Baking Professional Development Planning by design

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This paper reflects on different approaches to Personal Development Planning (PDP) in higher education, including consideration of the potential role for PDP e-portfolios. It draws upon a survey of courses within the Faculty of Arts and Society (now Arts, Environment & Technology) at Leeds Metropolitan University, and more specifically on the authors' experience of facilitating PDP on the BA Design course. The paper concludes by exploring the tensions that arise from embedding PDP while at the same time wishing to enable students to articulate personal and professional development.

The Faculty survey took Michael Atlay's models of PDP intention and delivery as a framework (Atlay, 2006). In his paper Atlay suggests that there are three strands to PDP: personal development, educational development and professional development, and that although there is overlap between the strands, the curriculum may place greater emphasis on one or the other.

Our survey results show that across the Faculty there are courses that place particular emphasis on each of these strands. However, there are clusters that indicate that the more vocational the course, the more PDP emphasises professional development, especially where the related industry has its own established continuing professional development (CPD) processes. Conversely, the more creative or people-orientated the course, the more the emphasis of PDP is placed on personal development.

Atlay (2006) goes on to identify five models of how PDP is incorporated into the curriculum:

- an '*additional*' model whereby PDP is delivered in parallel to subject-specific curriculum modules with little or no integration between the two

- an '*integrated*' model where PDP is delivered in parallel but with some form of explicit link to the subject-specific curriculum

- a '*modular*' model in which elements of PDP are inserted into one or more subject-specific modules but retain their own integrity

- Atlay's '*embedded*' model is a whole curriculum approach where most modules involve PDP processes and learning is far more blended

- the '*curriculum plus*' model where PDP processes are embedded in the curriculum but also serve consciously to integrate activities that occur outside the curriculum.

As with approaches to PDP intention, the Faculty survey revealed a similar split in approaches to delivery, with vocational courses leaning more towards 'additional' or 'integrated' delivery, while creative and people-orientated courses tend more to the 'embedded' and 'curriculum plus' models.

In his article Atlay (2006) outlines the relevant pros and cons of the different forms of delivery. In addition to these eminently sensible differences the Faculty survey further elicited that with 'additional' or 'integrated' models of delivery, both staff and students are readily able to identify and define PDP learning. With the more embedded models students need more prompting to be able to identify and articulate what they have done and how they have benefited.

However, while the learning in additional and parallel models is easily identified, it tends to be confined to the scope of what has been taught and/or assessed. With embedded learning PDP appears to be broader, more individual and less confined to predetermined content.

The BA Design example

It is against this backdrop that the BA Design course is re-examining its own approach to PDP in recognition that both staff and students are in danger of having embedded the learning so deeply that it is no longer easily identifiable and that students therefore cannot articulate their PDP.

The authors believe that the inherent benefits of PDP in the BA Design curriculum are that it:

- is a **cumulative** progression: L4 = self-awareness, L5 = action planning, L6 = self-actualisation

- enables students to take a **holistic view** of their studies and progress

- enables students to take **command** of and **responsibility** for their studies

- encourages **internal motivation** and **deep learning**

- facilitates **informed decision-making** – electives/ self-initiated work/independent study

- enables students to identify and articulate a **personal approach** to design practice

- enables students to develop a **creative portfolio** and **employability skills** appropriate to **personal career plans.**

We also believe that these benefits accrue from the embedded nature of the learning:

"… believing that creativity draws on the experiences, skills, knowledge and attitudes of the whole person – that … thinking cannot be compartmentalised as it might, arguably, be in other disciplines. We also believe in applied learning – the need to know, with immediate practical applications for new skills and knowledge. Generally, our students are not motivated by learning that isn't connected to their main interest – design."

(BA Design Student Handbook, 2010)

The metaphor used to describe PDP to students is that of a baked cake. The course assembles the individual PDP ingredients, and not only mixes them together but also bakes them such that there is an irreversible transformation – once baked the ingredients can no longer be separated out again and can only be experienced as a single entity. The students and their creative folio of work *are* the evidence of PDP.

However, conversations with students and observations of their behaviours, especially in preparation for life beyond degree studies, indicate that they lack confidence in articulating PDP, make omissions from CVs and struggle to unpack their creative portfolios in terms of how their subject-specific practices demonstrate employability.

Consequently, we have re-mapped our curriculum contents and discovered that what we had at first considered to be a straightforward embedded model was in fact a combination of all but Atlay's additional model.

This process of excavation and review further enabled us to articulate more clearly to students the course's approach to PDP. This resulted in writing a new PDP section for the student handbook which explains the why? how? where? and what? of PDP – the thinking behind PDP, the rationale for an embedded approach, the role of reflection and the process of learning.

The handbook goes on to indicate clearly where PDP appears in modules, and the associated activities, significance and evidence that students will acquire to demonstrate their personal and professional development.

Module	PDP-related activities/ teaching, learning & assessment inputs/learning outcomes	Relevance to PDP	PDP evidence created
studio modules: D1.1 D1.2 D1.3 D1.4	Time & project management

Team work skills & roles

Information searching/Library online

Thinking skills

Independence & criticality

Problem solving

Opportunity for self-initiated project (D1.4) | Developing your learning skills

Familiarisation with facilities & resources

Learning applied within practical, creative exercises and assignments

Personal interpretation of umbrella briefs

Exposure to the available Pathways

Culmination of the year's learning in a project through which to demonstrate personal strengths & interests (D1.4) | Creative assignment outcomes

Written reflections on learning

Individually interpreted briefs reflecting personal interests & aspirations

Personal brief &/or self-initiated project reflecting personal interests & aspirations (D1.4) |

Table 1: Extract from the Level 4 section of the Student Handbook

Somewhat reluctantly we have also had to confront the need to be more prescriptive on occasions through, for example, consideration of assessment, directed log books and PDP e-portfolios.

To date only some aspects of PDP have been assessed but it is evident that the students are engaging more with those aspects which are. Consequently there are now more requirements for students to evidence learning for assessment purposes.

Another prescriptive approach is being developed to support students' awareness of PDP during international experiences (though it might equally apply on work placements and other activities which take place over an extended period of time). Students are tutored to identify a small number of goals under the headings of personal, professional and educational development. These goals are then broken down in two further steps to create up to 16 effectively SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) objectives. These are recorded in a log book which the students take with them on their experience (to date two course-specific field trips to The Gambia), recording and reflecting on their daily activities and noting dates on which they achieve each of their SMART objectives.

PDP e-portfolio

In the context of a national interest in Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) the authors have been exploring the potential of PDP e-portfolios, as distinct from design students' traditional creative portfolios. Interviews with graduate students and their employers from The Leeds School of Architecture, Landscape and Design led to the following conclusions about recruitment practices in the industries:

- Recruitment practices vary from the informal (without policy or explicit criteria) to the relatively structured and accountable. Few employers pay explicit attention to what we might term transferable or employability skills. 'Gut feelings' about whether an applicant would 'fit in' are typical

- The applicants' creative portfolio takes precedence for all employers

- Various formats of evidence are acceptable – though all employers interviewed expressed a desire for applicants to include some 'tangible' evidence in addition to online portfolios, e.g. original drawings

- PDP (though not recognised as such by employers) is assessed through:

- creative portfolio

- interview

- probationary periods/internships.

A review of potential e-portfolio platforms against the apparent criteria from student, tutor and employer perspectives concluded that e-portfolios:

- have potential as a tool for **teaching and learning** – enabling students to record achievement, to reflect and to enter a dialogue with tutors

- are only effective for employment purposes if they feed into the **creative portfolio**

- but are not in themselves directly **relevant to employers**

- are **not currently available** 'off the shelf' in a form that is suitable for students of visually creative disciplines, lacking the necessary flexibility and individuality – the best examples are tailor-made, with inherent cost implications for design and maintenance (Hibbert, 2010).

Herein lies the conundrum.

As educators we wish to embed PDP in the subject-specific curriculum and recognise that employers are unlikely to review job applicants' PDP evidence separately from the portfolio of creative work. How then to ensure that students recognise their PDP achievements and are able to articulate them to potential employers? How to extract the egg from the cake once it has been baked?

There is, however, the possibility of resolving this conundrum. Almost ironically, this is perhaps most easily resolved through digital creative portfolios such that students can hyperlink between creative work and the employability skills that work demonstrates. Work is ongoing with students to explore this possibility and to seek elegant approaches to making similar links in more traditional 'paper' portfolios, which evidence indicates will continue to be valued by industry.

References

Atlay, M. (2006) *Embedding PDP Practice in the Curriculum.* Learning & Employability Series 2. York: The Higher Education Academy.

Hibbert, G. (2010) *The Leeds School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design ePortfolio/Research/Feedback tool*. Centre for Recording Achievement. Available from: **www.recordingachievement.org/higher-education/case-studies.html** [Accessed 19 March 2010].