Investigation into the use of technologies in the form of e-Portfolios and Google apps.

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- ➢ those experienced in this field, many of whom I've not personally spoken to or met, who have shared their expertise on line via case studies, video interviews/clips, reports, articles, journals, books, … these people include:

… and many others knowingly and unknowingly who have helped me in many ways.

Summary

The one who gets the most out of any sabbatical is obviously the recipient and there is so much I have gained and been able to use that cannot be put into words. This report touches on what I have covered, with links to the portfolio sites I have created that give an idea of what can be done.
This report and the sites mentioned provide a snapshot of my journey and also give those readers some starting points should they wish to investigate e-portfolios further. The sites go into more depth than this report.
I believe e-portfolios do have a place within teaching and learning programmes and they are motivating and useful tools that can be readily incorporated into any teacher's toolkit.

For anybody starting on this journey, start with Carolyn Stuart's reading and Nick Rates 10 step framework for developing e-portfolios – see below 'So – the first few steps'.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this sabbatical was to upskill myself in the area of e-portfolios and the wider use of 'Google Apps'.

- ➢ covering:
  - ▪ the tools used to develop these.
  - ▪ various models used in New Zealand and further afield.
  - ▪ setting up an e-Portfolio structure for our school, then
  - ▪ using Junior Classes / teachers in the school :
    - • to look at the relationship of how teachers and students can use these e-Portfolios
    - • to enhance teaching and learning programmes, with a possible outcome of providing teachers and students with the starting point of a resource/tool/archive,
    - • that can be developed for future use within the school.

- ➢ and use this as a model for a regional AP/DP resource for the sharing and development of professional resources and readings to improve teaching and learning, plus the day-to-day management of schools

Rationale

The use of ICT in the classroom has always been an integral part of my own teaching as a Maths teacher and, when I moved into a senior management role in my last school, looking at the 'wider picture', made me aware of the positive possibilities for students and teachers of sharing ideas and resources school-wide, using technology. I had briefly read articles about e-portfolios and associated technologies and these confirmed for me that here are powerful sets of tools for both students and teachers. I had not dedicated enough time to research and implement them, recognising that the implementation of e-portfolios requires careful planning and doing plenty of 'homework'!
Knowing how well students have taken to social networking through 'Facebook', 'Twitter', 'YouTube', etc, I believe the time is right to introduce e-portfolios to both students and teachers. Hence, began my journey through this sabbatical….

So what have I covered?

Where do I begin?

Identifying this was the difficult part. It is many years since I have done formal study and even though I knew what I wanted to cover, the amount of material and sifting required was somewhat daunting!

A little background …

Opihi College began formally using Google Apps during 2011 and as I had already tinkered with Google sites, I realised here is yet another platform that can be used.
As I started my research, I looked for material from names I had already come across in earlier readings – Nick Rate, Mark Osborne, Ian Fox, Helen Barrett, among others.

I 'dug up' a resource that every teacher should become familiar with –
'Digital Portfolios – Guidelines for beginners', Ministry of Education, February 2011.

Throughout my sabbatical I have dipped into it and researched up to date information identified in this resource.
(*Be aware, e-portfolios are part of a rapidly changing landscape and the reader may find material that is 10 – 15 years old. Don't let this detract you, as much of this material is updated by the original writer, or by somebody else who has done research in this field*).

Definitely consider reading the article: "**MyPortfolio – Use it and you'll never lose it!**"
                                                Carolyn Stuart – Tawa Intermediate School
                                                New Zealand Principal June 2011 Vol 26 No 2

and also check her Myportfolio page :

                http://myportfolio.school.nz/user/carolynstuart/eportfolios-and-the-nz-curriculum

So – the first few steps

I spent 2 – 3 weeks researching the pedagogy of portfolios, reading, summarising, watching video clips, slideshows, summarising, talking with colleagues, reading - and more reading - with discussion and blogging, my thoughts began to crystallise and I began putting together a roadmap for Opihi College that represents a planned journey the school can undertake.

At this point I should emphasise that I used Nick Rate's 'Framework for developing e-Portfolios' as the ten step structure to develop our Roadmap.

The ten steps…
A summary of Nick's framework written by Elizabeth Craker

Source:
       http://blog.core-ed.org/blog/2011/04/nick-rates-10-step-process-for-effective-development-of-e-portfolios.html

1. Research to understand the pedagogy behind the approach:
      Read the literature, talk to the experts, look at a range of examples, and discuss widely with practitioners who use them.

      As mentioned earlier – there is a wealth of material and the names mentioned above are great starting points.

2. Define your purpose for using e-portfolios:
      Think about who the audience will be, what are the benefits, and how do these align with the broader vision and beliefs of the school?

      My audience covered three groups: Students, teachers and administrators.
      e-Portfolios are a great vehicle/tool for the Key Competencies. Most students are at ease with this environment and take responsibility for their own learning, given the opportunities.
      Some teachers are hesitant about e-portfolios, but they only need to regard them as another tool in their own teaching and learning toolbox.
      Administrators need to be aware of the power of e-portfolios and one of the best ways is to do as I did and develop site(s) that permit the sharing of professional ideas, resources and readings.

3. Consult and seek input from all stakeholders:
      Include students, teachers, school leadership, curriculum leaders and HODs, parents, the BOT, and related providers. In this way you will shape the beliefs of your school community in a way that best suits the needs of your students.

      Begun but not completed – a starting point is to use Google forms to gather information. This permits easy analysis of data gathered.

4. Develop a framework:
   This will form an ongoing process for e-portfolio construction, reinforce the purpose and beliefs and ensure that the approach is aligned to a pedagogical approach. This will also be the step where the relationship to formal processes such as reporting, appraisals, etc. are also considered.

   The key is to have an 'e-portfolio team' comprising senior and middle management, plus teaching staff and students. The input of these stakeholders equally, rather than one person driving the implementation is so important for the momentum and success of e-portfolios. Should one crucial person leave the school, then there will be sufficient knowledge, expertise and impetus to maintain the integration of e-portfolios across the fabric of the school.
   Being on sabbatical did not permit this key step and it is one that could begin early during the start of any school-wide review of their curriculum and teaching/learning programmes.

5. Define the criteria:
   Clarify the capability your school requires in the e-portfolio tool.

   At this point, I definitely realised that the direction I was heading in on my sabbatical was not going to work. Half way through the school year is not the time to try and introduce e-portfolios when teachers themselves need up-skilling, even though students easily take to e-portfolio use.
   Our other issue was speed and access to the Internet, both for students at home and at school.
   We had our SNUP completed in 2012, but fibre was a long way off (and even as I type, there is no guarantee that we will have UFB for the start of 2014). Home access for many families is not fast.
   School access became extremely difficult through 'SchoolZone' with a 2Mb down and <1Mb upload connection. Caching helped, but was not satisfactory.

6. Choose the tool:
   There are many options available so choosing the best option for your needs will be important.

   My experience in both MyPortfolio and 'Google sites' sees strengths in both. My personal preference is for MyPortfolio – for no particular reason, although ease of use and personal preference are to the fore.
   I have set up sample sites for both tools and they are referenced later in this report.

7. Educate all those involved in the process:
   Ensure students, parents, teachers and mentors all understand the pedagogy, how to give effective feedback, set goals, reflect and self-assess, as well as the necessary technical know-hows.

   This is obviously the time-consuming step and one that is crucial to the success or otherwise of the whole process. Teachers are at the front of the integration of e-portfolios into their learning programmes. Their understanding of the pedagogy of e-portfolios is crucial.

   A good, succinct source as a starting point for teachers is here:
   https://sites.google.com/site/officialwebsiteteachers/eportfolio-pedagogy
   This site covers a wealth of material in an easy to read format.

8. Implement:
   Get your e-portfolios up-and-running and integrated effectively into the teaching and learning programmes.

   I'd recommend trialling with one or two groups / classes, reviewing and evaluating often to fine tune and iron out any issues that arise. Having said that, my experience with some of my own students sees them as the best critics, who are able to identify problems first hand.

9. Update:

Ensure consideration is given to digital literacy, Internet use policies, and user-agreements. This also includes establishing reporting and assessment guidelines and procedures together with appraisal and teacher registration processes.

The above are reviewed regularly at Opihi College and with the implementation of e-portfolios the 'e-portfolio team' can have ready input into updates.

10. Review:

Assess what you have done, the progress you have made, the key lessons learnt, and the next-steps in the process. Note: this is not the last thing you do, but is woven throughout all phases of development.

Review and evaluation are very important to the implementation of any process like this.

Framework links:

➢ Download a copy of this 10 step guide from the CORE Breakfasts downloads page
   Other e-portfolio material and resources by Nick Rate ...
➢ Nick's excellent list of e-portfolio resources for beginners.
➢ Nick's A Framework for Developing ePortfolios slide presentation
   is available on the Breakfast   downloads page
➢ "Why e-portfolios?"- another presentation by Nick Rate

Hands on :

I've also spent a good deal of time learning my way around MyPortfolio and Google sites. I initially spent a vast amount of time viewing the pages of other users, including students, teachers, researchers and 'gurus'. I then started setting up my own pages within the e-portfolio sites above.

I personally find MyPortfolio a better site to use in terms of setting up, but personal preference needs to be put aside when one considers individual schools need to determine which path they want to go down.

A small group of students were then picked to be a test group to trial the use of MyPortfolio and Google sites/apps. Mixed reactions from students identified a need to take on board the advice given in my readings. Essentially ... **start with the adults** – students do not have the necessary overview for integration across a school curriculum, even though they have the skills to find their way around e-portfolios and be able to use them in a mature and productive way. With the NZ Curriculum emphasis on students taking responsibility for their own learning, including the Key Competencies, students can demonstrate these competencies easily to anybody viewing their pages.

Senior Managers

As I encountered lack of time and the need to use a roadmap covering all aspects of e-portfolios and curriculum integration, I moved onto the other aspect of e-portfolios for Senior Managers.

I wanted to develop a resource that other Senior Managers can use as a model, not only within their own schools, but also within the wider Aoraki region, or beyond.
I created two 'sites' – mirror images (to a degree) of each other. One created using MyPortfolio, the other using Google sites – sites.google.com.

As with any site development, plan what is to be put onto the site, for what purpose and for what audience. I will let these sites speak for themselves.

For the initial audience of these sites (the Aoraki AP/DP Association) they saw that such a site permits the sharing of ideas and resources. It can also act as a vehicle for reflection as well as a repository for archiving artefacts – written, oral, aural and visual.
Feedback on this site has been positive.

A similar site, using the same model as above has been set up for the staff of Opihi College for the sharing of and reflection on, professional materials and discussions – it is called Opihi Central.

Using either of these sites is perfect for the appraisal process and there are a number of templates on MyPortfolio that readers can adapt for their own circumstances. Check the linked sites for details.

Findings

If any teacher wants to set up and use e-portfolios in their teaching and learning programmes, or in their schools as vehicles for the promotion of professional learning, they should plan very carefully as outlined above under '*So what have I covered?*'.
Teachers need to be brought on board in terms of understanding the pedagogy of e-portfolios – if they do not provide any advantage in terms of effort and outcomes, then the question needs to be asked ..
'Why should I use them?'

Implications

There are plenty of reasons outlined in the literature referred to that indicate why e-portfolios can be successful. The implication for teachers and administrators is to ensure that access to any e-portfolio site is straightforward. (This should be identified in the framework development). Access to technology is crucial and the integration of BYOD into any school network is going to have potential impact on the success or otherwise of e-portfolio adoption, as is the speed of Internet access.

Conclusions

e-Portfolio adoption can benefit students, teachers and administrators. The concept of centrally locating (even off-site), and accessing material developed and refined overtime is a strong argument for using e-portfolios. Any teacher wanting to research this area for academic studies will find it a fascinating topic and one that seems to be boundless in terms of opportunities.

References / Links

On-line version of this report and links to a collection of other MyPortfolio material:

http://myportfolio.school.nz/user/bobcumming/2013-sabbatical-report

An e-portfolio starter page:

http://myportfolio.school.nz/user/bobcumming/opihi-manage

A sample page used by the Aoraki DP/AP Association:

http://myportfolio.school.nz/user/bobcumming/aoraki-dap

Teaching with MyPortfolio:

http://myportfolio.school.nz/user/bobcumming/teaching-with-myportfolio-a-copy-of-p-potter-s-page

Personalised-learning-document:

http://myportfolio.school.nz/user/bobcumming/personalised-learning-document

Companion Google site pages for the Aoraki DP/AP Association:

https://sites.google.com/site/aorakiapdp/

Google sites – a starting point:

https://support.google.com/sites/answer/153098?hl=en&topic=23216&rd=1#

'Digital Portfolios':

http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/Schools/Initiatives/ManagedLearningEnvironments/MLEPublications/ePortfolios.aspx

MyPortfolio – currently a free resource funded by the MoE:

http://myportfolio.school.nz