

making the case

PebblePad tools for a 3D approach to transition – industry, VET, HE or Career Pathways

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Theme(s)

Learning: Reflection, Employability, RPL

Teaching/Professional practice: Programme/Course Development, Managing e-Assessment

Organisation: Student Satisfaction, Retention

The background context

In 2012, the RMIT Business TAFE School's new online Diploma of Logistics, aimed at workplace learners, will be implemented through Open Universities Australia (OUA). One of the first VET Diplomas to be offered nationally through OUA, it is receiving considerable attention. Two other courses being developed by RMIT are using this design as a model.

“ Given the significant geographical spread of potential candidates across our industry sectors particularly in remote regional locations the decision to provide extended access to this excellent program should be warmly embraced By providing a flexible delivery model in an industry where time is a critical issue and through creating a supportive learning environment which is an area where RMIT excels you will ensure that this new program is highly successful. ”

Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council (Robert Adams, CEO)

Overview of the Transport and Logistics industry

- over 461,000 workers nationally
- a growth industry
- predominately low level of skilled personnel

- high concentration of workers aged 35 years and older
- median age 43 years
- lost productivity and low completion rates are barriers to training indicated by industry
- the sector requires more skilled and 'e-literate' workers with the growth of online supply chains
- 35.5 per cent of industry workers have an education level of year 10 or below

How things have been done in the past

The Diploma of Logistics was offered to industry in 2011 by RMIT to meet the growing need for training. A program was developed for a large player in the Australian market: TNT. This program was designed to be delivered in the workplace and supporting materials were developed, i.e. a text based workbook. The teacher who was delivering the program mailed the workbook to students, emailed and Skyped them regularly, and flew from state to state to offer on site workshops at regular intervals. This was a time consuming, costly, and non-sustainable practice. Online learning therefore was the perfect solution, as long as it had the appropriate support systems in place.

The issues

Cordes (2009) explained that most adult learners will come with some experience in technology; however one of the challenges to delivering through technology is the varying levels of experience. In the case of older learners, many will come with limited experience with technology, limited confidence in their own ability to learn this way, and perhaps in the lower end of the socio-economic scale, access to fewer resources. Given the median age of the logistics industry workforce these are very real issues. The TNT program teacher also identified that

many of the industry learners had few computer skills and their workplaces did not always have the facilities to support them.

This intended cohort, many with no formal or post-secondary qualifications, raises a concern for effective transition back into education. Digital literacy, literacy, understanding RPL, and career planning skills are expected to be areas where students will require additional support.

What we were aiming to achieve

- To develop tools and a framework in PebblePad to support industry based learners' transition into and pathways out of our program in order to optimize the probability of successful student outcomes, to mitigate the risk of attrition, and to build a workplace relevant program.

The tools we chose to develop in PebblePad to support this objective include:

- An induction kit
- An RPL kit
- An e-community centre
- A mentor kit
- A learning plan
- Upfront assessment of literacy and numeracy skills
- Assessment of digital literacy
- A professional pathways or articulation plan
- Webfolios for formative assessment and student reflections
- A graded assessment tool

Why PebblePad?

Key reasons for choosing PebblePad:

- A key tool for our technology mediated learning suite.

The design of our online program hinged on a range of e-learning tools selected to provide workplace-based online students with a balanced educational experience by catering to a range of learning styles: Blackboard for activity-based learning; Blackboard Collaborate for regular dialogue; and PebblePad for learners to store both reflections and work-relevant webfolios for future use in their workplaces.

Technology Mediated Learning



Fig 1: Technology Mediated Learning

- A range of features that support workplace learners.

The decision to use PebblePad hinged on its ability to offer multiple tools that provide learners with a 'Personal Learning Space' (Sutherland, Brotchie, & Chesney, 2011) that can be used both during and after the learning period. The program was designed with the intention of drawing people from the Transport and Logistics (T&L) industry back to study in order to further their employment outcomes and to support an industry which has a recognized need for skills development. PebblePad was chosen to create 3 dimensional support for these workplace learners; a scaffold between their workplace, VET, and post Diploma into HE or better workplace outcomes.

PebblePad's strong link to the workplace is demonstrated through the tools that learners can use to build a professional identity and ultimately to guide their post study pathway. They can easily update their CV, store examples of templates to be used in the workplace, share projects with their employers/managers/mentors, and join in industry discussions in their e-community.

- A permanent support tool.

PebblePad offered the opportunity to build tools that were open to all students enrolled in a program. Blackboard is being used for individual course information but a more permanent space for all relevant program information was necessary given the nature of OUA where students enter and exit the program at different places.

- A range of features to facilitate building professional templates and forms.

The PebblePad transition toolkit will include a range of templates and forms to provide transition support into and out of the learning program with the intention of minimizing attrition and assisting students in their choice of pathways on exiting the program.

The approach

The initial stage of this project evolved in 2011 when I was required to guide the instructional design. At that time there was a need to select the learning tools and to design the learning and assessment activities. New to the University I attended a number of PD sessions and discovered PebblePad. It seemed to suit the workplace learner group because of its many features that could be transferred to the workplace and was subsequently selected.

The project-based assessments are all housed in webfolios in PebblePad for the 14 courses in this program. Most of the projects have students working on workplace projects and analysing efficiencies in the workplace; the intent of the design meaning they may retain their projects after study for workplace use, to share with management, or to use as a stepping stone towards career development.

While developing the assessments, one of my major concerns was in keeping the learners on track. OUA operates on four study periods per year of 13 weeks each, one rolling in straight after another. Learners do not have time to get behind in their studies and this became a crucial design point. The idea that when each learning outcome was completed it should lead directly to a part of the assessment made sense. I intended this to be prominent in Blackboard where the learning activities

are housed, so designed the 'Assessment Pitstop' approach highlighted by an image of a Formula One racing flag to alert students to complete the relevant section of the webfolio in PebblePad. This means at the end of the 13 week study period they will have completed their major assessment by working sequentially through their webfolio project.

Assessment Pitstop - Complete your 'Competitor Analysis'	
	<i>Activity</i>
<p>Understanding your competitors in the marketplace is critical for business survival. Go to your PebblePad now and complete the <i>Competitor Analysis Table</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List your competitors Note what they do well, what they do poorly 	

Fig. 2: An extract from Blackboard site for the unit 'Develop and evaluate strategies for the transport and logistics industry'

During the planning stage I was also involved in the articulation agreements for students who completed the Diploma of Logistics and was fortunate to sit in on the many meetings required in order to complete that agreement. Academics voiced concerns of VET (FE) students' readiness for HE, so it seemed important to develop students' academic literacies and readiness for university life. Transition and pathways subsequently became a focus in the second stage of program development. On finding a call for pathways projects I placed a submission to government to fund further work on this project. The project was chosen as one of 8 to gain funding from the Australian Government's 'Higher Qualifications Pathways Projects'. This broadened the stakeholders in this project to include government.

The plan to support students in their transition into and out of study is hinged on student satisfaction and retention. The '3D transition tools' designed to meet these two ends in PebblePad include:

- A full induction kit into the program – including individual learning plans and goal setting, an RPL kit, and an e-community.
- Tools for upfront assessment of literacy and numeracy (LL&N) skills and digital literacy in order to provide timely support.
- A professional pathways or articulation plan entitled 'Where to from here', including Higher Education pathways and career planning assistance with related web links and training in the use of social media to increase employment possibilities.
- A mentor scheme – where students are encouraged to find a workplace mentor to discuss their projects to enhance their learning. The PebblePad induction webfolio houses a Mentor Kit with meeting schedules, objectives, role descriptors, discussion questions, etc. The expectation of the mentor scheme is that students will then also find motivation in the workplace itself.

	Mentor Stop
<p>If you have chosen to find a mentor in the workplace to discuss your studies and ideas with, it would be appropriate at this point to make a time to meet up. Discuss what you have learned in this section as well as your proposed idea for the business. The mentor may have some valuable input on your workplace proposal.</p> <p>Remember your Mentor Guide is housed in your PebblePad and this holds a 'mentor meeting schedule'; it is a good idea to complete one of these prior to your meeting to keep the discussion focused.</p>	

Fig. 3: Students are prompted approximately every 4 weeks to use the mentor kit in PebblePad.

The result

The assessment tools have been built in PebblePad Classic and it was anticipated these would be transferred to PebblePad3 in March. However, due to unavoidable delays and internal support issues our management put the transition to PebblePad3 on hold. The tools are expected to be completed prior to the commencement of the first cohort. Trials of the transition and pathways webfolios are scheduled for May and responses to the kit will be documented with a full report due to government by early June. An industry advisory board evaluation of the program and the tools is also scheduled for May.

The webfolios hold a broad range of information and tools that will support students at both ends of their program. The project based webfolios developed for assessment ensure that students' assessments are closely related to their workplaces and provide learners with the possibility of growing an internal profile in their respective companies while studying.

The impact

The design of the program has been well received across RMIT. I have been invited to speak at a number of internal events promoting the design and the use of PebblePad to other staff.

As part of the Higher Qualifications Pathways Projects I have recently attended a meeting in Adelaide with the other successful project members to explain the design and the tools we are using. In all instances the project has been well received.

The impact on the teaching staff involved in the design of the learning and teaching materials has been very positive. The use of webfolios as a guided assessment tool for distance learners has made the process of assessment design easy with excellent links to the learning materials. The 'pitstops' have proved to be an effective design tool and the concept is now being implemented in other programs.

Lessons learnt

Until the final design and its imminent trial is complete, it is difficult to say what the lessons are. We have, however, learnt a considerable amount by simply developing the design and are now replicating it in other programs; the ability to copy webfolios means much of the structural work can be easily transferred across the Institute.

The transition to the new PebblePad while in the design stage has proved to be a hurdle. Obviously the idea of commencing

such a multi-faceted project in a new interface may have been premature and the transition to the new PebblePad would be more suited to smaller and more stable projects while we become competent using the new system.

The sheer adaptability of PebblePad as the main tool in such a broadly scoped project has however been illuminating. It paves the way for its use in many programs to meet a variety of objectives.

In brief – making the case for PebblePad

- Excellent features like webfolio which adapt easily to workplace projects.
- An excellent form building tool to build a multi-faceted transition tool.
- Provides a professional space for workplace projects so students can share work.
- A one-stop shop for all student needs.
- Easy to embed into Blackboard.

References:

Cordes, S. (2009). Adult learners: How IT can support “new” students. *Educause Quarterly Magazine*, 32 (1). Retrieved December 11, 2011, from <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/EDUCAUSEQuarterlyMagazineVolum/AdultLearnersHowITCanSupportNe/163869>.

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