

PDP & e-Portfolio UK Newsletter

ISSUE 22 MAY 2011

Welcome to issue 22, and to a revised PDP-UK, at least in terms of format! Welcome also to a strong collection of contributions, encompassing a range-from individual to whole sector. Maxwell Jeffrey's contribution deals with the importance of community development at the school level very directly, emphasising community development and wholeness but without any of the baggage of the 'Big Society'. The work presented by Tanyasha Yearwood, an international CRA member, looks at how introducing PDP practice can emphasise personal and (potential future) career relevance of an existing module; that by Panos Vlachopoulos offers a broader structure for considerations of learner directed learning which emphasises both staff and student responsibilities. Both of these themes are currently picked up in our series of Curriculum Design workshops. More broadly, Gordon Joyes, Angela Smallwood and Lisa Gray report upon work in progress to explore, and report upon large scale implementations of e-portfolio use in the UK; We look forward to learning more on the results from this work in the months ahead.

More broadly, the contribution of Janet Hansen and Beth Shephard at Bournemouth, and of the work at the University of Surrey as presented by Charlie Betts both emphasise the importance of recognizing lifewide learning as an essential element in the student experience, for both individual benefits - Hansen and Shephard talk of '*developing students' orientation towards the future by being able to imagine their future selves attuned to employability*', but also of importance in institutional thinking, for in the content of increases in the costs of tuition – at least in England – in 2012 considerations of enhancement have suddenly come to feature very prominently on the agenda of many institutions at senior manager level. And, of course, we can't ever get far away from the essential truth that, at the end of the day, unless our graduates are capable of articulating and evidencing the learning and development that they have developed through their undergraduate education they are likely to be at a substantial disadvantage in the graduate labour market.

Happy Summertime
Reading!

Rob Ward, Director

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Learning To Lead

Maxwell Jeffery, max@ltolead.org



My name is Maxwell Jeffery and I am a young director of the community interest company 'Learning to Lead'. Our initial guise was in the form of an individual school council about nine years ago, since then we have grown to the point of our scheme being present in over seventy primary, secondary and special schools across England. One of our main strengths lies in the fact that our development has been 'grassroots up'. Rather than seeking to address any particular issues from the offset, we have progressed over time to meet challenges as and when they've presented themselves. Via this means of working we have managed to arrive at a model that is equipped with a range of tools and working methods that enable participants to make an effective and sustainable impact on their communities.

Learning to Lead's practical implementation is in the form of 'community councils' in schools, the difference between these and the traditional model of a school council is crucial. A community council is founded on the idea of a 'wholarchy' whereby every member of the school, be they students or staff, are enabled to work in co-production with one another to improve their learning and working environment. Everyone can 'self-elect' to form and join teams addressing a range of issues which they feel passionate about. In this way, the school is recognised as a learning resource that can impart skills for life and work that go beyond the conventions of a traditional academic experience.

Upon joining the community council, members are given a training which educates them in the unique toolkit and structure of the Learning to Lead programme. Skills gained during training include team working and facilitation skills, collaborative decision making, goal setting and budgeting, reviewing and project planning and planning goal setting and budgeting. Throughout this process trainees will be educated in the meaning of accountability, transparency and governance so that they are instilled with a sense that they have a valid contribution to make as responsible members of their community.

After training, students are able to run and maintain their own teams without the need to appeal to members of staff. The issues teams choose to address differs widely, everything from dyslexia support to gardening and wildlife is represented in the community councils currently active across the country.

Different areas will of course have different matters of interest and students are incomparable in their ability to identify what needs to be done and how to do it in their own context. One of the really interesting results to come out of Learning to Lead however, is that regardless of location, a number of key themes tend to re-occur in the teams. Students almost invariably exercise a desire to benefit the whole school community and accommodate the variety contained therein. What's more, once the effects have been put in place, they tend to have a deeper and more sustainable impact as a result of the action coming from within the school rather than being fed from the top down.

What I've mentioned here is only a brief outlining of how LtoL works. As we progress we are continually shown new ways in which our initiative affects people and communities for the better, but it is all reducible to some very simple founding principles. It is not unrealistic to strive for an environment where the life skills and values we encourage are embedded into every student's learning experience. Indeed, if we are to achieve our ambitions for the future then these are essential to improving our own lives and our society at large.

For more information please email me at the address given or visit www.learningtolead.org.uk

The Learning Development Portfolio: a tool for reflecting on employability skills at the module level

Tanyasha Yearwood, Heidelberg International Business Academy

“Reflection is an essential feature of a deep approach to learning ...”
(Stefani et al., 2007: 61).

It is in light of the value of facilitating a deep approach to learning, identified by Stefani and her colleagues as having a worthwhile place within course design, that a significant change was made to the delivery of the Level Two English for Business and International Study Module at the Heidelberg International Business Academy in Germany.

The following account gives a background to the institution and the rationale for expanding the learning outcomes of the module. It then presents a glimpse into the nature of the tasks and how challenges faced by both the module tutor and the students were addressed. Finally, it briefly summarizes the benefits gained from the experience.

Background

As a small private Open University accredited provider of higher education, delivering a BA (Hons) degree programme in International Business, the challenge of implementing innovative practices which divert from the more traditional learning scenarios with which students might be familiar in their cultural context is no small one.

Having recognized the need to complement students' previously acquired knowledge of the norms of business encounters and documents, this year we aimed at providing a juncture in the English module, where students could reflect on what they had learned and how this related to their career. We would, therefore, be making the curriculum more meaningful for students by:

- situating the content of the module in a more professional context;
- avoiding the repetition and mundane approach previously adopted in business communication lessons; and
- helping them to identify the employability skills they were developing in English and mapping these and other skills across the programme.

The nature of the tasks

During the Winter Semester, students were confronted with five tasks which would form the framework of a learning development portfolio. In the first task, for example, students were asked to think about their strengths (recounting and using their responses to a simulated interview at Level One as a starting point) and consider how, at Level Two, after having completed an internship or gone abroad, they would now provide convincing evidence of these strengths. They then did a role play and wrote a reflective commentary entitled “Reflecting on my strengths





Facing the challenges

The main challenge for the module tutor was to “sell” the concept of embedding reflection on learning development within the English module. Along with discussing the authenticity of the task with the group – compiling a document in English which they could present at or use to prepare for a job interview – students could arrange a “support” tutorial. Additionally, and to help students cope with not knowing exactly what their portfolio should contain, a Portfolio Exhibition with samples of work-in-progress was organized.

Summary of benefits

As expressed by the vast majority of the students at the end of the semester, the experience of reflecting on their employability skills and the way in which they were being prepared for their future career was indeed an exercise in professional development. While some admitted that having to think about their strengths, for example, was nothing new, all agreed that having to articulate it, particularly in written form, and more so in English, was certainly worthwhile and that they could see themselves developing even as they struggled to create such a personalised document. For the module tutor, it was rewarding to be able to trace and observe students’ development as they moved from concrete tasks representing compartmentalised bits of achievement to successfully understanding, finding evidence for and detailing their learning as a holistic process

Reference:

Stefani, L., Mason, R., and Pegler, C. (2007) The educational potential of e-portfolios: Supporting personal development and reflective learning. London: Routledge.

Learner-directed learning: shifting responsibilities or developing abilities?

Dr Panos Vlachopoulos, Centre for Learning Innovation and Professional Practice, Aston University

Introduction

I argue here that the pedagogical shift from didactic, teacher-centred instruction to featuring teachers as originators and facilitators of learner-centred learning, and as fellow-learners, is integral to the major purpose of Education, that of self-fulfilment in a rich and challenging environment where individuals explore and develop in their own ways (Dewey, 1916). In current higher education contexts, however, where much learning and assessment happens through prescribed and fixed curricula (Boud, 2006) with little, if any, negotiation with the students, how can teachers scaffold their students' development of learner-directed learning skills? I base my answer on recent experiences of facilitating discussions and reflections online in a university context in New Zealand.

The context

In 2009 I moved to Massey University as Lecturer in E-learning in the College of Education. I worked for two semesters with a diverse cohort of postgraduate students studying online and at a distance. The cohort comprised twenty five students from various professional teaching backgrounds from New Zealand, Malta, Egypt and India.

My primary concern was to create the necessary atmosphere and conditions for all of us to learn from and with each other in the most meaningful way to support personal and professional aspirations. In searching for a pedagogic approach, I turned to the concept of the desirable 'ring-fence' (Vlachopoulos & Cowan, 2010) isolating learning and facilitation. I implemented this through a number of activities designed to empower autonomous online learning.

The Pedagogy: Ring-fencing learner-directed learning

The principle expressed in the ring-fence framework (Figure 1) is simple. It stems directly from my interpretation of "learner-directed learning". For if learning is to be truly learner-directed, then the learner-directed activity – set at the heart of the diagram – the decisions which matter, the interpretations placed on sourced material and experiences, should be the sole responsibility of the learners, free from pro-active inputs by teachers, however they define that title and with whatever benevolent intent.

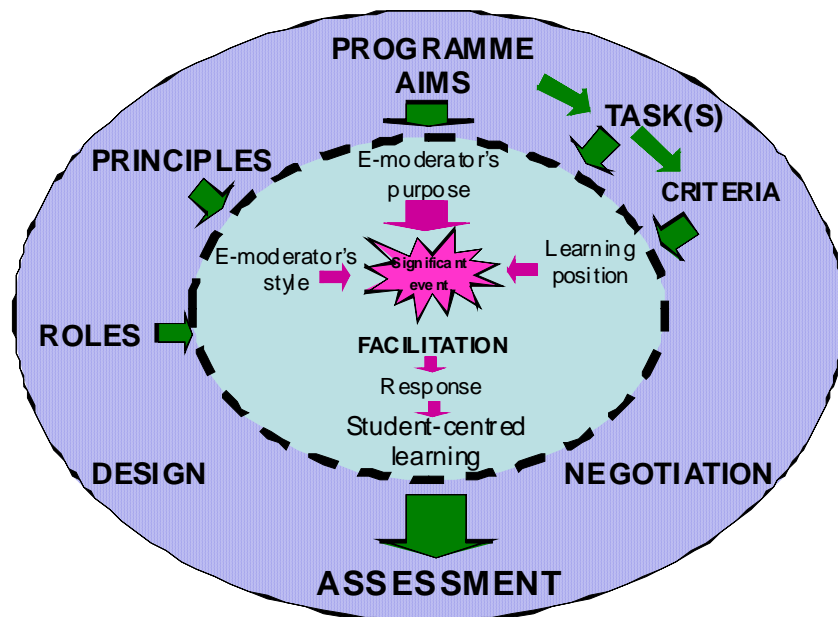
Those who are responsible for the quality and standard of student-directed educational experiences will wish to define roles and relationships, to frame tasks, to determine matters of assessment and accreditation, and to identify sources and resources to support learning. But such activity, even and perhaps especially when it entails negotiation with the students, should normally be concluded and accepted and understood by all concerned, before the learning activity begins.

Learner-directed learning

To support the development of my students within their 'ring-fenced' learning arena I employed a number of tools and activities.

1. At the outset all students review their tasks, the assessment criteria, their roles and the expectations of them. A virtual learning environment (VLE) provided the "learning space", wherein students could access resources, and develop a community through interactions with fellow learners and their facilitating tutor.

Figure 1: The Ring-fence framework (Abridged from Vlachopoulos & Cowan, 2010).



2. Initially each student negotiated a learning contract (Biggs & Tang, 2007) based on learning goals and priorities, and where possible re-negotiated aspects of the task and assessments. At the heart of each learning contract was the expectation that learner and tutor would 'monitor' progress and report to each and to fellow learners through an 'evidence-based' portfolio.
3. An e-portfolio system supported the assembly of evidence and the 'monitoring' of the contract. Students showed evidence of progress; how they were managing themselves; reflection on the relevance of materials studied; their understanding of materials, and the lessons learnt for their professional practice.
4. I was careful to avoid intervening authoritatively within the learners' own learning arena, while regularly checking 'their learning position' against the agreed learning contracts and 'monitoring' adherence to the curriculum.

Lessons learnt

1. Learner-directed learning as a power-shift from the teacher to the learner required the development of skills that enable learners to effectively exercise autonomy to learn.
2. The more autonomous the learner, the more the teacher should nevertheless exert influence in two distinct ways;
 - a. By the creation of a structure in which all are clear about the planned activities and desired development by the learner. The emphasis is on the nature of the activity, and the area of study. Particular content and activities are left to the learner who has been prepared to exercise that autonomy.
 - b. Facilitative efforts by the teacher, within the arrangements agreed at the outset, to empower the learner to be the best that they can be - meeting expectations.
3. Whether or not both sides have honoured the agreement into which they entered needs to be judged. For the student, this may be through assessment, or another way of "signing off"; for the teacher, it should be evaluation of the learning experience and of the standard of development within the agreed programme.
4. The more autonomous the learner, and the higher the level of abilities developed, the more the arrangement calls for self-assessment.



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Learning the lessons about large scale e-portfolio implementations – introducing the ePI research study

Gordon Joyes & Angela Smallwood,
University of Nottingham.
Lisa Gray, JISC UK

Although there are various instances of large-scale implementations of e-portfolios by Further and Higher Education institutions and professional organisations, knowledge of the specifics of their implementation journeys remains relatively unshared and unanalysed. To capture the lessons learnt the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) is funding the e-Portfolio Implementations (ePI) study from August 2010 to May 2011.

The ePI study, exploring large-scale implementations of e-portfolio use in Higher and Further Education and professional organisations in the UK, involves 9 participating HE institutions, 3 FE colleges and 2 professional organisations in the UK. There are also 4 Australian and 3 New Zealand participants.

The study seeks to:

- Identify a range of examples of wide scale e-portfolio implementations within HE/FE institutions and professional bodies that will inform practice/strategy;
- Gather a range of case studies to support the articulation of models of implementation;
- Develop an appropriate means of disseminating the outcomes that enables a potential user to understand the implementation issues and identify the cases that are most relevant to their own contexts.

This builds on a prior research study of over twenty e-portfolio projects funded by JISC 2007-09 as reported in the September 2010 edition of the PDP UK newsletter (Joyes & Gray, 2010) and elsewhere (Joyes et al, 2010) which revealed the complex nature of e-portfolio implementation and that there are core threshold concepts (Meyer and Land, 2003) related to this (Joyes, Gray and Hartnell-Young, 2010).

It appears that an experiential implementation journey is a necessary prerequisite for developing an understanding of the area and for successful e-portfolio adoption. Once the threshold has been passed through, a new and irreversible perspective is attained and this perhaps explains why those new to e-portfolio implementation often fail to comprehend the extensive guidance available (JISC 2006, 2008, 2008a, 2008b). The ePI study is using this threshold concepts perspective as a framework (Figure 1) to identify different 'slices' of effective e-portfolio use within twenty Higher and Further Education institutions and professional organisations in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. This provides the important contextual background evidencing effective use that is used to underpin the description of the implementation journey for each participating institution or professional organisation.

The ePI study participants have identified their institutions/ organisations as being involved with large-scale implementation of e-portfolios and have volunteered to share their practice. They are currently creating their implementation case studies within a wiki. This is supported by telephone interviews with the two ePI study researchers and small group participation in web conferences to refine each case, consider themes/ issues arising and to discuss and explore future directions. Senior managers within each institution or organisation will be interviewed in order to gain their perspectives and develop an understanding of how to present the outcomes to both practitioners and managers.



The JISC e-portfolio infoKit (2008) will contain the key outcomes of this study in the form of an ePI toolkit to support large-scale implementation. This will contain the different models of implementation that are currently emerging and case studies of practice from the UK, Australia and New Zealand, as well as a framework to support the analysis of current practice and ways forward. It is expected that the study will be able to provide exemplars of implementations that are seeking optimisation of the benefits of e-portfolios.

Further information can be found on the JISC funding call website
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/funding_calls/2010/04/eportfolio.aspx

or the ePI study website
<https://sites.google.com/site/epistudy/>

In addition outcomes will be presented at key conferences in 2011, for example, ALT-C and Eifel.

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| e-Portfolio implementation on threshold concept | Nature of implementation | Intra course - localised use only | Inter faculty/ school whole course use | Cross (intra) institution use | Extra curricular use | Inter institution use |
|--|--------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose is aligned to context to maximise benefits • Learning activity is designed to suit the purpose • Processes are supported technologically and pedagogically • Ownership is student centred • Transformation (disruption) is planned for | | For example, isolated lecturers integrating e-portfolios in a module or course | For example, a whole course or faculty implementation | For example, Personal Development Planning, Mapping of graduate attributes. | For example, Professional development of staff, Student volunteering activities | For example, Professional organisation e-portfolio use across the sector |

Figure 1: e-portfolio implementation framework

The role of the extra-curricular award in a university's Student Experience Strategy

As fees rise and students become the prime funders of their undergraduate education, universities are challenged to meet the demands of a 'value for money' culture without losing their claim to be communities of learning, in which students actively collaborate in the production of a positive student experience rather than being positioned as passive consumers.

Furthermore, as competition for graduate jobs increases, both students and employers are using engagement with extracurricular activities (ECAs) as a differentiating factor in the employment market (Norton and Thomas, 2009). This is the context for the growth of schemes to recognise students' ECAs through an additional award. For Bournemouth University (BU), the trigger to pilot our Student Development Award (SDA) in 2010/11 was the development of our Student Experience Strategy. One of its aims under the core theme of Student Communities is to ensure that students feel a valued member of the BU community. One of the vehicles for achieving this is the SDA.

In our pilot year the SDA has 63 students participating from all six academic Schools. With up to 100 places available, the SDA was aimed initially at undergraduates but some postgraduates have been accepted. We have also noted a high proportion of registrations from students from a widening participation background, which may indicate the potential for these awards to support increasing retention.

The SDA is a non-credit bearing scheme where students gain points for their ECAs. Our original list of ECAs included familiar activities offered by BU and the Students' Union, such as sports, volunteering, peer-mentoring and student representation. We also encourage students to submit details of other ECAs both within the university and externally. We assess the commitment and engagement with that activity to assign the points. The availability of independent verification of the student's engagement with the ECA is also important.

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Having achieved a minimum of 100 points, students reflect on the graduate attributes they have developed through their ECAs in order to gain the award. Our list of attributes is divided into essential, as identified by employers, which all students have to evidence and optional, from which students select five, tailored according to their individual achievements and interests.

The key aim here is to develop the student's capacity to articulate achievements gained through their ECAs in a way that captures employers' interest and indicates the student's self-awareness of skills gained.

This aligns well with the proposal by Stevenson and Clegg (2011) that ECAs can play an important role in developing students' orientation towards the future by being able to imagine their future selves attuned to employability.

Students also complete an e-portfolio containing evidence of their ECAs. This may include items such as minutes from meetings, planning documents, photographs, videos, or organisers' letters of thanks.

The SDA is co-ordinated by BU's Student and Academic Services (SAS) Directorate. Students are allocated a staff mentor who is available for individual discussions about progress. This is regarded as a developmental opportunity for staff who would not normally have frontline contact with students and enables them to gain a wider view of their role in the student experience, as well as providing important support for the student.

Decisions on students' completed portfolios are ratified by the Award Advisory Board. In addition to professional and academic staff, membership of this includes the Students' Union and representatives from employers and the third sector. The student gains a certificate and a document similar to a degree transcript which lists all the ECAs they have completed. Prizes provided by employers are awarded to the most outstanding candidates.

Looking beyond the pilot year, a full evaluation of the costs incurred and benefits derived from the SDA is underway. These, together with feedback from students, the Students' Union, staff and employers, will form the basis for decisions about further development of the SDA and its future sustainability.

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Portfolios for creativity and self-expression

Charlotte Betts, SCEPTre, University of Surrey

Background

SCEPTre, University of Surrey launched a pilot Award for students in 2010. The Surrey Lifewide Learning Award was designed to recognise the lifewide learning (Jackson, 2008) students gain in addition to their academic studies through a wide variety of activities including: volunteering, part time work, mentoring, involvement in societies, travel, sport and many more.

Students that participated in the Award produced reflective portfolios describing their experiences and what they had learnt from them. The freedom to choose is a foundation principle for the Award and this extended to the choice of portfolio, students could choose the medium and format for example; portfolio, blog, handmade sketchbook or scrapbook, diary, video diary or digital story, PowerPoint or even a 'shoebox'. Table 1 shows the portfolio media and formats chosen by students completing the Lifewide Learning Award in October 2010 and March 2011.

| | |
|--|---|
| 'Shoebox' literally a physical container into which representations of learning are deposited and explained | 0 |
| Handwritten diary essentially text based – could be a word document | 9 |
| Scrapbook containing text, photos, drawings and diagrams, and other artifacts like tickets/ mementos of events | 8 |
| PowerPoint | 1 |
| Digital story | 1 |
| Blog or wiki | 6 |
| E portfolio | 1 |
| Personal website | 1 |
| Mixed media - part physical part virtual | 1 |

Table 1 Categorization of portfolios submitted for the Lifewide Learning Award n=28 (Jackson, Betts and Willis in press)

The portfolios, which required considerable effort to produce, demonstrated the creativity and dedication with which they had been made and the depth of learning acquired through the process. In response to these rich and diverse examples it has been of interest to explore some of the factors that appeared to inspire a sense of ownership, empowerment and motivation for those taking part.

Reflective Portfolios

Portfolios can capture reflection on a wide range of experiences and allow the learner to collate a 'purposeful aggregation' of items (Sutherland & Powell, 2007, in JISC, 2007, p.7). The Award encouraged individuals to use their unique combinations of experiences as a resource for reflection and did not determine set experiences for inclusion, similarly, students retained autonomy over the format or style of portfolio produced.

Among the submissions, blogs and ePortfolios allowed for a mix of technologies to be included like audio and video. One student enjoyed the immediacy of being able to record spoken reflection on to a phone in a moment's inspiration and then send it directly to a blog from the phone. Some students used innovative prompts to initiate their reflection: including past Facebook announcements as a basis for deeper reflection. Seeing how people mix and adapt these technologies demonstrates the advantages of a virtual portfolio, its immediacy and accessibility, which is useful in maintaining engagement and interaction.

Although a number of students chose digital platforms, a significant proportion opted for creating a handmade journal which gave them a sense of freedom and relief from their technology heavy courses and lives, they spoke of how they looked forward to returning to it and felt a sense of pride in doing something creative that could be kept to look back on or shown to people. These beautifully presented creative scrapbooks or sketchbooks with images: photographic and hand drawn, decorations, supporting artefacts, mementos and writing, demonstrated the time and attention that had gone in to their production and the enthusiasm with which the learners were engaging with the task.

The portfolios were manifestations of creativity, the process of gathering and collating materials, particularly as an artistic and crafting pursuit was rewarding and as one student said 'gave me permission to be creative in ways I had stopped being creative' and. 'gave everything a little bit more significance'. The storytelling occurring in many portfolios was rich in metaphor; one student described how a series of passport photos represented not only physical change over time but the journey taken through the portfolio.

Conclusion

Porter and Cleland (1995) discuss the need for students to have control over their portfolios and the importance of allowing them to determine the artefacts they include; it is this very process of exploring, interpreting and reflecting upon the rationale behind the choices of items (Irons, 2008) that allows for review and development and provides a space for meaning making. By fostering a sense of ownership, learners become the author of their own story.

The ability to make one's own choices is empowering and motivating and it is in the freedom to choose that the learner is able to construct their views and learn about their beliefs and values. In this context it seemed paramount that the element of choice extended not only to the content selection but also to the style in which the portfolio was presented and that this became a significant emblem of individualism and self-actualisation for the student; by articulating their capabilities, skills and values, learners' developed a greater sense of *self-authorship* (Baxter-Madgolda, 2001), a sense of autonomy over the construction of their own identity and ideas.

Further details will be provided in a book 'Learning for a Complex World: A lifewide concept of learning, education and personal development' to be published by Authorhouse later this year. Visit www.surrey.ac.uk/sceptre for further information.

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‘IMPLEMENTING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT REPORT: What’s it got to do with us?’

Wednesday 18th May 2011

12.30 pm – 1.30 pm

Venue: ONLINE – REMOTE ACCESS

Contact Cath Hewson, cath@recordingachievement.org for more details

Incorporating Personal Development Planning and e-portfolio use into curriculum design

Bath Spa University

Tuesday, 24 May 2011, 10:30 - 15:45

A regional workshop programme delivered by the Centre for Recording Achievement with support from the Higher Education Academy

This practical workshop will consider:-

Why PDP matters even more in the post-Browne world.

What’s already there in the curriculum?

How to design new practice in - to curriculum units, to longer elements, to the achievement of overall curriculum outcomes.

How to ensure such practice - and the outcomes of such practice - become explicit to students and can be used by them in relation to further learning and progression.

Contact : Cath Hewson cath@recordingachievement.org

DATE FOR DIARIES!

The 11th Residential Seminar of the Centre for Recording Achievement,

Thursday 24th & Friday 25th November 2011

University of Aston, Lakeside Birmingham

ePIC 2011, the 9th international ePortfolio & Identity Conference

11th -13th July 2011, at the Savoy Place, London

Should everybody have an ePortfolio? How do ePortfolios contribute to the identity construction process? How do ePortfolios support the acquisition of 21st century skills? How do ePortfolios support lifelong learning, orientation and employability? Why are ePortfolio mostly still non-interoperable?

Early bird discount until 15 May 2011!

For more information contact Esther Linley, esther.linley@iosf.org
tel +33 3 8643 1343



Delegate fees (except speakers and students)

| | 3 days | 2 days | 1 day | Social Dinner (12 July) |
|-----------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|----------------------------|
| Regular registration | 800 € | 650 € | 450 € | 50 € |
| Early bird discount (1) | - 100 € | - 75 € | - 50 € | N/A |
| Additional delegate (2) | - 100 € | - 75 € | - 50 € | N/A |
| IoS and EifEL Member discount (3) | - 100 € | - 75 € | - 50 € | N/A |