

PebblePad Profilers for Enhanced Employability and Reflexivity in the Arts

UWL Impact Case Studies 2012/2013

Eti Wade
Senior Lecturer in Media (HE)
Ealing School of Arts, Design and Media

Description

Text For the level 6 BA Photography module 'Professional Portfolio' I created a PebblePad profiler called 'The Photography Employability Profiler'. The 'Professional Portfolio' module supports students in preparing for employment in the Photo-Imaging industry. The Photo-Imaging industry, like most creative industries, is highly competitive and success in gaining employment is achieved through personal initiative, strong technical and creative abilities, self-confidence, good presentation skills and an excellent photographic portfolio. Students' ability to talk about their skills and competencies in a confident and informed manner is a major factor affecting their level of success in gaining photo-imaging industry related employment.

Approach

1. The Programme Learning Outcomes:

Third year BA students, approaching the end of their degree studies, should be close to achieving the Programme Learning Outcomes.

2. Skillset skills required for entry into the photo-imaging industry:

The skillset papers regarding the Photo-Imaging industry specify skills and competencies desired by the photo-imaging industry and have guided the re-design of the programme.

3. UWL Graduate Attributes document:

This document guides the University in designing programmes and assessing graduateness.

The questions on the profiler have been worded in relation to competencies. To aid understanding, most questions have two sections, with the second section detailing specific evidence of the competency.

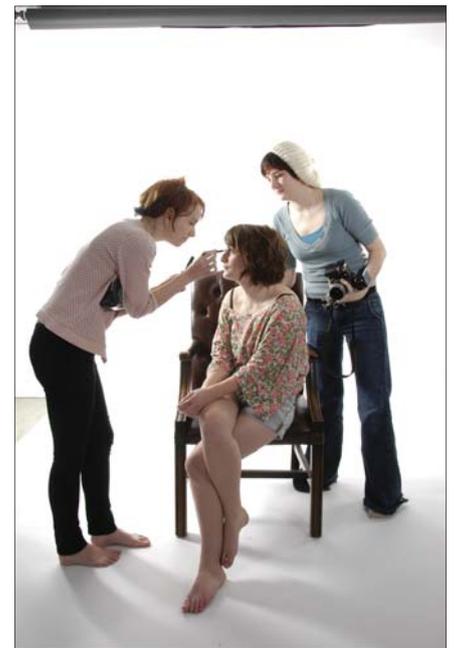
For example

The subject-specific, practical skill category learning outcome states that students should be able to '*Photograph professionally in complex and unpredictable contexts requiring selection and application from a wide range of innovative or standard photographic techniques*' upon graduation. The following competency question was written and included in the profiler:

- **Can you select from a wide range of standard or innovative photographic techniques?**

This was expanded upon by highlighting the associated practical activities in which the student should be competent.

Would you know what photographic equipment, cameras and other imaging tools would be appropriate for specific image production requirements and in relation to space and lighting conditions?



Competency questions are self-graded on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'No, I can't' and 5 being 'Can do well'. After self-grading their competencies, students were guided to reflect on an instance where they demonstrated this competency in an assignment or a work experience situation. In many instances this required the incorporation of the students' photographic work. Progress on the profiler was regularly monitored throughout the semester by the tutor, and students who were lagging behind were coaxed with encouraging messages. The workspace was set so that all students could publish, view and comment to encourage the sharing of good practice. The profiler was offered to the students as part of an assessed PebblePad webfolio requiring them to engage in a range of activities relating to preparation for employment in the photographic industry.

Outcomes

Students were required to undertake the profiler as an assessment element and all students engaged in the process. It was anticipated that not all students would work at an appropriate level of reflection, with some remaining at a superficial level. This is one of the potential difficulties with reflective activity that Moon identifies in her paper, 'Employability and Reflection' (Moon, 2004, p. 13). The problems encountered in the students work with the profiler included:

1. students who did not read the questions properly or did not work at a deep level of reflection;
2. very few students set up 'action plans', which might be because the 'action plan' asset is more complex and elaborate than the 'ability' asset;
3. students who viewed this as a paper exercise that they needed to get through.

These problems were addressed by tutor monitoring of student work and the provision of formative feedback throughout the semester. At the end of the module, students indicated that the profiler and the requirement to reflect upon their current academic and professional skills in varied aspects were useful. This benefit was more apparent for those students who actively engaged in deep and meaningful reflection.

Impact

According to Moon, "reflection upon learning is important in employability as a means for students to gain, maintain awareness of, express and explore their abilities in general and particularly in recruitment processes" (Moon 2004 p. 7). Students' engagement with the 'Photography Employability Profiler' directs and encourages personal reflection designed to create insight into their level of readiness for industry. This reflection enhances their ability to articulate this readiness. This effect is of particular importance with students from non-traditional backgrounds who often lack the self-confidence needed to engage with industry.

Lessons learned

The PebblePad Profiler is an ideal tool for guided reflection. Having the action plan within this structure guides students to take charge of their development and become independent, life-long learners.

Reflection upon learning is not easy for many students, especially if they have not been guided to engage in reflective activity beforehand. To save the tutor a lot of feedback time, more class discussion on the difference between deep and surface reflection is needed to ensure students understand what is expected of them. The activity needs to be presented as a meaningful and powerful learning tool, which is of significant benefit in the preparation for employability.

Where next?

The use of programme learning outcomes in this way is now being extended to all three levels of the degree programme, and students will be asked to use the profilers as part of their employability skills programme throughout their education.

