

# Credit where credit's due

Continuing professional development (CPD) – why do we do it and what value does it hold for us? What is ‘good’ CPD and how can we make the most of the CPD that we take part in? People Dancing’s **Anna Leatherdale** explores



People Dancing Summer School 2015. Photo: Rachel Cherry

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**These are some of the questions that we've been trying to address at People Dancing as part of our work with the ArtWorks Alliance (a collection of umbrella organisations that support artists working in participatory settings).**

We believe that in order to keep pace with changes in our working world and to make our practice not only relevant but the best that it can be, we need to continue to learn and grow.

People Dancing and the ArtWorks Alliance have come to the conclusion that really effective CPD involves a number of phases:

### **1. Identify what you need (or want) to learn**

Taking time to work out what you really need (or want) to learn will save you time and resources in the long run and is more likely to make your learning more effective. One of the best ways to do this is to think about what skills or knowledge you need for a particular role and ask yourself how confident you feel about your ability to perform those tasks. A couple of years ago, People Dancing created an online tool called the Development Needs Analysis (DNA). It was designed to help practitioners assess their own levels of confidence in relation to a range of skills and knowledge set out in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Dance Leadership. The advantages of using the DNA to assess your skills is that it focuses on very specific areas of practice – things like 'developing choreographic skills' or 'behavioural management' – and the computer system links resources to the areas in which the practitioner identifies that they need most help. If we plan our CPD and identify learning goals for ourselves, we're more likely to use our resources effectively and come away with a greater sense of accomplishment when we achieve them.

### **2. Identify a way to learn more about your chosen topic and take part in a learning activity**

Often people say they can't afford to take part in CPD because they assume it means they have to go on a course. Whilst courses offer a good way of learning for some people, they may not be appropriate (or economically viable) for others. Talking with other colleagues or friends; observing another teacher's class; reading a book; taking part in online learning; seeing a performance or visiting a gallery; talking with class participants – and many other mechanisms – are all equally valid forms of CPD. The crucial issues are whether the learning mechanism helps the learner to achieve their learning goal, and whether the learner reflects on their experience.

### **3. Reflect on your learning**

Taking part in any learning activity only becomes really effective if we reflect on what we've learnt and work out how we can apply it to our own practice. Keeping a reflective journal can be a good way of doing this, yet it's important to remember to not just describe what you did (i.e. "took part in a class aimed at frail elderly participants") but record what change it will make to your practice and why you want that change to occur. This will also help you figure out whether the activity has helped you meet your learning goals and may assist you when you start looking for your next CPD opportunity.

People Dancing, with ArtWorks, has recently gone one step further. We've been piloting the CPD Credit System with a view to awarding recognition to dance practitioners who make a personal commitment to their CPD. Practitioners on the pilot completed the DNA to help themselves identify areas of skill or knowledge that they needed to improve. They then took part in CPD activities that helped them to meet their learning goals, recorded

the CPD they'd taken part in and, crucially, reflected on their learning. They then submitted the electronic log book in which they'd recorded their CPD activity to the People Dancing office and have been awarded one 'credit' for approximately every hour of CPD they've undertaken. We'll soon be issuing 'credit' certificates to pilot participants that will show the number of hours they participated in CPD over the pilot period, together with the key areas of learning that they invested in.

Over time we hope to publicise the CPD Credit System to employers across the sector so they'll be able to more easily identify those practitioners who are working hard to keep their knowledge and skills updated. CPD is an obligatory part of many professions (e.g. sports and exercise coaches, medical professionals, teachers) and many local authorities, health care groups and schools understand the value of CPD. Most of us are unconsciously engaging with CPD on a frequent basis: talking to colleagues; watching a performance; reading an article in a book or magazine. By formalising our own CPD a little more – identifying our own learning goals, recording our activity and reflecting on it – we're more likely to begin to see the value of our own engagement as we're able to track our own progress over time.

People Dancing's website is full of all sorts of CPD resources – from information sheets, lists of courses and means of identifying other practitioners who we can learn from, through to the online learning programmes. Have a go at the DNA and contact our office if you would like further information about the CPD Credit System. But most of all, enjoy your learning!

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#### **Info**

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