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SABBATICAL REPORT (Term 3 2014)

To inquire into the development and use of eportfolios at the Primary School level and the impact of these as tools to enhance learning and parent / teacher / student partnerships.

SPECIFIC FOCUS

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the use of ePortfolios and how they might be introduced across our own school.

To consider the format of eportfolios at various levels of the school with a particular focus on the use of Ultranet as an LMS. (Learning Management System)

To determine a developmental pathway for the introduction of Parkland School eportfolios.

INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I sincerely thank my own Board of Trustees for their ongoing support and enabling me to take up this extraordinary opportunity. Thankyou to the staff at Parkland School who have participated first hand in much of this work and who have contributed constructively and positively to the outcomes. Thankyou to the large number of principals and staff from other schools who have been so ready to share their own experiences and findings as they have worked through a similar process. Particular thanks to Chris & Mandy from eTime in Christchurch who hosted a most valuable visit by our 'eTeam'.

It is important to note that the emphasis of our journey has evolved somewhat since my initial proposal was put together. This is clearly inevitable when dealing with anything related to eLearning. Even as we finalise our findings and proposals we can see their lifespan is finite. I have deliberately chosen however to keep the focus of this inquiry narrow and related to the successful implementation of ePortfolios across the school.

BACKGROUND

Parkland School was well placed to utilise the development of ePortfolios as a practical and purposeful focus of an inquiry. The school had been an early adopter of a Learning Management System (LMS), based on information available at the time. It was fortunate to be included in the 'SNUP' (School Network Upgrade)Programme and was also one of the first 200 schools to participate in the N4L rollout. Whilst we have not yet reached our desired number of devices available to students throughout the school we have made a substantial commitment in this area, both financially and in terms of including eLearning as a key strategic development area within a revised School Charter.

As at Feb 2012, Parkland was one of the 28% of schools using an LMS. Of that group of schools we were one of the 40% (290 Schools) who had decided to use Ultranet. (I suspect these stats may well have changed significantly over the past two years!)

Source: MOE Website June 2014

At that time the MOE encouraged and supported schools to adopt one of several LMS options, through a subsidy system in the first twelve months. Like everything related to eLearning, change is the only constant, and by mid 2014 the MOE now only provides free access to 'MyPortfolio' (up until the end of 2015.)

The introduction of ePortfolios was viewed as a natural progression in our eLearning development. Our exploration and journey throughout 2014 has been both guided and limited by the use of Ultranet as an LMS.

We remain unsure as to the future impact of N4L on our use of Ultranet. In an ideal world the school would have begun with a blank page when beginning to consider how best we would introduce and use ePortfolios. However, that was never a practical option as we were already using Ultranet which has an ePortfolio function, along with a parent portal. One thing we did not want to see emerge was a complicated and confusing multiple portal system for parents.

Throughout our work we have had growing concerns about the lack of support and development of Ultranet and teachers have been increasingly frustrated by the limitations Ultranet has in terms of ease of use by teachers, children and parents.

After 6 months of research, visits to schools and exploration we (eLearning Team) agreed that whilst Ultranet posed a number of difficulties we felt it would be able to be used as a tool to enable the school to successfully implement ePortfolios across the school and we committed ourselves to its continued use in the medium term. (At least until the end of 2015) We need however to be mindful of the fact that we need to constantly be open minded and not be afraid to continue to explore all options available to the school over the coming years.

METHODOLOGY

The project has been led by myself but has required and utilised the skills and representation of a staff member from each of the three school Teams (Junior Year 1 & 2, Middle Year 3 & 4, Senior Year 5 & 6) as well as the Deputy Principal. This group formed the 'eTeam.'

Clarification around what we wanted the ePortfolio to do for us was key to our early exploration & research. As a motivating tool the UTube clip 'Austin's Butterfly' was shared to illustrate the value and power of critical feedback by teachers and peers to improve learning. This approach set the scene for our work which followed.

A wide range or research literature has been reviewed over a seven month period. It was reassuring to find a plethora of NZ based information and support. This included several previous sabbatical reports that were related, the vast array of Ministry of Education material available on the MOE Website, documents such as 'Digital Portfolios – A Guide for Beginners' – published by the MOE were very useful. We utilised the extensive material ePortfolio Gurus such as Nick Rate and Carolyn Stuart have published.

We visited a range of other local schools and observed the implementation and use of ePortfolios across a broad and varied spectrum. At one end the school had a highly documented and structured approach that determined what portfolio samples were to be included, how these might be used and over what time period. At the other end of the spectrum students largely determined what was important to them and what media they might use to best illustrate their work sample.

From these visits we identified there were some common areas that we needed to include in our early thinking.

- Clearly, the purpose of the ePortfolio needed to be clearly understood by all participants.
- The need to provide students with explicit teaching around providing effective feedback.
- The need to teach students how to share their eportfolios (when used as a basis for discussion at student / teacher / parent conferences.
- The need to explicitly teach parents the purpose of commenting and how best to provide comment.
- Encouraging and developing the need and habit by parents to regularly visit students work. All schools acknowledged the difficulty in engaging family/whanau in the close and regular interaction with their child's learning.
- The need to have some consistency across the school so that both students and parents had some expectation about what they might find and what the purpose of it was.
- The need to link any schoolwide expectations and guidelines to the school's curriculum, rather than having work samples for the sake of them.
- The importance of planning the assessment and reporting as a genuine part of the classroom programme so that teachers were using the samples as a critical component of each child's learning, rather than as an 'add on' to meet some disconnected schoolwide guideline.

- There were also some common issues around the ease of use of Ultranet by both students and teachers.

We utilised the considerable experience and talents of Nick Rate to clarify the important things we needed to consider. Nick shared his 'Ten Steps Framework' to developing ePortfolios with all staff and this both clarified our own next steps as well as provided some challenges we needed to consider more deeply.

Alongside the research we were undertaking staff continued to explore our own understandings and beliefs around what was going to be important to our school in this area. We initiated a trial ePortfolio project across all classes so that we would have some first hand knowledge about what might work, what formats were better than others, how students were able to use the ePortfolio to self-reflect, collaborate and identify their own next steps.

As we already were using Ultranet we wanted to know if this could be used to meet our requirements, so the trial itself had to explore the benefits or shortcomings of Ultranet. The trial was crafted around the belief *that for our school we wanted the ePortfolio to be used to support formative assessment, to demonstrate the learning process that has taken place and to enhance the individual learner's ability to self-reflect and identify their own next steps*. The use of an ePortfolio as a showcase was not seen as being as valuable as the former.

There was a requirement for the trial sample to have a clear purpose, to have learning intentions linked to our school curriculum and the workload needed to be seen as an integral part of the teaching & learning programme, rather than as an 'add on' to meet the needs of the principal! Teams developed their approach collaboratively at their regular planning meetings. Outcomes and issues were shared along the way. Samples needed to include self-reflection, teacher feedback and peer reflection. (We had not included parent feedback at this point.)

Whilst the structure of the trial was closely managed, the media teachers used and the format was completely left open for individuals to explore and staff are to be congratulated for their willingness to test the boundaries of possibility.

A critical point, in terms of determining our own direction, came when the five members of the eTeam flew to Christchurch and spent a day with the staff of eTime. During this day we were able to digitally explore the journey and outcomes of five-six schools without having to physically travel to each one. This was an extremely efficient use of time and excellent value for money.

We came away from this day with renewed enthusiasm, an extensive range of ideas/suggestions /resources to explore and all five members of the team were satisfied that Ultranet could in fact meet our needs in the medium term.

We were encouraged to not see the LMS as an isolated and limiting factor but to embrace what it could do and to then use other software and devices to supplement and enrich our elearning environment.
The further use of Google Docs, the recently released IPad App and the upgrade to Ultranet 2.6 itself fitted nicely with our changing thinking and were a huge relief to see happening.

The IPad App in particular provided all staff with some answers to our reservations about the difficulty for staff and students to upload media. The ease of use was clear to us all when demonstrated. The range of new Apps that can be taken immediately and used in classes at all levels in the school was also exciting.

This visit clearly demonstrated that there is a wide range of approaches in use and obviously no one way is correct. It reinforced the need to establish our own school direction and plan what would then meet our own identified needs and purposes. Staff present could see however that there are a range of alternatives that do work at different levels of the school. As an important aside to the eportfolio work, we also collated a wide range of ideas towards the logical development of the schools website as a whole.

The key change in thinking for us was the existence of a belief that the ePortfolio facility within Ultranet was 'where it should happen'. This was clearly wrong and we returned with a much broader understanding and more open minded approach to the use of whatever technology we planned to utilise. The idea that we could use the ePortfolio plus the media gallery plus the blog facility to present a broad spectrum range of work samples that show learning growth, self reflection, critical feedback, collaboration and the identification of next steps fitted with the direction we wished to take. The integration of the blog aspect into our class pages rather than as a separate entity was also a hugely positive piece of learning.

Towards the end of two terms exploration and trial each of the three teams shared samples of work as well as their 'team thinking' around the use of ePortfolios at their level of the school.

The Senior Team's proposal at this point was to use eportfolios to show learning progress/process with examples of work and critical feedback similar to our trial format. Examples would be in CORE curriculum areas of Literacy & Numeracy.
They would use a BLOG format to show other examples of work and would use the Media Gallery as well to supplement this. Overall, the three aspects (portfolio / blog/media gallery) would be used collectively to provide a broad range of samples showing the learning that has taken place.
The Senior Team would use a one page class blog that was ongoing. This would be easy to maintain and update. It would mean reduced level of repetition and more efficient administration. A combined 'Team Page' that provides one message for all senior students instead of four teachers writing individual notes that say the same thing.

The Middle Team proposed that they would use the 3 areas ePortfolio/Blog/Media Gallery to show progress. It would not be used as a showcase. Would use hyperlinks to other areas that might be related.

The Junior Team proposed that they would need to be different to the rest of the school. Instead they would use a Class Page Blog area for all samples that would show process. Would be student owned. At the Junior level they would have a 'Class Page ePortfolio'

BENEFITS OF USING EPORTFOLIOS AT OUR SCHOOL

The following are a collection of ideas collaboratively developed by staff which reflect some of the many benefits we currently believe that eportfolios might have on learning and teaching in our context.

- Students immediately have greater ownership, responsibility, control and direction of their own learning journey.
- Learners are able to self–reflect on their learning in a variety of ways – not just in a written format. (eg Able to include audio or visual reflection)
- Provide opportunities for quality self-reflection plus effective critical feedback from peers, teachers and whanau.
- Enables open ended collaborative learning and social networking opportunities.
- Provides meaningful student voice and ownership.
- Provide interactive access to an individuals learning journey for multiple viewers – peers, teachers, whanau.
- Totally portable and accessible anywhere, anytime, yet remain secure if desired.
- Enhance and strengthen the developing partnerships between teachers/students and parents/community.
- Provide a cumulative and historical record of learning over time that demonstrates learning growth and development based on self reflection and effective feedback.
- Will be able to support the current STP Conferences and provide the basis for ongoing discussion and development/identification of next steps.
- Provides an authentic audience for students.
- Could be used as evidence to support teacher assessments/judgements.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to self-reflect on their own teaching.
- Relationships between students and teachers strengthened.
- Provides opportunities for powerful peer reflection and influence on learning.

PERCEIVED RISKS AND SOLUTIONS

As with the benefits, staff worked collaboratively to determine the range of issues / difficulties we might face and worked with a positive mindset to consider likely solutions.

(Our staff workshop on this topic created 25 areas to be considered. Below is a selection. These are not in any particular order)

Issue / Concern	Solutions
Time consuming throughout the initial stages	Allow adequate time for all staff to work collectively through new learning. Allocate adequate meeting time to set up viable approaches when implementing.
Inability of parents to provide effective critical feedback	Parent evenings to explore expectations and to show what works and what doesn't. Parents made aware of purpose and their responsibilities to be involved. Staff very clear about provision of feedback themselves. Parents explicitly taught how to provide feedback. Student voice on what works best for them.
Accessibility for all students	Adequate and ongoing provision of devices Parent access to school computers such as the library
Ensuring that work samples are purposeful and meaningful	Teachers have shared understandings about the purpose of ePortfolios. Collaborative planning and moderation /sharing of ePortfolio content.
Teacher's current skill set is variable	PD provided within groups of like minded people with similar skills. Provision of accessible resource person within each team Ongoing staff PD slots
The issue of privacy of student work.	An advantage of using an LMS is that the structure can be quite well managed. Permissions can be applied to different groups to enable appropriate access. Again – Teaching parents to understand the purpose was important
Workload – Raised across all of the workshop groups as an important issue.	A consideration in all school development. Will be important to know the purpose, to link whatever we do directly to our school curriculum and to not double up on tasks. If we introduce anything we need to consider what we can take away or

	replace.
	ePortfolios themselves need to be integrated into the class programme and not an add on.
	We need to take small steps and imbed the process thoroughly.
Considerations around equity of access for individuals and families.	Continue to increase the device:pupil ratio in a measured and timely manner.
	Continue to make devices available to parents, as we currently do.
	Consider having tablets that parents could borrow. This could be part of the eReader Programme already established.
Schoolwide consistency	This would be developed as part of the schoolwide expectations.
	Students, teachers & parents would need to be very familiar with the purpose and the format.
Extensive PD requirement	PD will be crucial to the success of ePortfolios – For students, teachers & parents.
	To consider release time
	The use of Buddy Classes to support each other
	Parent workshops to support understanding and use.
	Parent involvement at school in school time.
	Collaboration and sharing of ideas/successes/failures across teams and across the staff.
Ability of Junior children to manage independently	ePortfolios likely to look different at different levels of the school.
	We should not underestimate the ability of junior children to manage seemingly complex task in this area however.
Limitations or issues with the LMS	Will be important to continually challenge and explore the capabilities.
	Need to consider enhancing across district links with other schools and establish regular liaison and collaboration.
	Will be important to maintain ongoing external expertise and advice.
	Will be important for all staff to remain open minded to new learning and direction at all times.

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Over time and as a result of the research and trials undertaken by staff, the definition of the ePortfolio in 'our context' has been clarified – and is likely to continue to evolve as our understanding and pedagogical knowledge increases. We also acknowledge that it is likely to look slightly different at each level of the school.

For us…

The ePortfolio will be an integral component of the teaching and learning process, which will include aspects of assessment and reporting.

High quality interaction between students, their peers, teachers and parents by way of collaboration, self-reflection, critical feedback / feed-forward will be important to the process as students shape and share their own learning.

Student ownership, independence, responsibility and self-direction will increase as they move through the school.

The ePortfolio will consist of a range of student constructed learning artefacts and reflections from across the curriculum and utilising a broad range of digital media.

The ePortfolio will be used, in part, by learners, teachers and parents to support judgments about learning and to identify the next steps in the learning process.

The ePortfolio will be cumulative throughout the learner's time at this school and will be totally accessible and transportable at any point in time.

These shared understandings fit with the description put forward by Carolyn Stuart (2011) and the Ministry's own guidelines on the use of ePortfolios –

 "The use of digital media enables students to record and collect digitised artefacts including text, audio, video and multimedia. This represents their ideas, learnings experiences, expressions, reflections, activities, assessments etc. The student retains these artefacts for as long as required, continually adding, subtracting and remixing for the appropriate use and audience."

When combined with the interactions between learners, peers, teachers and parents, this type of approach to ePortfolios will have very positive and powerful influences on learning.

Outcomes/Proposals

The sharing of outcomes from the various trials throughout the school provided a broad discussion amongst staff about the relative pros and cons of different approaches. Not all of the trials met our schoolwide expectations but were successful in their own right.

As a result of those discussions we have chosen to undertake a more robust trial that will be extended into 2015. Teachers in middle and senior teams have been split into two groups so that both approaches listed below will be fairly represented. There will however be a requirement that both sets of outcomes must meet the collaboratively developed checklist below. This process also enabled us to refine and better understand what we wanted the ePortfolios to do for learners.

Whilst this has not provided a nice neat and tidy answer to our inquiry it has been a valuable exercise and will in the long term bring great buy in by staff and students.

PARKLAND SCHOOL ePortfolio Development Guidelines 2015

At Parkland School the ePortfolio is to be used to support formative assessment, to demonstrate the learning process that has taken place over time and to enhance the individual learner's ability to self-reflect and identify their own next steps.

SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS

a) Learners will be able to self–reflect on their learning in a variety of ways – not just in a written format. (eg Able to include audio or visual reflection)
b) ePortfolios will be totally portable and accessible anywhere, anytime.
c) ePortfolios will Provide a cumulative and historical record of learning over time that demonstrates learning growth and development based on self-reflection and effective feedback.
d) ePortfolios will support the current STP Conferences and provide the basis for ongoing discussion and development/identification of next steps.
e) ePortfolios will provides an authentic audience for students.
f) ePortfolios will be used as evidence to support teacher assessments/judgements.
g) ePortfolios will provide opportunities for teachers to self-reflect on their own teaching.
h) The ePortfolio will be an integral component of the teaching and learning process, which will include aspects of assessment and reporting.
i) Student ownership, independence, responsibility and self-direction will increase as they move through the school.
j) The ePortfolio will consist of a range of student constructed learning artefacts and reflections from across the curriculum and utilising a range of digital media.
k) Individual ePortfolios will be private documents and only available to the student, their teacher and parents. Some aspects will be shared with buddies as required.

2015 Development

In 2015 there will be two separate ongoing trials over the course of the year. Each trial group will include two teachers from each of the Middle & Senior Teams. This will provide a core group of four staff looking at different approaches to the ePortfolio. The coordinator of each group is responsible for ensuring the ePortfolios meet the checklist of Parkland School requirements listed below.

a) **Google Apps / Blogger**

b) **Ultranet -** Based on use of the Media Gallery. (ePortfolio and Blog buttons to be turned off.)

In 2015 ePortfolios will be developed for every child in years 3-6 and must include the following:

1) **Literacy** (Writing) Progressions that demonstrate the learning journey of the individual. Able to show critical feedback and then changes by the learner as a result of feedback. This would replace the requirement to undertake a handwritten writing sample. This would be used to support teacher OTJ's at mid year and end of year.

2) **Numeracy** – Able to demonstrate strategy understandings. This would be used to support teacher OTJ's at mid-year and end of year.

3) **Science** – Able to demonstrate understanding of any scientific concept or process.

These trial groups will meet at least termly to share ideas and challenges. A mid-year review will take place where both groups will come together to share progress and strategies. Staff meetings will be used by each group to demonstrate samples and trials.

Checklist – ePortfolios from both groups must meet these

1.	Every child in Years 3-6 has an ePortfolio	
2.	Each of the 3 'samples' must have a clear purpose (learning intention/WALT)	
3.	Must be linked to stated curriculum areas	
4.	Clearly labelled with year, term and curriculum area. (eg: Year 3 Term 1 Literacy – Writing)	
5.	Must be an integral part of class programme rather than an 'add on'.	
6.	Must replace what was previously completed on paper.	
7.	Must include self-reflection	
8.	Must include teacher reflection	
9.	Must include Peer Reflection	
10.	Must identify Next Steps	
11.	Must demonstrate changes made as a result of reflection/suggestions. (Remember Austin's Butterfly)	
12.	Must be able to be archived in a consistent manner across different levels of the school.	
13.	Must be transferable	
14.	Must be accessible anywhere/anytime by students/teachers/parents and only buddies when appropriate.	
15.	Must be private for each individual across the school – Not available to the general public or other parents.	
16.	Should include a range of media formats	

ePortfolio Resources / References

Becta (2007) *Impact Study of e-Portfolio on Learning.* www.becta.org.uk

Bullick, J. (2012) *An inquiry into the implementation and use of ePortfolios, in order to enhance student learning, assessment and reporting effectiveness.* (Sabbatical Report – MOE Website)

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Fox, I. (2008) *ePortfolios – A personal Space for Learning* (Sabbatical Report – MOE Website)

Ministry of Education. (2011) *Digital Portfolios – Guidelines for Beginners.* Draft Version 2 Feb 2011

Ministry of Education (2013) *Enabling eLearning – ePortfolios.* www.elearning.tki.org.nz/Teaching/Assessment/e-Portfolios (Including school stories)

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Stuart, C. (2011) *Digital Portfolios Grow with the Learner.* (Article – NZ Education Gazette / July 4 2011. Page 6)