

Case Study

Dual learning experience: An academic studying and learning through the PebblePad environment

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The background context

Charles Sturt University (CSU) is a regional university with multiple campuses in regional cities in New South Wales and beyond. The University has identified itself as a University for the Professions. The Faculty of Education is one of the largest in Australia with four of its six Schools focussing on Teacher Education.

EEL409 (University Learning & Teaching) is the first subject in the Graduate Certificate in University Learning & Teaching (GCULT), and while it is available to all students studying the GCULT, it is compulsory for all 'new' teaching/academic staff at CSU. The subject involved is available across campuses, schools, and faculties but is administered by the School of Education in the Faculty of Education and delivered by the Division of Learning and Teaching Services. EEL409 is a distance education subject that has been augmented by two internal work-

shops for those who are CSU staff (which is my situation).

A generalised view of the student cohort would characterise them by being a group of educated professionals who are new to teaching at University level or who want to solidify their University teaching experience with a formal qualification. In my cohort, there were more than 20 students, most of whom are teaching at CSU at one of the nine campuses.

My expectations

As an academic undertaking this subject and discovering that I would need to use PebblePad

as the tool to submit the assessment items, I was a bit wary at first because using a personal learning system to submit assessments is not conventional at CSU. It also seemed very technologically savvy for a group who were not necessarily up to date with technology. However, I

was excited at the prospect of learning a new tool that I could potentially use with my students in the subjects that I teach. I saw this as an opportunity

for me to evaluate the personal learning system as a study tool and an assessment method without having the pressure of ensuring that I had considered all potential issues that may arise with a diverse cohort.

The challenge

The challenge for me as a student was to learn a new personal learning system and produce a webfolio that would be more than just text – more than just a word document transferred into an online environment in the personal learning system.

I was also challenging myself to be more creative in my thought processes and in how I displayed information. Sometimes when a new technology is introduced, it is easy to do the bare minimum to get by while not actually absorbing the technology and working with it. So, I also wanted to push the boundaries of what I could achieve in the webfolio while staying within those that had been set in the assessment guidelines.



The purpose

The existing process involved a complex paper trail which involved students contacting and sending a potential supervisor all relevant documents including any supporting evidence in a paper format.

The purpose of creating the webfolio was to showcase or illustrate the work-based project that I undertook during the subject. The work-based project was the essence of our assessment and PebblePad was the means of submitting the assessment.

Because the subject was also part of my Professional Development as an academic at CSU, the impetus for presenting our assessment in PebblePad was also to help us become more competent and confident in using personal learning systems. As we worked with PebblePad, we were encouraged to constantly consider how we might use PebblePad in our own subjects.

As CSU has an initiative about using technology in subjects, this was also one of the drivers behind PebblePad's use in the subject.

The approach

PebblePad was briefly introduced during the first internal workshop and we were guided through it via vodcasts in our subject's online environment. There was a lot of self-guided study required to become proficient at the basics of PebblePad, but once I became familiar with the environment, it seemed to be a logical process that allowed me to be non-linear in the development of my webfolio.

Initially, I attempted to 'have a go' at using PebblePad but I was not competent at using it due to the new terminologies (such as 'Assets' instead of 'Files'). However, after a quick look at the introductory vodcast provided by the subject lecturer, the structure, layout, and usage of PebblePad became obvious. From this point, I felt that I could produce anything and start to be very creative in my approach to both the assessment task and its presentation in PebblePad. It was at this point that I began to experiment with content and layout. (* See the Appendices for examples of the different layouts I experimented with.)

“ Overall, I felt that PebblePad became very intuitive after I took the time to understand the initial concept and layout. ”

I began to enjoy creating small assets such as Thoughts, Meetings, and Blogs. As I created more and more assets, I found that I could present much more information in the webfolio than I could have done in a simple document. There is a great amount of flexibility available in PebblePad and this helped me think outside of the typical assessment box when I was creating the webfolio.

The issues

The main hurdle that I faced as a student using PebblePad to present my assessment was changing my preconceptions of what assessment should look like at a postgraduate level. When I first found out that we would submit our work in a webfolio, I felt as though the subject was not a 'serious' subject but rather something that I needed to do to 'tick the boxes'.

However, as I began to work in PebblePad and develop my webfolio, I realised how much more was required from me in terms of creativity, planning, organising, and preparing something that was not only academically sound, but also visually appealing. It was at this point that I realised that I had a lot more freedom in the presentation of my project because I wasn't limited to text-and image-based content: I could create a more interactive and attractive assessment piece.

One minor barrier that I faced was when I wanted to create HTML-style pages with fully integrated and embedded videos. (I did not have time to experiment further with embedding videos due to time constraints on both myself and the assessment deadlines.) At this point, I felt that the PebblePad environment became restrictive, but also appreciated that most people would not see this as a restriction because they might not reach that stage or level of de-



velopment. If they do reach it, then it is likely that they will use another environment to create their document then add it into the PebblePad environment as an asset. I have since found out how to embed HTML into a webfolio and it appears to be relatively easy (and logical) once explained.

The result

Using PebblePad to present and submit an assessment item has shown me how flexible and creative I can be in assessment items – both as a student and an academic who is evaluating PebblePad as an assessment tool. It has opened another avenue to presenting work in a more technologically-driven world and one where Web 2.0 technologies are becoming the norm in tertiary education spheres.

I have seen the value of using a personal learning system such as PebblePad with my students to give them another option for presenting work and tracking their progress through their subject and their course.

Having gone through the process of being introduced to PebblePad and internally reconceptualising how assessment can be presented, I can understand the barriers that my students might face when I introduce the concept and technol-

ogy to them in my subjects. Also, as I know how my students might react, I believe that I am in a better position to introduce PebblePad to them as a professional development tool and one that can enhance, enforce, and increase their learning.

The physical results of my work with PebblePad during the subject can be viewed online and there are some images in the Appendices at the end of this document.

The learning

This experience with PebblePad has changed my perceptions of what is 'valid' learning in a university learning and teaching arena. It has also made me more aware of alternate learning and assessment processes that would be beneficial to both academics and students alike (and to those of us who are both!). I also found that through the process of reconceptualising the assessment, it gave me the opportunity to become more creative and flexible in the content that I included and how I presented it.

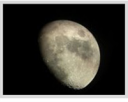
The functionality of PebblePad allows non-linear work processes and thought patterns to flourish, and are perhaps even favoured: this can allow more creative processes and assist in producing more innovative work.

It also supports students (and academics) who are more visually oriented than textually oriented. I believe that this is a great step towards providing more inclusive learning and assessing environments.

In brief

- A good introduction and orientation to the software is important otherwise it can be confusing and overwhelming.
- PebblePad offers a great amount of flexibility and it is only limited to the user's imagination.
- People who work non-linearly can flourish in this environment because it offers great diversity and many options for presenting information.
- When a more flexible environment is provided for teaching and learning, more innovative outcomes can be created.

EEL409 - Trisha Poole - Work-based Project: Develop Presentations for Three Conferences



Literature

A list of resources that I have used during this project... (To be updated as I go through - a kind of tracking of literature, information sources and so on...)

A quote to start with:
"Technology is so much fun, but we can drown in our technology. The fog of information can drive out knowledge." Daniel J. Boorstin

I'm not sure if these qualify for academic sources, but they do apply to my workbased project:

- [A how-to on writing abstracts](#)
- [5 Ways We're Diminishing Learning by Assuming Face-to-Face Instruction Is Best](#)
- [Back to School: 10 Terrific Web Apps for Teachers](#)
- [Technology How-to's](#)

Here are some more 'traditional' academic sources that I haven't directly used, but are informing my teaching philosophy:

- [Inclusivity and alignment: Principles of pedagogy, task and assessment design for effective cross-cultural online learning](#)
- [What the Student Does: teaching for enhanced learning](#)
- [Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education: Foundations for Success](#) (I haven't gotten to read this yet, but it's on my list!)
- [Teaching with Technology](#)

Critical Pedagogy

This is one of the theories that underpins my pedagogy at this point in my academic career and I feel that this quote from Ira Shor (1992, p. 129) sums it up nicely:

"habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse."


- Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education: Critical teaching for social change*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Other relevant articles and books that I consulted during this process:

- [Haggis, T. \(2009\) 'What have we been thinking of? A critical overview of 40 years of student learning research in higher education'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34:4, pp. 377-390.](#)
- [Littlejohn, A. & Pegler, C. \(2002\) *Preparing for blended learning*. Routledge: Oxon.](#)
- [Richardson, L. \(1990\) *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Press.](#)
- [Singh, H. \(2003\) *Building Effective Blended Learning Programs*. *Educational Technology*, 43:6, pp. 51-54.](#)

Other Random Information


A framework for elearning by Badrul Khan.




- The **pedagogical** dimension of E-learning refers to teaching and learning. This dimension addresses issues concerning content analysis, audience analysis, goal analysis, media analysis, design approach, organization and methods and strategies of e-learning environments.
- The **technological** dimension of the E-Learning Framework examines issues of technology infrastructure in e-learning environments. This includes infrastructure planning, hardware and software.
- The **interface design** refers to the overall look and feel of e-learning programs. Interface design dimension encompasses page and site design, content design, navigation, and usability testing.
- The **evaluation** for e-learning includes both assessment of learners and evaluation of the instruction and learning environment.
- The **management** of e-learning refers to the maintenance of learning environment and distribution of information.
- The **resources support** dimension of the E-Learning Framework examines the online support...

Appendix 3 – more complex embedding of images

Display Options



EEL409 - Trisha Poole - Work-based Project: Develop Presentations for Three Conferences



CSUed09 Conference (Presentation+Poster)

CSUed09 Conference

Presentation title
 Bringing TESOL into the 21st Century

Presentation length
 15 minutes + poster

Presentation content

- [Webquest site](#)
- [Poster](#)
- Handout for viewers (if required)
- PPT (coming next week!)
- Notes pages for participants (if required)

Presentation audience
 Other CSU staff - academic, general, development

Presentation purpose
 To showcase how different tools are being used to take the print-based TESOL subjects and make them blended using online tools

Presentation abstract

Poster abstract

Creating rich student experiences for TESOL learners
Trisha Poole & Linda Ward

The introduction of CSU Interact in 2008 has provided the impetus for both academic staff and educational designers to rethink learning and teaching 'in the 21st Century'. In this paper, we discuss the challenges and opportunities...

Appendix 4 – creating submenus/embedding other webfolios

Acknowledgements

Case study by Trisha Poole
 All images courtesy of Charles Sturt University