

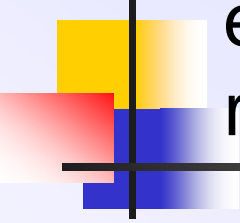
# Tools for effective: ePortfolios, self-reflection and personal development planning

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This paper explores first year science student engagement with self-reflection and PDP in a range of contexts

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Has the ePortfolio encouraged *engagement* with self-reflection and PDP?

Can ePortfolios encourage *effective* self-reflection and PDP?



# ePortfolios (e.g. PebblePad)

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## Personal on-line spaces for students:

- to store records of their learning, abilities, achievements, action plans, experiences, thoughts etc.
- create WebLogs, WebFolios and upload documents in common file formats
- can be inviting to use, flexible, provide guidance and structure, prompt reflection on success as well as shortcomings
- Permanent, transferable
- Stimulate greater enthusiasm for PDP.....?

# Reluctance to engage (staff as well as students)

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# What do we mean by reflection and self-reflection?



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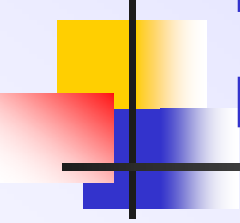
Dewey (1933):

Reflection is “a kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious thought”

Moon (2001):

Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we use **to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome**. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the **further processing of knowledge and understanding** and possibly emotions that we already possess.

**Self-reflection** – the knowledge being processed is about oneself.



# How do first year students choose to reflect on their learning?

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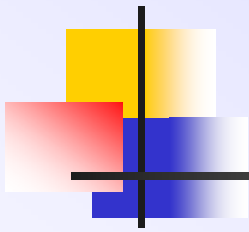
- First year **Vocational Skills** module, 75 students
- PDP only a part of a largely subject-centred skills module
- ePortfolio (PebblePad) introduced in workshop session with follow-up exercises:
  - Choices how to use ePortfolio
  - Choices whether to use ePortfolio or paper submission of reflective exercises

# What happened?

Students took to using  
PebblePad ePortfolio  
like ducks to water

The large majority used  
ePortfolio even when  
given a choice of paper  
or e-submission





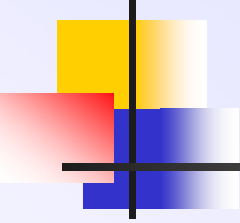
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Has the ePortfolio encouraged *engagement* with self-reflection and PDP?

Can ePortfolios encourage *effective* self-reflection and PDP?

What constitutes *effective* self-reflection?

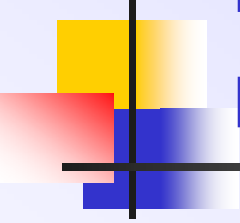




## Reflections assessed according to three levels of self-reflection, adapted from Hatton and Smith (1995) and Moon (2001):

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1. Descriptive account, little reflection; one point made at a time, ideas not linked. Little evidence that what has been learned from past events or behaviour is likely to influence future behaviour.
2. The account goes beyond description to provide a deeper, more critical consideration of events and own behaviour. There is some evidence of having learned from experience in a way which could influence future behaviour [Kolb cycle (Kolb 1984)]. Little or no consideration of the wider context, implications or possible interpretations of the events.
3. The reflection is analytical or integrative; there is recognition that the personal frame of reference can change according to the emotional state in which it is written, the acquisition of new information, the review of ideas and the effect of time passing. Clear evidence of having learned from events.

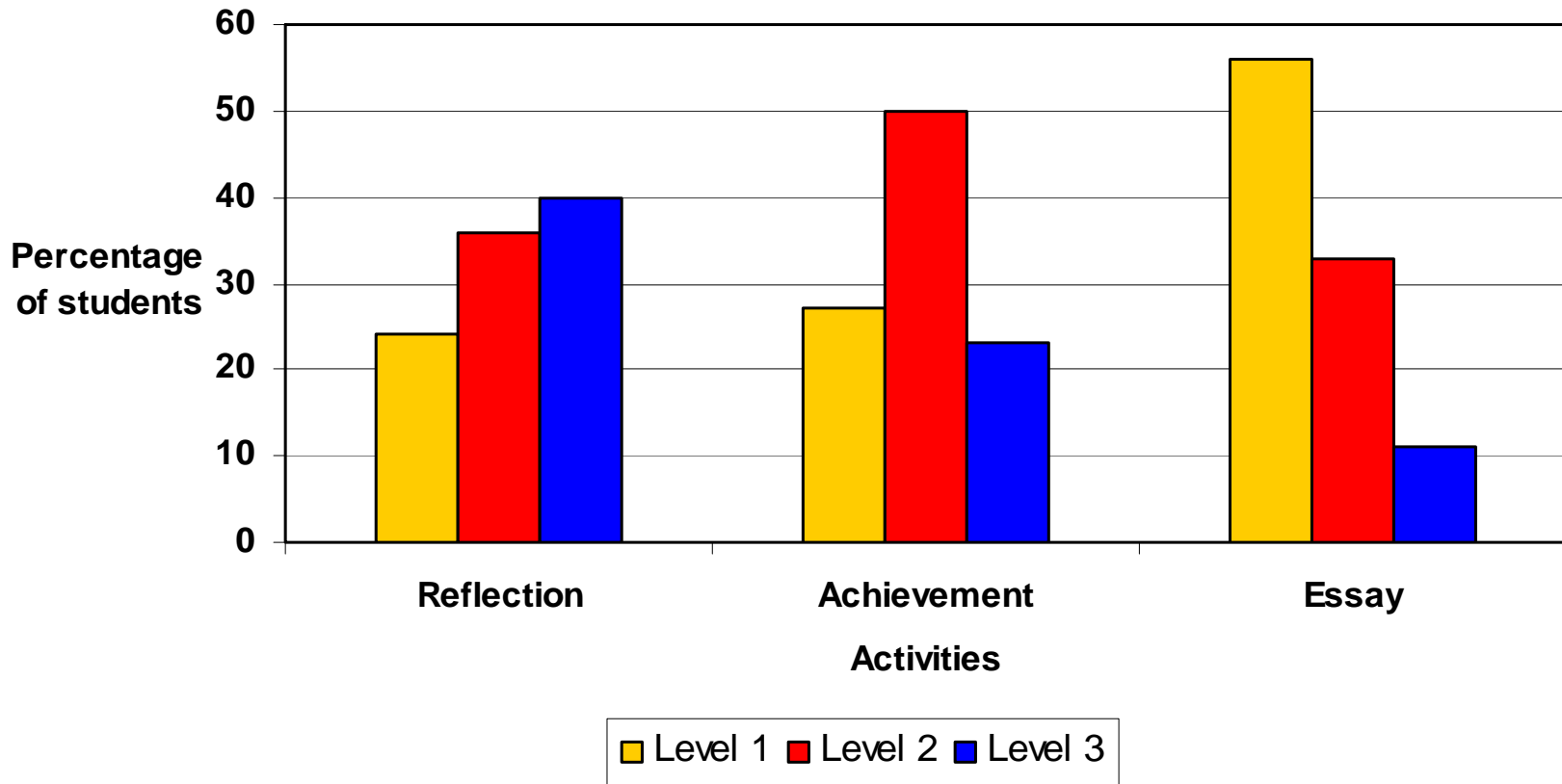


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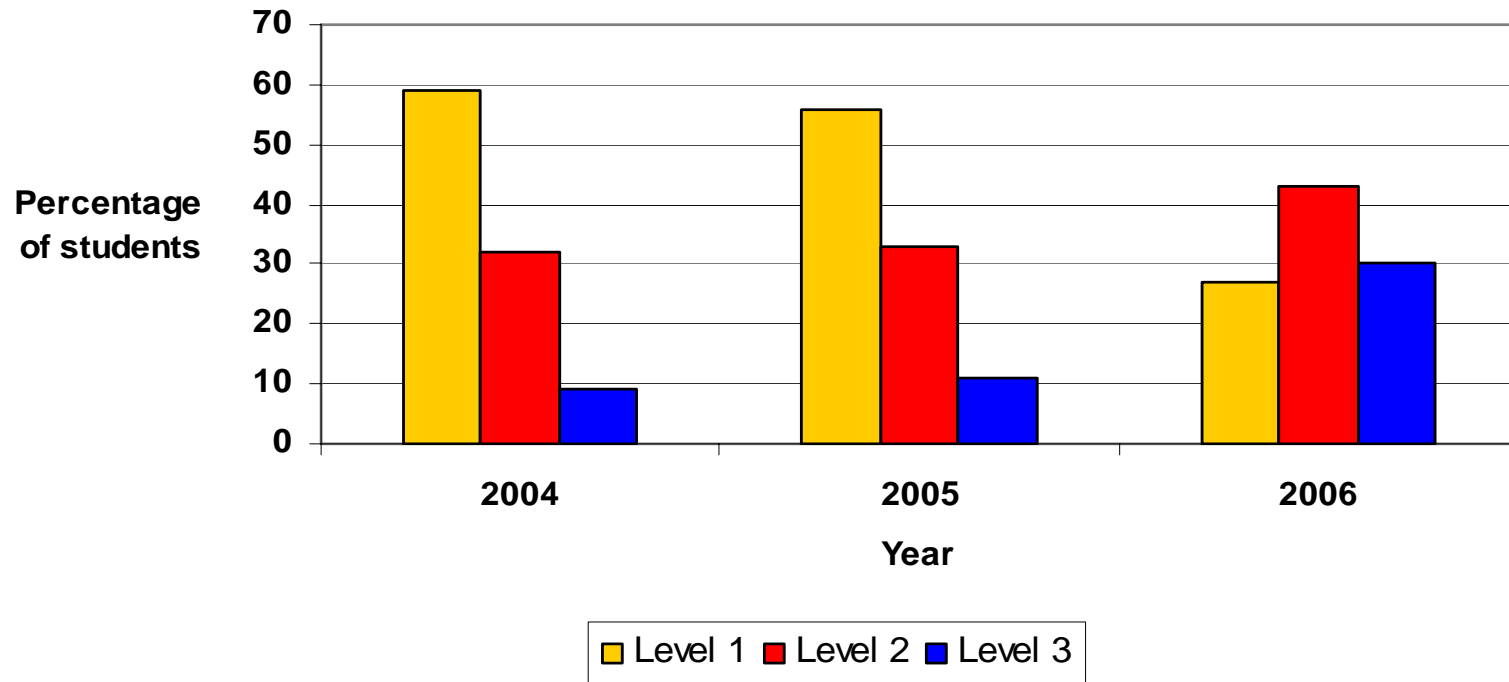
- First year **Introduction to Ecology module**; c 45-60 students
- Assessment: 60% theory; 40% practical & field; **Pass/Fail reflective study portfolio**
- Given guidance on reflecting on learning, study skills and achievement on module
- Free choice on using paper submission or ePortfolio electronic submission

## Levels of self-reflection with 3 different PDP activities



In the first two activities, almost one third of students explored the wider opportunities for reflection offered by the ePortfolio.

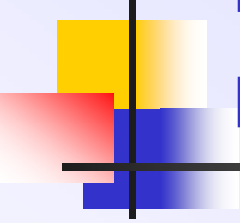
## Levels of reflection on timed essay assessment for three cohorts of first year students



2004: Component of paper-based portfolio at end of module

2005: Component of electronic portfolio at end of module

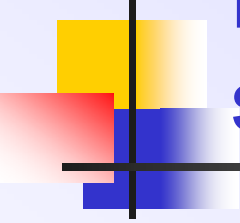
2006: Reflection in class immediately after peer-marking



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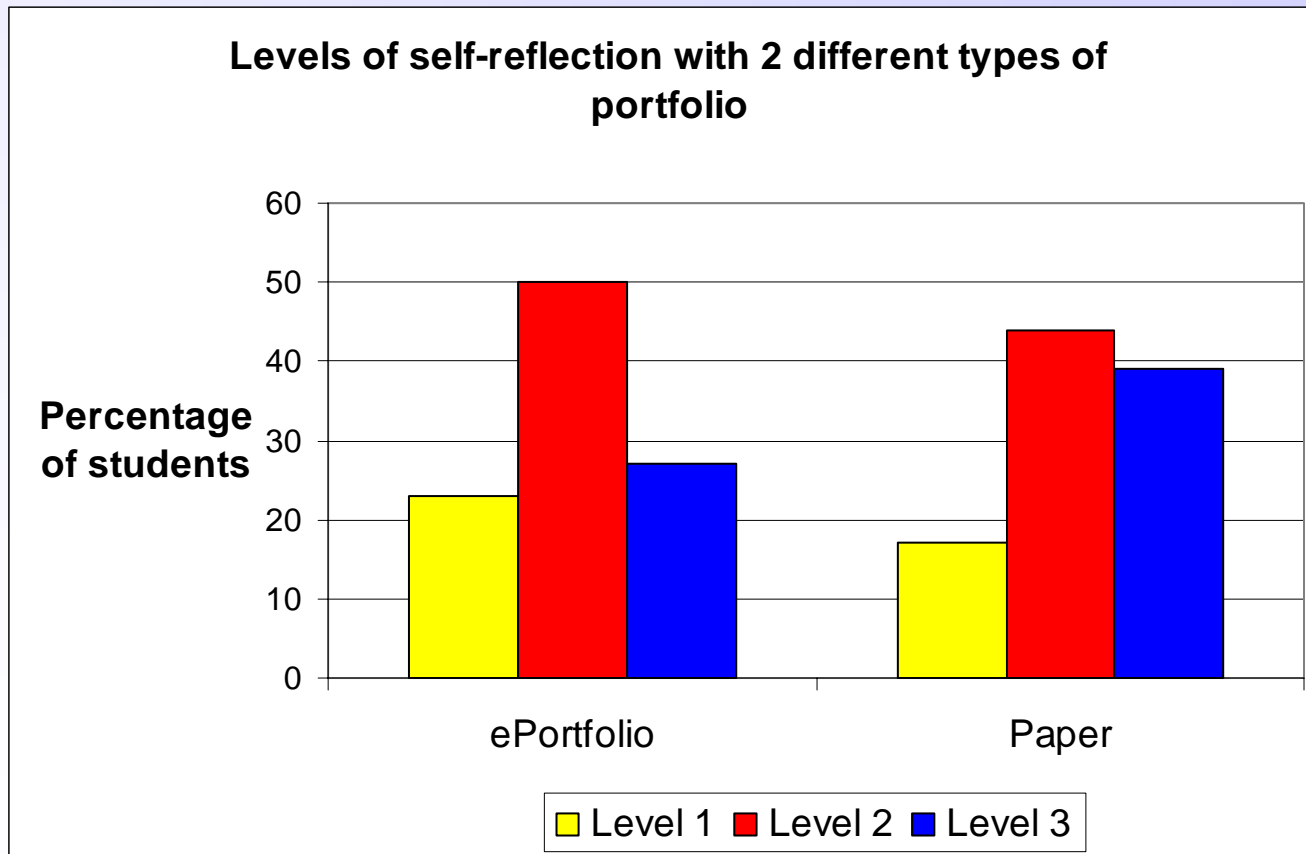


## How do students choose to compile and submit their reflective study portfolio?

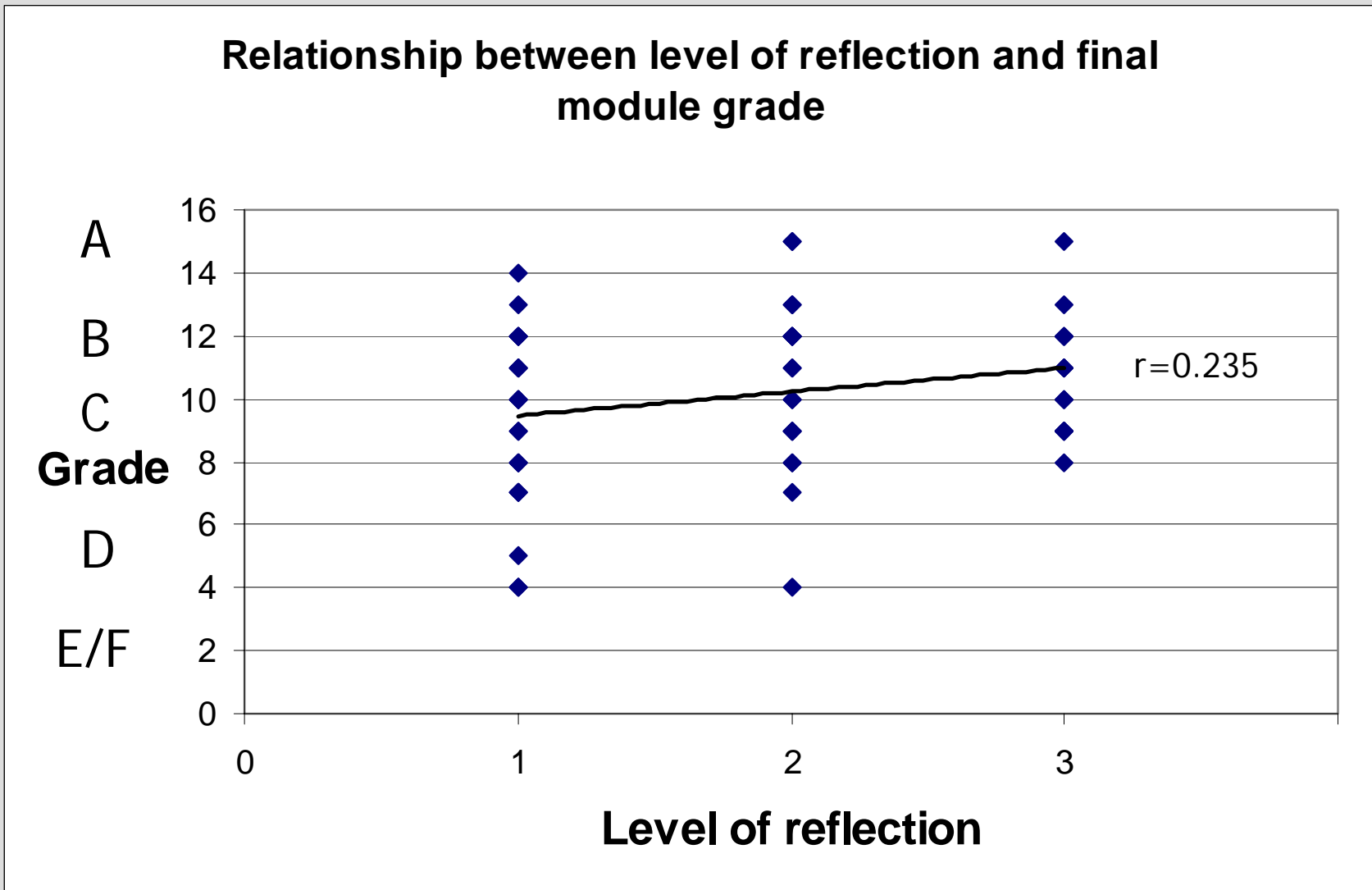
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- 49% chose the ePortfolio
- 40% chose to submit a paper portfolio
- 11% did not submit any portfolio

# Was there a difference in the quality of reflection?

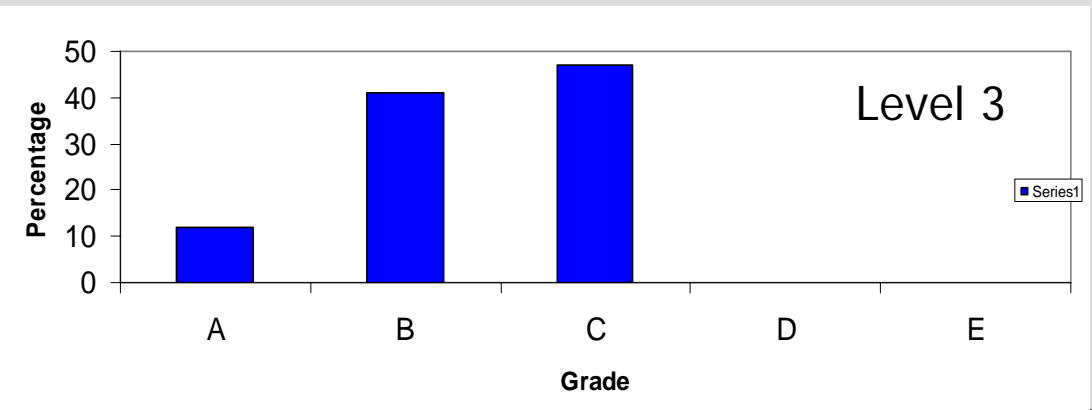
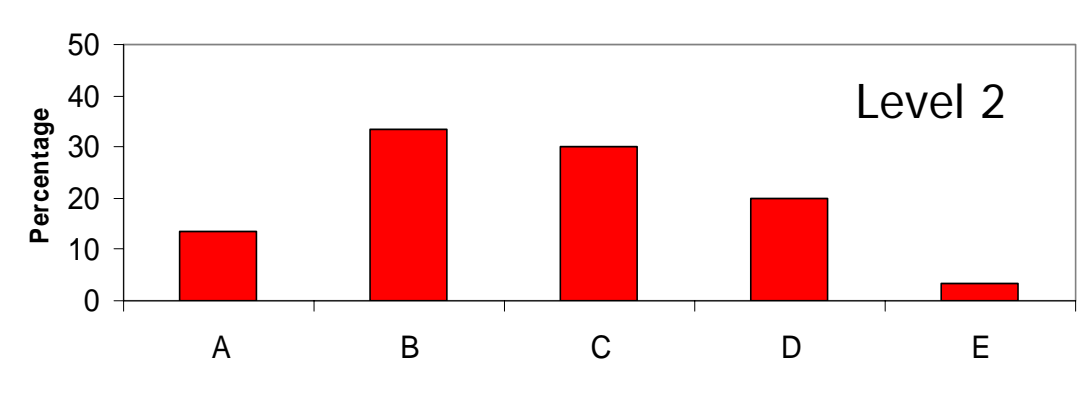
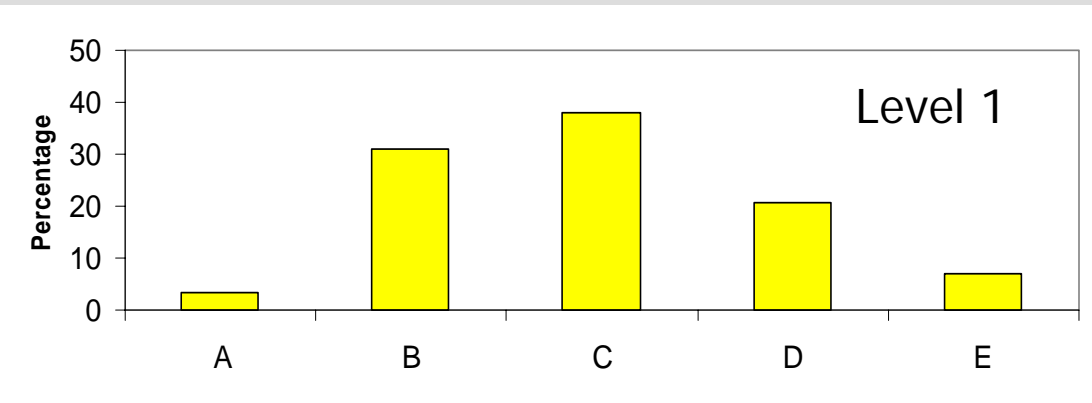


Is there a relationship between module grade and level of reflection demonstrated?





# Final module grades in relation to 3 levels of reflection





# What were the features of Level 2-3 reflective portfolios?

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- Constructive engagement with feedback
- Reflection on study patterns
- Positive attitude to disappointment and difficulties
- Constructively self-critical
- Ownership of learning
- Positive reflection on the value of reflection!



# What were the features of Level 1-2 reflective portfolios?

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- Brief and/or superficial
- Descriptive
- Unconstructively self-critical
- Critical of aspects of the course
- Lack of ownership of learning
- Frequent references to time constraints and poor time management
- No complaints about having to produce a reflective portfolio – implicit acceptance of the value of it?



# How do the eportfolios and paper portfolios differ?

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## ■ ePortfolio

- Lower level reflections tended to be more structured
- Higher level reflections tended to use the less structured asset formats or used several different assets.

## ■ Paper portfolio

- Lower level reflections would have benefitted from the prompts of the eportfolio
- Higher level reflections seem to have benefitted from the absence of prompts

# Can ePortfolios encourage effective self-reflection and PDP?



## Conclusions

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- Encourages students to engage with the process:
  - They *chose* to use ePortfolio over paper submission
  - Almost a third chose to do more than minimum asked
  - No negative comments on module evaluation questionnaires about having to complete a reflective study portfolio
- No evidence that in itself the ePortfolio prompts *deeper* reflection
- No evidence either that it prompts more *superficial* reflection in the context of PDP
- Some evidence that it prompts more superficial reflection on learning



# General Conclusions on first year students as reflective learners

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- Students are more comfortable with some types of reflection than others
- There are some situations where more immediate back-of-the-envelope type reflection is more effective than waiting to use the ePortfolio (but e-portfolio may provide ideal vehicle for second order reflection)
- Effective self-reflection does not come naturally to most students – it needs to be taught and practiced.

Overall, ePortfolios can make students *willing* reflective learners, but we still have a role in making them *able*.

And what happens to willing and able reflective learners.....?

Any questions?



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Writing this has given me something to look back at and reflect on where I can improve. It is also some good evidence on how I feel I am doing at Level 1. **This should be recommended by all lecturers in all modules.**

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What  
doi

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from reading students'  
reflective writing –  
about how they learn,  
their anxieties, what  
they value in the  
learning environment.....

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