

Integrating Personal Development Planning (PDP) into a module for 1st Year Sociology students

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Origin of project

This case study concerns the introduction of PDP into a first year module called 'Studying the social world' for sociology students in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Southampton run in 2004. It was delivered by a member of Sociology staff team and supported by a staff member from the University wide Centre for Learning and Teaching.

Purpose

The intention was to integrate PDP elements into a first year module for Sociology students, but that PDP would also permeate across other Year 1 modules.

Envisaged outcomes

It was felt that by embedding the process of reflection that supports PDP within a subject specific context this would make it more meaningful, achievable and relevant to students. It was felt that in turn this applied approach would enhance the quality of the portfolio material and associated activities.

Preparation and Support Developmental issues

- PDP portfolio building process planned in 2 stages for Semester 1 and Semester 2
- Portfolio document given out with guidance and areas to be covered. These include:
 - Review of prior experiences
 - Expectations of Higher education
 - Why sociology/social policy
 - Personal learning resources
 - First impressions
 - Goal setting for the course
 - Longer term aspirations.

Course in action

- Use of Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard) to
 - provide information
 - downloadable versions of the portfolio documentation
 - online quizzes about student progress, the results of which were collated and shared in group
- activities as learning resources – to enable individual students to compare their answers with those of the whole group and to use these as the basis for further discussion
- CV assessment, supported by lecture on CV production
- Oral group presentations
- Reflective account of writing of first essay

Review

Positive outcomes

- Quality of group oral presentations high
- Reflective discussions and assignment enabled airing of students' concerns about essay writing
- Use of quizzes as learning resources for discussion successful

Challenges

- Aspects of the PDP elements were not valued, as represented by low attendance at lecture about CVs
- Anticipated input from other academics did not emerge
- Due to staff sickness portfolio building work in semester 2 did not happen so continuity and progression not resolved
- To strike balance between reflection and introspection
- Opportunity to access views of students via focus group or questionnaires was not taken up
- Managing different levels and types of experience that younger and mature students may bring to the discussion and how to ensure that younger students feel their contribution is valid and valuable.

Next steps

- For PDP to work it must speak directly to the course/subject that the student is taking as this where the student's interest/identity is situated. This may extend to using concepts and language from social policy or social work theory to support the connections between the personal and the subject.
- Use data gathered from students over a period of time at intervals as a learning resource for students to understand better their individual progress & perspectives when viewed alongside those of their student group.
- Plan pathways for integrating PDP through the different years of courses. For non-vocational courses the third or fourth year dissertation may be an important milestone in PDP. Work backwards from this to design progression activities for Years 3, 2 and 1.
- There must be 'buy in' to PDP principles and processes by course teams, especially those that are cross-disciplinary. Tutors are key people in ensuring that the process is valued by students and for making the connections between PDP and wider academic development.

Abstract

This case study describes the process of introducing personal development planning into a first year module of a Sociology degree, the activities undertaken and the lessons learned from working with the first cohort who took the module.



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