Supporting Reflective Practice with Technology

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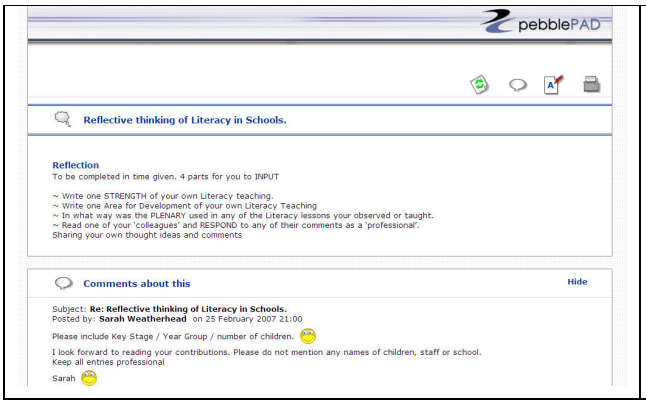
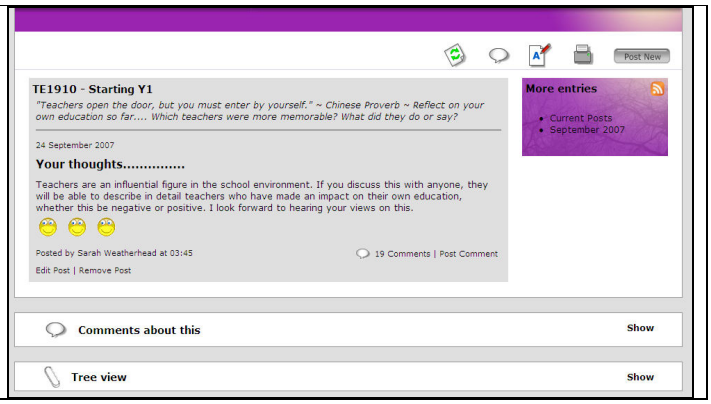
This case study considers the effectiveness of web-based activities (ie. PebblePAD) to encourage trainees on the B.Ed course to become reflective practitioners. This particular cohort is an early years group in their first year of training. The Government's e-Learning strategy (DfES 2003) has set the target that by Spring 2008 every learner should have access to a personalised on-line learning space. The strategy states that 'e-learning and e-delivery have the potential to offer complete and personalised support for learners' needs throughout the learning process'. Beetham, (2005), an e-learning consultant, takes a more balanced approach and warns that, 'It should be emphasised that the capacity to record evidence about individual learners is no guarantee that the evidence can or will be used to personalise their learning experience in a meaningful way' (p.7) The challenge is to implement e-portfolios as a 'medium for learning' for trainees and to explore their reflective thinking as 'deep/surface learners'. As a lecturer, and in my role as an e-moderator, I wanted to explore 'asynchronous on-line discussions' as a medium for learning.
Personal Development Planning (PDP) is defined by Cottrell as, 'a structured reflective process which gives individuals greater insight into their own development with opportunities to explore what is valuable to learner's personal, professional and academic development' Cottrell (2003) Reflection is a type of thinking. 'It is associated with deep thought aimed at better understanding.' (p.171) and Personal Development Planning (PDP) is a means by which students can be encouraged to become more reflective learners.

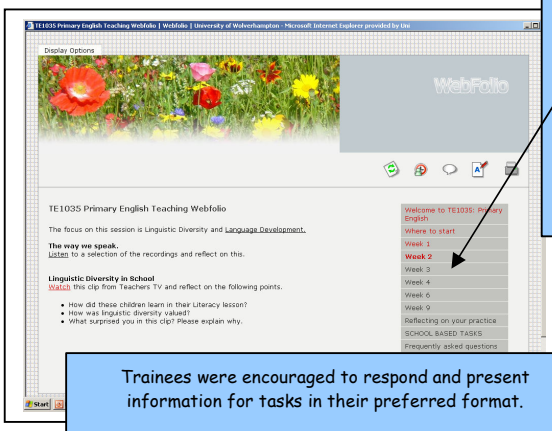
The current three year B.Ed course at Wolverhampton University is designed to implement a range of 'action learning' components and strategies throughout both Semesters 1 and 2 (placements, focus days, school visits, short exams, peer teaching and so on). A group of approx 35 year 1 trainees (2006/2007 & 2007/2008) are following an Early Years route. Throughout two modules, 'Professional Studies' and 'English in the Primary School', the trainees were invited to create their own 'digital space' using the webfolio template to share their reflective thoughts with their tutor and to develop themselves as reflective practitioners.

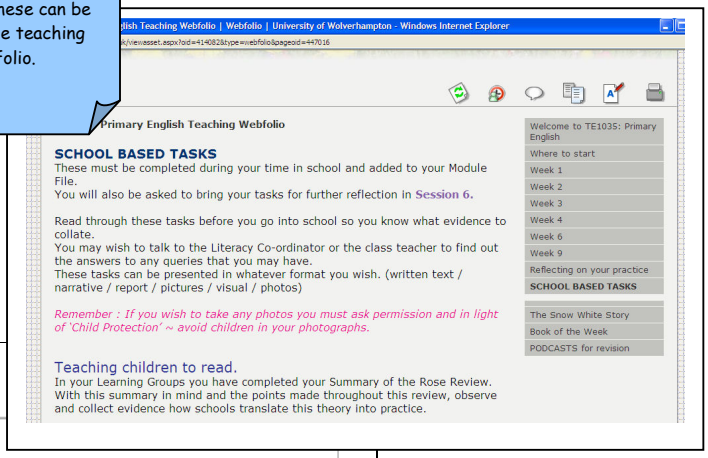
We introduced webfolios for reflective practice in September 2006, and again in September 2007. In face to face sessions, 'Learning Groups' were introduced to encourage professional dialogue. Studies (Watkins & Akande, 1994; Cassidy & Eachus, 2000 in Wilson & Fowler, 2005) support this view that the use of group learning may contribute towards a significant shift in students approach to learning. One consequence of this was that those trainees who find speaking in larger groups difficult could take advantage of the organisational 'asynchronous on-line discussions' to develop their thinking skill as reflective practitioners. Would the PebblePAD activities assist the students to make the link between the theoretical conceptual base and their own practice, and encourage deeper learning?





Assets are added throughout the year. The trainees' own responses to the School based tasks are stored here. Details of these can be found on the teaching Webfolio.





Trainees were encouraged to respond and present information for tasks in their preferred format.

There was a concern as PebblePAD doesn't have the facility to display many photographs on a page.

One trainee came up with a solution and used PICZO.com. A link was then put on her Webfolio.

My Blog

My Inspirational Gallery

School Based Tasks

Action Plan

Attachment 1

Reflection of my placement 09/05/08

This page is where you can find out about my recent school visit.

The information is hosted on a different website due to it being easier to work with and a more suitable layout. Please select the links below for more information.

Teaching Children to read

The Learning Environment

Thematic Planning

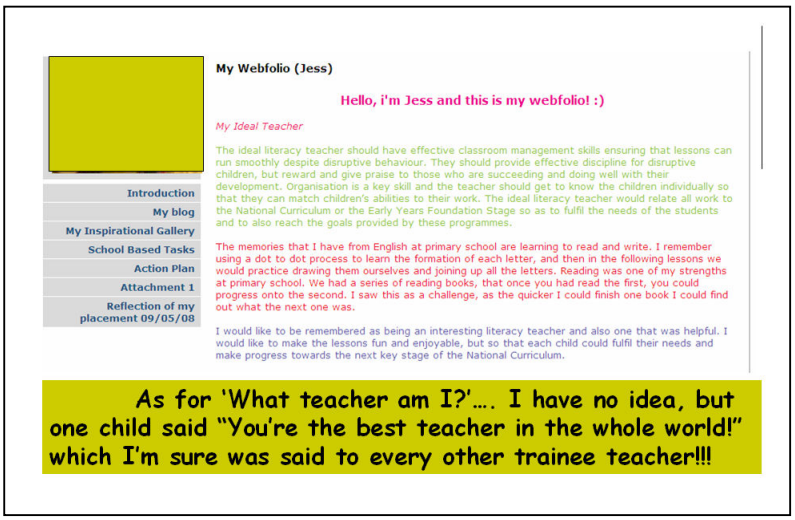
pic1.piczo.com

Year 5 has a large literacy display. It contains a lot more information than that of the year 4's display. It has various different writing techniques, connectives, targets. It has lots of photos of children doing literacy work, book reviews and children's work. It also has metaphors and similes, and the punctuation pyramid.

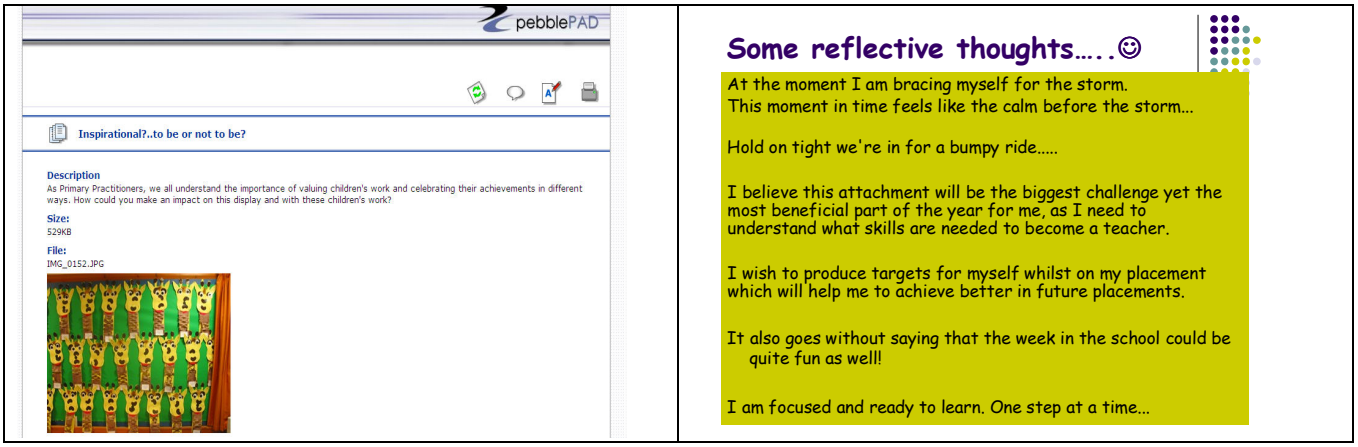
Year 6's literacy display is similar to that of year 5's. It is considerably smaller to that of year 5's, but the only information that is different are the targets. In year 6 you are obviously aiming for a higher level and therefore the targets that are on the board require the pupil to know more than that of a year 5 pupil.

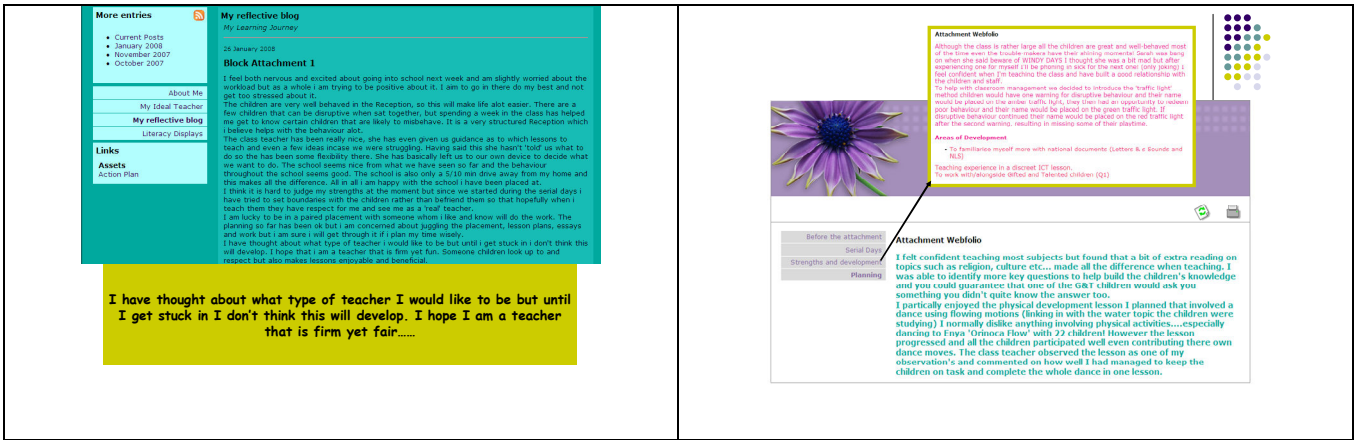
The examples shared are from (2006 / 2007) and (2007 / 2008). In response to my own reflective practice, and a group focus interview, there has been a transition in the implementation of how this has been used. Cowan (2006), highlights that innovation in teaching requires close scrutiny and that '… getting the innovative show on the road often calls for a bit of tactical nous' (p.135) and also suggests areas for reflection for the lecturer, including the consideration of 'how the task was set, how well was it done, what happened and why did things happen in the way that they did'. This reflection is on-going.

A shift is taking place now from classroom teaching and learning to asynchronous web-based and web-supported learning environments. The delivery of the educational content is slowly moving from a teacher/student model to one that is integrating the content within a technology-enabled model. Providing the trainees with the opportunities to explore the experiential learning experience has two main benefits; firstly, it will filter into their own practice when they use 'on-line tasks' in their own school based practice and secondly they will become 'competent' reflective practitioners.



The new 'tool' for encouraging reflection, has already proven to be a success and it is evident that critical reflective thinking is progressing in its quality, showing an awareness of the pedagogy in schools. The trainees, having been given this experience, are developing into 'natural' reflective practitioners' highlighting areas for their continual professional development.





Effective learning today cannot be just a spectator sport, listening to the lecture impart information. It is vital that the trainees have the opportunity to talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it and relate to past experiences. The challenge lies in providing opportunities for these trainees to undertake a learning transition and to adopt deeper processing strategies. Are these students able to move from their 'culture of learning' in their previous educational environment to the 'culture of learning' expected of them in higher education?

Responses of the trainees

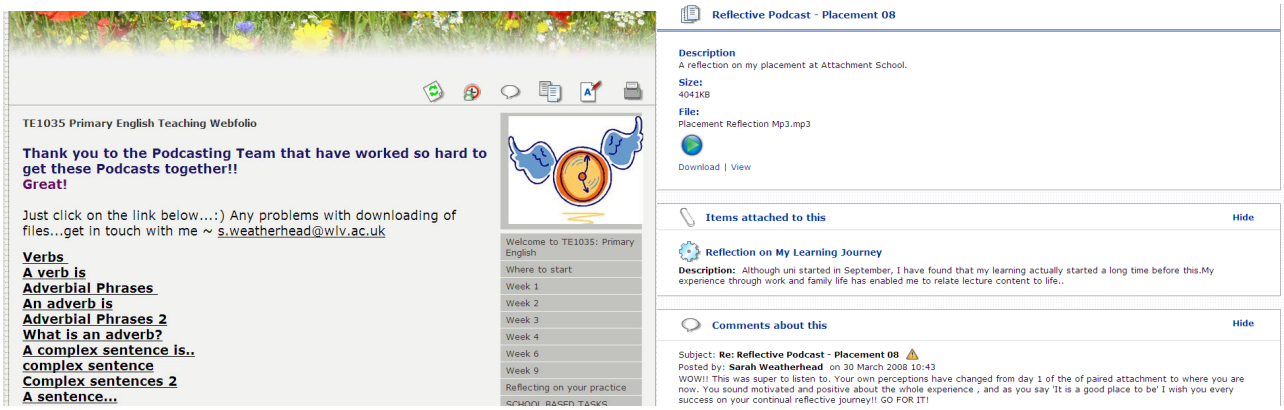
From evaluation of the verbal and written responses in April 2008, the trainees said that they now felt less overwhelmed with the concept of on-line activities since last September and believe they are succeeding with the 'on-line' challenges; as some of the trainees stated they '…liked having the time and option to think before responding'

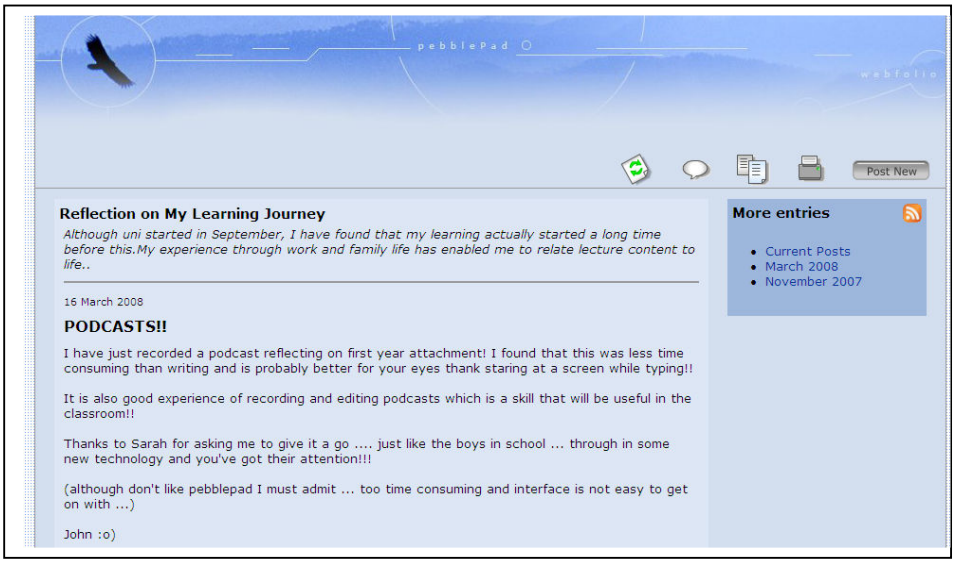
Salmon, (2003), emphasises the key role of the e-moderator in the online learning process. Trainees welcomed the thought of lecturers contributing to their development. One student wrote *'It would be good to use it as a live forum – for example whilst on teaching practice – speak with other trainees while it is fresh in your mind – Also anonymity may encourage more realistic, honest, kinda open comments on the forum. Lecturers can look in on forums to give any advice.'.* In response to this comment, a 'collaborative blog' was set up for the trainees to 'converse' online with each other.

As a tutor, I do believe that it is possible to influence trainees and their approach to learning from surface (instrumental, reproductive and minimalistic) to deep learning (striving for meaning and understanding) (Marton & Salijo, 1976; Entwistle, 1991)

One year 1 trainee stated that, *'PebblePAD has been a positive experience through enabling me to keep in contact with peers and share thoughts and ideas and consolidate learning through shared views and reflecting on experiences.'* Another trainee said in response to the structure of the activity, *'…– the layout was excellent, it ensured that I knew what was expected to keep it precise…it also ensured I didn't go off on a tangent…. I knew what to expect. …kept focused and on task…..'* A trainee asked her fellow 'peers', *'…doesn't it give you more time to be reflective*

when you can think about the comments said?' and concluded by stating, *'when you are face to face you have to contribute straight away, if you have more time… think you can make a better more constructive comment.'* This supports the concept in web based learning known as 'asynchronous on-line discussions'.
This year we have also experimented with podcasting, initially to help with literacy revision and then alongside this, some trainees produced podcasts to capture their reflective thoughts, after attachment and at the end of the 'academic year'. The styles are different and complement their preferred 'learning styles'.





My experience, albeit limited at the moment, is to explore the practical solutions to these questions: 'How can I continue to incorporate worthwhile activities in the e-learning environment to extend, enhance and supplement student thinking as reflective practitioners, as part of the overall package for the trainees' PDP? However, technology is the only enabler; the challenge now is to take those trainees further forward in their reflective thinking and in their understanding of the pedagogy. These tasks need refining and tutors are ever mindful of the ever increasing ICT capability that the trainees are bringing to these learning environments. I endeavour to strive as an e-moderator to facilitate online tasks to match these needs.
'It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may be quickly forgotten or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively.' (Gibbs, 1998)

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