

Introducing eportfolios into the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy (OT) program

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Chosen theme(s)

Unit level implementation

Program curriculum

Professional learning and accreditation

The context

In 2013 the University of the Sunshine Coast undertook an ePortfolio Early Adopter Phase using the PebblePad platform. As part of this phase the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy (OT), a four year degree, was the first undergraduate program to use eportfolios at the University. In this program eportfolios play an important role in providing students with a Personal Learning Space (PLS) to develop reflective practice and store evidence for meeting external graduate standards, practitioner registration and career opportunities. The implementation of eportfolios began with the first year cohort of 140 students with the intention of an incremental introduction of further eportfolio features over the whole program as outlined in Table 1.



Table 1: Anticipated OT Program Level ePortfolio Implementation for Students

Development & implementation of the student ePortfolio								
Year	Personal Statement	Ongoing Reflection	Evidence of Learning	Graduate Attributes	Aust Min Standards	CV	CPD Plan	CPD Review
1	✓	✓	✓					
2	✓	✓	✓	✓				
3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

How it was ...

The first year introduction to eportfolios occurred in two courses/units i.e. Semester 1: Concepts in Human Occupation and Semester 2: Participation in Occupation. No portfolio activities existed in these courses prior to 2013 which meant that students previously saw their reflections as merely 'an assignment' and would not keep them for review later in their degree. Many students potentially lost their work over time which meant that they were unable to look back on their growth and development over the time of their degree. Consequently, even though a paper-based portfolio already existed in fourth year, students often complained they did not have enough evidence of their progress towards becoming a competent occupational therapy graduate and expressed regret at not keeping a portfolio across their degree. Including the eportfolio in first year creates a means by which students will not only start to save their work and review their progress, but they will store these assets in one place and will be able to retrieve them in fourth year to demonstrate their competency in the final assignment and be confident in using an eportfolio when applying for jobs after graduation.

The approach

A collaborative approach was taken to facilitate the embedding of ePortfolios into the course curriculum as explained in Table 2.



Table 2: Details of Major OT ePortfolio Implementation: Groups, Timeframes and Activities

Stakeholder	Timeframe	Activities
C~SALT Staff	Semester 1	Planning session (building eportfolios into the course)
		Introduction to eportfolios and PebblePad for academic teaching staff
		Development of research partnership between C~SALT and course coordinator
		Training session with academic teaching staff
		One-to-one support creation of templates with course coordinators
		Pre-usage surveys facilitated by C~SALT staff with students
	Semester 2	Training session with academic teaching staff
		One-to-one support creation of templates and making videos
Online post-usage surveys facilitated by C~SALT staff with students		
Debrief session with OT eportfolio/course coordinator at end of 2013		
OT Portfolio/ course coordinator	Semester 1	Attend first year class to present to students what eportfolios are and why we are introducing them at USC.
		In consultation with course coordinator select activities that will be included in eportfolio.
		Create templates for students to use to upload work to eportfolio
		Arrange training for academic staff on scope of eportfolio tool (PebblePad)
		Arrange training for students on how to use eportfolio tool
	Semester 2	In consultation with course coordinator select activities that will be included in eportfolio
		Arrange training for academic staff on scope of eportfolio tool
		Check templates and create additional ones for semester 2 eportfolio tasks
Make instructional videos with C~SALT team members about eportfolio tool so students can upload information for assessment task.		



Students	Semester 1	Hear about eportfolios generally in class
		Choose to attend optional face-to-face training sessions to learn how to use the eportfolio
	Semester 2	Some students 'played' with the PebblePad software to explore how it worked.
		Watch videos about how to upload work to the eportfolio
		Upload a selection of work to the eportfolio

Centre for the Support and Advancement of Learning and Teaching (C~SALT) support staff worked with the OT eportfolio/course coordinators to design the eportfolio implementation and to build teaching staff skill levels with the view that these educators would then work to up skill students in their eportfolio use.

ePortfolio tasks for students

Two existing tasks i.e. 'The Desk' and the Fieldwork journal, plus one optional task, 'Why I chose occupational therapy' formed the foundation of the eportfolio. Templates were developed for students to use to complete these tasks as illustrated in Figures 2, 3 and 4.

Figure 1: 'The Desk' Template



Occ102 thedesk reflection

Tasks

thedesk is a confidential online counselling tool created and run by the University of Qld specifically for students navigating the demands of university and their daily life. It is a free interactive web application that offers access to online modules on health and wellbeing. It includes modules, tools, quizzes, fact sheets and an open forum. I began my experience of thedesk by completing a quiz. My answers were analysed with my strengths and weaknesses displayed. Links to modules that would benefit me were then shown on the screen. I chose to explore 'Feeling Good-Keeping Healthy'. I engaged in questions which required me to type answers and read information relevant to how I was feeling and what I could do to improve my physical and mental health. I chose to explore 'Staying Active'. thedesk guided me through 5 steps of the importance of staying active and I learnt about the positive effect 30 minutes of exercise per day would have on my occupational performance. The final step resulted in my input to create an action plan to implement in my life. I then explored the 'tools' section of the application and enjoyed the 'My 168', which is a weekly planner to help with time management.

Relevance

I found the thedesk to be an excellent interactive, analytical and educational tool. I found myself engaged and empowered. It clarified barriers to my optimum performance as a student as being poor diet and lack of daily exercise. Enablers to my health and wellbeing as a student are my strong sense of self, effective goal setting and good time management.

Learning Goal

A learning goal is to improve my diet by cutting out soft drink, eating more fruit and vegetables and spending 30 minutes daily walking. I will explore the other modules in thedesk and recommend the thedesk experience to all university students.






Figure 2: Sample student response (used with permission)

Fieldwork reflection OCC102
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Fieldwork Journal OCC102
please enter a title for this record

please enter a label

Identify the topics covered in fieldwork in OCC102.

	Topic
Week 1	
Week 2	
Week 3	

Fieldwork Journal
Copy and paste your fieldwork journal assignment here

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Figure 3: Fieldwork Template Used to Guide Student Reflection of the Experience



How it is now

By the end of 2013 students were introduced to the main features of PebblePad and required to submit a reflective task into ATLAS using the custom designed templates. Reflecting on the Early Adopter Phase the OT eportfolio coordinator commented:

At this point I don't feel that I have many ideas about where to improve what we have done in our first year. I feel that by only taking on a small challenge we were successful. If we had tried to achieve anything more I doubt that it would have gone as smoothly as I think it did.

In 2014 the new cohort of first year students will follow a similar effective 'gentle' approach although an assessment task using eportfolios will be added to the semester one curriculum which was not possible for the Early Adopter Phase in 2013. The curriculum for the second year students (the 2013 first year cohort) requires them to regularly add further evidence of learning and graduate attribute attainment and the development of competency in using other aspects of their PebblePad eportfolios.

The benefits

Emerging benefits from this short Early Adopter Phase include:

1. The importance of developing a critical reflective practice as students was reinforced through the eportfolio assessment task.

It forces students to put reflection on their progress on their "must do" list and will help them build habits that will be very important in professional life. Being able to reflect on one's achievements, struggles, learning and growth is important in the cycle of any professional's annual review and planning process. Students will be able to use the ePortfolio to prepare for workplace activities such as PPR and for annual registration through AHPRA .

[Course coordinator]

Will be able to reflect on what I learnt in previous years of my course.

[Student]

2. Students can be engaged through pedagogical tools that encourage self-learning. Students shared in the Post-Usage Survey that instructions from the lecturer, training received on campus, the 'how to' videos the course coordinator posted online, and taking time to play with the software program made learning how to use an ePortfolio easier. Students developed self-confidence with using PebblePad through these methods as described below:



Designing a template for placement was challenging. I don't think I did it right, but I can go back and change it as I learn how to use it.

[Student]

3. C~SALT staff and academic teaching staff found the slow start approach effective in an undergraduate degree program.

I think this experience reinforced my "take it slowly" approach, and that is a very good thing. I think that rolling the eportfolio out slowly is critical to its success.

[OT ePortfolio coordinator]

Lessons learnt

- It is vital to plan early the embedding of eportfolios into the course curriculum, particularly assessment tasks.
- Be mindful that staff and students may struggle initially with learning the software within a context of multiple demands on time, energy and resources.
- Having training workshops engaged some students early. Others relied on later help, such as the 'how to' videos.
- The importance of all members of the eportfolio implementation 'team' communicating and planning together regularly so support will be available when needed.

In summary:

It is difficult to "retrofit" a course with an eportfolio, it needs to be slowly integrated into the course, the training needs to be part of the learning activities in the course and the students need to be continually reminded why it is being done

[OT ePortfolio coordinator]

In brief – personalising the curriculum

- PebblePad not only allows storage of assets in one place but these assets can be used for multiple purposes and audiences.
- The ATLAS interface between student and academic teaching staff allows students to be comfortable putting assets in PebblePad as their own private Personal Learning Space.
- PebblePad is a versatile tool enabling many pedagogical objectives.

