible and convenient working platform.

The project

This e-portfolio could be seen as all three of 'mirror, map and sonnet', in that its contents included reflective pieces and evidence of learning, showed that learning was evaluated and

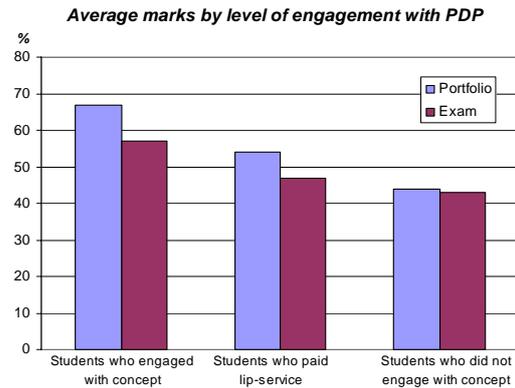
planned, and was a showcase of work the student wished to submit for assessment. The reflective commentary on the year's work included in the portfolio gave an indication of students' views on the value of PDP. The manner in which these views were expressed could indicate their depth of understanding of the concept, but in order to ensure validity, their engagement in the process was also assessed by grading the quality and appropriateness of the portfolio contents, and carrying out a qualitative assessment of the reflective pieces, using the SOLO taxonomy of Biggs and Collis (1994).

Results

Analysis showed that the overwhelming majority (87%) of students said that they found the PDP process either 'very useful' or 'useful' as a study aid. However, analysis of the reflective pieces using the SOLO taxonomy showed that some students seemed to be merely paying lip-service to the process. On the premise that true engagement would result in deeper reflection and more appropriate support for the opinions given, only those reflections assessed as multi-structural, relational or extended abstract were regarded as giving a valid opinion. Of the 83 students who said they found PDP either helpful or very helpful, 46 were judged to have given valid opinions; of the 12 students who thought PDP was unhelpful, none gave

valid reasons for their opinion, and thus did not seem to have engaged with the concept.

The average marks of these 3 groups of students for the portfolio and for the year-end examination were graphed and compared.



These results would seem to support Peters' findings – that those who engage with PDP report better assessment results.

However, further analysis is needed to answer the nagging question of whether it is only the committed, academic types who engage with the PDP concept in the first place!

News and Events:

Forthcoming attraction: PDP AND EMPLOYABILITY 2007

A Seminar convened jointly by AGCAS, CRA and the Higher Education Academy

To be held at the Higher Education Academy, York, on Wednesday 28 February 2007.

Following the successful conference on the theme of PDP and Employability held at the University of Northampton in April 2006, this one day event will:

- Formally launch the new publication *PDP and Employability* in the Learning and Teaching series of the Higher Education Academy.
- Showcase a number of the case studies presented in the publication.
- Respond to feedback from participants at the earlier meeting by emphasising the sharing of practice and the fuller development of networking.
- Explicitly incorporate sessions dealing with international students and PDP for Postgraduate Researchers.

To ensure full opportunities for participation places will be limited, and early application is therefore advised. To request a programme and booking form when these become available please contact Katy Beesley, CRA Seminar Administrator Katy@recordingachievement.org

For the Future: The 'You are not alone' workshop programme

As we move into the implementation of PDP, and beyond early champions and enthusiasts, a range of issues will arise and strategies need to be developed and implemented in order to ensure success. This series of workshops will give each participant the opportunity to:

- Share some of the key challenges they face, and get some support in devising strategies for tackling them;
- Offer their own experience in helping others take forward their thinking and practice.

You will also be able to learn about key issues at national level, and contribute to the overall development agenda.

Each meeting will be highly interactive and participative, with maximum opportunities of discussion debate and even conflict resolution!

Keeping up:

An account of recent work undertaken with JISC funding in the area of e-portfolios can be found at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/publications/pub_eportfolio_overview.aspx (accessed 13th December)

An outline of the recently published Leitch Skills review can be found at:

<http://www.egovmonitor.com/node/8832> (accessed 13th December) which also gives a full reference for the report itself. You might have all sorts of reactions to this, but the intention that by 2020 *'more than 40% of adults are skilled to graduate level and above - up from 29% in 2005'* – is something might come to occupy our minds more fully in the years ahead.

Forthcoming CMS Conference

The Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS) will be holding its second conference on 11-12 January 07 on the topic 'What can the curriculum do for careers?'

The conference will look at the advantages and challenges of curriculum-based CMS; its effects on academics, careers services, and students; and the position of careers education and guidance within the broader university structure, including its relation to, for example, PDP and enterprise initiatives. As such, it will include a balance of practical examples and critical debate. The new CMS website under development at Reading – 'Destinations' – will be introduced at the conference.

Further details are available on the project website <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/ccms/events/events.php> (accessed 13th December), including an outline of the programme, and information about how to book a place.

If you have any news items or events that you wish to publicise in the next issue, please email Tansy Abbott at tansy@recordingachievement.org with the details.