**Appendix 5** Staff Development (Online reflective practice TDP project)

## Online reflective practice project draft final report (See Appendix 5)

**Project** [blog](http://dial.myblog.arts.ac.uk/category/online-reflective-practice/) **and project** [resources](http://process.arts.ac.uk/category/project-groups/cltad-teaching-development-projects)

The aim of the Online Reflective Practice group was to focus on increasing capacity for *learning* openly and in collaboration with others. Specific objectives identified were the development of: familiarity with tools that enable online reflection and the documentation of process an appreciation of the benefits and challenges of open (online) reflection experience in online collaborative reflection skills and knowledge for the building of personal reflective learning networks

As the two core PG Cert units draw to a close, it’s an ideal time to look back at the online reflection that colleagues have participated in as part of the course. I’ll report on the outcomes first and then the process:

* 1. **Outcomes**

All those completing the first unit engaged to a satisfactory extent with the online reflective tasks, with the vast majority engaging at a high level. [The tasks, with links to examples of posts and comments, are detailed here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1V26GEE6VUVZhS3lHSX1dojTa6KtxWkRFL9Z7H8fd6mU/edit). Participation in the reflective tasks was measured through self and peer assessment and the spread of grades awarded was interesting; ‘B’ was by far the most commonly awarded grade. There were also several ‘A’s and a few ‘D’s. Hardly any ‘C’s were awarded. This supports my observation that once people began to engage in the tasks, they saw the benefits fairly swiftly and their engagement continued and deepened. The few who obtained ‘D’ grades generally did not engage until it was too late (I’ll post up a couple of graphic representations once I’ve got feedback out to the participants).

The quality of the posts exceeded my expectations. The quality of the comments was also very good, but in many cases these conversations did not take place when they were supposed to. While some groups maintained conversations throughout around the monthly topics, in many cases interactions were sparse until the few days preceding the terminal assessment, when they rose significantly. Some of these comments referred to posts made three or four months previously.

The self and peer assessment of participation demonstrated colleagues’ capacity for honest and constructive assessment of their own and their peers’ engagement in the tasks. It also revealed their understanding of the benefits of online reflection and the attitudes and approaches required to maximise these. The following is an example of anonymous peer feedback exchanged:

*I believe that [x] is committed to the subject and is highly reflective, however there were some planning issues which meant I got to read some of the posts quite late. Some of the posts I do feel would have benefited from being a little more concise which would have helped with the articulation of some points. [x] shows a high level of self-direction in his/her blog posts and demonstrates a desire to improve his/her teaching practice throughout.*

In terms of the impact online reflective practice has had on learning, I am certain of three things. First, the standard of the terminal assignments submitted for the first unit (i.e. after six months on the course and five day-long workshops), *was significantly higher than those submitted by previous cohorts after 12 months on the course and 20 half-day workshops*. Essentially, this cohort have **achieved more** in **half the time**. Second, in conversation with participants halfway through the unit, many told me that, were it not for the online tasks, they probably would not have read or written anything yet. And third, a small but significant proportion of those who have completed both units are *continuing to use their blogs*.

Feedback gathered from participants about the online reflective tasks revealed that the vast majority felt they should be retained as a fundamental part of the course. Some participants even felt that we should increase the weighting the tasks have on the unit grade (currently 10%), as such low stakes are disproportionate to the amount of work they put in to completing the tasks. A minority (albeit a significant one) stated a preference for using a less public forum for the tasks, or at least a system with simpler privacy settings.

* 1. **Process**

Although engagement in online reflective practice was high among those who completed the unit, and appeared to enhance learning, participant drop-out/deferral rates were also significant. Minor factors contributing to this include improved flexibility of the programme, which makes it easier for participants to defer one or two units until the following year, and higher than normal redundancies. One major factor was the overlapping scheduling of the first two units, which increased the workload and the complexity of the programme; this has been resolved for 2012/13. Unfortunately it is very difficult to untangle this factor from the **increased complexity and greater challenge inherent in the new curriculum**. The other major factor was the *continuous nature of the online reflective tasks*. For the first time, participants were being required to produce something from the outset that would influence their grade for the course. This meant that those who were not engaging as they should were made aware of this – often through informal peer feedback – and forced to be pro-active in arranging deferral rather than waiting until the end of the course to submit a borderline assignment (or not).

* 1. **Lessons learned about literacies for online reflective practice**

Introducing online reflection as a compulsory element of a course has led to the development of the following elements of participants’ digital literacy:

* **Understanding the benefits and challenges of online reflective practice** – as evidenced in terminal reflective assignments and ongoing exchange of feedback with participants.
* **Understanding the attitudes and approaches required to maximise the benefits of online reflective practice** – as evidenced in the self and peer assessments.
* **Willingness to try new tools and processes** – as evidenced on the blogs. Seeing group members posting images and videos often prompted participants to try this for themselves and/or ask each other for advice and support.
* **Willingness to find the answers oneself** – whereas at the start of the course I would receive requests for assistance before a participant had even tried to find any information, by the end the requests I received were much more specific; participants had tried a number of avenues and had come to me as a last resort.
* **Greater tolerance of complexity** – several participants who felt in the early stages that the course requirements were overwhelmingly complex seemed much more comfortable about the requirements in the latter stages. Four months in, we found we had to ask everyone to start logging in with their new student IDs to access their feedback, whereas we had assured them previously that they would be able to use their existing staff IDs. The response to this was nowhere near as negative as we expected – people seemed to just get on with it.
* **Tool-specific knowledge** – e.g. how to add and edit blog posts and comments, how to create blog groups and subscribe to new posts, how to upload media and create hyperlinks.
  1. **Next steps**

The next phase will be to look more deeply at the data from the tasks, the assessments, and from forthcoming surveys and interviews, to get a better understanding of the role of compulsory, course-based online reflective activities in developing particular aspects of participants’ digital literacy. It will be important to contact colleagues who deferred their studies to gain a better understanding of the factors that influenced their decision. I’m not anticipating that this information will be of much use (previous studies have shown that withdrawing students often cite external pressures and are unlikely to connect their attrition with course design, student support, etc..), but it’s worth a shot. One strategy may be to ask them to speculate what they would have found most challenging had the external pressures (work, family etc.) not been as significant. My major concern is that the online reflective activities were actually a little too challenging, and that this contributed to participant withdrawal and delayed engagement. If this is the case, I need to identify how best to address this; through greater applicant awareness, longer participant induction, different support structures, etc..

I am also interested in looking at the other end of the spectrum; those participants who are now continuing to engage in online reflective practice through their blogs now the units have ended. What are their motivations for doing this and how did these come about? Was it a particular aspect of the course that helped them over a particular threshold, and is this something that can be developed, or given more emphasis, for future cohorts? Was it a particular experience they had, and can this be replicated for others?

* 1. **Achievements to date:**

Around 70 PG Cert participants – primarily UAL staff, plus others from RCA and other institutions have engaged in compulsory online reflective tasks to a satisfactory extent from October 2011 to April 2012, certainly achieving outcomes 1-3 and with some beginning to work towards outcome 4.

A small but significant proportion of those who have completed both units are *continuing to use their blogs*.

A modest number of participants incorporated online reflective practice into the curricula of the courses they teach during this academic year.

A significant number of participants have expressed an intention to introduce online reflective practice into their courses into the future.

The monthly activities for the two core units, with examples of participants’ posts, have been published under a CC 3.0 license (links below):

[Learning & Teaching for Art & Design in HE unit: Monthly activities & examples Teaching Development Project unit: Monthly activities & examples](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11h0-p7Utpxv6Znh46XOsPEFVkD0zvbDdw1rzY3YhIig)

And as PDF here: [TDPResearchJournalActivities](http://dial.myblog.arts.ac.uk/files/2012/07/TDPResearchJournalActivities.pdf)

Data on participation and participant experience were gathered through self and peer assessment, a number of feedback surveys (anonymous and open), a face-to-face workshop and a short focus group that was audio recorded.

* 1. **Future actions:**

Capitalise on the driving force of summative assessment and use this to ensure the regularity of reflective activities is maintained throughout the two core units

Use good examples of collaborative reflective practice in the induction stage

Experiment with introducing an e-portfolio tool rather than a blog tool for early activities, as a stepping-stone to completely open practice

* 1. **Resources & Support Networks:**

The intention behind focusing on the Postgraduate Certificate is that it offers an intensive and immersive experience for a significant number of staff who are actively developing their teaching practice. The current cohort therefore naturally forms the hub of the ’support network’ around this group, with participants’ colleagues and students also forming connections to a variable degree (dependent on the extent to which the group’s activities directly impact on an individual’s teaching practice). Despite this expanding nature of the network and the openness of the group’s reflective outputs, there is still more that can be done to make the collective learning of the Online Reflective Practice group more accessible to a wider pool of staff and students; for example, the production of multimedia resources presenting the benefits of and strategies for ORP as a learner, and as a teacher. These could include text, video, audio and images, and could be hosted on Process Arts and publicised for use in a range of contexts; in particular the new common Year 1 unit Introduction to Study in Higher Education unit, and more widely across the Academic Practice Provision. This could link up with previous work on the creation of multimedia resources for Personal and Professional Development (<http://www.arts.ac.uk/ppd/>) , which includes several resources to support reflective practice.

**Case study**

Here are two mini case studies of participants on this year’s PG Cert programme who have made good progress already in incorporating online reflective practice into their own courses:

Monika Parrinder, a Visual Culture and Theory tutor at LCC, introduced the use of blogs for open drafting of written work. This was intended to reduce the stress associated with writing and submitting formal drafts and to foster a culture where writing is seen as an intrinsic aspect of design practice – a useful way of exploring ideas – rather than a ‘necessary evil’ for assessment purposes. Students reported a range of benefits, such as the sharing of references and the broadening of perspective that came from viewing and commenting on others’ work, and an ability to make better judgements about their own work. A range of technical challenges were experienced; some students found strategies to overcome these and some didn’t. A desire for a greater level of tutor engagement has led Monika to consider what she needs to do differently in order to better support the technical aspects of blogging. <http://goo.gl/MUutn>

James Montgomery, a Photography Technician at LCF, set up a tutor blog to share learning resources with his students as an accompaniment to a series of technical workshops. This was intended to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own research and to free up workshop time for practical activities that led up to a final shoot. The final shoot provided the motivation for deeper approaches to learning in the absence of formal assessment. In addition to this, James set up group blogs for the students to document their progress in the workshops. James noted that this constructivist approach improved student learning and confidence, and student feedback (captured using a video ‘pod’) was very positive. Engagement with group blogs was lower than James hoped for and he is considering ways of better integrating this activity; for example through enabling and encouraging students to record processes and outcomes on the blog *during* the workshops. <http://goo.gl/qhQyi>