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Knowledge Sharing: Exploring Institutional Policy and Educator Practice Through Eportfolios In Music And Writing

Diana Blom¹, Jennifer Rowley², Dawn Bennett³, Matthew Hitchcock⁴ and Peter Dunbar-Hall²

¹University of Western Sydney, Australia

²Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney, Australia

³Curtin University, Perth, Australia

⁴Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

d.blom@uws.edu.au

Abstract: Many higher education institutions have embraced e-Learning and urge, or make compulsory, engagement by academics. Despite this, it is often the educators themselves who take the initiative to engage with innovative e-learning approaches. These approaches, in turn, can influence both peer- and institution-wide thinking about e-Learning. This paper focuses on the introduction or extension of ePortfolios within the creative arts at four Australian universities. Each educator adopted the ePortfolio for a different purpose, and in doing so has influenced, or is at least being monitored by, their university. All four studies have resulted in the growth, development and enrichment of teaching and learning because of the ePortfolio's facility to engage students in such activities as reflection, ongoing student-teacher dialogue, collaborative essay writing, peer evaluation, identity formation, and the documentation of skills, competencies and graduate attributes for career awareness and employability. In sharing this knowledge the studies have also influenced curriculum design and e-learning policy. The academic literature notes institutional interest in ePortfolios in relation to career preparation, demonstrating and assessing student learning, academic advising, and addressing public accountability concerns by facilitating internal and external departmental review and accreditation. Within this paper we discuss the bi-directional impact and sharing of knowledge about ePortfolio use as it occurs between institution and educator. The study findings inform future development of curriculum, policy and practice for creative arts students and academics in a variety of higher education settings. Further, the findings suggest that ePortfolios provide an efficient and transparent means to archive and access student work, and that they facilitate internal and external departmental review and broader institutional assessment.

Keywords: ePortfolio, creative arts, curriculum enhancement, reflective practice, institutional knowledge sharing

1. Introduction

Taking as its context the creative arts programs of four Australian universities, this study explores the two-way impact of ePortfolios between institutional policy-makers and academics teaching undergraduate students. The researchers undertook a teaching and learning project focused on ePortfolios in the creative arts¹, funded by the Australian Office for Teaching and Learning². As such the paper focuses on the use of the ePortfolio in creative arts departments working with students in music performance, professional practice, music education, sound technology, creative writing and feature writing. Each educator/researcher adopted different platforms for different purposes and with a different cohort of students. We discuss this use and its influence on the institution, together with each university's ePortfolio policies and planning.

2. Background

Uses for ePortfolios

Institutional ePortfolio policy and practice varies considerably across Australian universities. Indeed, ePortfolio use within a university often originates from within different departments or faculties and can be adopted for a variety of reasons (Reardon, Lumsden and Meyer, 2005) with institutional policy often reflecting these reasons. Factors can include, for example:

- graduate competitiveness (Chan and Cheng, 2010);
- career preparation (Reese and Levy, 2009); and
- demonstration and assessment of student learning (Jafari, 2004) and student achievements (Baume & Yorke, 2002; Nystrand, Cohen & Dowling, 1993)

Similarly, data collection can inform:

¹ <http://capaeportfolios.ning.com/page/aboutus>

² <http://www.olt.gov.au/project-eportfolios-creative-arts-music-and-arts-students-australian-universities-2011>

- curricular improvements (Miller and Morgaine, 2009);
- academic advisement and choosing the type of ePortfolio carefully to suit students' needs (Reese and Levy, 2009);
- ePortfolio as a central storage facility or archive to guard against document loss (Herman and Kirkup, 2008); and
- addressing public accountability concerns (Lorenzo and Ittleson, 2005a) by facilitating internal and external departmental review and accreditation (Reese and Levy, 2009).

Institutions must also decide which type of ePortfolio best suits their needs across disparate disciplinary and student needs (Lorenzo and Ittleson, 2005a). In this respect, four main types of ePortfolio platform have been identified: home grown or proprietary software; open source software; commercially available software; and software generated or web-authoring tools (Lorenzo and Ittleson, 2005b; Stefani, Mason and Peglar, 2007).

Other factors for consideration by an institution include: licensing conditions; development and maintenance expenses; the level of integration with campus-wide systems and the degree of desired adaptation; the level of technical support required and available to cater to ICT literacy levels of staff and students; vendor support; potential longevity of a system; the degree of structure and guidance required for users; and the degree of creativity offered to the users (Hallam et al., 2008). Added to this are practical considerations including whether the ePortfolio is a stand-alone activity or part of another experience such as an internship; whether a faculty member will be responsible for guiding the process; timing of implementation and access within student progress; and how, when, and by whom the portfolio will be evaluated (Buzzetto-More and Alade, 2008).

Institutional policy – top down

Several writers acknowledge that support at the policy level within universities is crucial to successful ePortfolio implementation and practice (Cooper and Love, 2007; Cosh, 2008; Emmett, Harper and Hauville, 2006; Espinosa, 2007; Reese and Levy, 2009; Richter, 2006). To promote effective ePortfolio practice academic managers require

a broad understanding of the benefits and value that ePortfolios can bring to the learning, teaching and development processes, so that an ePortfolio culture becomes an integral aspect of the academic environment. ... [Benefits include contributing] to contribute to student-centred learning strategies, transparent learning outcomes and the relevant employability skills for graduates (Hallam et al., 2008: 15).

Commitment to, involvement in, and support of, ePortfolio implementation by high-level administrators, such as a deputy vice-chancellor or university president, have been shown to contribute to successful implementation and utilisation of ePortfolios through lending credibility and giving visibility across campuses (McCowan, Harper and Hauville, 2005; Reardon, Lumsden and Meyer, 2005). Further, a study on ePortfolio use by university students in Australia, conducted by Hallam et al., (2008), states that strong alignment between strategic, tactical and operational areas of academic management is required for successful implementation. Effective practice is supported by clear communication within and across the institution; a common, collaborative language; strategic and technical leadership that provides examples of good practice; a cohesive approach to management and funding responsibilities; investment in staff development; and reward and recognition for staff in both academic and professional areas.

Two provosts at USA universities have agreed that an ePortfolio presents information in ways which are both "certifiable and practically useful" (Plater, 2006: 64). One of the certifiable aspects is that the ePortfolio allows students to transfer records from institution to institution. This provides a 'true seamless transfer' (Henry, 2006: 55) and enables better advice to be given to the student regarding placement. It even has the potential to 'supplant the traditional transcript and replace the degree' (Plater, 2006: 63). With further potential for an 'interweaving [of] schooling, work, and civic engagement into a record of performance and a plan for future growth' (68) for vocational choice, the ePortfolio has 'global implications' (63).

Another certifiable issue is the use of random samples of ePortfolio work to monitor the quality of an institution's academic program and 'determine areas of improvement' (Henry, 2006: 60). Once in a university program, the ePortfolio can help students plan and think ahead to choose a major area of study and track their own progress, resulting in graduates who have a 'demonstrated mastery of learning outcomes' (55). For Henry, students' fascination with presenting themselves and their own work will provide 'the hook for students and

ePortfolios' (57). A third US provost has focused on the ability of the ePortfolio to store all course material and outcomes, thereby allowing faculty to access their own work efficiently and directly and, in doing so, to 'study their own assessment practice over time' (O'Brien, 2006: 80). However, Plater (2006) acknowledges the importance of the need for a collective will in the institution, without which the provost has a lonely and uncertain path ahead.

An ePortfolio policy for all - horizontal

In considering the implementation of significant educational change, Hall and Hord (2001:10) state: 'Although top-down and bottom-up change can work, a horizontal perspective is best'. They acknowledge that change mandated from administration may be effective if accompanied by support, training, and an understanding of the change process. Fullan (2013) is in agreement, noting that top-down changes may meet with resistance, but can be effective if implementation includes empowerment and choices for those involved. Fullan outlines several elements necessary for successful change, including improving relationships between all involved; informing change with research; and spreading leadership among many. A horizontal approach to implementing change includes administrator support and assistance in securing resources, as well as commitment from those involved in implementing the change (Strudler and Wetzel, 2005). Looking at ePortfolios as a fluid resource that will continue to grow beyond the years of university study, Heinrich (2008) argues that if ePortfolios are to support lifelong learning the institutional role should be one of support, rather than control, and suggests that the advantages of institutional types of ePortfolio may be maintained by hosting an ePortfolio system with an external provider.

Shared governance in higher education is a recent tradition that has evolved as faculty has sought delegated authority in decision-making on key issues such as curriculum, students, and teaching and learning within areas of their expertise (Kezar and Sam, 2012). While faculty participation in institutional governance is considered both desirable and important in higher education, Jones (2011) has also found that faculty are rarely satisfied with their level of involvement in governance. Within an institution, multiple interests may also be represented in the development of ePortfolio policy and practice as various parties envisage different usages (Hallam et al., 2008). To this end, Jafari (2004) has noted that different functional requirements of ePortfolios may be perceived by provosts, deans, chairs, career centres, faculty, students, accrediting bodies and professional organisations. Hallam et al. (2008) have claimed that policies and strategies are required at sectoral and institutional levels in order to ensure advantage is taken of connectivity and cohesion opportunities. They recommend open dialogue and collaboration across a range of contexts. Moreover, they assert that such dialogue should include those involved in teaching and learning and those involved in academic policy, government policy and technical standards.

An example of shared governance can be seen at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), where in order to develop quality websites and improve the online environment, teaching and learning staff followed two underlying principles. One of these was to adopt:

a collegial approach, rather than a top down "auditing" or pejorative approach ... to review sites according to the standards. Our view is that, in order for the process to be truly developmental and collegial, this approach has to be adopted by academics rather than being imposed upon them. This implies a major cultural shift in understanding and practice (Correia, Malfroy, Griffin, Ireland and Rankine, 2008: 198).

The next stage of the development and implementation process at UWS benefitted from the knowledge sharing gained from this collegial approach. Similarly, Curtin University sought the views of students in relation to its purpose-built *iPortfolio* platform (von Kinsky and Oliver, 2012), which had been designed after considerable consultation with staff and students. This enabled the institution to understand the platform's primary use and to inform its future development, including the need for graduates to demonstrate skills to potential employers, possibly 'aggregating digital artefacts from the cloud providers and social media sites ... to make more extensive use of templates for guiding reflection activities' (87).

3. Methodology

A case study explores a system 'bounded by time and place' (Cresswell, 1998: 61). This takes place 'through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context' (61). The four institutions at the heart of this paper produced multiple case studies from two predominant sources of information: the e-learning/ePortfolio policy and its application at each university, and ePortfolio use by four

academics and their students in the creative arts. In doing so, the multiple case studies were designed to 'probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit [ePortfolio policy and use] with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 106-107).

Participant observers engage in 'the very activities they set out to observe' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 107), and in our study the researchers were also the academics using ePortfolio in their departments. Clements (2010), when exploring creative ways in which university music educators engage with emerging practices in music teaching and learning, has offered 'personalized case studies' (ix) in which the researcher is often the active participant and facilitator. As she notes: 'these models of successful alternative approaches can be replicated in a variety of school, university, or community settings' (ix). Because the literature review of our study notes a lack of research on ePortfolio use in the creative arts in universities, we hoped that the findings would establish some issues for the wider creative arts population and that they could be replicated in other universities.

3.1 ePortfolio case studies: Institutions and academics

In this next section of the paper we present a brief overview of the four institutional ePortfolio projects that formed this study. Specifically, we consider institutional policies, the academics' use of ePortfolios, and the impact of each project on academics and the institution.

3.2 Sydney Conservatorium of Music – The University of Sydney

3.2.1 Institutional policy

At the University of Sydney, eLearning is a unit within the DVC Education Division and the university-wide e-learning strategy is part of the division's strategic plan. However, each faculty is expected to develop their own Teaching and Learning Plan aligned with the University's strategic plan. The eLearning aspect of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music (SCM) Learning and Teaching Strategic and Operational Plan: 2011-15, actions technology to be used 'appropriately and consistently so as to support multi-modal learning', [part of which is to] 'trial the development of e-portfolios' (Sydney Conservatorium of Music, 2010: 2).

3.2.2 Impact on the academics

For the academics working with ePortfolios, the impact of this policy directive and the specific action point has been that, firstly, staff had to establish eLearning sites using proprietary, closed-source learning management systems or ePortfolio platforms. Although staff uptake of ePortfolios across the university is low, Rowley and Dunbar-Hall (2012) have used the eLearning policy as an incentive and encouragement to trial ePortfolio in their classes with music students.

3.2.3 Academic ePortfolio use

Prior to 2009, ePortfolios were new for all students other than those in music education. Acting as capstone objects in the music education program, ePortfolios were intended for use in job applications and they were designed to address the requirements of professional teacher accreditation (Rowley, Dunbar-Hall, Bell and Taylor, 2012; Rowley and Dunbar-Hall, 2012; Dunbar-Hall, Rowley, Webb and Bell, 2010). A project subsequently analysed their implementation for advantages to student learning and self-reflection (Rowley, 2011), implications for curriculum design (Rowley and Dunbar-Hall, 2012), their IT requirements (Taylor, Dunbar-Hall and Rowley, 2012), their relationships to assessment (Rowley and Dunbar-Hall, 2012), and accreditation (Rowley, Dunbar-Hall, Bell and Taylor, 2012). The university selected a commercial ePortfolio platform.

The project assessed the expectations of ePortfolio use with different cohorts of students, staff and programs. The findings demonstrated differing levels of student engagement with ePortfolios, ambiguities over their efficaciousness in music as a profession, a range of student motivation to engage with ePortfolios and the technology required to work on and through them, and a spectrum of possibilities for their use.

3.2.4 Impact on the institution

Both the process and product of the research acted as a model for ePortfolio development in the creative arts and more broadly in the institution. Results of the research were published in articles and presented at conferences, and they were also presented to a university audience at the invitation of the university's eLearning office. The project summary was presented to staff and students at the Learning and Teaching annual forum, and exposure within the institution led to broader uptake and interest.

4. Queensland Conservatorium – Griffith University

4.1 Institutional policy

At the Queensland Conservatorium, eLearning had taken various well-supported and centralised forms over the past decade. While there is no individual policy on ePortfolios at the time of writing, Griffith has a range of policies and statements that pertain to engaging in online learning and teaching strategies. These include academic and strategic plans, the lecture capture policy, the policy on staff engagement with learning, and the blended learning strategy. The blended learning environment at Griffith is characterised by:

- strategic and systematic use of technology in association with a quality face-to-face environment to support student learning;
- enhanced interaction between students, staff, peers and the learning community;
- creation of collaborative, distributed learning environments;
- increased capacity for student-managed learning;
- learning that takes place at students' discretion in terms of time and place; and
- flexibility in terms of implementation at the program and course levels.

4.1.1 Impact on the academics

At the time of the study, Griffith had supported the development of online and distance-learning strategies for well over a decade with support aimed almost entirely at uni-directional models focused on delivering materials and information to students. Simultaneously, academics considered to be early-adopters of technology were spearheading moves to create bi-directional online strategies that placed emphasis on students' ability to generate, upload and edit their own content. It was not until the late 2000s that the impact of these early adopters gained traction to the point of influence.

During this time, academics were given financial and workload support to establish online strategies, however, significant constraints existed in the interface between ICT administrators and academics. Over time, concerted efforts from academics, high-level administrators and pro-change information and ICT team-members coalesced to erode many of the significant challenges.

Hitchcock (2008) has observed historical tensions between two fundamentally opposing (but not mutually exclusive) motivations to technical and pedagogical innovation in the 2000s, which were seen as techno-centric versus user-centric. Herein, techno-centric can be characterised as 'technology in search of ideas', whereas user-centric inverts the aspects to become 'ideas in search of technology'. The 'technology in search of ideas' approach created some significant challenges to user acceptance and uptake, often through poor graphical interface design, overly complex structures, or ambiguous pedagogical or epistemological foundations. Similarly, it is noted that the ground-up design and creation of user-centric technological infrastructure to support pedagogical imperatives is also problematic. This is often due to a lack of understanding on the part of academics as to the detailed technological challenges and long-term commitment required to realise a viable outcome.

Consequently, top-down approaches have achieved overall acceptance of a process leading to the uptake of technology for student-centred learning, including proprietary learning management systems, real-time communication strategies and video capture, and delivery of lectures for student consumption. Hitchcock (2009) has noted, however, that these one-size-fits-all strategies require a heavy centralised commitment from the University in time, money, technological support and manpower, thereby limiting the number of 'top-

down' directives via a form of natural selection. Further, some aspects now appearing as top-down directives were instigated by bottom-up activities a decade earlier.

While some outcomes may have been a decade in the making, institutional vision and long-term strategies, guided by perseverance, strength of purpose and commitment to quality outcomes, have been a major contributor to successes. The impact of ePortfolios on an institutional level is certainly slow in coming, partly because the number of mandated eLearning (and blended learning) initiatives are not insignificant, and partly because a critical mass is required to elevate initiatives to centralised support. Given the size and bureaucratic weight of each institution and the financial commitment involved, this is hardly surprising.

4.1.2 Academic ePortfolio use

Academic ePortfolio use at the time of writing is driven by staff interest and there are no current plans (or indeed perceived demand) for the institution-wide integration of ePortfolios. Use of ePortfolios in the music department arose because work in music technology is largely driven by hard-copy portfolios similar to those in many creative arts sectors such as photography and art. For students, creating portfolios in this area is a process of creativity in establishing identity, potential and evidence of skills, reflective ability and professional capability. It is a career object because of several important factors, namely, an ePortfolio:

- has traditional use throughout the professional sector;
- is evidence-based;
- depicts personality & aesthetic character (uniqueness and identity) reconfigurable for different contexts;
- displays understanding and potential not just outcome; collates rich media in different forms; Is often bulky and costly to produce (and share/reproduce/update); and
- encourages wide dissemination in network-driven industries where most jobs are not advertised, as opposed to the inherent impediments of traditional hard-copy material.

Work with ePortfolios was reinvigorated in the Conservatorium's music technology department by the funded project of which all authors are members. For this project the researcher chose to use only open source web-ware, with six issues as the basis for the decision, namely that the platform is:

- not tied to any single solution (for example distributed component architecture, cloud components);
- intuitive to learn and be situated in real-world contexts including transferability, sustainability and agility;
- has a defined place(s) to start embedded support through stages;
- is sufficiently frustrating to provide challenges including peer recognition and benchmarking;
- builds desire to repeat and improve leads to regular (staged) rewards; and
- is customisable enabling a sense of personalisation and ownership.

4.1.3 Impact on the institution

Earlier trials identified the main impediments to broader uptake by students and staff as being the difficulty of maintaining the ePortfolio in-house; the commercial sector not being ready for online portfolios; student resistance to uptake of the platform in relation to workload and cutting edge concerns; bandwidth issues overall including costs, consistency and reliability; and cross platform and browser issues including coding inconsistencies, formatting inconsistencies, accessibility issues, proprietary versus open source content, ownership and long-term storage. As a result of this study, techno-centric thinking was observed to diminish with a view to raising potential for other interested academics to embrace ePortfolios with low technological barriers to engagement.

5. Curtin University

5.1.1 Institutional policy

In 2009/2010, Curtin University developed an ePortfolio platform known as 'iPortfolio' for use by staff and students. The platform's development was championed by an academic whose efforts led eventually to university-wide support, and one year after its introduction it had more than 17,000 users (von Kinsky & Oliver, 2012). Flexible learning in all its guises comes under the Deputy Vice Chancellor Education, and the policy covers online access to learning resources, online teaching and learning, and online assessment

management. As such, the iPortfolio is described in the 2011 Flexible Learning Policy and Procedures as one of the approaches “that facilitate effective student engagement through the provision of appropriate online environments” (Curtin University, 2011: n. p).

5.1.2 Impact on the academics

The impact on academics has varied according to uptake by schools and faculties, determined in part by whether the iPortfolio was embedded within programs. A distinct advantage for academics has been that the platform was fully developed and centrally supported, which has meant that engaging with an ePortfolio is very easy, requiring minimal technological skills and no new design or development. Beyond the practical implications, the most impactful aspect has been that the iPortfolio was designed to ‘encourage student reflection on ‘lifewide’ experiences that enhance employability and augment learning within the formal curriculum’ (von Kinsky and Oliver, 2012: 67). This includes space for students to evidence each of their graduate attributes as well as the three main aspects of the University’s ‘Triple I curriculum’, which incorporates Industry (graduate employability), Indigenous, intercultural and international (global citizenship), and Interdisciplinary experiences (Curtin University, 2010). A future-oriented focus such as this necessitated a commitment by the university to give students lifelong access to their portfolio, which is becoming more problematic as the number of users increases over time; however, it was a distinct advantage to the project team.

The iPortfolio’s emphasis on ‘self and career’ enabled academics to house within a student’s portfolio the results of career development activities such as work-integrated-learning or evidence of the skills and knowledge required for professional accreditation. Students and staff have been pleased with the inclusion of features such as an app, which enables users to photograph evidence with their smartphone and upload it directly to their iPortfolio. Another advantage has been the ability to incorporate multimedia files, which are used to evidence multiple artefacts including film, video résumés and 3-dimensional design work.

5.1.3 Academic ePortfolio use

Given the complex nature of careers across the creative sectors, the development of employability skills is a high priority for every institution. As elsewhere, students at the university explore practical techniques and theory, developing both collaborative and creative skills. What the students tend not to consider is the relevance of this learning to their future lives and careers; and in an already overcrowded curriculum there is little space for this discussion. The project aimed to determine whether an ePortfolio could be a means of exploring possible future selves and careers, assisting students with the transition from student-hood to graduate professional.

The study involved first-year theatre students and third-year professional writing students, who were challenged to think about the role of undergraduate study in their future lives and careers. This thinking enabled students to compile evidence within their portfolios of a broad range of skills and abilities. As part of this, the writing students engaged in blogging about their internships. This blogging acted as a collection of artefacts about skills and competencies that could be articulated through ePortfolios.

5.1.4 Impact on the institution

At the time of writing there are 30,000 users of iPortfolio, the majority being students. The activity level on each these accounts, however, is not known. Given growing concern that many higher education students feel unprepared for the workplace and have not had career-related discussions as part of their studies (AUSSE, 2010), it is likely that the use of iPortfolio as a career and life-development tool will continue to increase. In the case of this study, the researchers noted increased career awareness among the students and much more motivation to engage in future-oriented thinking. Students reported feeling more prepared for, and aware of, their professional selves, and the ePortfolio approach will be embedded within the writing degree from 2014.

5.2 University of Western Sydney

Institutional policy

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) feels that ‘the push towards greater flexibility of learning, supported by existing and emerging technologies, is substantially being driven by students who increasingly seek to

engage in learning when and where they choose' (University of Western Sydney, Blended Learning, 2013) . Because many student learners are 'digitally literate, frequent users of mobile devices, and seeking highly interactive, visual, immediate, and socially engaging learning' (ibid), the university is adopting a 'strategic and systematic approach to combining times and modes of learning, integrating the best aspects of face-to-face and online interactions for each discipline, using appropriate ICTs' (ibid) through a Blended Learning Quality Framework currently being implemented by Schools. The blended learning website offers 'a guide to a range of technologies' for user consideration, with four headings – content creation and presentation, synchronous communication, asynchronous communication and e-Assessment – and ePortfolio is listed under content creation and presentation. (University of Western Sydney, Using Technology for Blended Learning, 2013). In recognition of their potential value an ePortfolio trial commenced in 2012.

5.2.1 Impact on the academics

The trial of ePortfolio engaged a commercial ePortfolio platform for use with four academics and their students in music, medicine and engineering. The confluence of two events—looking at an existing CV platform as a possible career professional ePortfolio component of a professional practice subject, and the funded national project reported here—introduced the researcher to the idea of embedding an ePortfolio platform into a second-year group music performance subject and into a final-year professional practice capstone subject in which music students take their arts practice into the community.

5.2.2 Academic ePortfolio use

Students in the music performance subject focused on group rehearsal and performance, and the ePortfolio offered a collaborative platform for essay writing in pairs, drawing in video and audio clips for deeper analysis and discussion. Through their commercial ePortfolio platform and their learning management system (adopted in consecutive years), students individually reviewed two in-house concerts of professional performers, often accompanied by video footage taken by students on a mobile phone. At the end of the semester, each student peer-reviewed the essay of another collaborative writing pair, with guided criteria to focus their comments. This e-written task, plus the ability to type comments in real time for assessable rehearsal and performance events, sending marks and comments immediately to students, has drawn the ePortfolio deeply into the teaching of this real time activity. Using two different platforms for the ePortfolio work highlighted strengths and weakness for the task and enabled considered decisions to be made for the future in relation to the suitability of one platform over another when submitting the peer review.

The third-year professional practice capstone subject required students to take their music practice—performing, event organising, recording, music criticism, music survey, teaching, among others—into the community. A summary of this practical project including written, edited visual and audio artefacts, together with a professional career portfolio of CV, photo and letter of introduction, were housed on the ePortfolio platform. This collection of artefacts is available for a potential employer to view on invitation.

5.2.3 Impact on the institution

The four academics undertaking the ePortfolio trial were monitored by the university through an annual questionnaire and discussion meetings seeking student and teacher responses to using the platform. At the end of 2012 an in-house summary report noted the need for ongoing workshops for both students and staff, representing a 'user guide' approach with specific instructions for each subject for completing and submitting work through the portal, and for careful consideration as to whether this was the most suitable platform for the outcome. A specific concern related to students working in groups and sharing within teams, as the commercial platform was found to be more suited to individual development..

Data has so far been gathered from students on several ePortfolio uses including peer evaluation, collaborative essay writing about music performance, and student views on how the ePortfolio could be used in a music program. The key findings indicate: a dislike by students of learning a new and unfamiliar commercial platform although several see its potential; a range of different collaborative essay writing styles (Blom, 2014); and a positive student attitude to peer evaluation of the essay.

6. Conclusions

A spectrum of two-way relationships between institution and teaching academics has emerged in this study with respect to how information is shared regarding the ePortfolio as an eLearning approach. This sharing ranges from the discussions held by early adopters of ePortfolios, who have influenced institutional eLearning policies; academics serving on eLearning policy-making committees and informing potential online learning and engagement strategies; academics designing platforms specifically for the institution with feedback from staff and students; influential trials being adopted by other disciplines; and monitored trials of an ePortfolio platform for possible purchase and adoption by the institution, involving regular sharing of information by academics and ePortfolio support staff who, in turn, reported to the wider institution. These extend the thinking and findings of USA provosts and other researchers in the literature. As well, academics in this study impacted on their institutions through the work funded by internal and external funding, which enabled time to explore teaching and learning use of the ePortfolio. From these activities came institutional workshops, conference presentations and published papers disseminating information within and outside the institution. In combination the groundswell of interest has influenced curriculum design and university policy.

Within this spectrum of knowledge sharing, platforms ranged from home grown, one-size-fits-all platforms, through commercial ePortfolio or eLearning platforms, to open source software, all introduced in the literature. The use of ePortfolio platforms facilitated student reflection, collaborative essay writing, peer evaluation, the housing of multiple artefacts and the representation of multiple interests; and enhanced the relevance of learning for career development and employability. While some of these uses are reflected in the literature, in particular career preparation, several offer new thinking.

When the institution and its academics work together to pool information and ideas about ePortfolio, three things result: other disciplines benefit, unsuitable uses are noted and discontinued, and students benefit from a platform for use within and after their studies, thereby breaking down barriers between student-hood and graduate life. From our experience with ePortfolios, we support the notion that institutional leadership must be bi-directional, where people at the 'coal-face' of teaching and learning challenge their institutions to engage in different ways and on different levels, including policy debate, and where institutions demonstrate leadership through a balance of autocratic decision-making and a willingness to be challenged and to listen from the bottom up.

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