

# making the case

## Using umbrella webfolios to enhance diversity and creativity in the Personal Development Planning process.

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### **Theme(s)**

**Teaching/Professional practice:** Programme Course Development

### **The background context**

This case study is based in the Faculty of Education, Health and Sciences, in the subject area of Mental Health and Therapeutic Practice.

PebblePad was used to create an umbrella information webfolio with pictures, links, instructions, examples and task areas that was flexible and open to change and individualisation

The webfolio work was to provide an environment for Creative Expressive Therapy and Complementary Therapy students to collate academic and creative materials in sub-folios that were in themselves to be part of a creative/reflective learning and personal development planning process. They were level 5 students, who, in the main, had limited computer experience, as they generally worked with art, dance, drama and music, or hands-on work such as aromatherapy and shiatsu. Therefore, one of the principal issues was aspects of technophobia, and a reluctance to link computer work with creativity of expression.

### **The purpose**

In the previous year PebblePad had been used mainly as a collection point for work done and tasks set for the module. It was felt that by making a more interactive, illustrated webfolio with subfolios, it would give an example of the flexibility, and creative potential of the webfolio. This would in addition enhance their transferable skills, while at the same time linking creativity with technology, and addressing the challenge of technophobia, if given the right support.

### **The approach**

An umbrella webfolio was created that contained an interactive information webfolio where students could find module information and guidance but with interactive features, and two separate task subfolios; one to complete directed learning activities and collate evidence of experience and the other for the student to house creative reflections on the module learning itself, and a resultant Personal Development Plan (PDP). This was a development from the previous year where the module documentation had been placed simply on Blackboard and the students submitted webfolios for the PDP module assessment. This merged the interface with Blackboard more fully. The methodology for using subfolios was developed for this academic year and is still under review with feedback being used to improve support systems and enhance performance for next year.

### **The result**

PebblePad was used with a cohort of approximately 60 students ranged across the Creative Expressive Therapies' pathways that included art, music, dance, drama, and complementary therapies. Many of the students displayed varying degrees of technophobia and needed regular support with different aspects of PebblePad work used for the module.

They were asked to create a webfolio to support their PDP, as well as collate personal data, certificates, references and so on, for post-university use. In addition, they were required to reflect on the taught sessions of the module as part of the learning outcomes, and their PDP was to be based around these reflections. What PebblePad allowed was the use of all their diverse individual approaches to illustrate, inform and

enhance their work and create webfolios of evidence suitable for presentation to future employers.

There were two principal areas of data to be considered by the students, i.e. personal data and the module work, in addition to information and support material supplied by the university. Therefore, the notion of a multileveled webfolio was developed and used. It was felt that all the data needed to be kept in one place for convenience, but at the same time create the opportunity of having identifiable folios as integral units in their own right.

The construction of an information filled module folder (webfolio) was inserted into a simple holding or 'umbrella' webfolio, and then the two student work webfolios were entered in parallel to create a total of three sub-webfolios that could be stored and accessed separately yet be linked to one entry through the cohort gateway.

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This structure created the space for the students to target a more personal space that would be a useful data-bank at a later date outside the university environment, and another that targeted the aims and outcomes of the module.

One immediate issue was that when the gateway was launched the students received over 20 assets, as the information package contained various aspects to demonstrate the potential for being creative within PebblePad. However, some quickly saw the potential for 'playing' with the webfolios, but at times were frustrated by the structure because links and designs put in the sidebar of sub-folios were lost, and could only be placed in the umbrella webfolio. This meant that any links that they wished to keep in sub-webfolios had to be kept within individual pages, and not down the navigation sidebar. This was quickly learnt but would mean that any sub-webfolio used at a later date as a main webfolio would need to be adjusted or appear to have a relatively empty navigation bar. The student, therefore, received what appeared to be 4 different webfolios, so there was a problem of multiple submissions to overcome, followed by the need to ensure that assets were linked to the correct subfolio. This problem was not particularly difficult to rectify in a short, end-of-class session, as all that had to be established was that the umbrella webfolio was the one that had to be sent to the gateway.

Overall, most of the students engaged well, and created a wide variety of webfolios, including artwork, music, photographs, video links, cartoon illustrations, redesigned templates, and so on.

On reviewing the feedback, the negative aspect regarding PebblePad revolved around wanting more training and support with technical difficulties, as, for instance, there were password issues and size limitations that blocked certain asset uploads. We are currently reviewing feedback, some suggesting more and improved support for actual contact work with PebblePad, and some more related to module content and delivery.

### The impact

21% gained A grades for the module, 30% gained B grades, and a further 30% gained C grades which suggests a very

good level of engagement, and a high standard of webfolios. In addition, all referrals were due to incompleteness of tasks rather than standards of work.

From Table 1 below it can be seen that the percentage of those gaining the equivalent of a 2:1 or above has improved from 42.6% two years ago to 50.9% in the current academic year, and the number of students receiving the lowest pass grade dropped from 11 to 6; thus, overall the results have shown an upward trend.

Grade	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Sub-total 'A's (1st)	9	7	12
Sub-total 'B's (2:1)	17	14	17
Sub-total above C+	26	21	29
Percentage gaining above C+	42.6%	41.2%	50.9%
Sub-total 'C's	22	14	17
Sub-total 'D's	11	10	6
FMs	3	6	5
Total Submitted	61	51	57

Table 1: Comparison of student results for the past three academic years

From the table above it can be seen that there was little real change when PebblePad was first introduced in 2010, as it took some time to establish for both staff and students alike. However, even though there was a complete shift of paradigm from paper based folios to web based there was no perceivable negative impact on results, and the transition was relatively smooth.

This academic year, based on feedback from the previous cohort, PebblePad was introduced earlier, before the summer, so the students had an opportunity to work with it and explore its potential, and more specific time was set aside during the provision of the module to cover concerns, and this would appear to have helped results improve.

Many students were inspired by the versatility of the platform which allowed them to show their learning experience and skills in a creative, personalised and interactive way.

*“ I know I have creativity but it's kind of locked inside and so PebblePad actually almost gave permission for that creativity to come out .... it was a case of this is yours do what you want with it, not what we [university] want from it ... [it was only] once I accepted the challenge and I started by personalising my PebblePad and really getting involved with it, did I actually really enjoy the creativity that it allowed. ”*

It is felt that the possibility to employ a flexible and adaptable online personal study environment helped focus the students' creatively, and also gave them the possibility to network and help one another. This led to some students taking a supportive role as IT 'assistants', and has given them useful additional experience and transferable skills.

*"PebblePad's really helped me because it's meant that I've been able to gather all different kinds of work, put it together and create this eportfolio, and the advantage of that has been that I could send that across the world, and that I know that I'd like to work in America"*

Further analysis of individual cases of those who needed to re-present is called for to establish the reasons for this. It may have been a reluctance to use PebblePad, difficulty with it, or external personal challenges that prevented complete presentations. However re-submissions are still in process so final results are unknown.

To help simplify matters it is foreseen that the holding umbrella next year will be the information webfolio, and the illustrations will be standardised to reduce the number of transferred assets. The illustrations may also be formatted to create instructions on how to replace them, giving them a two-fold purpose, as the more students can see they can have fun with it the more they are likely to engage, but they need initial guidance and support.

*"In the future I would like to use PebblePad to create a much larger database for myself"*

### **Lessons learnt**

PebblePad is now being introduced earlier. More support sessions and specific roles of student IT mentors and PebblePad advisors have been created, and additional support material is being considered in the way of screen-shots, Jing type video instructions, and so on. Using the information webfolio as the umbrella is being considered rather than having it as a parallel subfolio. This will reduce the number of webfolios actually used and simplify the process a little. Additional prompts for individualising pages within webfolios is also being looked at, and the university is being asked to consider a different interface set up with PebblePad itself to support smoother login facilities. Although the feedback and 'tree view' tools are good it will be a great improvement to be able to open more than one window at a time, as in Pebble+.

### **In brief – making the case for PebblePad**

PebblePad provides:

- A flexible, creative webfolio space for collation of, and reflection upon, a wide range of learning, work and evidence.
- Webfolios that are relatively easy to create and can be fun to personalise.
- An opportunity to create an 'instruction' area that can be a 'hub' of interactive information, examples, and links to other areas of the university's systems such as Blackboard.
- Feedback and 'tree view' tools that make formative and final marking relatively quick (even in their current state).