L-Università ta' Malta

Professional Development Portfolio

Lessons Learned from its Implementation in Initial Teacher Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta

The Presentation

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Deborah was part of the focus group that developed and introduced the PDP in 2001. She conducted some research following its introduction and implementation of the PDP.

Michael has used the PDP with initial teachers since its introduction both with mathematics B.Ed.(Hons.) and PGCE students as well as more recently with the MTL students.

The Context

Initial Teacher Education programs in the Faculty of Education

B.ED. (HONS.)
1978 TO 2019

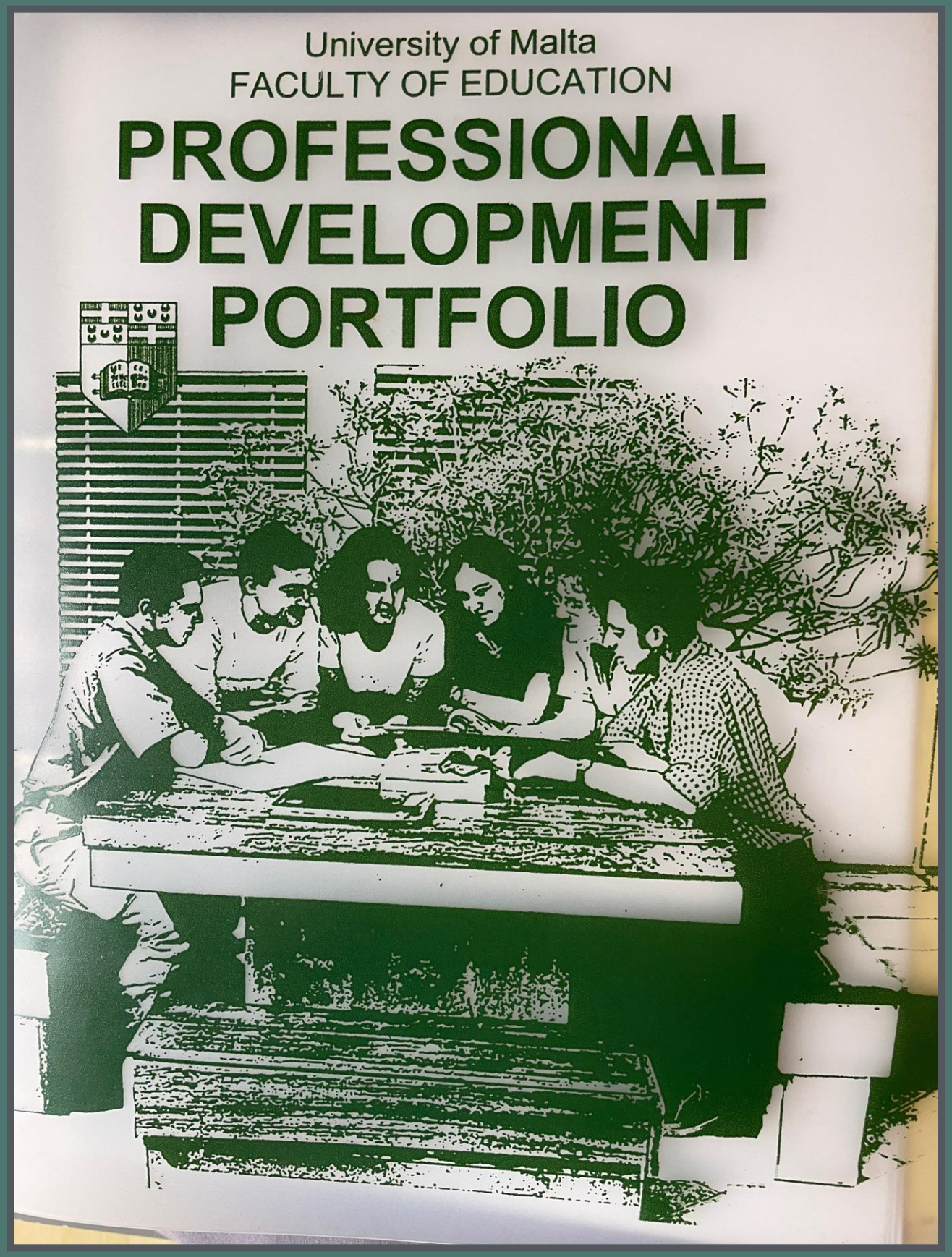
- The main route into teaching for several years.
- A five year concurrent program for Primary and Secondary Teachers.
- For secondary teachers included both subject content and pedagogy.

PGCE
1978 TO 2019

- A one year postgraduate certificate in Education.
- Students enter following an initial three year Bachelor's program.
- Program includes only pedagogy.

MTL
2019 - TO DATE

- A new two year program at Masters Level.
- Replaced both B.Ed.(Hons.) and PGCE.
- Focus on the teacher as reflective practitioner.



The PDP was used with the B.Ed. (Hons.) and P.G.C.E. students.

It was not included as a mandatory component in the MTL that was introduced in the Faculty of Education in 2019.

Introducing the PDP

…within the B.Ed. (Hons.) program in the Faculty of Education, University of Malta

1998
PDP launched by Faculty. Students introduced to the PDP. PDP optional for students.

2002
PDP made compulsory for students in B.Ed. (Hons.) program with launch of guidelines.

2012
Faculty shifts from the use of a manual portfolio to an e-portfolio.

2001
Members of the Faculty of Education start the discussion regarding the introduction of a teaching portfolio.

2003
Piloting of the PDP with students and discussion re its implementation in Departmental Seminar.

What triggered the discussions…

There were a number of reasons…

1 A NEW NATIONAL CURRICULUM

This recommended a shift in assessment practices in secondary schools to more formative assessment practices in addition to the traditional summative practices.

2 CHANGE IN ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

This required a concurrent shift in assessment practices for Initial teachers who would need to place more emphasis on formative assessment practices as teachers in schools.

3 FOR EMPLOYMENT PURPOSES

Student Teachers complained that they had nothing to show during their interview for employment. The PDP would provide a showcase of their achievements.

4 TO ENCOURAGE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

There was a desire to encourage student teachers to engage in critical reflection as part of their professional development.

Working Group

An Assessment Committee was set up by the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Education with members from the different departments.

The remit of the Assessment Committee was to set up and develop a Professional Development Portfolio for Initial Teachers in the Faculty of Education and to develop an Implementation strategy.

Theoretical Framework

A review of the literature was carried out and various definitions of teaching portfolios were looked at.

Three main definitions of teaching portfolios stood out…

1. The use of the portfolio to document teaching and provide evidence of professional skills and competencies - a summative function (Zeichner & Wray, 2001).

2. While understanding how to develop a portfolio initial teachers develop an understanding of formative practices that they can then use in their own practices as teachers (Klenowski, 2002).

3. The development of the portfolio enables initial teachers to engage in critical reflection and encouraged learning, personal growth and the development of a professional identity (Kilbane & Milman, 2003).

A working definition

... the structured, documentary history of a set of coached or mentored acts of teaching substantiated by samples of student work and fully realized only through reflective writing, deliberation and serious conversation.

(Shulman, 1998, p. 37)

The dual role of the PDP

The Faculty adopted a PDP that had both a summative as well as a formative purpose

- The PDP could be used as a showcase document and presented during employment interviews.
- The PDP would provide qualitative evidence rather than just grades on a transcript.

- In the process of selecting the materials for their PDP students could engage in critical reflection, leading to personal growth and development.
- The PDP created collaborative dialogue between Initial teachers and lecturers.

Concerns…

A residential departmental seminar was held in 2000 with an invited critical friend to discuss the working definition of the PDP

Members raised some concerns:

- The issue of verification and plagiarism. Who would verify that the work and reflections in the portfolio were written by the students?
  - If the PDP was to be on a voluntary basis what would be the motivation for students to compile it?
    - If the PDP had a dual role would students focus on the ‘showcase’ aspect at the expense of the reflective, formative learning?

The content…

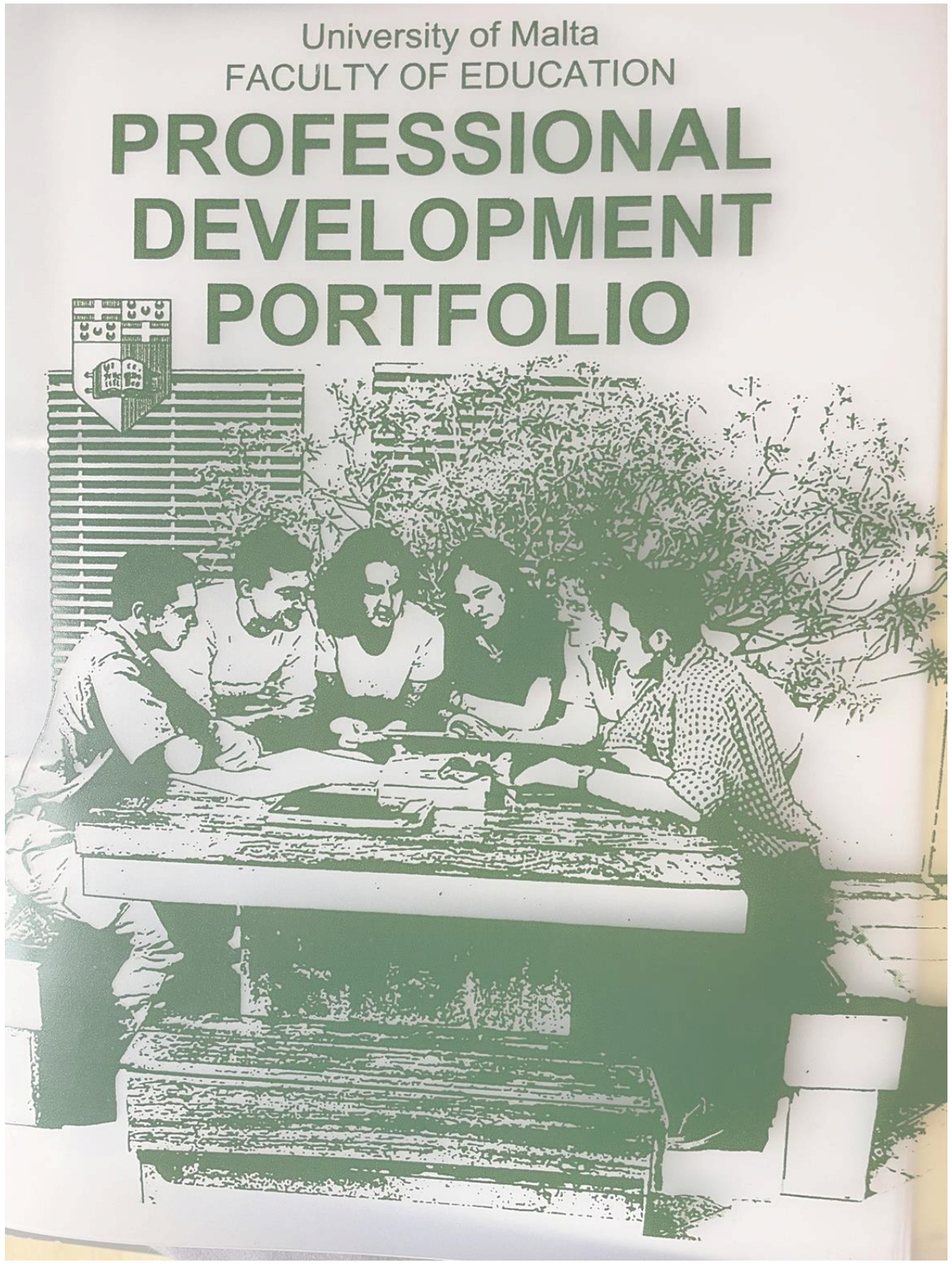
The next step involved choosing the actual contents of the PDP. Based on a number of international sources such as teaching portfolios developed by the University of Western Australia, seven areas were identified as crucial for the professional development of a teacher and they became the sections of the PDP.

It was also decided that the PDP should include both the actual artefacts to show competence as well as their reflections on their strengths, areas of improvement and their learning experience.

The contents of the PDP

Section	Artefact	Reflective Writing Task
Professional knowledge	• Final transcript of results • An example of a submitted piece of work • Abstract of dissertation and evaluation sheet • Evidence of participation at seminars, in-service courses.	• **One:** Philosophy and goals as a teacher • **Two**: An example of a submitted piece of work • **Three:** The Dissertation • **Four:** Participation in seminars, in-service courses and conferences
The teaching and learning process	• Tutors' reports • Scheme of work, lesson plan, resources, IEP • Feedback from cooperating teachers and Heads • Feedback from pupils and parents • Samples of pupil work	• **Five:** Reflections on strengths and areas of development at start • **Six:** Reflections on preparation of teaching documents What was learnt from feedback. What was learnt from feedback • **Seven:** Reflections reviewing development of professional teaching
Management skills	• Photographs of class during specific learning activities Floor plans of classrooms, labs and space • Anecdotal record of dealing with discipline problem Excerpts from tutors' reports re management	• **Eight:** Discipline

Section	Artefact	Reflective Writing Task
Information and communications technology	• Examples of resources • Evidence of inclusion of ICT Examples of learning aids	• **Nine:** Reflective evaluation of advantages and disadvantages of resources • **Ten:** Reflections on the use of ICT in teaching • **Eleven:** Reflections on the use of learning aids
Monitoring student learning	• An assessment plan • An example of an assessment tool • An example of progressive feedback given to pupils • An example of an assessment record sheet • A pupil or class profile	
Other professional qualities and community involvement	• Evidence of involvement in school and extra curricular activities • Photographs of organised field-trips • Photographs of school and extra-curricular activities	• **Twelve:** School and community involvement
Professional development		• **Thirteen:** Growth and development throughout the course • **Fourteen:** Development of the portfolio • **Fifteen:** Professional development plan



Challenges…

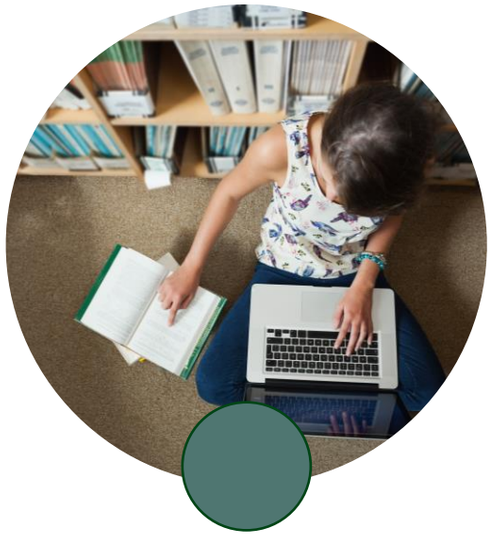
- The PDP was launched in Jan 2001 but there was no clear mandate about its implementation. Students were expected to compile PDP.
- For verification students were expected to get their work signed and stamped by a tutor but no structure was developed to facilitate this.
- Not all members of the Faculty were convinced of its usefulness.
- The PDP was marketed as an employment tool but employers were not consulted.
- The reflective aspect was introduced but students ignored this as they did not know how to reflect.

Reasons for lack of engagement

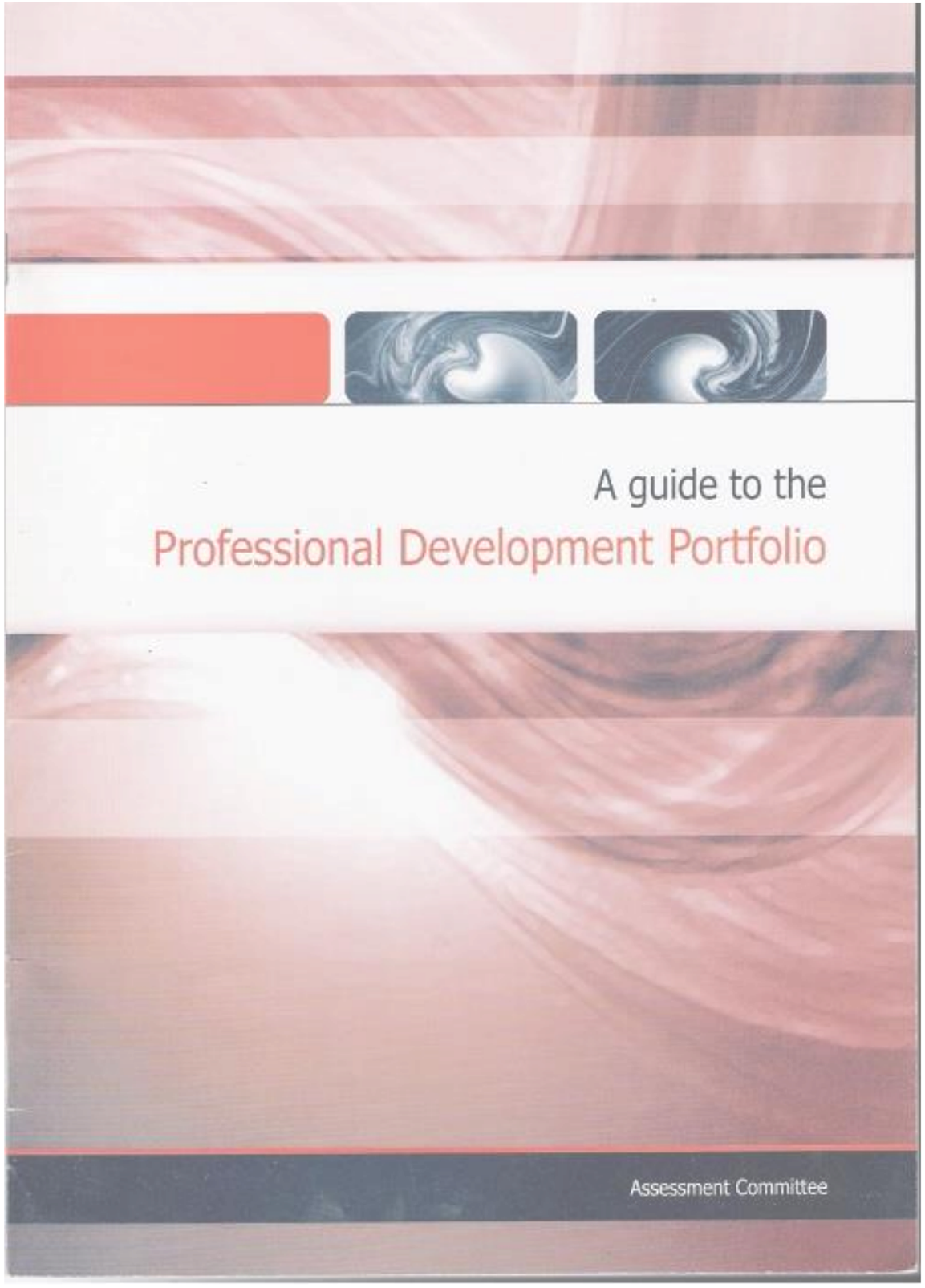
PDP launched in Jan 2001 - only 5 students out of 200 compiled their PDP

Since compiling the PDP was on a voluntary basis and not a requirement of the program - students chose not to engage with it.

Not all Faculty members believed in the formative aspect and usefulness of the PDP. They were engrained within a summative assessment system based on grades.



Students were expected to engage in reflective writing without being taught how to reflect or the importance of being reflective practitioners.



The response…

- A pilot study was conducted with student-teachers to get some feedback regarding the PDP and its implementation.
- The PDP was included as a compulsory credited unit, including a number of tutorial sessions in the third and fourth year of the B.Ed.(Hons.) program.
- Students would be awarded a Pass or a Fail on the completion of their PDP.
- To support students and tutors, the Assessment Committee published A Guide to the Professional Portfolio in January 2003. This included suggested reflective tasks and assessment criteria.

The remaining challenges…

Despite changes to the implementation some challenges remained…

1 THE DUAL PURPOSE OF THE PDP

The PDP was meant to be a showcase as well as a formative reflective document. Tutors felt that the summative aspect propagated the summative practices in the Faculty at the expense of reflection.

2 A CHANGE IN MINDSET

The successful implementation of the PDP requires a change in mindset of both students and tutors. There needs to be a shift in how Faculty members view learning and assessment.

3 THE NEED FOR STRUCTURE

Student-teachers need to develop the portfolio within a structure and be credited for their work. They will not take the effort for nothing.

4 DEVELOPMENT OF NEW SKILLS

Student-teachers need to acquire new skills in order to be able to write reflectively. This does not come automatically to many individuals and they need to be trained.

An Evaluation…

Two studies were carried out to evaluate the use of the PDP

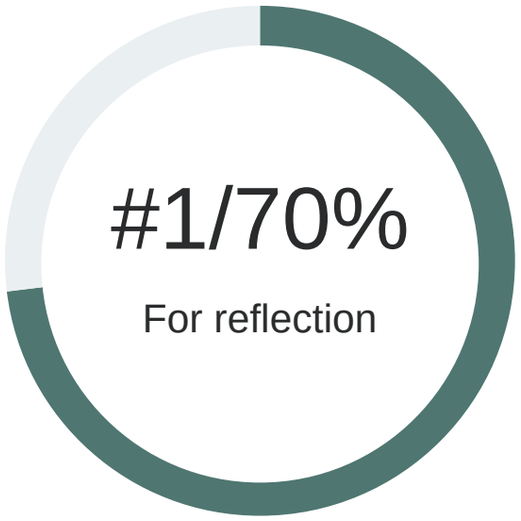
A study in May 2005 with the first group of students who had developed their PDP, using questionnaires and interviews with the whole cohort of B.Ed.(Hons.) students with 65% response rate (Chetcuti, 2007).

A study in 2010 with 15 first-year teachers, who had graduated in 2008 and taught for a whole scholastic year using one-to-one interviews (Chetcuti, Buhagiar & Cardona, 2011).

For the first cohort of students…

The students saw the purpose of the PDP as being a tool for reflection…

Developing this portfolio has been a truly deep experience for me as a professional. It has amplified my strengths and through reflection and questioning has brought me face to face with my weaknesses. It has given me a truly holistic vision of who I am as a professional teacher!



GROWTH DURING INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION

TO HAVE A RECORD TO LOOK BACK ON

TO USE IN JOB INTERVIEWS

The PDP as a reflective learning tool

At the start of the journey…

- The student-teachers were reluctant to compile their PDP. They saw it as a waste of time and they did not have the skills to write reflectively:

Before you start you say ... how am I going to choose the pieces of work …

I did not learn much from it ... it is just putting things together. I learnt much more from my teaching practice reports and feedback from students ... but this didn't help much.

As they participated in the tutorial sessions…

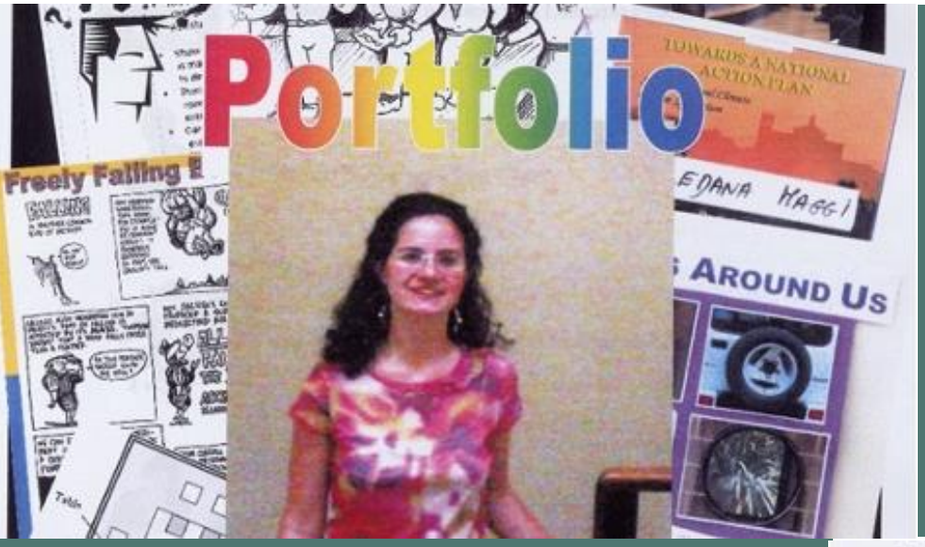
- The student-teachers started to realise and understand the importance of the PDP for their personal growth:

I learnt how to express myself and how to portray my current image as a teacher through reflective writing.

Since we're still inexperienced and we need to develop as teachers feedback is essential. I used the feedback to improve my insights and my writings. It helped me to produce something which I was really proud of in the end. ...

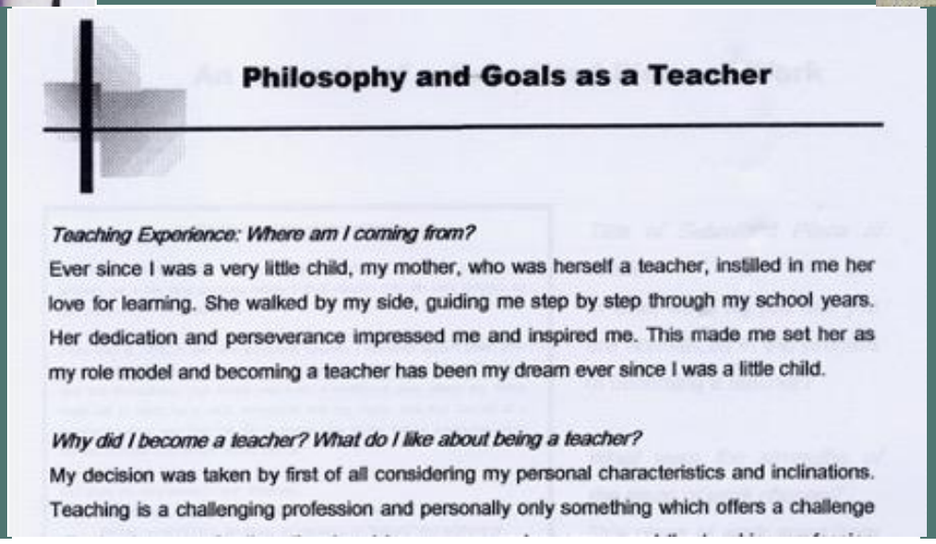
Feedback from the pilot study

Carried out with a group of eight PGCE science students and members of DMSTE staff…



The portfolio helped me to become the teacher I aspire to be. I feel it gives snapshots of these experiences of the teaching practice, which were a part of the teaching and learning process and my development as a professional teacher...

The portfolio was important as it enabled me to reflect on aspects such as which activities were the most successful and why (and so would use these activities in future), which activities were less successful and why, and thus try to improve the organisation of these activities.



Philosophy and Goals as a Teacher

Teaching Experience: Where am I coming from?

Ever since I was a very little child, my mother, who was herself a teacher, instilled in me her love for learning. She walked by my side, guiding me step by step through my school years. Her dedication and perseverance impressed me and inspired me. This made me set her as my role model and becoming a teacher has been my dream ever since I was a little child.

Why did I become a teacher? What do I like about being a teacher?

My decision was taken by first of all considering my personal characteristics and inclinations. Teaching is a challenging profession and personally only something which offers a challenge

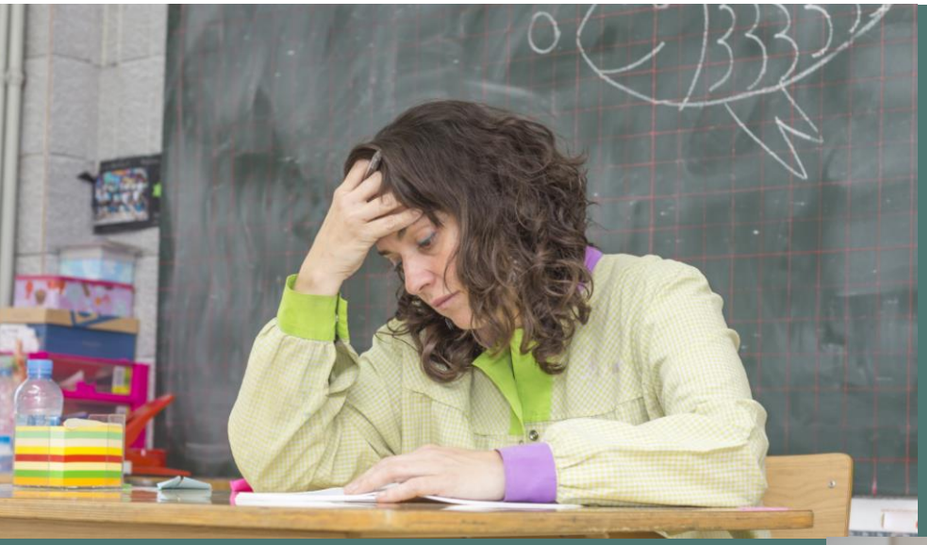
If I am going to give the students feedback on their work to help their formative development...they will not want to present the document to prospective employers because no-one wants to show what they are weak in...we need to decide whether this is their best work...or whether this is work in progress...

What was important for the student-teachers, rather than the actual PDP itself, was the interaction that took place within the tutorial group that became a community of shared practice.

In this community the student-teachers felt safe to share their strengths and weaknesses, reflect on challenges and develop their personal and professional identity as teachers.

The second study: After 1 year teaching

Following a year of teaching what remains from the PDP is the reflective skills gained by the student-teachers…



I believe that one does not unlearn what one learns especially if the learning experience becomes very much part of one's life. Skills such as reflective practice and self-evaluation have become second nature to me as a teacher. It is done continuously and almost automatically.

During my PDP I was able to reflect on these experiences by first recalling the experience in detail, then trying to look at it from any angle, and thus not only reflecting on the positive and negative aspects, but I automatically ended up thinking what I could have done differently and what I had learned.

The PDP helped me to develop reflective skills and to think back on things. I don't write in my PDP anymore and I haven't updated it, but the skills of reflection I acquired are still with me. I still think back and think how I could deal with a situation or how I could do things better....

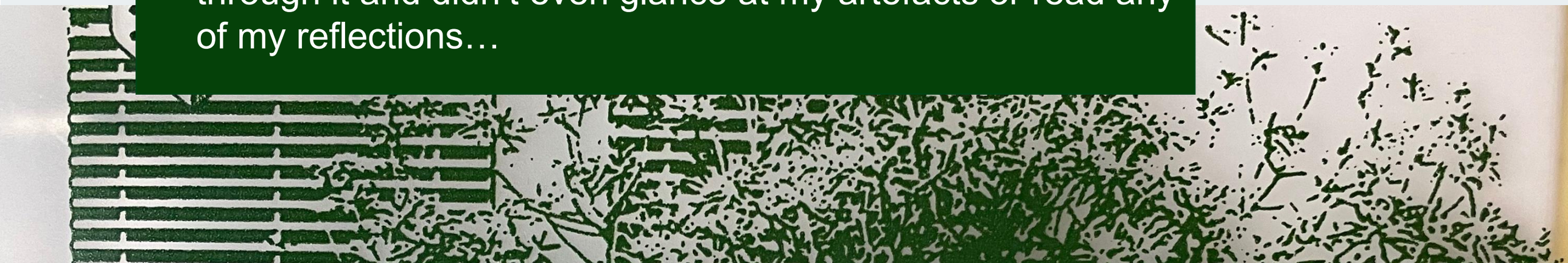
At the time I didn’t think much of the PDP, I looked at it just like another assignment. But as I started working on it and eventually finished it, it gave me a sense of achievement that none of the other assignments had given me. Now, every time I go through it I remind myself of how a year ago I pictured myself as a teacher in a few years time. Now I am working to become that awesome teacher and even if I’m having difficulties at reaching my aims I know I will get there...it reminds me of what I believed in...

Using the PDP for employment…

Two narratives…

I already used it for an interview, and the interviewer seemed to have liked my PDP as he went through it page by page and asked questions on it. Maybe I'll continue to develop my PDP as I gain more experience in teaching ...

Taking the PDP to my job interview was a waste of time. I was very disappointed as the interviewers just flicked through it and didn't even glance at my artefacts or read any of my reflections…



Lack of Collaboration

Although one of the main reasons for introducing the PDP was for student-teachers to have a showcase document that they could present doing job interviews - this goal was not reached with many student-teachers reporting that interviews did not look at their PDP and that therefore all their hard work to highlight their competencies was not being recognised.

A Possible Reason…

One possible reason for this lack of use of the PDP by employers in schools is that the schools were not involved in the development and implementation of the PDP.

This points to the need for more collaboration with schools and professional development for interviewers on how to make the best use of the PDP.

The e-portfolio…

- In 2012, the Faculty of Education moved towards the introduction of an e-portfolio that was called STeP.
- Essentially the features of the original PDP were retained but transferred to an online platform.
- The main reason for this was to save time and paper, make it easier for the student-teachers to upload materials and for the tutors to provide feedback.
- It was thought that an online version would allow for more collaboration, communication and sharing of ideas (Pace, 2018).

Evaluation of e-portfolio…

A study by Farrugia & Jumeily (2012) evaluated the new e-Portfolio

1 USEFULNESS

The students agreed that the e-portfolio made their work easier, more productive and efficient. Tutors thought that it saved time, did away with paper work and there was no need to carry files around.

2 EASE OF USE

Both students and tutors thought that the e-portfolio was easy to use, was not complex and fast to upload material.

3 EASE OF LEARNING

There were no special skills required to learn how to use the software, although knowledge of internet navigation and basic computer skills were required.

4 SATISFACTION

The online version of the PDP enabled students and tutors to communicate with ease, in their own time and added value to the PDP tutorial sessions.

Benefits of PDP

1

RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Provides a narrative of learning and professional growth.

2

CULTIVATES A FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT CULTURE

Assesses student learning qualitatively and not only by grades.

3

ENCOURAGES REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Helps students to develop reflective skills that remain with them in first years of teaching.

4

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

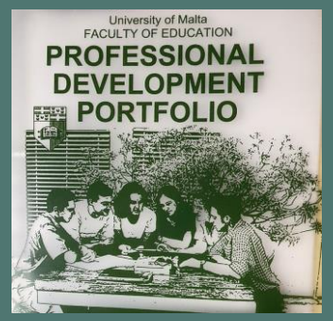
In PDP tutorials students and tutors form a community of practice that lead to the development of a teacher identity.

Developing this portfolio has been a truly deep experience for me as a professional. It has amplified my strengths and through reflection and questioning has brought me face to face with my weaknesses. While giving me the opportunity to build my strengths and improve in particular areas this has also improved my skills as a reflective practitioner. It has given me a truly holistic vision of who I am as a professional teacher...

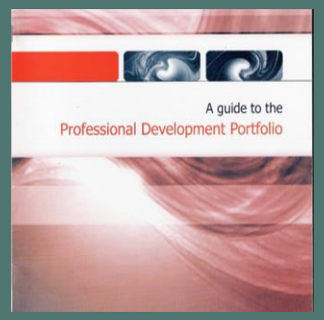
Were the original aims achieved?

Original Aim	Was it Achieved?
To change emphasis from summative assessment practices to more formative practices.	Throughout the use of the PDP with B.Ed.(Hons.) students emphasis on formative aspects occurred. The elimination of the PDP as a compulsory study unit in the MTL suggests that lecturers were not prepared for this shift.
For employment purposes.	Due to lack of collaboration with schools and no influence on employment interview - this did not take on with only some private schools asking for the PDP during the job interview.
As a reflective tool.	The use of the PDP as a reflective tool, had the most impact on both student-teachers and tutors. The PDP helped student-teachers develop their identity as teachers and they retained this skill even in their first years of teaching.

Lessons Learned



A teaching portfolio should form an integral part of an ITE program.



Students and tutors need to be provided with some guidance as to how to develop a portfolio.

The purpose whether showcase or reflective should be determined prior to introduction.

More collaboration with schools to encourage reflective practice & for employment.

Need for a change in mind set of university tutors and a shift in teaching and learning.

Portfolio needs to be introduced within a community of practice.

An example from Practice…

With the introduction of the MTL, the PDP tutorial sessions were discontinued. There were many reasons for this decision: lack of use in job interviews; lack of engagement by Faculty members and a return to summative assessment practices based on grades.

It was left up to individual tutors to include the PDP in their program. An example of good practice is the use of the PDP in the Mathematics ITE program.

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