

Supporting Reflective Practice with Technology

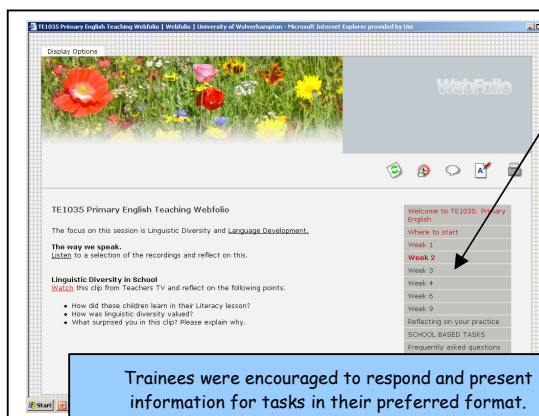
Sarah Weatherhead, University of Wolverhampton

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?

The image displays two screenshots of the PebblePAD web interface, which is used for reflective practice. The left screenshot shows a 'Reflection' activity titled 'Reflective thinking of Literacy in Schools.' It includes instructions for a 4-part input and a 'Comments about this' section. The right screenshot shows a 'Your thoughts.....' activity titled 'TE1910 - Starting Y1' with a prompt about Chinese Proverbs and a 'Comments about this' section.

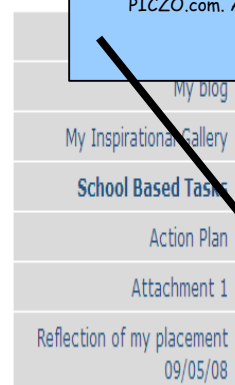
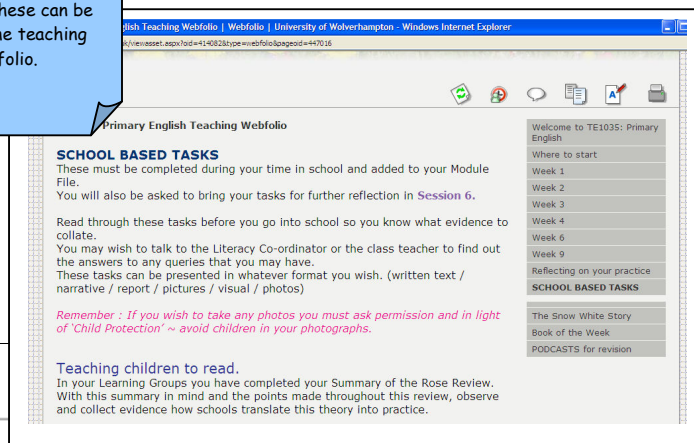


Assets are added throughout the year. The trainees' own responses to the School based tasks are stored here. Details of these can be found on the teaching Webfolio.

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.



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

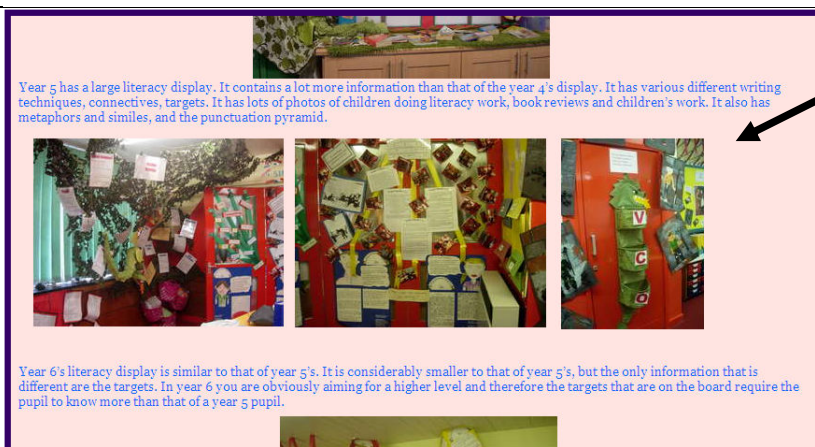
The information is hosted on a different website due to it being easier to work with and a more suitable layout. Please select the links below for more information.

[Teaching Children to read](#)

[The Learning Environment](#)


[Thematic Planning](#)

pic1.piczo.com



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.



My Webfolio (Jess)

Hello, i'm Jess and this is my webfolio! :)

My Ideal Teacher

The ideal literacy teacher should have effective classroom management skills ensuring that lessons can run smoothly despite disruptive behaviour. They should provide effective discipline for disruptive children, but reward and give praise to those who are succeeding and doing well with their development. Organisation is a key skill and the teacher should get to know the children individually so that they can match children's abilities to their work. The ideal literacy teacher would relate all work to the National Curriculum or the Early Years Foundation Stage so as to fulfil the needs of the students and to also reach the goals provided by these programmes.

The memories that I have from English at primary school are learning to read and write. I remember using a dot to dot process to learn the formation of each letter, and then in the following lessons we would practice drawing them ourselves and joining up all the letters. Reading was one of my strengths at primary school. We had a series of reading books, that once you had read the first, you could progress onto the second. I saw this as a challenge, as the quicker I could finish one book I could find out what the next one was.

I would like to be remembered as being an interesting literacy teacher and also one that was helpful. I would like to make the lessons fun and enjoyable, but so that each child could fulfil their needs and make progress towards the next key stage of the National Curriculum.

Introduction

My blog

My Inspirational Gallery

School Based Tasks

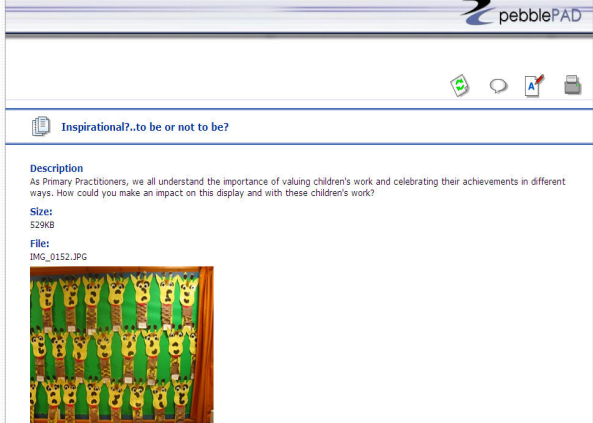
Action Plan

Attachment 1

Reflection of my placement 09/05/08

As for 'What teacher am I?'.... I have no idea, but one child said "You're the best teacher in the whole world!" which I'm sure was said to every other trainee teacher!!!

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.



Some reflective thoughts.... 😊

At the moment I am bracing myself for the storm. This moment in time feels like the calm before the storm...

Hold on tight we're in for a bumpy ride.....

I believe this attachment will be the biggest challenge yet the most beneficial part of the year for me, as I need to understand what skills are needed to become a teacher.

I wish to produce targets for myself whilst on my placement which will help me to achieve better in future placements.

It also goes without saying that the week in the school could be quite fun as well!

I am focused and ready to learn. One step at a time...

More entries

- Current Posts
- January 2008
- November 2007
- October 2007

About Me

My Ideal Teacher

My reflective blog

Literacy Displays

Links

Assets

Action Plan

My reflective blog

My Learning Journey

25 January 2008

Block Attachment 1

I feel both nervous and excited about going into school next week and am slightly worried about the workload but as a whole I am trying to be positive about it. I am to go in there do my best and not get too stressed about it.

The children are very well behaved in the Reception, so that will make life a lot easier. There are a few children that can be disruptive when sat together, but spending a week in the class has helped me get to know certain children that are likely to misbehave. It is a very structured Reception which I believe helps with the behaviour and the class teacher has been really nice, she has even given us guidance as to which lessons to teach and even a few ideas on how we were struggling. Having said that she hasn't told us what to do so the has been some flexibility there. She has basically left us to our own device to decide what we want to do. The school seems nice from what we have seen so far and the behaviour throughout the school seems good. The school is also only a 5/10 min drive away from my home and this makes all the difference. All in all I am happy with the school I have been placed at.

I think it is hard to judge my strengths at the moment but since we started during the serial days I have tried to set boundaries with the children rather than behind them so that hopefully when I teach them they have respect for me and see me as a real teacher.

I am lucky to be in a paired placement with someone whom I like and know will do the work. The planning so far has been ok but I am concerned about juggling the placement, lesson plans, essays and work but I am sure I will get through it if I plan my time wisely.

I have thought about what type of teacher I would like to be but until I get stuck in I don't think this will develop. I hope I am a teacher that is firm yet fair....

Attachment Weblogs

Although the class is rather large all the children are great and well behaved most of the time. The teacher makes sure they always receive good work and on when she said because of WENDY DAYS I thought she was a bit mad but after experiencing one for myself I'm getting it and for the next one I'm going to feel confident when I'm teaching the class and have built a good relationship with the children and staff.

The class management is good and I believe the teacher has managed to make the children feel safe and happy. I think the children would have some learning for disruptive behaviour and their name would be placed on the teacher's list. I think that is an opportunity to manage poor behaviour and their name would be placed on the green traffic light. If disruptive behaviour continued their name would be placed on the red traffic light after the second warning, resulting in missing some of their playtime.

Areas of Development

- To have more management more with national documents (Letters & a Sound and NLS)

Teaching experience is a difficult ICT lesson. To work with the children and the children (21)

Before the attachment

Serial Days

Strengths and development

Planning

Attachment Weblog

I felt confident teaching most subjects but found that a bit of extra reading on topics such as religion, culture etc., made all the difference when teaching. I was able to identify more key questions to help build the children's knowledge and you could guarantee that one of the Q&A children would ask you something you didn't quite know the answer too.

I particularly enjoyed the physical development lesson I planned that involved a dance using flowing motions (linking in with the water topic the children were studying). I normally dislike anything involving physical activities, especially dancing to Fava 'Orisoca Flow' with 22 children! However the lesson progressed and all the children participated well even contributing their own dance moves. The class teacher observed the lesson as one of my observations and commented on how well I had managed to keep the children on task and complete the whole dance in one lesson.

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.

Journal Entry

What a day!!.....????

"Difficulties are opportunities to better things; they are stepping stones to greater experience. Perhaps someday you will be thankful for some temporary failure in a particular direction. When one door closes, another always opens."

Brian Adams

.....so how are things?.... great?.....not so great?.... on my goodness.....WOW.....not so sure?..... I amazed myself.....

Comments about this

Hide

Subject: Re: Year 1 on their first attachment.....the story so far.....

Posted by: Sarah Weatherhead on 29 January 2008 11:45

Smile

Edit | Remove

Subject: Re: Year 1 on their first attachment.....the story so far.....

Posted by: Laura Talbot on 29 January 2008 17:08

Before my first day teaching Monday I downed three cups of coffee (which I don't normally drink) and could not touch my usual packet of chocolate biscuits I was a complete nervous wreck!

However once I had got over the initial shock the day got better and I enjoyed being a REAL teacher for the day.

Wish everyone lots of luck during their attachment.

Laura

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’.

The image shows two screenshots from a web-based learning environment. The left screenshot is a webfolio page for 'TE1035 Primary English Teaching Webfolio'. It features a header with a colorful abstract image and a sidebar with a navigation menu. The main content area includes a thank-you message to the podcasting team, a link to a weatherhead email, and a list of grammar topics: Verbs, A verb is, Adverbial Phrases, An adverb is, Adverbial Phrases 2, What is an adverb?, A complex sentence is., complex sentence, Complex sentences 2, and A sentence... The right screenshot shows a podcast file page titled 'Reflective Podcast - Placement 08'. It includes a description of the podcast, its size (4041KB), and a download link. Below this, there is a section for 'Items attached to this' with a link to 'Reflection on My Learning Journey', and a 'Comments about this' section with a subject line 'Re: Reflective Podcast - Placement 08' and a post by Sarah Weatherhead dated 30 March 2008.

The image shows a screenshot of a webfolio page titled 'Reflection on My Learning Journey'. The page has a blue header with a bird icon and the text 'pebblePad' and 'webfolio'. The main content area includes a date '16 March 2008' and a section titled 'PODCASTS!!'. The text in this section discusses the author's experience with recording a podcast, comparing it to writing, and mentioning a comment from Sarah. The page also features a 'More entries' sidebar with links to 'Current Posts', 'March 2008', and 'November 2007'. The footer of the page includes the text 'John :o)'.

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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