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From the Reflective ePractitioner: A Pilot Model of Teacher Preparation Employing ePortfolio

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Literacy is changing significantly alongside the prolific emergence of new technologies. The emergence of these new technologies has been so rapid that teachers may often not be as competent as their students in the use of new media or in the specific linguistic features of the growing range of text types. In this project, overseas trained teachers (OTTs) were scaffolded in their introduction to a variety of new technologies and typical text types relevant to the educational context in Australia where literacy is taught across the curriculum. As the OTTs prepared for a specific English test, which forms part of the process for gaining approval to teach in New South Wales (NSW), they were empowered by an integrated pedagogy: in the process of discovering ways to keep abreast of technology, they were simultaneously honing their language skills. The new software and text types to which these teachers were introduced made it possible for them to collate their qualifications, achievements, and reflections by creating their own professional, updatable, and portable reflective ePortfolios in English. They have since been able to use this learning to enhance their professional personas and self-esteem as they embark on a teaching career in a new country.

This paper reports on how overseas trained teachers (OTTs) were introduced to an adaptable process for creating, developing, and honing their own reflective professional ePortfolios in English. A broad-based genre approach was adopted and embedded within a sociocultural perspective on how a second language is acquired. Adapting the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky for second language learners, together with Moon's (2001) recommendations for building in reflection on learning, an interdisciplinary theoretical framework was combined with a genre approach to the teaching of writing and new technologies. This was the methodology chosen for introducing OTTs to the complexity of a range of vocationally relevant new technologies and specific text types.

The objectives were first, to empower these teachers by updating them in their use of emerging technologies, and second, to provide them with appropriate linguistic and sociopragmatic instruction and practice in using the English language. The linguistic instruction also had a dual purpose: (1) the development of well-written text types to include in their reflective ePortfolios and (2) instruction as to how to transfer learning of these text types to the more specific purpose of preparing for the Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT). For these ambitious objectives to be achieved, cultivation of a reflective attitude was essential; that is, the ability to notice, make sense of, and think about what one is doing while doing it; "reflection-in-action" (Moon, 2001; Schön 1983, 1987).

OTTs in New South Wales (NSW) Australia come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. OTTs are non-native speakers of English and predominantly female migrants. Usually they are also already experienced teachers of Language, Mathematics, Science, and other key learning areas in their first homelands. More often than not, they have migrated to an education system considerably different from the one in which they were educated and to a life in suburbs that are geographically widely dispersed.

Candidates of the PEAT generally face a long process (two years or more) when seeking to gain approval to work as teachers in NSW public schools. Most notably, they are required to achieve As in each of the four English language macro skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) before they can be deemed vocationally, socioculturally, and linguistically proficient. High scores of 7 – 7.5 in other English tests, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), are not accepted by the NSW Department of Education (DET) as alternatives to the PEAT, even though this option does exist for other professions (Medicine, Nursing, Psychology) in NSW and also for teaching in other states of Australia. The PEAT is, in other words, an extremely challenging test (pass rate of 15% or less per administration) with vocational language requirements seemingly more stringent than presently exist to gain access to other professions or a teaching career in other educational institutions and states in Australia.

All this being taken into account, the instructors on this reflective ePortfolio project hypothesized that OTTs could develop their language skills to the level required by the PEAT if these teachers also possessed an awareness of and a familiarity with the educational environment in which they would be presenting and using their skills. This hypothesis found its source in recent second language acquisition research, which has come to a consensus regarding the influence the diverse nature of the sociocultural environment has on second language learning (Johnson, 2004; Lantolf, 2007;

Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011). The implications of Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) sociocultural theory of mind, which also emphasizes the relationships between the individual and the socially and culturally produced artifacts that transform an individual's cognitive functioning, means there is a wide range of factors impacting second language learning that require consideration.

Theoretical Framework

Owing to an endorsement of Vygotsky's emphasis on the relationships between the individual and the relevant artifacts he/she produces, this project focused on the text types OTTs would develop for inclusion in their ePortfolios in addition to those required by the PEAT. For these OTTs, relevant text types (various kinds of written pieces of work) for their ePortfolios, were expected to consist of a succinctly stated career objective, a two page curriculum vitae, at least one response to essential criteria, a generic cover letter, a detailed lesson plan, critical reflections on the ePortfolio process itself, and a critique of teaching a lesson and/or work experience. Each of these text types was distinguished by its purpose, audience, content, staging, linguistic, and pragmatic features.

Significantly, text types are not universally the same even if they bear a similar name. For example, Western institutions usually prefer quite plain and succinct curriculum vitae rather than decorative and elaborately detailed ones, although these might well be appreciated in many areas such as in parts of India. Further, the logical and linear structure expected in Western academic essays contrasts markedly with the circular structure of the cultural thought patterns characterizing many Eastern counterparts (Kaplan, 2001).

Despite the differences across cultures, text types "reflect and coordinate social ways of knowing and acting in the world and thus provide valuable means of researching how texts function in various contexts and teaching students how to act meaningfully in multiple contexts" (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 29). The importance of being able to recognize and apply the unique structural and linguistic requirements for each of the various text types appropriately and accurately has led many educators across Australia to adopt the cyclical genre approach as a preferred pedagogy:

> Influenced in large part by the work of Michael Halliday (Halliday; Halliday and Hasan) at the University of Sydney, and applied to genre particularly in the work of J. R. Martin, Frances Christie, Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Brian Paltridge, Joan Rothery, Eija Ventola, and others, [this view of linguistics] operates from the premise that language structure is integrally related to social function and context. Language is organized the way it is within a culture because such an organization serves a social purpose within that culture (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 29).

Various researchers have adapted this teaching-learning cycle pedagogy in many ways, and yet it can be conveniently summarized as consisting of three stages: (1) brainstorming, modeling, and joint deconstruction; (2) negotiation and collaboration to reconstruct a similar version of what has been modeled; and (3) independent construction of this text type after content research and a process of drafting and feedback.

In the first stage, students are provided with several models representative of a given text type. During this stage, teachers guide their students in deconstruction of the modeled texts; that is, they work collaboratively to identify the cultural and situational context in which such texts function, the social purposes they may serve, "how their structural elements reflect their functions, and how their language features carry out their functions" (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010, p. 34). For example, the social purpose of an incident report could be for the school to have on file an accurate and objective record of an incident in which a student was seriously injured. The audience for such a report would be management or even a legal representative many years on. The report would need to be written in a formal register and contain details of the names of any persons involved, as well as the date and time of the incident. Various forms of the past tense would normally characterize the formal style of such a text type and students would be advantaged if their teacher were able to guide them in noticing the various structural, linguistic, and cultural features characterizing such a text type.

During the second stage, students and teacher negotiate and work collaboratively to reconstruct a version of the modeled text, so that it is similar to the original with respect to its purpose, form, and function. By the third stage of the teaching-learning cycle, students are expected to be able to construct their individual and independently written versions of the text type in question. They proceed to do so after conducting relevant research to develop content knowledge, after submitting drafts of their texts to their teacher and peers, and after a continuous process of editing, evaluating, redrafting, proofing, and, finally, publishing their texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

The cyclical or "wheel" shape of this approach exemplifies flexibility, since teachers and students can enter into the cycle at the stage most appropriate to their level. Further, the teacher and students can rotate through this cycle as different text types and/or more complex ones are attempted. In other words, the genre

approach–also conceived of as the "wheel" or teaching-learning cycle—makes the structural and linguistic features of different text types explicit and explores how these features are connected to their social functions and cultural context.

This linguistically inspired approach to teaching locates its insight in one of the main premises of genre theory; this premise examines the structural elements that combine to form predictable patterns in a text type, such as an incident report or a letter; in other words, context and social processes play a major role in the development of a text type and the language in which it is traditionally expressed. Furthermore, the premise of genre theory stresses the importance of understanding the relationship between language, knowledge, and power. This cyclical relationship requires the recognition of language as a social semiotic and literacy as social practice. In summary, the approach adopted in this project required a fundamental understanding of language as dynamic and evolving social process, which both shapes—and is shaped by—the cultural and social context in which it occurs (Halliday, 2004).

Learners were scaffolded in the development of their skills when applying this approach according to the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978, 1986), which also emphasizes the relationship between the individual and his/her mental functioning. These two theoretical concepts—a genre approach combined with scaffolding—were critical in determining the structure and content of the program. The concept of scaffolding is closely related to Vygotsky's concept of a zone of proximal development (ZPD). For Vygotsky, the ZPD referred to the gap that exists between a person's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under guidance, or in collaboration. Even though Vygotsky himself never mentioned *scaffolding*, the term was employed by other sociocultural theorists who applied Vygotsky's ZPD to a variety of educational contexts. Scaffolding, therefore, refers to a process through which a teacher, or even a more competent peer, assists a student as necessary, and tapers off any aid as it becomes unnecessary, in a manner similar to that of a scaffold being removed from a building during construction.

Vygotsky's method involved observation of individuals working on a task they could not yet accomplish independently. In these situations, the learner would be provided with "material or symbolic affordances" (Swain, Kinnear, & Steinmann, 2011, p. 9) and then observed as to how effectively such tools could be incorporated into the individual's problem-solving activities. Such affordances were often in the form of dialogue with the individual learner. Also significant, with respect to the effectiveness of this method, was the nature of the task, how the individual interacted with it, the place and time of the interaction, and the person who assisted in the development of this interaction. In other words, Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD was crucial in the theoretical framework and practical approach adopted by this project.

Assumed cultural knowledge of the NSW education system is assessed in the PEAT in which spoken and written tasks are evaluated equally according to the criteria of both accuracy and cultural appropriateness. Cultural knowledge was thus introduced gradually and when appropriate to do so. For example, the language of mitigation characterizing the way Australian teachers talk to their students when attempting to discipline them, would be addressed when studying the topic of behavior management. Further, even though the PEAT does not test students' digital literacies, this area is increasingly permeating the educational environment in which students learn; therefore, when learning about using new software such as Mahara, OTTs' awareness of related social networking applications that school students embrace, such as Facebook, would be addressed, compared, and discussed.

The essential features in this project were that the pedagogical approach used for the development of appropriate writing skills for each text type was not simply employed for sociocultural and linguistic purposes, but simultaneously adapted for the teaching of learning how to use a range of emerging technologies (Moreno & Valdez, 2007) and also on learning how to best reflect on the educative process.

The wheel, or genre, approach has become increasingly popular for teaching traditional text types such as information reports to young children, but it has also been used to assist adolescents and adults in their mastery of writing of more sophisticated and academic texts such incident reports and essays. In this reflective ePortfolio project, the wheel approach was used to teach relevant text types found in the PEAT (such as the incident report, the letter/handout, and comment), and also employed to introduce and develop proficiency with the interface and application of new technologies. For example, Learning Management Systems (LMSs), and in particular Moodle, the ePortfolio platforms of Mahara and Adobe Acrobat Pro 9, and connected classroom technology were all introduced in a manner reminiscent of the genre approach. The range of text types extended from incident reports to critical reflections. The variety of new media ranged from software to hardware. Due to the small scale of the PEAT in its present form, the dearth of relevant textbook materials prompted the discovery of a wealth of online resources, which were made available through the Learning Management System (LMS) of Moodle, with which students needed to become thoroughly acquainted in order to access many of the resources for the course.

Simultaneously, guidance and encouragement to become a "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983) was fully integrated in this pedagogy based on a blend of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory for second language learners with a genre approach. OTTs were, for example, initially asked to read Gunn's (2010) article "Exploring MATESOL Student 'Resistance' to Reflection" in order to clarify what "reflection" in this learning context would mean, as well as to explore how it could be practically incorporated as a part of their ePortfolio. Towards the middle of the 17 week course, when embarking on work experience, OTTs were asked to notice the differences in their host teachers' use of language when instructing versus disciplining their students or explaining a concept, when talking to their peers or to their students. With notes kept from this observation placement, OTTs were then required to compare these different uses of language not only in order to memorize relevant English collocations, but to make selected aspects of these culturally appropriate ways of communication their own. By way of further illustration, selected parts (e.g., see p. 42-43, 90-119, &167-168) of Peters (1993), which investigated the experience of reflective writing in Mathematics in a primary classroom, were provided as discussion starters and models for reflection and reflective writing in lesson planning, especially since most of the OTTs needed to include Mathematics teaching as part of their work. Models for the reflective writing pieces (on the process of creating a portfolio, lesson plans, or work experience) were provided together with an exercise from UniSA's website on reflective writing and Moon (2001). These models were deconstructed and reconstructed according to the same genre approach as applied to all other text types explored during this course.

In these varied ways, it was hoped that incorporation of a reflective component into this ePortfolio project would result in OTTs being educated to become "reflective ePractitioners," developing a fluency and flexibility that they could transfer to their future careers, to new technologies, and to the writing of text types required by the PEAT.

Institutional Context

Four of more than forty OTTs studying at Randwick TAFE NSW Sydney Institute in 2010 successfully completed a full-time course in Career Development (PEAT) in which the reflective ePortfolio project and a part-time Statement of Attainment in Preparation for PEAT were embedded. Nearly all the other enrolled OTTs were not interested in preparing for the PEAT examination in this way and chose instead to have a more test-focused form of study by enrolling in the part-time Statement of Attainment in Preparation for PEAT. A minority chose the full-time option, with its broad-based sociocultural, technological savvy and reflective approach, rather than selecting a part-time study option devoted solely to PEAT preparation via test analysis and exemplar practice. A minority elected to study full-time in order to have the opportunity to be supported in developing their careers whilst preparing for the twin requirement of the PEAT: accuracy and appropriacy. They consciously opted for a course of study encompassing more than test preparation: they signed up to a program in which they would develop their career prospects by preparing for the PEAT via a process of learning to use emerging technologies as teachers and by creating their own reflective ePortfolios. This minority of OTTs (compared with the majority who were only studying part-time and solely concerned with test preparation), agreed to attempt their PEAT examination preparation via a new pilot course and a demanding approach, which was not totally test-focused. Technology and reflection are not commonly associated with the PEAT, but these four OTTs were willing to explore and persist with the goal of preparing for their examination via a project that did not, initially, appear to assist with examination preparation.

The project required each of these participants to commit to completing tasks, which, on the surface, appeared to be only tangentially connected to preparation for the PEAT itself. These OTTs were expected to become proficient in their use of new technologies, artifacts, and reflective text types, which do not form part of the PEAT. The PEAT is a traditional pen and paper based test, requiring OTTs to handwrite vocationally specific text types. Nevertheless, the OTTs enrolled in this pilot course were expected to develop and transfer their literacy skills through completing written assignments for text types not specifically related to test exemplar text types. An additional option for those OTTs who chose to study full-time was work experience, mainly in the form of classroom observation with an occasional option for lesson delivery; this field-based option allowed the OTTs to experience first-hand the sociocultural context of education in NSW.

The purpose of these far-reaching requirements for the full-time students was based on the principle that familiarity with the sociocultural context of the school and new media with their relatively novel text types (email, chats, and forums to name only a few) that had become part of general education in NSW would transfer positively to the learner's ability to prepare for the test itself. Further, it was hypothesized the educative process (Bolton, 2010; Dewey, 1933) of reflection and reflective writing practice would encourage a deep approach to learning (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1997) and, therefore, result in a wide range of positive

outcomes, one of which would be becoming a reflective ePractitioner.

This select group of OTTs became part of a reflective ePortfolio project aligned to four compulsory units concerned with project development, career evaluation, sustainability, and emerging technologies in a nationally accredited Certificate IV Course in Career Development. The Languages Department at Randwick TAFE NSW Sydney Institute and the Australian Flexible Learning Framework jointly funded this venture.

Pedagogy

Each teaching stage, whether concerned with introducing a new technology or text type, was adapted according to the teaching-learning cycle mentioned earlier and as such initially involved building the field by brainstorming and then modeling. These two parts to stage one were followed by a third; that is, teacher-student deconstruction. As with the three basic stages of the teaching-learning cycle for teaching different written text types, joint reconstruction and collaboration, and finally, individual application, (after research, conferencing, adaptation, redrafting, editing, and proofing) followed when introducing each new technology or artifact. In this way the pedagogical approach employed in this project for scaffolding learners in skill development (whether for creation of text types or familiarity with the use of a new technology) followed that of the curriculum genre or teaching-learning cycle (the wheel), as originally recommended by Martin and Rothery as early as the 1980s (in Cope & Kalantzis, 1993).

Scaffolding implies a teaching strategy where instruction begins at a level in which students are able to achieve and then provides the correct amount of support so that students are enabled to progress on to a higher level of understanding and/or competence. This staged approach was developed to assist learners in their discovery of the specific language of written texts and in their development of writing and digital skills appropriate for each type of text and each new technology while simultaneously creating culturally produced artifacts capable of transforming cognitive functioning. For example, when learners explored how best to develop their curriculum vitae, they were explicitly introduced to the purpose, content, structure, sequencing, and language features of this text type, and then they were shown how these differed when writing generic cover letters. Similarly, when learners were introduced to the range of resources available to them on their Learning Management System, Moodle, they were introduced via a hands-on approach to its purpose, the range of content it contained, its organization, and its navigation. Further, Moodle was later explicitly compared to the related but distinctive ePortfolio platform Mahara, whose purpose, content, and navigation is considerably different. Third, as mentioned earlier, when students were introduced to the concept of reflective writing, they were given models, which they would explore and analyze regarding their purpose, their linguistic style, as well as their dialogic and reflective elements before attempting the next step of creating their own versions.

When using a traditional genre approach, the purpose, audience, staging, content, as well as linguistic and pragmatic features are first brainstormed and modeled. Learners are provided with annotated models of relevant text types and the distinctive features of these with which they need to be familiar. When the models are deconstructed, their features are identified and imitated in small groups or pairs. It is only after all of these several stages have been completed that learners are obliged to adapt and transfer their learning to create similar texts independently.

In order to transfer this approach to the realm of teaching how to use new technologies, it was principally the interface that was annotated and explored. First the teacher modeled and provided annotated visual representations of the key parts, structure, content type and functions of a new software or platform. Only after this modeling stage would each learner have hands-on time to explore the space. The joint reconstruction stage, which has traditionally been applied to texts as a whole, was attempted in the case of these emerging technologies, for much more minor aspects, or mini-genres. As an example, when creating a View in the ePortfolio platform of Mahara, it was necessary first to define what a View was; that is, a specific configuration of the artifacts a person chose to combine in one virtual space. For instance, one person might have several Views: one View could display his/her professional documents, another View might only relate to his/her personal music interests. In order to display a range of artifacts within one View, however, several skills are involved: an ability to create the View, name it, and then populate it with a range of files (perhaps embedded media, images and/or blogs and RSS feeds). Discrete aspects of this total View function, each one possibly needing to be modeled, imitated, and then practiced, varied from the function of creating a folder to uploading a file or embedding media. Nevertheless, only when each micro-step could be repeated individually, sequenced appropriately, and applied independently and accurately were learners considered ready to combine all steps and, in such instances, create a View (see Appendix A). In this way, Vygotsky's ZPD was applied to the teaching of creating artifacts for the ePortfolio via a process of scaffolding each learner every step of the way. It must be emphasized even one whole View is only one part of

navigating and utilizing the vastness of the Mahara ePortfolio platform.

Saving edited and rewritten text types as Microsoft Word files, and afterwards being able to upload these Word documents to Mahara, meant that learners would create backup documents. At this stage, learners could choose whether to include these files in their Views, keep these files private, or share them, making them public. In this manner the relationships between the classroom, or computer room, and the outside world could be made explicit. Further, the built-in time for reflection and reflective writing helped OTTs become aware of the various and different sociocultural influences impacting their teaching and, subsequently, their professional identities. Reflective writing provided a space for explicitly detailing their learning and exploring how they might apply, vary, and/or share it.

If learners chose to make their documents public, they were encouraged to create a copy of their editable and portable Word files, as well as save these copies as attractive professional and secure PDF (Adobe 9) files. It was principally these files that were chosen for the final ePortfolio. Resaving documents as secure and professional-looking PDF files introduced yet another stage in the literacy/technology teaching-learning cycle for OTTs in this project. Nevertheless, it was a step these OTTs were obliged to take in order to complete their project for the course and in so doing, they collected a range of files on which to draw for the purpose of promoting themselves when the time came to look for a teaching position.

Since the overall aim of the reflective ePortfolio project required OTTs to create their own ePortfolios by following a structured and staged process for both traditional and reflective text types as well as by using of a range of technologies, the broad-based genre approach was extended to apply to the use of a variety of software and platforms.

Two main models were selected as the focus:

1. ePortfolios as represented by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (the organization that partly funded this initiative) at: http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/content/e-portfolios-4 and, in particular, Allison Miller's ePortfolio using Mahara at: http://mahara.e-skills.com.au/user/view.php?id=24
2. The Marine Biology course portfolio available from Adobe at: http://www.adobe.com/education/instruction/teach/acrobat-curriculum_old.html

Facilitating learners' evaluation of both platforms, and their ePortfolio examples, was an important final stage. The stage necessarily entailed consideration of language, culture, and technology. As Paas (2010) emphasizes, "If individuals are to learn effectively in a learning environment, their cognitive architecture, the learning environment, and interactions between both must be understood, accommodated and aligned" (slide 3). The cultural practice of critical thinking was, therefore, introduced as a precursor to several descriptors for reflective writing.

Reflection, which was a distinguishing feature of this ePortfolio practitioner project, was not undertaken merely at a descriptive level, nor solely at the end of the project, but encouraged and engaged in as part of the "staged goal-oriented learning process" (Martin, 2009, p. 10) based on deconstructing and recreating models of various text types. The teaching-learning cycle was ongoing. Each time a learner was able to master a new skill in using technology or after each significant artifact (curriculum vitae or cover letter) for the ePortfolio was completed and proofed, the learner was encouraged to write down his/her reflections on the process. The higher cognitive levels of reflection, descriptive, dialogic and critical (Smith & Hatton, 1993), were then introduced also by providing models of each type of reflective writing. These reflective text types, which need to be mastered as well, both challenged and extended the learners' thinking. Through this exposure to multiple text types, learners were not only provided with opportunities to hone their written skills in English, but also with the imperative to make connections between the sociocultural aspects of reflection, language, technology, context, and power.

The higher cognitive levels of descriptive, dialogic, and critical reflection (Smith & Hatton, 1993) were discussed and deconstructed. Learners were encouraged to aspire to write in a critical reflective manner and also to submit several drafts for each reflective written piece. OTTs were further guided by a list of relevant questions they could ask of themselves, such as ones relating to objectives (Did the students understand what they did in the lesson?); activities and materials (What different kinds of activities and materials could have been used?); students (Which parts of the lesson did they seem to participate in most enthusiastically and which least?); classroom management (Was I aware of how well the students were understanding and making progress?); and personal teaching style (How do I show my respect for the students and for the subject?).

Learners would write their reflections about their own lessons or lesson plans, work experience, or the ePortfolio process, either in a Word file or in an online discussion forum, focusing on how useful or challenging a new technology might be or on their perceived value of certain parts or even the whole course itself:

> Sharing our reflections as teachers is a great idea and I believe it opens the gate and gives us

> opportunities not only to share but also receive some new ideas . . . I believe with the help of the reflective ePortfolio, I could improve my skills, improve my delivery of a syllabus, share my reflections and be no stranger in a digital environment.

The teacher would then feedback and comment on the writing of each reflection, as well as on the files that were to be included in the ePortfolio. Following individual conferencing and written formative feedback, learners were expected to rewrite their texts, address the comments raised, and finally, aim for their writings to be completely free of errors. This last error-free requirement was essential as NSW DET expects an extremely high degree of accuracy from its teachers, OTTs included, in all subjects. Teachers in NSW are expected to be able to identify and correct their students' errors across the curriculum, as well as facilitate their own students in the development of skills in editing and self-correction. English language and literacy were of ongoing and critical concern in this project where the learners, OTTs, became reflective ePractitioners.

The twin aims of critical reflection and error free writing meant that, based on the models discussed and deconstructed in class and in small groups, OTTs had to draft, revise, rewrite, proof, and resubmit their own materials as model files that would become the content for their reflective ePortfolios. The three required written text types of the PEAT were practiced explicitly in sessions for the part-time PEAT Preparation Course and also indirectly via creation of related files for the ePortfolios. The three written PEAT text types are an incident report, a letter/handout, and a comment, which test formal, semi-informal, and informal writing, respectively. Curriculum vitae, cover letters, and reflections provided corresponding text types where these different levels of formality could be practiced, errors corrected, so the lessons thereby learnt could be transferred. The content for the ePortfolios included files for these traditional vocational items and lesson plans, which incorporated appropriate use of digital learning objects, reflections, and recorded lesson observations via work experience and/or via the connected classroom setup.

By following this staged and goal-oriented process, learners were able to improve their written English language skills in a diverse range of text types while simultaneously collating a set of personal and proofread files suitable for inclusion in their reflective ePortfolios. They were, meanwhile, also practicing uploading, arranging, reformatting their files, and gradually taking charge of their own learning and making it their own, while becoming proficient in the use of emerging technologies, such as the Mahara platform, and then Adobe Pro 9 Extended.

Results and Discussion

Learners were supported in the relatively lengthy process of preparing for the PEAT not only by specific exam and exemplar practice, but also by the knowledge that their learning would be recorded in a form over which they were in charge and that was accessible, flexible, and portable.

Despite agreeing on the choice of the relatively expensive Adobe platform for the final stage of this process (that is, the publication of their reflective ePortfolios), it was still of paramount concern for alumni of this project to enjoy free access to their ePortfolios for life. Mahara was valued as the platform that could provide this access in the long term, but it was the professional appearance of PDF files in the Adobe ePortfolio platform for which the OTTs expressed a preference. As a consequence, Mahara became the repository of word-processed files that could be edited and accessed after the course finished, whereas Adobe was the final publishing platform for the students' work during the project. OTTs would, however, only be able to edit the ePortfolio in this format if they themselves hired or purchased the relevant Adobe Acrobat Pro 9 software at a later date; Mahara provided the necessary, interim flexibility and backup as a repository for the original and editable Word files.

Of the four OTTs who successfully completed this project, one proceeded to attend a DET Interview where he presented his reflective ePortfolio in its Adobe Acrobat 9 format. This OTT was subsequently granted an exemption from needing to sit the PEAT. Another OTT was awarded a postgraduate scholarship to complete her Ph.D. in the ecology of a heritage language. A third and fourth OTT reenrolled in Randwick Languages' part-time PEAT preparation course, and the third of these is preparing by studying exclusively online. Online she accesses a newly developed Adobe Pro 9 ePortfolio of PEAT Writing materials (see Appendix B). The fourth OTT, who is now preparing to sit the PEAT again, completed her work experience by teaching a lesson on Graphs to the group of Grade 4 students she had observed for five school days at Auburn West Public Primary School from a distance, using connected classroom technology.

Enrollments and completions in this full-time Career Development ePortfolio option have increased significantly in Semesters 1 & 2, 2011. Comments such as the following characterized the forum discussion on Mahara and have been, no doubt, instrumental in encouraging new OTTs to choose a broad-based option

for preparing for their teaching careers in their new country:

> Emerging technologies have opened a new window for language teaching, language students and teachers, as they facilitate and even accelerate target language awareness and acquisition.

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Appendix A
A View of the Reflective ePortfolio Project

Back Edit

Profile of Project by Reflective e-portfolios

mahara

Profile of Project

Follow our journey

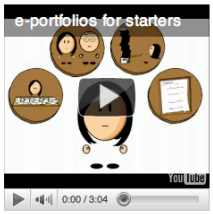
Resistance to Reflection?

Language_...8-23.pdf
206KB | Monday, 23 August 2010 | Details

AFLF Case Study

AFLF Case...lios.pdf
441.1KB | Wednesday, 13 October 2010 | Details

E-portfolios for starters



Sample Reflective E-portfolio in Adobe

SampleRef...ioTS.pdf
7MB | Monday, 20 September 2010 | Details

Learners' Guide

Learners'...ve E.pdf
688.1KB | Sunday, 28 November 2010 | Details

The journey

Entry One - The journey begins:

On 28th and 29th April, Jane Lock (our Facilitator) and I attended the informative induction program for the 2010 Australian Flexible Framework Projects and ours, which falls into the category of Empowering Learners.

We stayed for two days so that we could learn more about how to submit our Project Implementation Plan (due on May 7th in draft form) and about eportfolios in general from Allison Miller.

Hoping to share the project implementation plan draft with you soon!

In the meantime, we look forward to our first training session on Mahara delivered by Stephan Ridgway in A321 on Friday morning 28th May between 10am and 1pm.

Entry Two - training in Mahara:

As scehduled, on Friday 28th May, Stephan Ridgway gave our project team their first training session on *Mahara* and eportfolios. All project team members attended as well as interested teachers from other Languages staff, Melanie Dorlean from the Framework and Susan Haddock from Enmore TAFE NSW.

The general consensus was that the session was very interesting and that having someone personally show you how to do things makes getting acquainted with new technology much easier.

Entry Three - IWBs, connected classrooms and netbooks:

We have been lucky during the last two weeks in that we have successfully connected to Auburn West Primary school via our connected classroom setup in AG17.

One of our TESOL students, Anastasia Avgoustis, is a primary school teacher at Auburn West and she has been using Smart Boards (the deluxe version of an Interactive Whiteboard or IWB) for sometime with her classes there. Our OTTs were able to witness her engaging and excellent class on the Solar System and then Time with Year 4.

Afterwards, Anastasia demonstrated how she uses an IWB in Randwick TAFE's setup in AG17. We now hope that our OTTs will soon be presenting demonstration lessons in this way too, even though the methodology will need to be adapted to suit our Panaboard IWB hardware and compatible software.

Of course, ways to process and then add Reflections will also need to be discussed and workshopped.

Another useful addition to our project has been the set of 5 Netbooks available for our OTTs from Randwick TAFE Library. OTTs have been

Forum Topic One: our virtual group for reflection

I hope that each of us can become virtual friends for each other and thus, form a reflective and professional teacher practitioner group. I also hope our group will enjoy privacy for our postings, expect it to be a secure space and am sure we will avoid any infringements of copyright.

I would like us to be able to share our reflections as teachers who are learning to apply our varied discipline-specific literacy skills to a digital environment that has the capability of assisting and transforming delivery.

Any comments?

1. Sharing our reflections as teachers is a great idea and I believe it opens the gate and gives us opportunities not only to share but also receive some new ideas.

In this modern world, technology has become an integral part of the curriculum. As a Mathematics teacher, it has always been challenging for me to incorporate technology in the syllabi appropriately. For example, while teaching "Solving Linear Equations", I usually explain the steps in detail using the white board. But I feel that if I use an interactive smart board I could show the steps more attractively, clearly and hopefully engage the students more actively.

A concern for me however, is the appropriate time to use the technology. Is it at the beginning, in the middle or at the end? For example, I was teaching about types of triangles to a year7 class. I explained all the types and properties of triangles and then showed the visual images accompanied by a recorded explanation. But unfortunately, students found the video boring as they felt it was too repetitious.

I believe with the help of the reflective eport-folio, I could improve my skills, improve my delivery of a syllabus, share my reflections and be no stranger in a digital environment.

To be top notch in literacy skills is not an easy job, but with all the assistance of an eportfolio group it can be achieved.

2. I showed a website (http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/) Board of Studies, NSW (2003) in class using the interactive whiteboard. This site contains essential educational resources for Australian teachers and students. We studied the Stage 6 Extension Chinese language online. This web page contains the updated HSC Syllabus for the Chinese Language and also contains some documents related to the subject, such as specimen

CLI website news

CLI website news

DER-NSW
CLI is supporting the rollout of laptops to teachers and students in NSW Department of Education and Training Schools.

Mobile learning
CLI has partnered with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney and Telstra to trial the use of GPS location-based technology to enhance learning for Stage 3 and 4 public school students

WeCreate
Encouraging students to use technology as a tool for learning through challenges and awards that students love to engage with.

Mystery Matters
Bathurst or Bust is the latest online history mystery game for stages 3 and 4 students where they play the role of a convict sent to Sydney.

Guidelines for resource developers
Guidelines and specifications to help NSW DET staff to develop accessible learning resources.

Last updated on 01 June 2011, 6:15 AM

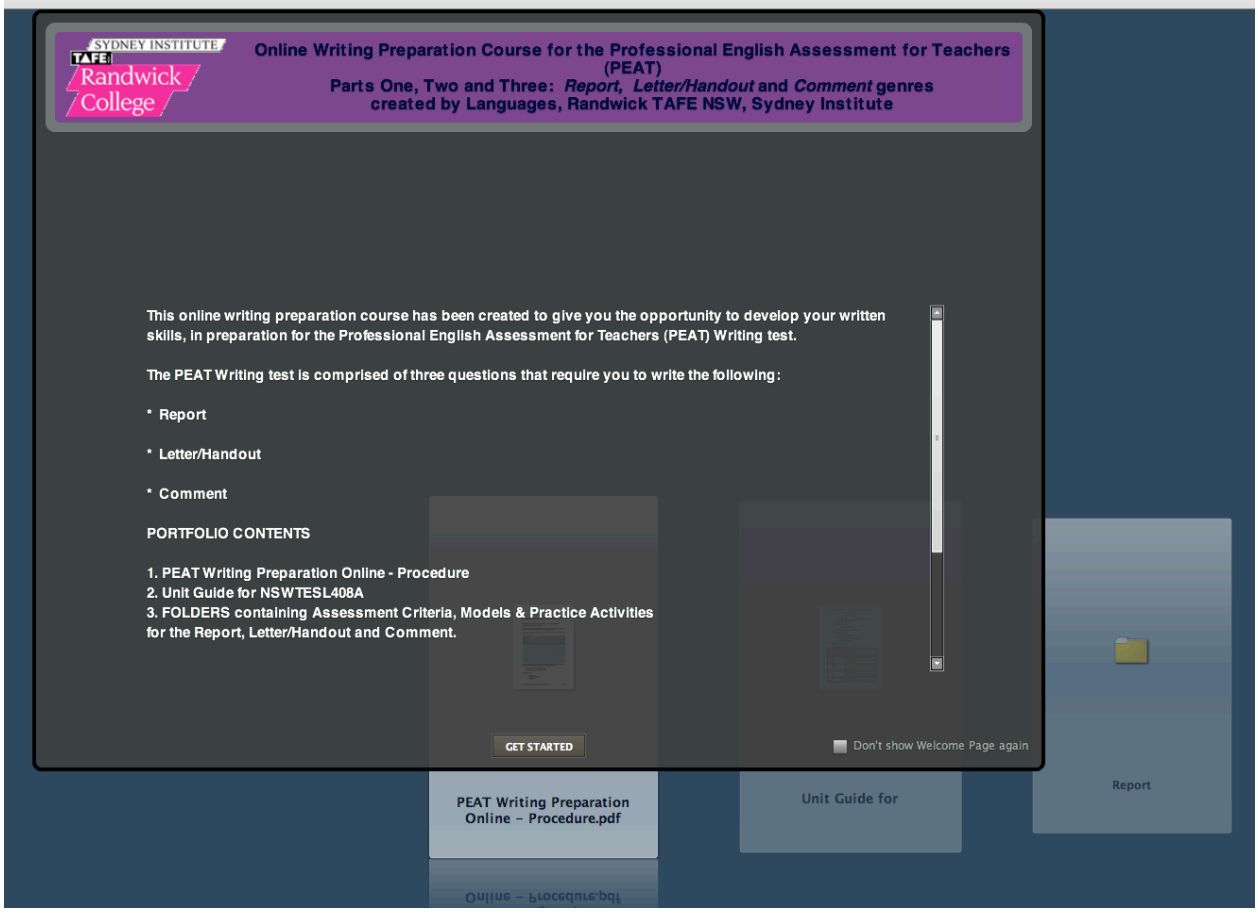
Jane & Judie

Framework Induction Day

J&J@induction day 28/04/2010

Project Implementation Plan

Project_i...plan.pdf
488.8KB | Monday, 23 August 2010 | Details

Appendix B

The new Online PEAT Writing course using the Adobe ePortfolio software