

making the case

A music teacher's development – documenting the journey for accreditation

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Theme(s)

Teaching/Professional practice: Programme/Course Development

The background context

The eportfolio was introduced incrementally at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music over a 3 year period, supported by a University of Sydney Teaching Improvement Grant. The funding provided access to support services and funds for academics' time in their research agenda to undertake its introduction into the degree program. Accreditation to become a music teacher was introduced by the NSW Institute of Teachers (NSW IoT) in 2008 and we, at the Music Education Unit, decided an electronic portfolio was the best vehicle for collecting evidence for the mandated graduate teacher professional standards. We began by engaging in a curriculum remodelling of the degree to incorporate eportfolio tasks into discrete units of study within the degree program. We had no idea that this would be such a powerful learning tool for the students and so we watched them take ownership of their learning and engage in the personal learning environment that PebblePad provided.

Why PebblePad?

Institutional requirement... but we like PebblePad!

The purpose

We were aiming to ensure the students (and the degree program) met NSW IoT accreditation standards. We were also aiming to enhance the student learning experience.

The rationale driving this was to engage students in the ways in which eportfolios could be used to support their developing concept of their roles as trainee music educators. It was important to model good teaching and learning for these teachers in training, so we highlighted the use of eportfolios as a medium for reflection and self-evaluation.

It became apparent that the electronic folio was a perfect vehicle and impetus for developing technological skills. The self-reflection and the development of the technological skills became apparent very soon after the project began. These outcomes of the project were in addition to the original intentions, which related directly to graduate employment through the ability to demonstrate students' responses to government accreditation requirements for teachers. Through consideration of these multiple layers of meaning of eportfolios, we position them as new ways of preparing music teachers for the future.

The approach

To begin with we were focused on the collection of evidence for the portfolio so that the students could prove the graduate teacher professional standards were met. When we began in 2008 the University did not have a "platform" and was only trialing PebblePad (and another platform) and so the students were asked to document and present the evidence through any multimedia medium. The students were creatively designing their own learning 'story' and it was evident as they progressed that they were designing the curriculum for us as teacher educators. From 2008 it was decided that we had to have the students' voice in this project and so when PebblePad arrived at our institution in May 2009 we had already initiated students into the purpose of an eportfolio (the project concluded in December 2011).

The background, history and multiple intentions of the project are described above, especially how its aim was to address university expectations, music education proficiencies, and official government teacher accreditation criteria. The research relied on action research in which each stage of the project was used to generate the next stage. Interviews with students were held regularly, students were trained on a one-to-one basis in the technological aspects of PebblePad, and student eportfolios were analysed for their content, mode of delivery, and usefulness.

Our project's journey (with various roadblocks, challenges and constraints of the development of eportfolios through PebblePad) became a form of curriculum evaluation. This is a necessary evil as it usually closes more doors than it opens but in our experience it provided a pathway to a reinterpretation of the degree program. This, in turn, provided a new way to ensure that future music educators are comprehensively prepared for their profession.

The result

We achieved what we set out to achieve and more. As teachers, we regenerated our curriculum using evidence from students about what they thought was important. We also provided evidence to the accreditation body that students could demonstrate the professional standards as required. For students, the development of their eportfolio provided evidence of abilities, utilisation of technology skills, and thinking about job application and placement. It also acted as a site for learning, for clarifying what their studies were about, for thinking about who they were becoming, and for reflection and self-evaluation. In these ways we position eportfolios as an advantageous new undertaking in the preparation of future music educators.

The impact

As an eportfolio was established to give a snapshot of the learning outcomes of this four-year degree program, it drew attention to the aims of the degree as a whole, its officially accredited professional status, and the range of skills it develops. Its implementation made explicit many issues often left implicit in music teacher preparation. One of the main aims was to address the competencies required to be met by graduate teachers as a result of completing the degree program. This meant searching and selecting evidence to demonstrate they "possess the requisite knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to plan for and manage successful learning" (NSW IoT, 2009, p2).

So what did our students actually "do" in PebblePad? They were asked to complete tasks incrementally as they progressed through the degree. In Year 2, they completed the "about me" in a process towards developing the CV section so that a resume could be developed for each student. In Year 3, they were required to assign evidence to selected professional standards – of which there were 49 to choose from. The 49 professional graduate teacher standards were set as a template in PebblePad and students uploaded artifacts (or assets) that were either collected from practice teaching or assessments they completed at University in a variety of subjects. For example, a student uploaded a video of an interview she did for a Cultural Diversity in Music Education subject and that met element 7 of the professional standards: "Teachers are actively engaged members of their profession and the wider community" (NSW IoT, 2009, p 14). Another student uploaded an original composition and then a sound file of the recording she made with a junior school band that were playing her

composition. This was evidence for the element "Demonstrate research-based knowledge of the pedagogies of the content/discipline(s) taught" (NSW IoT, 2009, p 4).

In these examples the students were addressing competencies in a defined template but they were also developing their own learning story. We emphasised that it was not about 'storage' but really about the 'story' of what they learn and how they used that learning to become a graduate teacher. In 4th year they commenced developing a webfolio in PebblePad. By this stage they had enough understanding of the platform and the technology requirements to synthesize what was expected and to create their own webfolio – or 'story'.

Lessons learnt

During implementation of the project a number of issues, often unforeseen, emerged. First, the student perceptions of eportfolios changed from the initial survey asking them what they thought the purpose of an eportfolio in Music education was. Initial responses included a place to collect "... 'stuff' for a job interview in 2 years' time". The students moved away from this concept – but not entirely towards an understanding of, and a pride in, their learning outcomes.

Second, through the interaction with PebblePad the students' identities as 'digital natives' appeared to develop. They were able to see the relationship between the technology and the learning task.

We also saw the role of eportfolios in representing students' multiple musical and pedagogic identities as they took ownership and created their webfolios. Many designed elaborate webfolios with personal aspirations whilst others restricted the webfolio to their achievements over the 4 years at university only.

We were pleased with the process of curriculum renewal that took place as a result of the mapping of eportfolios across the subjects of the degree program. This meant that eportfolios replaced existing assessment tasks as we redesigned the tasks in relation to eportfolios and the PebblePad platform. As a result the eportfolios became a site of learning for the students. They valued the process and were proud of the product.

In brief – making the case for PebblePad

- PebblePad encourages students to 'post' and 'comment' (like social media sites such as Facebook).
- It looks professional for graduate employment for our graduate music teachers.
- It provides the nexus between teaching and learning
- It encourages higher order thinking skills as students have to analyse the assessment tasks and then synthesise these in the process of creating the webfolio. They are allowed to comment and give their own opinion about how it has met the requirements of the set task.

References:

NSW Institute of Teachers (2009). *Professional teaching standards*. Retrieved December 16, 2011, from <http://www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au>.