

WORKSHOP at the CRA's Annual Residential Seminar

How much PDP will I get for my money... and does it matter?

Workshop title: Unchartered waters: what's next for ePDP

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Background

The workshop presents an update of the results and challenges faced during the implementation of pilot studies of exercises in two different faculties, at the University of Bolton (UoB): Faculty of Arts and Media Technologies (AMT), and Faculty of Advanced Engineering & Sciences (AES), as well as the progression to a University-wide implementation using open source electronic media. The inclusion of PDP (personal development planning) is a University requirement for all programmes and traditionally embedded through a text based/visual journal approach in Art and Design and blogs and journals in other departments. The experience has provided both faculties with relevant data to inform the newly created UoB ePDP working group to further develop ePDP and to explore optimum processes, infrastructure and research that needs to be undertaken to support future implementation and dissemination more effectively.

Description of approach used

In 2008 the School of Art, Media and Education AME (later AMT) eLearning team (e-Team) starting testing the development of an ePDP resource within the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) WebCT. The results of that experience informed a second pilot using a more flexible VLE (Moodle). Art and Design were chosen to undertake both pilots as there is experience of working visually in a PDP context. Around 150 students and 4 academic members of staff were involved in the exercise.

AES is a newcomer to the implementation of ePDP and there appears to already be some identifiable positives and some further challenges. The software currently being used (Mahara) has numerous format similarities to "Facebook™", so many students get to grips with the social networking elements. The reflective requirement for PDP is the element that provides the biggest challenge, not least with staff. Many Engineering Staff are so busy with the day to day running of lecturing; they do not have time to reflect! The challenge then requires two approaches: One approach to teach the software tools and another to get the STAFF and students to learn to reflect!

Results of work done

While Moodle resulted in a more flexible VLE for ePDP in AMT, cross platform and cross browser issues were apparent particularly the compatibility with Apple Mac's (used in Art & Design in AMT). In addition, some AMT cohorts preferred a less 'prescriptive' approach to ePDP, and explored the use of other cloud-based technologies to evidence their PDP. Mahara has been considered as a valid open-source option to progress with 'e'PDP within the University, as AES trials have shown.

Conclusion

The culture of ePDP is slowly changing due to the greater involvement of students and staff with technology (within and out the university). Both faculties (AMT and AES) have identified that the reflective requirement for PDP is the element that provides the biggest challenge, not least with staff. Many Engineering staff are 'well established' in their yearly cycle of activities, so the elements of self-reflection are something that passes many by! . In Art & Design staff the claim is that '*due to the nature of their work*', their piece of work demonstrate the reflective practice. The challenge then becomes twofold: 'staff to embrace a new software (Facebook-type social networking software, in the case of Mahara)' and getting STAFF and students to understand the UoB reflective practice concept.

KEYWORDS: ePDP, VLE, Art & Design, engineering, reflective practice, eLearning, flexibility, pilot