Case Study

Using a webfolio to present an exercise training program.

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The background context

This case study describes the use of Pebble-Pad in the unit CHI225 – Essentials of Strength and Conditioning, taught by a member of staff in the School of Chiropractic and Sports Science.

The broad aims of the unit are:
- to advance the students' understanding of scientific principles related to the strength and conditioning field
- to be able to transfer this knowledge into the practical setting

The Unit Coordinator worked with a staff member from the Educational Development Unit to investigate how PebblePad could be used for a specific assignment and to provide information to students on the use of PebblePad.

The task for students in CHI225 was to structure an 8 week training program for a "client" described by the Unit Coordinator. The criteria to be assessed included, but were not limited to: background evaluation and performance testing, program implementation, outcome measures and conclusions. The detailed exercise program was to include information and video footage and/or a description of each exercise to be performed, alternative exercises where applicable, and variations within the training pro-

gram. The final product was to be presented in PebblePad and made available to the Unit Coordinator through a gateway.

The current practice

This was a first-time offering of the CHI225 unit and therefore an assessment template had not previously been developed.

The current practice for these types of assessments is to develop and write the exercise training program using a word processing package. There are two broad issues with this:

i) It limits the thinking of students to designing programs for people whom they are visually observing/training, as opposed to reminding them that the World Wide Web can now be used to search for exercise trainers/clients on different continents;

ii) The material presented and interaction between client-trainer is often limited in word-processing software. For example:

- The program is pre-programmed and difficult to alter once implemented therefore ignoring the training principle of individualisation.
- The use of images and video footage in word-processing software to demonstrate various exercise routines is more cumbersome than in a web-based program.
- There is limited opportunity for the "client" to dialogue with the trainer using a word processing package (e.g. for feedback, posting of video to show trainer how they performed the exercise etc.).

The challenge

There were multiple aims for the trial:

- to evaluate students' use of PebblePad and their feedback on the program (usability, suitability etc.);
- to determine (subjectively by Unit Coordinator) the applicability of the webfolio tool to implement a training program designed for a virtual client;
- to gather additional feedback from the Unit Coordinator and students on PebblePad;
- to provide alternative platforms for the development and implementation of training programs;
- to enable students to consider the global opportunities that may exist in the exercise training business.

The assignment was set up to be presented in PebblePad so that initial feedback and data

could be collected about the use of PebblePad from both a staff and student perspective. This information can now be used to modify subsequent use of PebblePad and determine the changes in satisfaction scores by subsequent students.

The approach

Prior to semester 2, 2009, the Unit Coordinator and I met several times to discuss the assignment/problem which was to be presented. We discussed the different ways in which the finished assignment could be presented and decided that a webfolio would be most suitable for the final presentation.

A short demonstration of PebblePad was provided to the students during a lecture early in the semester. Within the online unit on the Learning Management System copies of the PebblePad document "Getting started", details on how to access Murdoch's version of PebblePad, and instructions on creating a webfolio were provided for the students. A follow-up session was then provided approximately seven weeks later

to address specific questions and ensure that students were familiar with the program. The final assessment was sent to the gateway during week 12 of the semester for grading.

The issues

The majority of the students did not access PebblePad during the early part of the semester. As the deadline for the assignment approached the students found that they were unsure about the use of PebblePad and how to structure their assignment to display as a webfolio.

The Unit Coordinator found that he was not able to address many of the questions that students had regarding the use of PebblePad during the early stages of the semester. He therefore created a sample training program webfolio for students and found that he learnt a lot about the

use of PebblePad in the process. A second session on PebblePad was given in a lecture where the Unit Coordinator explained the criteria for the assignment and demonstrated his version of the training program. Student questions about the functionality of PebblePad were addressed. One of the issues raised by students was the creation of a training schedule as a table in a Microsoft Word document and then an inability to copy the table into a page in the webfolio. While alternatives were discussed, they were cumbersome and this issue was noted as a major technical limitation of PebblePad.

The result

The majority of students in the unit developed a training program and each webfolio was strikingly different. Some students were very creative with their own templates and graphics, while others adopted the basic styles within PebblePad.

There was a range of ways in which material was provided to the "client" – all text within the pages in the webfolio, links to Microsoft Word documents, websites, and videos on YouTube including personally made videos of various exercises. The range of webfolios showed that the webfolio tool could be used effectively to present the training program and it enabled stu-

dents to structure their assignment in a format which suited them.

The three examples below show the different ways in which the students presented the training program for the 'client'.

Example 1 – Each week of the training program set up as page within the webfolio. The exercises were described in Word documents (listed under Assets and linked from the individual Week pages) and there were separate links to videos to illustrate the exercises.
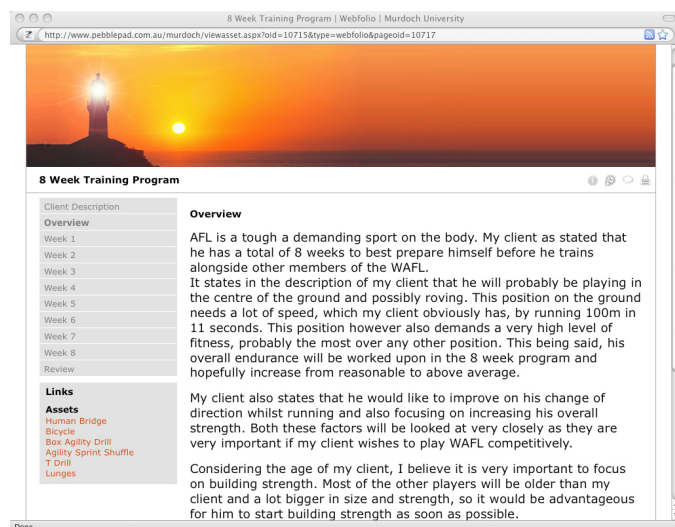
Example 2 – Training program set up as a webfolio within the main webfolio.
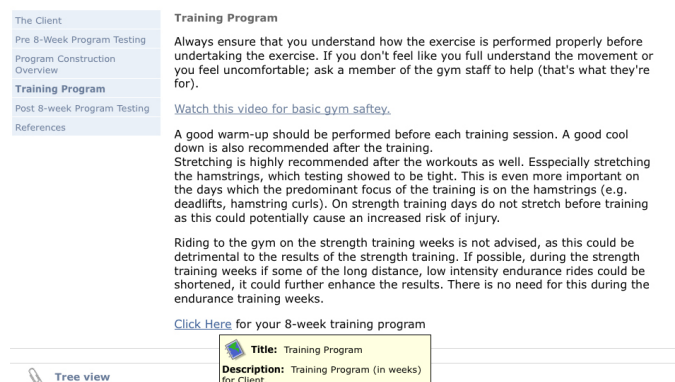
Example 3 – Page contains links to graphic files showing the days' exercises and links to a description and video illustrating each exercise.
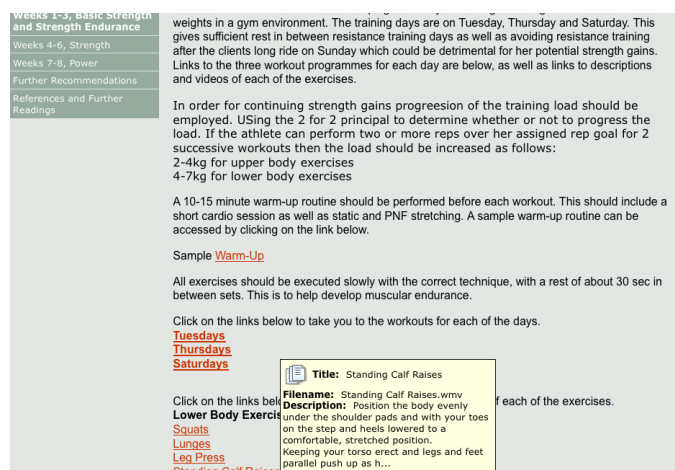
When viewing the webfolios the Unit Coordinator noted that some third-party copyright material had been included and permission for publishing videos had not been acknowledged.

All students who used PebblePad at Murdoch in 2009 were surveyed for feedback on their experience. Twenty-one of the students in this unit responded to the survey. 59.4% found the webfolio tool difficult or very difficult to use and 40.6% found it easy or very easy. We received some useful data from the survey and overall the data showed that assets/items which had been used the most had been rated of lower difficulty compared to the items which were used least.

Student comments included:

- *"The setup is useful."*
- *"I encountered problems with adding certain types of pages to my webfolio – eg adding photos only to a page."*
- *"Trying to find a specific page or asset to edit sometimes difficult, but I have now discovered the 'search' option making it easier."*
- *"It was a good way to break up the monotony of word and generic publishing programs and provided a great range of formats. It personalised the content."*
- *"Some parts were easy but should be more user friendly like Word inputting in graphs, tables etc."*

The Unit Coordinator will be using creation of a webfolio in PebblePad for the assignment in 2010. He will demonstrate PebblePad to the students early in the semester and raise the students' awareness about third-party copyright material, gaining permission for publishing content and referencing correctly. The students' first task will be to create an action plan for the development of their assignment and submit it to the gateway. Milestones will then be implemented to engage the students throughout the semester with the aim of increasing student's comprehension on the use of PebblePad. The webfolio and student queries will be answered during a class midway through the semester and again two weeks before the assignment is due. He hopes that the students will be able to test their plans in a subsequent unit.

The learning

PebblePad proved to be a useful tool for individual assignment tasks for students. Each webfolio looked different as the program provides an environment where students can be more creative and individualistic. Most students altered the template for their webfolio.

Instruction needs to be provided for students before they use the program and a question and answer session some time after they have used the system could be beneficial. Accessible documentation should be provided. We have updated Murdoch's student help page for PebblePad to provide more documentation and Frequently Asked Questions. We need to encourage use of the email facility within a gateway to disseminate information to students.

Unit Coordinators who want their students to use PebblePad should attend a hands-on workshop and become familiar with the system's capabilities before they introduce the program to their students.

It was concluded by both the Unit Coordinator and me that the knowledge of the Unit Coordinator is likely to affect the students' ability to use PebblePad and subsequently, the students' satisfaction with the use of PebblePad.

In brief

- Staff need to become familiar with PebblePad prior to introducing it to their students.
- An authentic and specific task (eg creation of the training program) should be set to engage students in the use of PebblePad.
- Provide instructions for students on using PebblePad in an introductory session and have a later question/answer session where specific issues raised by students
- can be addressed.

Acknowledgements