Integrating e-portfolios: Putting the pedagogy in its place

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E-portfolio's have been a feature in teacher education degree programs as a means to document professional accreditation (Gerbic & Maher, 2008). The development of a professional e-portfolio for pre-service music education students has challenged teacher educators in a NSW university music Faculty as it was essential to embed the *processes* of creating a student e-portfolio across the four-year music education degree program that allowed students high levels of independence and creativity in the presentation of themselves as both reflective learners and professional practitioners (musician and music teacher). This poster presents a work in progress describing the *processes* of introducing e-portfolios into a music education degree program and discusses the initial design issues of blended learning, the methodology used to embed e-portfolios into existing Units of Study, assessment, the pedagogical possibilities for engaging students in a technology rich learning environment and other conceptual issues that arose in the design process.

Keywords: e-portfolio, music education, quality teaching and learning, assessment, professional accreditation standards

Background information

An e-portfolio (or electronic portfolio) is a purposeful collection of artefacts and reflections saved onto a website (or CD) that has the potential to demonstrate how a student has met the current accreditation standards for their professional practice – in this case, teaching music in NSW secondary schools. Preparing for integrating e-portfolios into the music education degree program, and identifying the issues in developing e-portfolios for music education students and professional practice as music teachers, was a challenge to teacher educators in the music faculty in a NSW university. The NSW Teacher accreditation body now requires graduate teacher standards be met with artefacts and/or evidence to support the achievement of these set standards. Concerns about how to appropriately integrate the evidence of graduate teacher standards with the evidence of accomplished musician raised much discussion about the inter-dependence of one professional practice on the other. In addition to these issues were the university and faculty graduate attributes that also required to be demonstrated as 'accomplished' within the students' academic work. Balancing these criteria along with mandatory teacher preparation curriculum was posing a challenge for teacher educators as both required students engage in a technology rich learning environment.

It was clear, therefore, that the e-portfolio potentially had many masters to serve. To be able to reflect on one's professional practice (i.e. as a performer/musician) whilst connecting teaching and learning theory and linking this to relevant authentic artefacts emphasises the "constructivists nature" of the e-portfolio (Stefani, Mason & Pelger, 2007 as cited in Gerbic & Maher, 2008: 320). The challenge was to embed the e-portfolio into existing Units of study in a meaningful way whilst also addressing issues of whether the e-portfolio should be included in assessment. It was also imperative to distinguish the purpose of the e-portfolio – which was an institutional e-portfolio as the University had recently embarked on an "all students" e-portfolio policy which was to be developed during the students' time as a student and available as a storage system for evidence of their degree completion (ALTC, 2008).

The initial aim of introducing e-portfolios was as a means for music education students to demonstrate the professional skills they had acquired as music teachers during their pre-service teacher training degree

program and to provide evidence of how these skills responded to NSW Graduate Teacher professional accreditation standards. Whilst working towards this aim, it was clear that the teacher educators were in the *same place*, but needed to investigate a *different space* to capture the students' development as both musician and music teacher. Through blended learning, where the students moved between a dependent and independent space for components of their learning to become a music teacher, the effectiveness of the e-portfolio appeared to be appropriate as a technology application (Baston, 2002).

Teacher education is an advanced field of research when it comes to integrating e-portfolio into pre-service teacher degree programs (Adamy & Milman, 2009; Penny & Kinslow, 2006). Music education students are required to provide evidence of their meeting of graduate standards with the NSW accreditation body and the e-portfolio systems used by other NSW universities' teacher education faculties have incorporated the graduate standards into their process. The challenge with musicians is the nature of performance and creativity that should be captured by the portfolio to adequately show the parallel development of musician and music teacher. Research focusing on music education and e-portfolios is limited and yet there exists a large body of literature on the use of e-portfolios in teacher training (Imhof & Picard, 2009).

Why create an e-portfolio?

It is thought that for music education students, the e-portfolio can provide "evidence for their learning and development and showcase professional competencies" (Abrami & Barrett, 2005 as cited in Gerbic & Maher, 2008: 320). As the process unfolded, the development of the e-portfolio became a means for investigating issues related to pre-service music teacher preparation. Initially the e-portfolio was to document the students' progress as a music teacher (and musician) over the four-years of their undergraduate teacher training. The main concern was how to ensure that patterns of growth in competencies in music and music teacher were the main rationale for the introduction of the e-portfolio into the degree program. However, questions such as how e-portfolios would be integrated into students' academic studies and how they would reflect the nature of the degree program (which included high levels of musical creativity) were raised by the project team responsible for designing the e-portfolio. How could the e-portfolio represent pre-service music teachers' multiple identities and provide evidence for students' development as music teachers over the four years of the degree program? In effect, the e-portfolio had to present a holistic picture of the students' skills and abilities as a pre-service music teacher whilst highlighting the individuals' development as a musician. Through these issues, the e-portfolio began to be seen as a conceptual site and to take on a role as a medium for teaching and learning, rather than acting solely as representation of what students had achieved or could do as musicians and music teachers.

Methodology

The first undertaking was a focus group where students (n=6) were asked the following questions:

1. What is your understanding of e-portfolios in the Music Education Degree? And what do you see as the potential uses for e-portfolios?
2. What would you put in your e-portfolio?
3. Do you think your e-portfolio should include
   - personal profile – including a statement outlining your educational philosophy
   - official documents – for example, practicum reports, certificates (AMEB)
   - examples of performance/composition/teaching e.g. 1 minute film clip of you performing/teaching/taking a rehearsal
4. Do you think components of the e-portfolio should be assessable tasks in your degree?
5. What are the advantages of e-portfolios and what do you see as the potential problems?

The students were volunteers from the third year cohort who had been introduced to one e-portfolio assessment task in semester 2, 2009 as a trial. Data from the focus groups and the assessment task will be collected and analysed to inform the next stage of the research project.

Discussion and recommendations

It was imperative that the e-portfolio was not to be an electronic version of a printed academic resume but rather a dynamic presentation of the student as musician, music teacher and university graduate. To achieve this, the project team embedded the first stage of the e-portfolio into a final year Unit of Study

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requiring an online assessment task of writing guided reflective journal entries during the seven block professional experience (practice teaching). Following an evaluation of this the next step was to embed another component of the e-portfolio into another Unit of Study where 3rd year and 4th year students kept a log of any professional music teaching activity they engaged in (paid or volunteer).

So far, the project team has undertaken an extensive review of the literature on e-portfolios. Specifically, the literature review has investigated e-portfolios in professional practice and in teacher education. A great deal of the literature supports the embedding of e-portfolios into existing Units of Study (Munday, Hunter & Oerlemans, 2009) and the development of graduate attributes and standards for teacher education students. Same place and yet a different space seemed to indicate the movement of the Units of Study to incorporate the pedagogy required to bring e-portfolios into existence. As there appears to be very little literature in the introduction or development of e-portfolios for music teachers, the project team looked to examples of blended learning that already existed in the degree program for a starting point.

It was imperative that the e-portfolio was not to be an electronic version of a printed academic resume but rather a dynamic presentation of the student as musician, music teacher and university graduate. To achieve this, the project team embedded the first stage of the e-portfolio into a final year Unit of Study requiring an online assessment task of writing guided reflective journal entries during the seven block professional experience (practice teaching). Following an evaluation of this the next step was to embed another component of the e-portfolio into another Unit of Study where 3rd year and 4th year students kept a log of any professional music teaching activity they engaged in (paid or volunteer).

The project team is now at a stage of understanding how these components may come together to form a template for an e-portfolio to be introduced in first year. Students are in the process of developing a statement about their philosophy of teaching and why they want to become a music teacher. This activity is embedded in a second year Unit of Study and will be evaluated at the end of 2009. The slow and meaningful process of introducing the e-portfolio though embedding it into various assessment tasks in a range of Units of Study was to allow students the opportunity to reflect on their development as a teacher and to gather material (and evidence) of their professional practice as musician and music teacher. Evidence such as recitals, performances, managing choir and band rehearsal and engaging in learning new music in non western music exchanges are just a few examples of the evidence students are being encouraged to collect and contribute to their e-portfolios. The implications for directed and clear development of the e-portfolio allow meaning to be derived from the experience and accreditation professional standards to be documented.

The introduction of an e-portfolio has "added a number of pragmatic advantages" and, for the music education student, it will include digital artefacts showcasing not just the teacher but the musician/performer as well (Gerbic & Maher, 2008: 320). This poster proposes that due to the specifics of music as a performance, creative and pedagogic undertaking, relevant technology provides a range of ways for students to comprehensively present themselves in potential professional teaching and musical situations. This work in progress will develop the notion of different spaces for students to showcase their development as a musician and a music teacher whilst engaging in a technology rich environment that utilizes blended learning for the adoption of e-portfolios as a meaningful inclusion into the development of a professional music practitioner.

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