

E-PDP in Bolton: Dr. Maria A. Rodriguez-Yborra and Mike Lawrence examine the nature of a trans-disciplinary approach to PDP, highlighting the benefits of collaboration in action.

We are members of two Faculties, two philosophies and ways of looking at how to 'express' and plan professional development to enhance the employability opportunities for our student. One team trying to understand how things could work for multidisciplinary statements. Most importantly, an additional challenge is how to encourage student engagement? and more importantly, how to get long-standing traditional art, media, technology and engineering staff to buy into the new technology, if only to promote/support the students' future career potential?.

The Faculty of Art and Media Technologies (AMT) has been exploring in the past three years the best approach to develop a sound and efficient e-PDP model for a challenging multidisciplinary faculty, attempting to enrich the model with the variety of discipline background and good practice, as well as informing the University of Bolton (UoB), on the findings and outcomes. On the other hand, the Faculty of Advanced Engineering & Sciences (AE&S) is a newcomer to the implementation of e-PDP, and in the process of learning a lot from others' experiences along the way and it is already apparent that there are some identifiable positives along with some further challenges.

The University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is Moodle and the software currently chosen for both faculties

to test the e-PDP in the past year is Mahara, which is accessed via the VLE. Mahara has numerous format similarities to Facebook, so many students get to grips with the social networking elements reasonably quickly. It is the reflective requirement element for PDP that provides the biggest challenge, not least with staff who are very happy in their comfort zones, being set in their ways and paper-friendly. Loads of staff development sessions have been organised to promote the use of the chosen e-PDP tool, but very low enthusiasm has been showed by academic staff. Staff are consumed with the day to day running of lecturing and some seem to have very little time to reflect!, or 'learn' a new e-Tool (Mahara). The challenge then requires two approaches: One approach to teach the software tools to both students and staff and another to get the STAFF to promote reflection while the students learn to reflect on their academic journey!

For engineering students, Mahara allows 'logic' sequences which appears to be intuitive for them. This is, the process back down into its individual logical blocks, the student's goal is to create their own Portfolio View (webpage) that captures their abilities, reflections and best working practices. This 'View' will be built up from their own images, reflections from their own thoughts, writings about their findings, their subject aware-

ness and using their individual creative flair to produce their own style in the webpage layout.

For students with 'arts' background, the approach is different. They consider their pieces of 'art' as their 'reflective' practice. They struggle to 'think in sequence' and progress professionally. Mahara allows to create reflective blogs that 'simulate' their traditional paper-based sketchbook journals.

Students 'reflective abilities' has to be nurtured and guided by the academic staff, and there is evidence that shows that the UoB academic staff are far from reaching any commonalities on what 'reflection' means and how to get the most of it from our students. The culture of e-PDP is slowly changing due to the greater involvement of students and staff with technology (both within and outside the university). Both faculties have started breaking down the barriers associated with the reflective requirement for PDP being the biggest challenge, not least with staff.

It is seen as key to revisit staff common understanding of what is 'reflective practice' and to engage staff and students with the available technology to document the reflective exercise. Students engagement with technology does not seem to be an issue.



Dr. Maria A. Rodriguez-Yborra



Mike Lawrence

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