



**National
Teaching
Fellowship
Scheme**



**National Action Research Network on Researching and Evaluating Personal
Development Planning and e-Portfolio Practice**

Contact details:

Name: Arti Kumar

Organisation: University of Bedfordshire

E-mail address: arti.kumar@beds.ac.uk

Contact telephone number: 01582 743256

1. The context/background for your research

My background is in careers education, information and guidance, especially in designing, delivering and leading accredited and assessed Career Development Learning (CDL) Modules (both generic and subject-specific) within HE curricula. These were continuously refined through a process of evaluation and feedback, akin to action research, and received very good feedback.

I wrote and produced a student text in 1999 and subsequently developed a web-based tutorial package to deliver generic Career Management Skills when I went on secondment to University of Reading. 'CMS Online' has since been sold on to other HEIs, has won awards and a CETL for University of Reading.

In 'Careers' we subscribed to all the PDP principles before they became a government agenda and a bandwagon. On my return to Luton I was co-opted onto working groups to revise the curriculum - to address the linked issues of access, success on course and progress beyond HE. The CDL module was phased out in 2001-02 and replaced by customised PDP modules in various subject disciplines. I worked with academic staff and transferred ownership of content and materials to them via our VLE (Blackboard-based module documents and weblinks).

I was seconded to the role of PDP coordinator for 40% of my workload. In this role I helped write the bid for our current CETL. I also won a National Teaching Fellowship in 2005, and as my NTF project wrote a book, *Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education – SOARing to Success* published by Routledge and released in January 2008.

The pedagogy for CDL is entirely appropriate for PDP interventions and modules, and is increasingly being mainstreamed within a broader learning framework and revised



curriculum at University of Bedfordshire, valued as a good foundation for the lifelong and life-wide learning that is needed for life and employability in the 21st Century. As Associate Director of our CETL I am working with CETL Fellows and Associates, and across the wider University, to spread and embed the concepts and practices.

2. Current thinking about your research focus/question.

I have undertaken action research informally, but not through a robust research design – i.e. I have been evaluating and refining the ‘PDP modules’ outlined above using a variety of methods:

- focus groups led by student module representatives;
- a specifically designed questionnaire to evaluate the extent to which students engaged with the module methods and resources, and achieved the intended learning outcomes;
- diagnostic self-audits linked with personal and social constructionist approaches which established a starting point for each student and then became an evaluative tool at the end to indicate the ‘distance travelled’ by the individual;
- formative feedback during and at the end of modules, from review meetings with the module team, external examiner (and external contributors, if any).

These methods can be used as part of a more objective and well-designed action research project that I now wish to convene and lead. It fits well with the requirements for our CETL to evaluate and disseminate how it has been instrumental in enhancing PDP and employability. I have initially scoped the project with the team of core CETL Fellows, who are keen to help frame research questions and take the project out into their subject departments as a way of sharing, promoting and replicating good practices in PDP.

For now, we have identified an over-arching research question:

What impact does e-portfolio have on student and staff perceptions of PDP?

3. Your initial plan

Initial guidelines and plans developed with my team include:

Principles

- Projects will be designed to investigate specific aspects of PDP¹ and its implementation in undergraduate programmes and staff development when it enhances PDP, e.g. as embedded in units.
- The CRe8 (Curriculum Review towards 2008-09 implementation) provides a

¹ Including development of transferable skills, employability.



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context of changes in the content and modes of implementation of the new curricula and offers opportunities to investigate the effects of such changes; however the focus should be on PDP.

- Action research as a methodology should be used in a flexible way to investigate the processes and outcomes of interventions.
- We favour collaboration across areas on a particular topic.
- Project teams can include practitioners and students as researchers.
- Projects can generate and evaluate resources to support PDP processes.

Topic areas (examples)

- Group work
- Mentoring and peer-assisted learning
- Electronic portfolios
- Students motivation
- Feedback

Resources

- Support by the CETL team in helping to clarify a working definition of PDP that each specific project team finds helpful to focus their research and define their research question(s).
- Support by a CETL research assistant for specific tasks such as data collection/entry or transcribing interviews.
- A support group composed of other researchers and CETL fellows where specific methodological issues can be discussed.
- Access to CETL facilities for running specific activities, such as focus groups or individual interviews.

Dissemination

Researchers will be encouraged to disseminate their findings in the following:

- Reports on the CETL website
- Presentations at events organised by the CETL

Timescale

Considering that the revised curricula will start to be implemented in September 2008, projects should begin to collect information around that time. As Action Research often works on the basis of several cycles, in the case of projects that research PDP in the context of units, a first cycle would be completed at the time when the units finish at the end of an academic year. Projects can include a second cycle if the team considers this useful. Projects not linked to CRe8 units do not need to adhere to this timescale.



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4. First thoughts on methodology/ies

It will be up to the different individuals involved to decide on their precise methods, but we intend to tie in the new Action Research Consortium with staff development, and through this we will collaborate to decide on some standard quality-assured means of evaluating and researching PDP and (e)-portfolio practices.

Some of us are enthusiastic about using an Appreciative Inquiry approach.

5. Key references you have identified so far.

Hilzensauer (2007) *Grab Your Future with an e-Portfolio!* Salzburg: MOSEP

Hopkins, D (2002) *A Teachers' Guide to Classroom Research* (4th edition) Open University Press, Buckingham

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K (2003) *Research Methods in Education* Routledge, London

Kumar, A (2007) *Personal, Academic and Career Development in Higher Education – SOARing to Success* Routledge Taylor& Francis, London and New York.