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More than a tool: Integrating the 'teacher voice' into an ePortfolio using the Three-layered PDP model

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Abstract

Personal Development Planning (PDP) was developed as a structured process to enable learners to reflect on their own learning, to record achievement and to plan for personal, academic and career development (QAA, 2009). PDP has been associated with ePortfolios as a means to support the pedagogical functions of PDP (Ward & Strivens, 2010, Toner & McDowall, 2015). Different approaches have been implemented in numerous UK higher education (HE) institutions (Strivens, 2007).

This paper describes an innovative approach to the design and use of ePortfolios exemplified in the implementation of PDP using the dynamic interplay of three elements: the *Three-layered PDP Model*. In this model PDP is closely interwoven with two other elements: a learning ePortfolio and scaffolding activities. The paper discusses how this model is different from previous uses of ePortfolios and it explains the pedagogical rationale behind this model.

This study took place within the context of the Open University (OU), one of the largest universities in the UK which is dedicated to distance education. The study reports on two pilot studies and the data gathered using this *Three-layered PDP Model*. It finishes by evaluating the model and suggesting some further steps.

Background and context

The Open University

Not only one of the largest universities in the UK with around 175,000 students, The Open University in the UK (OU) is dedicated to distance education. As such, the OU's approach to learning and teaching is necessarily specific to this context. The Student Charter (Open University, 2018a) states:

“As staff members of an academic community, we [...] aim to support each student in a way that is appropriate for them to develop as an engaged and independent learner or researcher; develop and take advantage of new technologies which enable people to learn in a way that meets their individual needs [...]; actively support the student to achieve positive personal and career development outcomes [...]” (Open University, 2018a, p.5)

What does this mean in practice? OU students study at a distance using skills and knowledge developed through activities, resources and tools provided via module websites and, in some cases, sent through the post. The modules are designed and produced by a central team comprising academics, learning designers, media specialists, tutors and, in some cases, students. One main teaching experience of OU students is through the learning materials themselves, where the ‘teacher voice’ is incorporated in the learning materials (Coleman & Vialleton, 2011), as well as through tutors with whom students have contact via asynchronous and synchronous means and, in some cases, face-to-face settings. OU students are therefore taught through specifically crafted activities that have to be explicit enough to enable independent learning at a distance, as well as taught more directly by people: the ‘teacher voice’ is key.

The OU is currently exploring ways to help students become more aware of connections between their learning, personal contexts and employability. In this context, the authors were part of the team designing and producing new Level 2¹ language modules for the BA (Honours) Language Studies (Open University, 2018b). While it was agreed that Personal Development Planning (PDP) should be incorporated, the question was how.

¹ Level 2 sits mid-way through the OU Bachelor's Degree pathway and equates approximately to Year 2 of a full-time three-year Bachelor's Degree. The Degree comprises 360 credits and students need to acquire 120 credits at Level 2, which they do through selecting from a range of modules each comprising 60 or 30 credits.

What is Personal Development Planning (PDP)?

The origins of PDP and Progress Files² can be traced back to a number of macro-socio-political and pedagogical debates that took place in the UK around 2000-2001 (Dearing Report, 1997; Clegg, 2004) and work before that on learning logs and personal development within the Enterprise in Higher Education initiative³, for example. The main aim was to put the autonomous learner at the centre of Higher Education (HE) policy and practice.

The original guidelines developed to support the implementation of the HE Progress File (Quality Assurance Agency [QAA], 2001) make it a recommendation that students are provided with opportunities for PDP and guidance to support the process. In addition, the Generic Centre of the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) in the UK produced guides which emphasized the importance of improving students' understanding of how they are learning, of offering students an opportunity to develop a holistic overview of their course, of enabling them to reflect critically and become more independent and encouraging students to consider actively their academic, extracurricular activity and career opportunities (Houghton & Maddocks, 2005).

The definition this paper will use is that PDP is a “structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and /or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development” (QAA, 2001, 2009). The concept of *process* is central to this paper, as well as the fact that it is a *structured* process and that learners are *supported* through this process. We will return to these fundamental points later.

A systematic review of the effectiveness of PDP in improving student learning was carried out by a team from the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) centre in 2003 (Gough *et al.*, 2003). After reviewing 157 studies the researchers found that these demonstrated that the use of PDP had a positive impact on student learning in terms of outcomes and student approaches to learning (Gough *et al.*, 2003).

ePortfolio? Yes, but what sort?

Over the last decade ePortfolios have become an increasingly common component of HE programmes, serving as constructivist learning spaces where students can reflect on their learning journeys, where they can be assessed, collect their work and demonstrate their

² Progress Files comprise three elements: (1) a transcript which is the formal and accredited record of a student's achievements (2) a personal record of learning and achievements (3) PDP.

³ The Enterprise in Higher Education initiative, funded by the UK Government's Department for Employment, ran between 1987 and 1996 and aimed to increase the effectiveness of HE in preparing students for working life.

achievements to potential employers (Pengrum & Oakley, 2017). The recent saliency of ePortfolios has been stressed (Chaudhuri & Cabau, 2017) as they are demonstrating in different contexts and across disciplines how they might fit with institutional objectives as well as allowing for a greater personalisation of learning. As Pengrum and Oakley state:

“It is suggested that ePortfolios may have a role to play in supporting a shift away from today’s administratively oriented, pedagogically limited learning management systems (LMSs), and towards personal learning environments (PLEs) where students can engage in more individualised, autonomous learning practices” (Pengrum & Oakley, 2017, p.21).

Within this context there has been a good deal of research carried out over the years into the use of an ePortfolio to support PDP (Strivens, 2007). The QAA refers to the use of ePortfolios to structure and support learning in its PDP guidelines (QAA, 2009) and evidence suggests the suitability of ePortfolios to foster the process of PDP (Toner & McDowall, 2015; Marais and Perkins, 2012; Orsini-Jones, 2006; Cotterill et al., 2010). Consequently, in order to implement PDP in our languages modules the question was not ‘if’ we wanted an ePortfolio, but ‘what type’ of ePortfolio we were going to use.

In their comprehensive review of PDP and ePortfolios, Ward and Strivens (2010) state the strong tendency of UK HE institutions to use an ePortfolio to support PDP. Exploring UK university websites suggests they provide a range of ePortfolio tools for students to use, including PebblePad⁴ and Mahara⁵; and this was confirmed by the various discussions at the recent *ePortfolios & More* Conference (CRA/AAEEBL, 2018) which the authors attended. Despite this, there is little information openly available regarding the effectiveness of each tool in relation to PDP, and in relation to supporting language students.

In fact, the term ‘ePortfolio’ can mean different things. While the overarching concept from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) (n.d.), is that an ePortfolio is a collection of digital artefacts created and collected by students as a record of their learning achievements, the term ‘ePortfolio’ can also refer to both product and process (JISC, 2008). Further, different types of ePortfolio have been identified such as Showcase, Development, Reflective and Assessment (Stefani *et al*, 2007) and Workspace or Showcase (Barrett, 2010).

In relation to PDP, the use of ePortfolios has been understood as a tool or as vehicle to support the processes involved in Personal Development Planning, such as recording, reflection and planning. Ward and Strivens (2010) suggest that one development of

⁴ Pebblepad: <https://www.pebblepad.co.uk/>

⁵ Mahara: <https://mahara.org/>

ePortfolio systems in relation to PDP has been in the direction of providing templates to guide the learner into producing a reflective statement, record or commentary, although the templates are arguably not 'part of the e-Portfolio itself' (Ward & Strivens, 2010, p.10).

Taking into account the different types of portfolios, regarding PDP we were particularly interested in Development and Reflective ePortfolios as these match the main principles and pedagogical framework of PDP, which is based on a learner-centred approach (Peters, 2010).

Designing a tailored learning ePortfolio for PDP: more than a tool

As mentioned above, a theme that often recurs in the literature is that an ePortfolio is a tool. This may range from a storage tool (Grant, 2009) to a more complex supporting tool (Strivens & Ward, 2010). To meet the requirements of the OU's learning and teaching approach, the authors felt a tool alone would not suffice. We needed to enable our students 'to develop as an engaged and independent learner' as per the OU Student Charter (Open University, 2018a) and which aligns with the QAA 2009 definition of PDP.

It has been suggested that ePortfolios facilitate "deep learning as they allow students to achieve a contextual understanding of their learning" (Haverkam & Vogt, 2015). It has also been suggested that by fostering connections across learning areas and learning experiences, ePortfolios may help students build a more holistic sense of their learning journey (Martin 2013).

These pedagogical benefits of using an ePortfolio were crucial when designing an ePortfolio to support PDP for OU students. In addition, the authors needed to enable their students to 'learn in a way that meets their individual needs, providing a flexible method of learning' (Open University, 2018c). Being able to access their learning portfolio 'on the go', perhaps making plans in their lunch break at work or reviewing progress while taking time out between modules to raise a family, in addition to being able to take their portfolio with them after completing their studies, meant that Kim *et al.*'s (2010) recommendation of a cloud-based approach for ePortfolios caught our attention, encouraging us to think beyond tools that are specifically called an 'ePortfolio'.

Learning Design has long been a key element of OU pedagogy with regard to the design of modules and activities (Open University, 2018d). Outside the OU, the importance of Learning Design in supporting student engagement with ePortfolios and PDP has been

researched by many. For example, one approach, taken by Hush (2012), was to create entire PDP modules as ‘bookends’ to a degree. A different approach proposed by Baker *et al.* (2014) was to provide PDP resources within a course; yet another approach from Howes *et al.* (2011) involved a structure being put inside the ePortfolio.

However, as these studies do not result in an obvious single recommendation, the authors needed to investigate the best way to structure the ePortfolio-type tool and provide guidance to their students.

The Three-Layered PDP Model

The particular challenges we faced to implement PDP in our modules was to communicate with students – at a distance – the complex concept of PDP, what it was for and how to work with it in a user-friendly and motivating manner.

We ran two pilot studies with volunteer students on undergraduate language modules. The results from the first pilot fed into the second one. Not having the possibility to have face to face sessions with students to explain how to work with PDP, we created a ‘bridge website’ where all the information, templates and activities were accessible. The website also contained support forums and a video conference facility using Adobe Connect.

As a result of the pilot studies we propose a new model to support students in PDP – the Three-layered PDP model as shown in Figure 1.

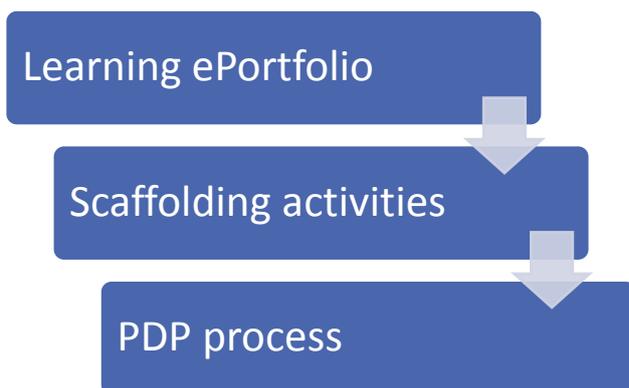


Figure 1: The Three-layered PDP model

The Three-layered model comprises three closely interwoven elements:

1. The process of PDP

2. The use of a personal learning ePortfolio
3. The use of scaffolding activities.

We will take each of these in turn:

PDP process

According to Gough et al. (2003) the primary objective for PDP is to improve the capacity of individuals to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning. PDP helps students:

- “to become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners
- to understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context
- to improve their general skills for study and career management
- to articulate personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement
- to encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life.” (Gough et al., 2003, p.8-9)

One key element of PDP, then, is that it is a process (QAA, 2009). Like McEntee (2013), the OU defines five stages of this process, as seen in Figure 2, provided to students via the OU Help centre in the section entitled ‘Develop your career’ (Open University, 2018b).

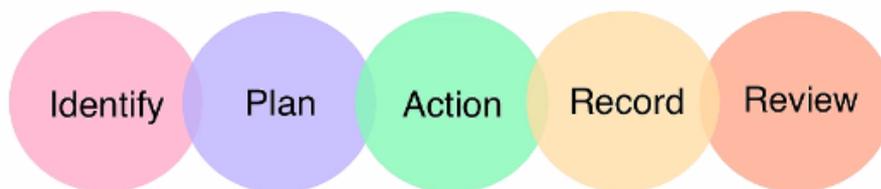


Figure 2: Stages within the OU PDP process

While QAA (2009) suggests a cyclical process or learning cycle in relation to PDP, based on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model, other authors (Jackson, 2005) have pointed out that Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) provides a research-based explanation of the processes that underlie PDP and helps us understand the dispositions, thinking and behaviours that PDP promotes.

There are different models of SRL. According to the cyclical model proposed by Zimmermann (2000) there are three phases in SRL: Forethought, Performance and Self-reflection, as can be seen in Figure 3. These phases closely match the PDP functions:

- Forethought – (Identifying / Planning)
- Performance – (Action, Recording)
- Self-reflection – (Reviewing, Evaluating).

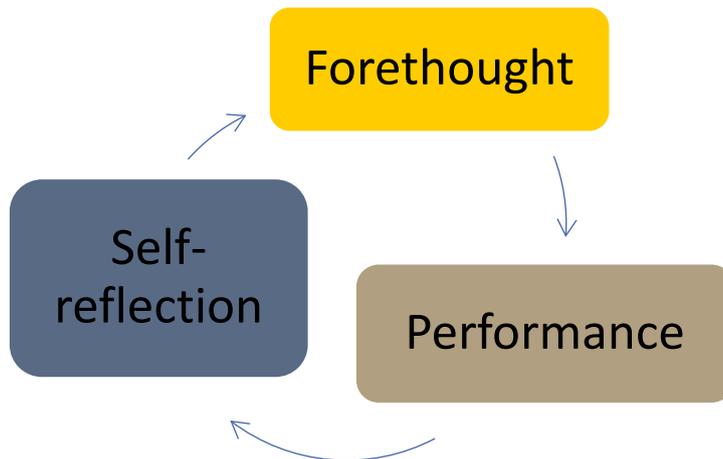


Figure 3: The three phases of SRL

A second key element of PDP is that its holistic framework comprises three overlapping areas of students' learning: personal, academic, and career and employability (Figure 4). This relates to the QAA's (2009) definition of PDP as a process undertaken by students to reflect on their own learning and to plan for their personal, educational and career development. It is an inclusive process.

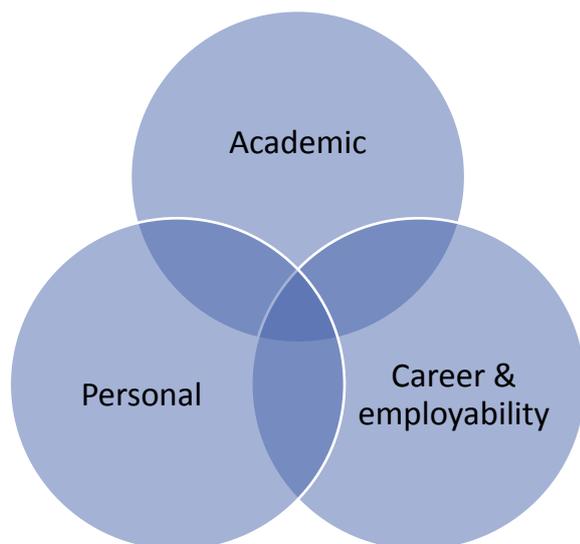


Figure 4: The three overlapping areas of PDP – academic, personal, and career and employability

Atlay (2009) considers the importance of the student being the owner of the PDP process and sees PDP as a mediation process, as a bridge between learning and career. As a matter of fact, this bridging role of PDP between academic and career has had an impact in the different ways that PDP has been implemented in UK universities (Quinton & Smallbone, 2008), as there is no clear consensus over where the responsibility for PDP fits within a university. Despite this, for our research, the fact that the PDP process should be owned by the student was absolutely fundamental.

The use of scaffolding activities

The variety and richness regarding PDP implementation has also been documented by Rob Ward and colleagues with numerous case studies from UK Universities (Ward, 2009). The way we designed the activities was following an embedded modular model as recommended by Atlay (2009):

“These modules provide the main support for PDP and may serve to link with material studied in other modules. They will also link to the student’s Progress File. Such modules may have a skills and/or a subject focus as well as emphasising PDP processes” (Atlay, 2009, p.24).

Therefore the particular emphasis of our PDP approach was to enable students to see connections, and to reflect on and experience the benefits of linking the three areas (career, academic and personal) in terms of common and overlapping goals and how they interrelate with the functions ‘identify, plan, record, review’.

We used the pilots to explore the role of learning design, in terms of scaffolding and support provided to students. This included:

- The activities
- The ePortfolio tool.

Figure 5 shows an extract from one of the activities. It was provided via the bridge website. Note the structure which reflects the PDP process. Structuring the activities in this way was found to be effective in the first pilot (Perez Cavana & Lowe, 2017).

Step A. Identify

1. You are going to start evaluating the extent to which you have achieved the objectives of L226 Unit 1, Section 1. You will rate your current competence for each descriptor provided from 0–2 (where 0 = 'I don't remember how to do this', 1 = 'I need more practice' and 2 = 'I am confident'). The descriptors are provided

[...]

Step B. Plan

1. If you have identified any of the objectives as 0 or 1, make a plan as to how you might improve your competence. This might include returning to the activity where this objective was explained and/or practised, and revising it. This step is very useful to work on your weaknesses. For example, if you are not confident about

[...]

Step C. Record

Being aware of your weaknesses or the aspects you want to develop is very important, but so is being aware of your strengths, your achievements and all that you now know.

Under the tab 'Record' in 'My PDP' you can start collecting evidence of what you have done and what you have achieved in this unit. For example, if you have written a

[...]

Step D. Review

In this step you will reflect on your achievements, and also at a more general level, on how this module and the competences you are developing are helping you to reach your wider objectives.

1. Before writing your reflection, have a look again at the page 'Relating objectives' under 'Identify' that you completed in Activity 1. Try to see how the objectives you

[...]

Figure 5: extract of a scaffold activity clearly denoting the PDP stages

The use of a personal learning ePortfolio

Through successive pilots we have designed and refined our learning ePortfolio prototype. For the first pilot we used an ePortfolio developed by the University of Bremen called *EPOS*. Originally designed as a languages ePortfolio following the structure of the European Languages Portfolio, we adapted EPOS specifically for PDP at the OU by integrating the pedagogical functions (identify, plan, record, review) in the main tabs (see Figure 6) in order to facilitate the visualization of the pedagogical process involved in PDP.



Figure 6: Tabs created within EPOS ePortfolio tool (Pilot A) to match the OU PDP process

The rationale behind inserting these PDP functions in the ePortfolio was twofold: one was cognitive, to help to understand what PDP is about, and one was practical, to facilitate the factual work with PDP (learning by doing)

At the time of the second pilot study, the OU was starting to provide students with Microsoft Office 365, a cloud-based suite of tools including OneNote. This aligned to Kim *et al.*'s (2010) proposal mentioned above in Section 2. We therefore piloted the use of OneNote as a means of supporting students in their PDP.

As advocated by Howes *et al.* (2011), we provided a **structure** within the 'ePortfolio' through the creation of a template in OneNote which we then made available to the students. Once set up with Office 365, students installed the OneNote template on their own devices. They had a choice of desktop version and cloud-based, potentially syncing the two and using both depending on their location and device to hand.

The template was a simplified version of the EPOS ePortfolio used in Pilot A (Figure 7) but maintaining the idea of the tabs to provide guidance through the stages of PDP (Identify, Plan, Record, Review). Under each of the tabs was space, in some cases with minimal scaffolding in the form of frameworks or prompt questions, and in other cases, space for students to use as they wish.

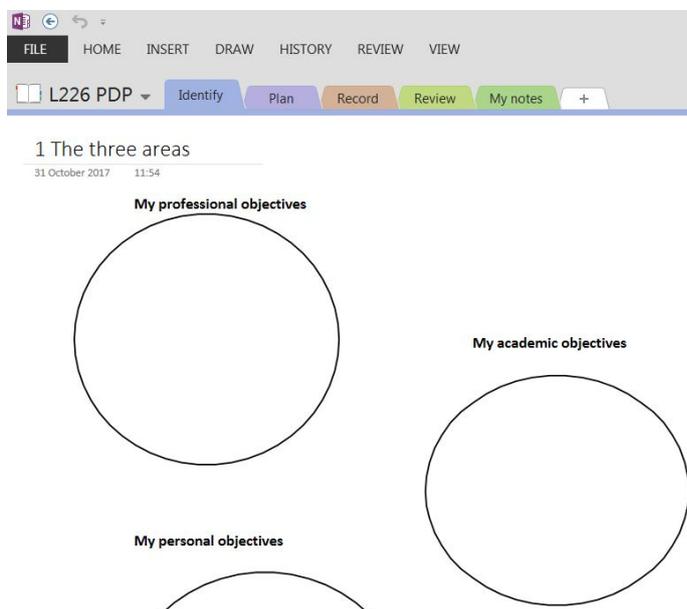


Figure 7: Tabs created within OneNote (Pilot B) to match the OU PDP process, based on the success of Pilot A.

Data Collection: the two pilots

Our data collection was based on the two pilot studies carried out with OU language students mentioned above: Pilot A which ran from February to May 2017, and Pilot B which ran over two weeks in November 2017. Table 1 provides a comparative overview.

	Pilot A	Pilot B
Participants	Level 1 L161 Exploring languages and culture students (11 completed responses)	Level 2 Spanish alumni (15 completed responses)
ePortfolio tool	EPOS (Mahara-based ePortfolio developed by the University of Bremen, Germany)	OneNote template (desktop and online versions, part of Microsoft Office 365)
PDP activities	3 Activities. Each of them with a special focus on: Academic, Personal or Career	2 Activities. Activity 1 focused on the three areas (Academic, personal, career) Activity 2 focused on the self-regulation cycle (identify, plan, record, review) whilst relating the current studies with career and personal goals.
Data collection	Pre-survey questionnaire, post-survey questionnaire, open comments, interviews	Pre-survey questionnaire, post-survey questionnaire, open comments, interviews

Table 1: A comparison of Pilot A and Pilot B.

We used a pre- and post-survey online questionnaire. 52 students were invited to take part in both pilots by email and at the end of the surveys we collected 21 end-of-pilot survey responses (40.3 % response rate). Due to the low number of participants the quantitative

data in terms of percentages are not significant. However as the questionnaires were semi-structured we collected a significant number of open comments. We also carried out 11 in-depth interviews with students. It should also be noted that, despite the low numbers, the student profiles reflected a typical range of OU language students.

Findings

The Three-Layered Model of PDP enabled distance students to understand and experience a complex but very useful way of working, and to relate it holistically to their learning and to themselves as learners.

Students responded very positively to the Three-Layered Model: it guided them through the PDP process. One student said *“I did find the format of this PDP to be more in depth than previous PDP’s I have completed before”*. The students perceived that it helped them to make connections with their modules and other modules they were studying, and to develop their awareness and confidence of more effective approaches to learning. Students acknowledged the need to invest time and effort in PDP, and that it was worthwhile engaging with it.

One student wrote: *“You have to go through the activities to see the benefits of it. The more you use it, the more benefits you will get out of it”*.

In the following we have grouped the comments around three main areas as they emerged from the interviews and open comments in the online surveys. We will discuss each in turn.

The Three-Layered Model enabled students to:

1. Develop Self-Regulated Learning
2. Increase motivation
3. Develop a different view of their studies and themselves.

Developing Self-Regulated Learning

Students reported that working with PDP enabled them to develop new competences. In particular they developed a sense of responsibility in relation to their learning. They were able to relate PDP to their life and to making progress in meeting personal goals. These new competences included the ability to identify their skills, the ability to critically reflect, to recognise things of importance and the ability to carry out self-analysis. They were able to give more in-depth responses and be more focussed on their study. One student said *“It does make me think about how I learn and it makes me think where I want to go with my modules... I’m taking control of my learning rather than just going with the flow”*.

Students developed a new awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, and of their limitations. They felt that their ability to clarify and identify weaknesses and strengths made their goals more achievable as they could see where they were going and how to get there. In this sense some students reported that PDP “gave them self-confidence”. They were able to identify where improvement was needed, and that made them feel more confident and focused as they realised the relevance of the activities. Having a better understanding of what they were doing and why was deemed helpful. Just the fact of understanding and realising made it more relevant for the students when looking into their goals and tasks, being able to define exactly what they wanted, and revealed that these goals were more achievable. They also had the experience that when you learn to plan, goals seem to be more manageable and easier to reach. One student commented: *“The more conscious you are of your strengths, weaknesses and what experience has taught you, the more likely you are to make informed choices about what to pursue.”*

Students felt that working with PDP was enabling and helpful in different areas. One aspect was in relation to managing their learning: it enabled them to revise and improve further, it also helped them to orientate their thinking towards module content. Working with PDP enabled them to develop their metacognition, and it helped them to critically analyse, carry out self-evaluations and review. It also helped them to organize their learning, to manage their time and make informed choices. One student wrote *“Some skills I had not previously been able to describe, and by seeing them written down in activities I was able to look at them from different perspectives.”*

The students perceived that PDP allowed them to see connections between different goals and different areas of their lives – personal, academic and professional. Thinking about their goals in relation to each of the three areas and then seeing how the goals interrelate was an unexpected experience for some of the students as they had not had this opportunity before.

They also realized how working towards one particular objective enhances the achievement of other objectives because they are often connected. In relation to this, two students wrote: *“Understanding connections of efforts can help achieve goals”; “I guess it was both motivating and as a consequence useful to become a more effective learner. It was interesting to see how one simple exercise could change the way of thinking and made me realise how connected the objectives are.”*

The activities were divided into four steps: (A) Identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to the learning objectives; (B) Plan how to improve what was identified as a weak point; (C) Record evidence of strong points; and (D) Review the whole learning process. This step by step approach used in the PDP activities was perceived as very useful by most of the students (9 out of 10). One student wrote *“Interesting to break down in smaller mini-activities or mini-challenges. A good tool for future use”*.

Increasing motivation

Different aspects of motivation were reported by students when describing their experiences working with PDP. For example, working with a new tool can increase motivation. Being able to see their own goals clearly and realise that they are achievable. Being able to revisit the initial reasons for study. Being able to set out what they want to get out of their learning journey. Reflecting on goals and understanding them, as well as the experience of becoming a more effective learner were deemed motivating. The fact that PDP helps to make their learning goals clearer and more tangible motivates students to achieve them. One student said: *“It enables you to collect the evidence of competencies, achievements, feedback to look back [at] when you feel slightly demotivated or in need of a push.”*

Students felt that putting everything in one place was a big advantage, as it helped them to develop and link their goals and experiences. Students also felt that the ePortfolio helped to structure their thinking. Being able to link self-evaluation and planning in EPOS was deemed very useful. It was also considered very useful in relation to employability, such as being able to articulate and present capabilities to an employer, and to apply for a job. One student wrote: *“I think that the ePortfolio is a great idea and enables you to put a full breakdown of your skills, development goals and experience in one place. Excellent for job applications and being able to better articulate your abilities to an employer.”*

Developing a different view of their studies and themselves

Different perspectives

Working with PDP allowed students to see things from a different perspective. It showed them that there are many reasons to study, and it is possible to envisage and consider a career plan. They were able to make links between working independently and managing

their time. It encouraged them to expand their thinking when completing assessment tasks and it showed them the advantages of this type of 'linking thinking' rather than considering the module materials in isolation. This was mind opening.

One student wrote about how working with PDP was life-changing for him: *"I wasn't expecting much from PDP, but I am so happy that I participated [in the pilot]. I was able to think about things I haven't thought [about] before. I started studying to escape from a difficult situation in my life and to keep my head busy, but through PDP I realised that I can make plans and relate to what I really want for my future. [...] I am going to do my degree in languages to become a language teacher."*

Seeing the bigger picture

A number of words related to 'seeing' were used to express how PDP enabled students to achieve clarity about different aspects of their learning, their strengths and their weaknesses. It enabled them to see the bigger picture in relation to their goals, keep track of progress and think about what to focus on.

One student wrote about their experience: *"It allows us as a student to see what we are capable of, what we have achieved and what we are competent in"*.

The 'bigger picture' seems to refer to the fact that through PDP students develop the ability to look at the wider context of their learning, it broadens their field. It has to do with remembering why they are undertaking the module and connecting it with their long-term goals, but also with having a better understanding of the aspects they need to improve. One student commented: *"Identifying the goals and aims, breaking them into different categories and then seeing the bigger picture would allow me to better focus on the weak parts and find tools and strategies to improve them."*

Sense of direction

Students also reported that having a clear structured path helped with orientation, a 'reminder' about their learning objectives and their learning path. For example, *"Reflection can serve as a reminder when you lose your way on the learning journey and gives you motivation to keep going"*.

The different steps of PDP helped them to learn how to be methodical in approaching their learning. One student wrote: *"Method helps focus on what you have achieved and what is still to do"*; another student said: *"I think the PDP will help students to adopt a more structured and systematic way of talking about their studies; it shows you how to be methodical so that you set out a study plan and regularly review your own progress as you learn"*.

Discussion

While the concept of PDP is not new nor the idea of using an ePortfolio to support it, nor indeed using scaffolding, what is new in the three-layered model bringing together these three elements. The OU context and its pedagogic approach informed and influenced our approach to PDP and to ePortfolios. We integrated the OU pedagogy into the ePortfolio, going beyond the mere instrumentalisation of ePortfolios and incorporated the 'teacher voice'.

The three elements in the three-layered model – ePortfolio, scaffolding activities and PDP process – are very much inter-related. This model worked with the two different ePortfolio tools: once students had set up their EPOS or OneNote account and accessed the template, they were able to start working with the activities. One clear finding from the pilots was the importance of the first activity. This first activity illustrated the whole PDP cycle (identify, plan, record, review) in order to allow students to experiment and get a sense of being in control of their learning. It guided students through the different steps of PDP using the tabs in their EPOS or OneNote ePortfolio. Each step was clearly explained in relation to the PDP principles, in relation to the module they were studying and their broader life context, and with guidance about how to reflect on or record the activity using their EPOS or OneNote ePortfolio. We learnt from the EPOS pilot and made the first activity in the OneNote pilot even more specific about the steps in the PDP process.

A second and important lesson learnt from the EPOS pilot was that an ePortfolio tool that is unfamiliar to students and relatively complicated to use can distract students from the process of PDP itself. One of the advantages of using OneNote was that it is very easy to customize by the users. Under the tabs and in their personal space, students were able to enter their thoughts as text, in paragraphs, in tables, in lists. They could upload photos of work done or inspirations, upload audio/video recordings of themselves reflecting, upload their assignments containing tutor feedback. They could make use of check boxes to help prioritise and to keep track of progress. Finally, as a tool potentially used outside of the academic sphere – in daily life and in the workplace – OneNote supports the very essence of PDP in promoting the transfer of skills, knowledge and experience from one aspect of life to another.

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