Personal and Professional Development (PPD)

Learning For Life

Nº 2

Introduction

This booklet is one of a series for tutors published by the Creative Learning in Practice Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of the Arts London. The centre received funding for five years from the Higher Education Funding Council for England to raise the profile of learning and teaching and to disseminate good practice across the sector.

For more details of the activities of the CLIP CETL please visit the website www.arts.ac.uk/cetl.htm

Here we offer thoughts, explanations and tips on how to engage with Personal and Professional Development (PPD) in the creative arts, not just for students but for all staff. Whatever your course or role, you will need to decide what to do in different situations, work out the implications of actions, consider what a task needs, and reflect on outcomes and achievements. The kind of PPD you and your students find meaningful, where it takes place and how expressed, will be shaped by the diversity, nature and ethos of your field. Some may be strongly oriented towards business skills and career management, while others may prefer a focus on softer, individual attributes and areas for exploration.

If you are new to PPD teaching or an old hand looking for new ideas, we hope this guide will help.

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Little Letters – Big Meanings

Higher education is full of acronyms and two of the most confusing may well be PPD and PDP.

Many of you already know that the first stands for Personal and Professional Development and the second for Personal Development Planning.

Some universities see these as two separate things:

> PPD being about creating your career or professional trajectory

> PDP being the reflective, planning and evaluative processes that help you understand how you will get to your destinations

Other universities use PPD as an umbrella title to capture both, as together they are about planning for the future. We're going to take this approach here, for ease of reading, and because PPD is not about disparate activities, but about the complex development of real people.

Fundamental to both is the understanding and application of critical reflection during and after all learning processes and activities - the glue that helps you bring everything together, as well as the sieve that helps you filter out critical learning - and turning - points.

> Planning
> Resourcefulness
> Personal Development
> Professional Aspirations
> Critical Reflection
> The Future

PPD Models

All kinds of PPD models exist, such as add-on accredited units, embedded provision within course modules, optional or compulsory study, or 'enrichment activities'. Whichever model is adopted, it's important to remember that life and learning are messy things, and that some significant PPD experiences or revelations may not be contained solely in one unit or event.

It may be helpful to think of PPD as an octopus – it may have its body in the curriculum but its tentacles spread beyond the confines of a unit into other areas of study, life and work.
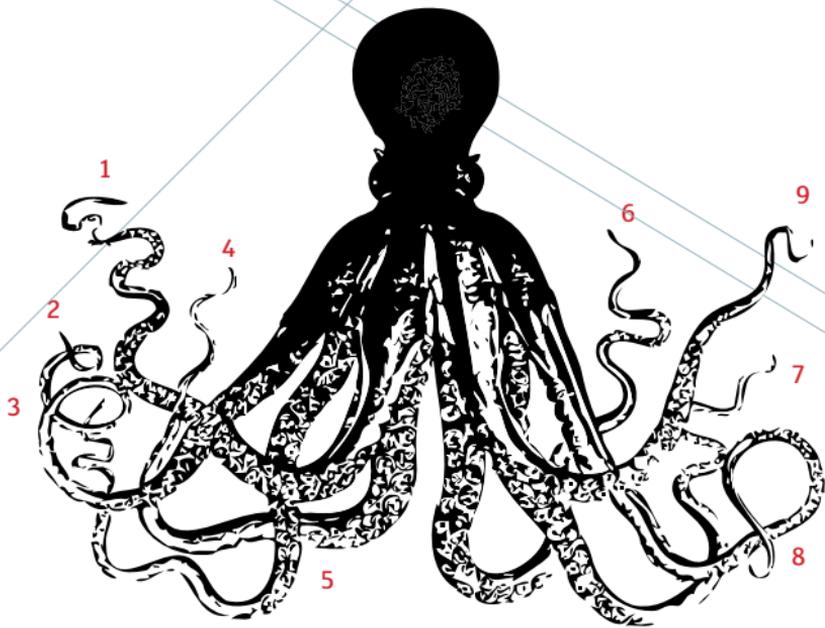
PPD Tools

Keeping a record of PPD, noting achievements and gathering evidence of activities and learning is crucial and there is tremendous variety in the tools and spaces offered to students to do this. Paper or electronic, examples include:

> E-portfolios

These are online systems which come in many shapes and have different purposes: showcase/repository for work, assessment records, place for reflection and planning, personal profile.

For example, MA Photography students at London College of Communication (LCC) submit their work to Senior Lecturer Paul Lowe online and build professional showcases.

> Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)

VLEs such as Blackboard are online meeting places for students and tutors to upload work, update themselves on course information, exchange files and communicate through chat rooms or email.

> **Blogs**
  Online diaries where users make the
  thoughts and experiences they write
  about public and can invite comments
  from other readers.

> **Learning journals, annotated sketchbooks
  and reflective statements**
  Paper versions of blogs where students
  gather images, ideas, accounts of
  experiences and reflect on them.
  Whether or how they are shared depends
  on local practice.

Pinning Down PDD

In July 2006 a workshop was held at the University of the Arts London to establish a joint philosophy and approach to PPD across its six colleges. Given our diverse range of creative subjects, we needed first of all to work out what the basic language of PPD actually meant to us. What did we mean by **PPD? PDP? Employability? Entrepreneurship?**

It became clear that these four terms shared a lot of common ground, while also having their own distinctive words associated with them.

For example, words and phrases that defined employability, such as life skills and personal attributes also related to PPD. Others related to self actualisation and self awareness, or:

"A way of being and doing which enables students to act in the world"

Ideas that enterprise/entrepreneurship were just about business skills and commercial endeavours were expanded to include a

broader interpretation – more like "bold resourcefulness" (as in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary).

'Whole person' PPD

Sometimes single words in PPD can dominate a view of what it's all about – perhaps that it is only about success in the workplace. In terms of identity and direction, creative practitioners often find it difficult to separate themselves from their practice so we wanted to promote a holistic understanding of PPD which is about who someone is, what they value, what makes them tick, rather than just a checklist of their skills and capabilities .

The Professional P

Many courses invest greatly in developing professional opportunities and know-how through experiential learning, live projects, placements and community activity; students too take the initiative in putting these together for themselves. Here are a couple of examples:

> What tutors do:

On an MA in Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art and Design , taught PPD sessions

are offered in order to "increase awareness of the need for a professional approach towards building a career as a practising artist and enable students to devise a personal strategy for continuing their practice."

They cover topics such as internet skills, publicising, curating and exhibiting work, setting up a studio, the London gallery system and funding opportunities.

> **What students do:**
At CCAD students have also set up the Chelsea Wiki, as a space to create a community and promote their work. *www.chelseawiki.org*

> **Useful resources include:**
Compass - a resource for higher education teachers about fine art professional practice, available in Publications on *www.a-n.co.uk*

The Artists Development Toolkit - an interactive programme helping artists review their practice, position and future direction, also available at *www.a-n.co.uk*

There's another argument for the 'professional p' in the creative arts: we know that the sector has grown significantly and contributed increasingly year on year to the national economy. We also know that employment and career patterns are often fragmented and unstable which means that individuals need to be independent, multifaceted and adaptable in the ways they work. Linda Ball, Project Director, Creative Graduates-Creative Futures, University of the Arts London, identifies a problem here to which PPD can be a solution:

> *"...although the most 'successful' graduates are innovative, entrepreneurial, adaptable, highly motivated and able to create opportunities, in general the majority of students and graduates lack confidence in identifying and explaining what they can do as a result of their creative education [...] added to which [...] industry studies point to poor skills amongst graduates in project management, networking and professional presentation"* (Ball, 2007:2)

The development of that confidence and ability to articulate what you have to offer is a crucial part of PPD.

The Personal P

While the need to make the places for PPD as visual and creative as the disciplines in which it takes place has long been recognised, students still sometimes have the perception that PPD is about form filling or writing.

Workshops that help students engage with PPD on a personal and creative level and which explore interactions between people using a variety of media and formats can help counteract this view.

In workshops on reflection Alison James, Head of Learning and Teaching at London College of Fashion, uses drawing, visualisation and active listening with students to explore and extend their understanding of what critical reflection is all about. Mind maps and reflective techniques help develop students' views of their progress beyond a 'what went well, what went badly and what will I do in the future' approach.

Case Study
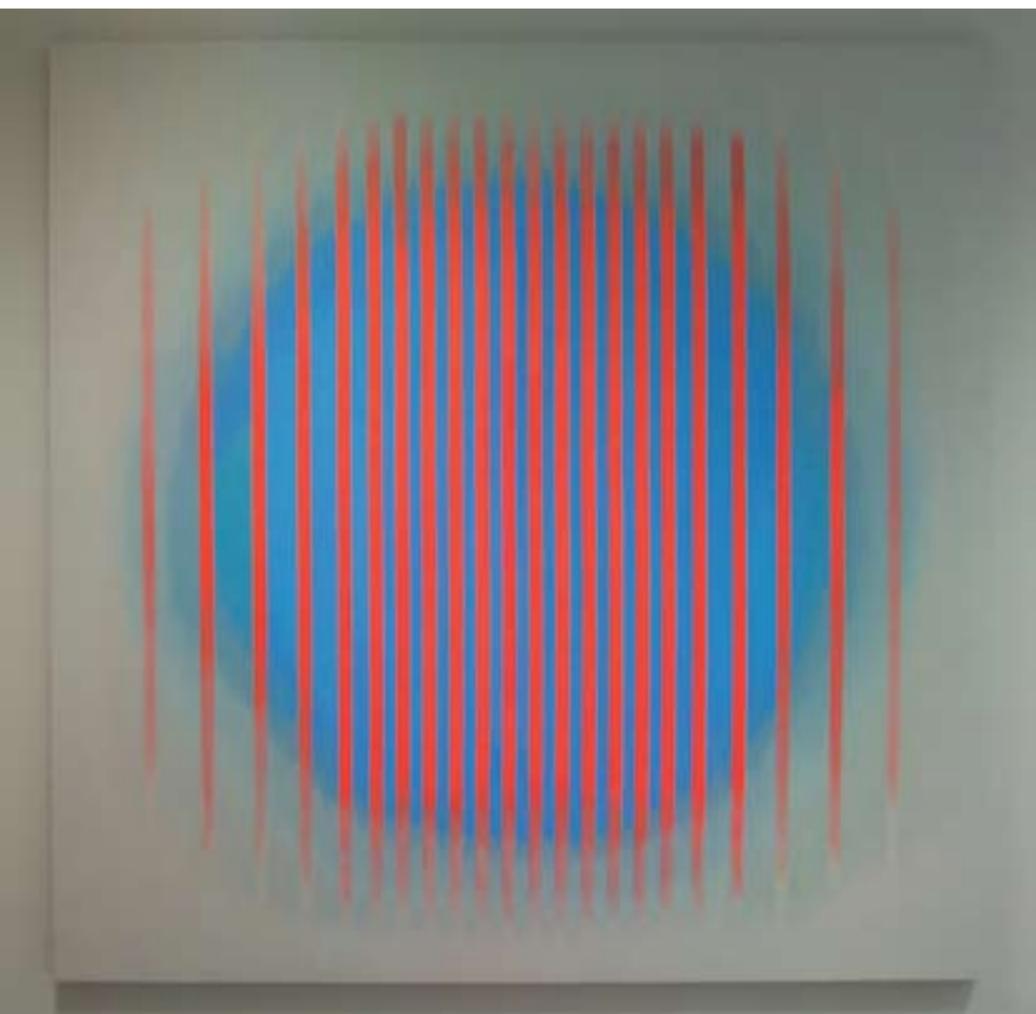
The Language of PPD

Like any subject or profession, each creative discipline will have its own terms, codes and tone of voice. Students need to be able to work with the local language of their discipline, feel comfortable with it and also find their own voice. Getting this wrong can alienate students (and staff) from some PPD activities.

Let's take exploring individual self awareness as an example. In the language of business or promotion this may be presented as learning to market yourself, or understand your personal brand values. For a fine artist or crafts person such language may be alien and better expressed through the language of practice, community and/or ideas.

At London College of Communication, this question of language is being addressed by Tony Wailey, PPD Co-ordinator, through the incorporation of creative writing workshops into the mainstream PPD provision. Initially three of these will take Naming, Being and Seeing as themes, allowing students to explore their own identity through their origins, where they are now and where they want to be. The aim is to enhance relevant employability and entrepreneurial skills as part of students' personal and professional development.

In the next example, students express their PPD by providing evidence and a reflective statement relating to four themes: employability, learning to learn, underpinning skills and personal development, numbered 1-4 here. Students appreciate the freedom to define what has been meaningful while recognising that dividing PPD into four does not mean life and learning are really this neat and tidy – there are inevitably overlaps!

1.0 Employability
Useful Resources
1.1 Enterprise Centre for the Creative Arts
   www.ecca-london.org
1.2 Creative Careers employability tools
   www.arts.ac.uk/creativecareers
1.3 Creative Living
   www.arts.ac.uk/student/careers/
   creativeliving

Senior Lecturer Sandra Drummond's consultancy projects - in which pairs of fashion business students act as consultants to companies who identify issues they need to resolve - have provided authentic opportunities for PPD. Students' ideas are often taken up by the companies they work for and final year students also act as mentors for subsequent years to help them understand the skills they will need to successfully complete consultancy work.

Case Study

2.0 Learning to Learn
Useful Resources
2.1 PPD workshops
2.2 Visual Directions reflective writing
   www.arts.ac.uk/cetl/visual-directions

2.3 Learning styles assessments such as VARK, available at *www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp* Students also learn to be discriminatory in their use of these, assess whether or not these are applicable to them and how they can be useful.

2.4 Blogs

2.5 Papers and research from Unspoken Interactions, a symposium exploring the critical impact of the emotions on creative arts learning. *www.arts.ac.uk/clipcetl-unspokeninteractions.htm*

Case Study

Mentoring schemes which extend work related learning. Lecturer Neil Barnett's project brought together second year Graphic Design students, design industry alumni, design professionals and PPD staff. www.arts.ac.uk/hr/development-training/39181.htm

Another useful resource is ArtQuest's Mentoring information, available at www.arts.ac.uk/mentoring-one-to-one-sessions.htm

3.0 Underpinning Skills

A Fashion Portal accessed through Blackboard encourages students to use web resources to develop their personal profile. Links include *www.fifzine.com* for their fifteen minutes of fame, news feeds and tools such as *www.voicethread.com* for adding voiceovers to videos.

The role of 'Blackboard Monitors' has been created at London College of Fashion which gives students who know their way around the Blackboard VLE the opportunity to work with course tutors on specific tasks and hone their IT know-how.

4.0 Personal Development

The Windmills Virtual Career Coach www.windmillsonline.co.uk/ provides a range of online tools including those which help users identify their skills, attributes and life direction alongside other kinds of career advice.

The BBC website also has free resources such as an online confidence course which users can dip in and out of: www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/expert_biographies/
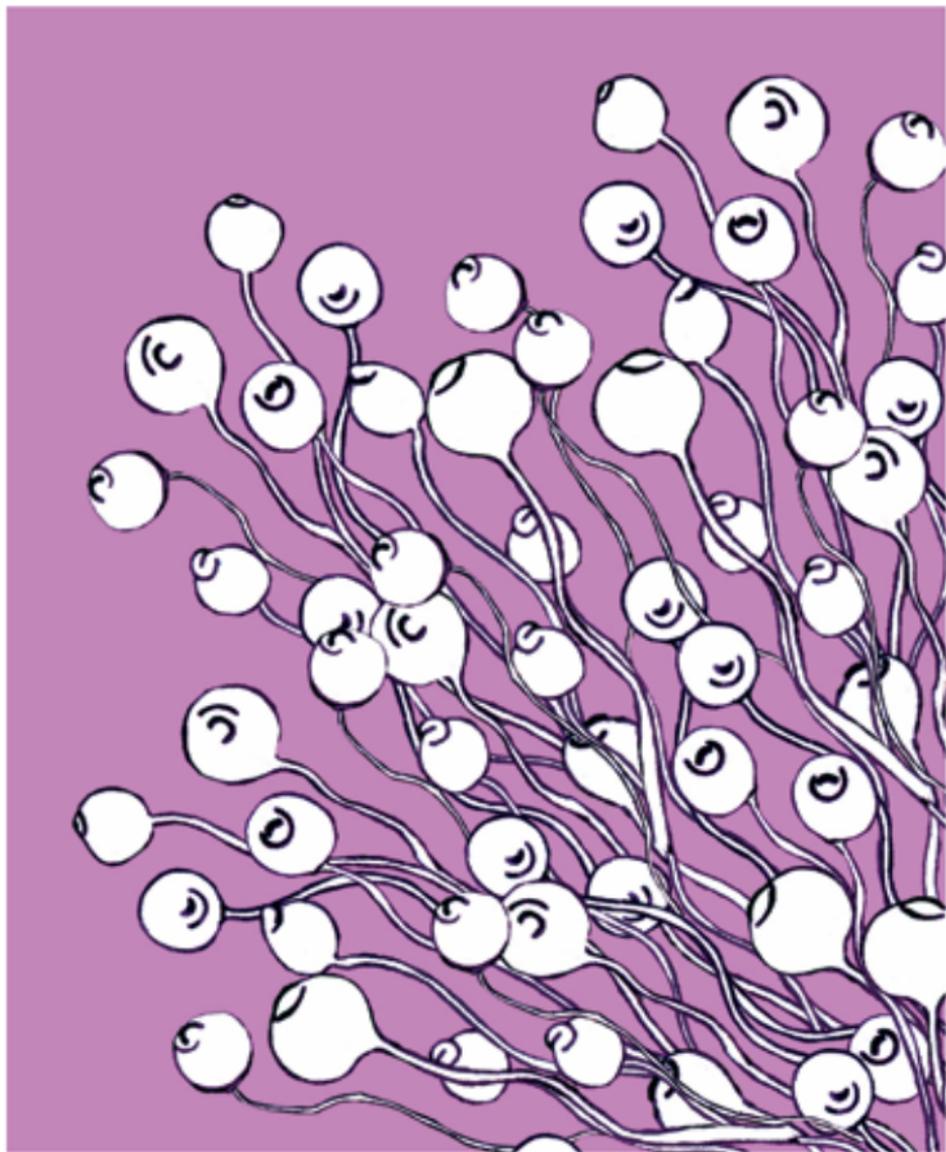
Myth 1
PPD is all about filling in forms

This misconception arises when generating evidence of engagement focuses too much on ticking competence checklists or writing in boxes. While these approaches are useful in moderation make sure students have multimedia or multisensory opportunities to express themselves and focus on what has been learned and its consequences.

Myth 2
Students don't like reflecting

It is well known that writing is often a task that a percentage of creative students are not fond of or find difficult. However, approaches to reflective writing that are short, have visual elements, or which build up the process, such as the Patchwork Text, can make this easier and more meaningful.

Also try…

Using reflective tools in class, such as Stephen Brookfield's Critical Incident Questionnaire *http://stephenbrookfield.com/ciq.html* to evaluate a learning session.

Using tools to develop thinking processes in a creative way, e.g. to generate ideas, pull an experience apart and go beyond surface judgements or assumptions. Catherine Smith, Tutor, Enterprise and PPD and Course Leader Darren Raven, draw on Edward de Bono's CoRT methodology www.edwdebono.com to provide students with transferable thinking and reasoning tools to boost independent learning and understanding of the HE environment.

Myth 3
International students won't want to learn this way

This is to swallow whole cultural assumptions about certain nationality groups in the student body and is unfounded. Adopting learning journals on a Fashion Portfolio course with a high proportion of international students

has resulted in exciting and revealing expressions of the differences encountered when studying abroad.

Myth 4
PPD does not add anything to courses

Wrong.

Through highlighting PPD we can:

- make explicit the depth and range of learning and development opportunities that might otherwise be overlooked

- overturn assumptions; the student who remarked that "I think and talk a lot so I'm a bit surprised to be taught how to reflect" had assumed that being critically reflective was little more than talking and thinking

- use teaching approaches that are flexible, student centred and allow for subjective interpretation as well as those that may need a stricter understanding of specific rights and wrongs (e.g. how to avoid poisoning clients with make up formulations)

Myth 5
The personal P is problematic

A reading of student journals or reflective statements makes it clear that their learning journeys are emotionally laden, with recurrent references to stress, nerves, fear, joy, relief, pride and so on. Staff worry that:

- activities which prioritise the personal may trigger vulnerabilities or difficulties in the learner. However, the personal is often inextricable from creative practice. Similarly, sooner or later every student will face issues of confidence which may affect their achievements; consideration of their values, drivers, sense of belonging, culture, roots and origins among many other influences may also infiltrate their learning

- the personal element of PPD is difficult to assess

Ways of dealing with these concerns are to:

- provide safe reflective spaces in PPD, using creative means, to express these thoughts and feelings

- allow for privacy in the kinds of reflective document provided to staff. Students can keep their own diary, write in their own language if need be, and extract or rewrite segments of it they are happy to share

- assess the quality of reflection rather than the veracity of the content or what the tutor thinks they should have said

Hits

> Encouraging tutors and students to take an holistic approach to PPD, synthesising, rather than compartmentalising, learning

> Making PPD as creative as possible

> Letting students tell their stories. In "Tell Us About It" (a CLIP CETL Project *www.arts.ac.uk/clipcetl-tellusaboutit.htm*), high achieving students from diverse backgrounds who had done well on their courses expressed what their learning journey had been like

> Encouraging the collaborative possibilities of PPD e.g. through sharing and discussing reflective activities

> Sharing the PPD journey: what do staff remember of their own learning experiences - negative and positive?

> Twinning PPD reflection with major projects, such as the dissertation or the development of a prototype design to capture the learning process

> If trying to measure the impact of PPD, do so sensitively to avoid killing the inspiration with heavy-handed evaluation methods!

'It was that moment... in my third year, when
I realised: we are the next generation'

(University of the Arts London, Graduate)

The Ultimate Evidence
Ask your students

"Where does your best evidence of PPD reside?"

They will most likely reply that it is in their CV,
their portfolio, sketchbook or learning journal.

 Inevitably, it is a trick question.

 It lies in themselves.

Notes

Notes