Roots, (para)chutes and ladders: on growing and nurturing e-portfolio teachers and learners.

Julie Hughes
j.hughes2@wlv.ac.uk

The University of Wolverhampton
HoD Post-Compulsory Education
ESCalate Academic Consultant

HEA National Teaching Fellow 2005
Starting with the students
The PGCE blog lifeboat –
HMS Hardwork.

Using the weblog as an online journal became a big part of our growth as reflective writers. Using the blog tool within the e-portfolio we could share thoughts, feelings, fears, anxieties and excitement and because it was a shared space we could see the value in the perceptions, thoughts and beliefs of others in the group.

It was a space where we could feel safe from ridicule and criticism. We would share war stories from the frontlines of teaching and by discussing and commenting on other’s journeys as teachers we were becoming reflective writers and practitioners without even knowing it!

Karim-Akhtar et al. PGCE group 2005/6
What do the teachers say?

My teaching has completely and utterly changed, totally from how I was taught on the Cert Ed – paper based ... Sometimes I walk in and there’s just images on the screen (on the blog) and that is the teaching and learning of the day. Students don’t cope well now with other formats, “we were talked at for an hour and a half – we go off and do our own learning or you talk to us in a different way”.

Annie (Foundation Degree Teacher for 3 years)
Pebbler since September 2009

I needed the space to do it for myself really.

Caroline (Foundation Degree Teacher for 3.5 years)
Pebbler since February 2008
It started with a secondment at the University. I was initially taken up with the idea of being able to access the students outside the lessons for their thoughts and ideas about the lessons. I was always interested in – how do we define that learning has take place?

This is a big Ofsted question all of the time – and one of the ways was to see how they actually engage with the material from the lesson, how they collaborated on their e-portfolio, how they talked to each other about the learning, it seemed to me a much more conversational approach with a sense of dialogue.

Maggie, Teacher for 20 years, Teacher Educator for 5 years
Pebbler since September 2008

Staff and students have learned much, together, and have moved forward, together. Now if that’s not liberating and worthwhile, I don’t what is.

David’s first year as an e-portfolio teacher in HE in 2008 (Hughes, Lacey and Wise 2008)
Moksha – Patamu, the 2nd Century BC Indian origin of the race game *Snakes and Ladders*, rewarded Nirvana to the player who successfully negotiated the vices and virtues of the board. Colonised by Victorian England, who approved of its moral punishment and rewards, it was adopted in the United States in the 20th century as the game of Chutes and Ladders. The morals of the game remained reward for good deeds (upwardly climbing ladders) and consequences (sliding down chutes) for mischievous behaviour.
Why snakes/chutes and ladders and e-portfolio?

There is evidence that e-portfolio implementation can be like a game of snakes and ladders where initial rapid progress can suffer major setbacks due to a poor understanding of the nature of e-portfolios. (Joyes, Gray & Hartnell-Young, 2010).

Extending the metaphor?
• (para) chutes – pedagogic bungee jumping (Barnett 2007);
• pedagogy (as) a form of restrained anarchy; even a disciplined anarchy – with its spaces and its risks (Barnett 2007, p.138);
• rhizomatic growth (Deleuze and Guattari 1987);
• a will to learn (Barnett 2007).
Back to those lovely students and what it’s like to learn in these spaces/in these pedagogies

Iterative learning – what does it feel like to be composing a professional self?

It’s like emptying a big jigsaw and **building it slowly in pieces**. Finding pieces of work that **fit together** and building from there and then maybe trying a different area afterwards. There's no logical, symmetrical or linear route but **emphasis upon drawing out the best points** and building upon them.

Claire, PGCE student

A web we weave, **spiralling outwards** with attachments becoming **part of the fabric**.

Elaine, PGCE student
Intro to me

E-portfolio teacher and teacher educator – FD, PGCE and M level with teaching mentors - 2004 to now.

Started with 15 students (2004) now working across teams, partners, stakeholders and professional bodies.

2011 - **1400** students and **50** staff this year.

E-portfolio consultant
JISC & ESCalate


E-portfolio mentor – supporting individuals and teams at local, regional and national levels - across disciplines.

E-portfolio learner – used ep for appraisal and **CPD** – recently attained QTLS with an e-portfolio application.

E-portfolio researcher – using e-portfolio to mentor and data-gather- using ep as a writing tool/companion with both students and colleagues.

INCEPR III – 10 US and Canadian HEIs and 2 UK HEIs

Have we reached 99/nirvana yet?
Pedagogic bungee jumping – being a student/teacher in an age of uncertainty

Learning (and teaching – my addition) in higher education calls for a courage on the part of the learner/teacher and a will to leap into a kind of void. There is bound to be uncertainty. A pedagogy of air opens up spaces and calls for a will to learn on the part of the student/teacher; to learn even amid uncertainty. In the process, it is just possible that the student/teacher may come into a new mode of being (Barnett 2007, p.1).

Teachers and the taught teach each other. Their roles are interwoven, such that their boundaries become indistinct to some extent (Barnett 2007, p.132).

Pedagogical bungee jumping may be catching (Barnett 2007, p.133).
So, was it all a blind alley? No. Was it worth it? Yes, yes, yes! From my own perspective, I have seen students become engaged with a reflective, dialogic process in a far more real and meaningful way than I have previously experienced. I have also seen deep learning take place both in relation to technological and pedagogical matters. And finally, this has happened in a truly democratic manner. Staff and students have learned much, together, and have moved forward, together. Now if that’s not liberating and worthwhile, I don’t what is.

David 2008 (Hughes, Lacey and Wise 2008)

Cathie – on letting go
But, and this is a big but for me, I have felt some loss of control.

Cathie Teacher Educator in 2008 in her 2nd year as an e-portfolio teacher
What might a learning community look/feel like?
What the students say...
Rollercoaster – the pedagogical being is fragile...it is brittle, liable to shatter suddenly’ (Barnett, 2007 p.29)
Restrained anarchy – a revolution in higher education

Pedagogies for an age of uncertainty should act so as to:

• affirm the humanity of each individual student;
• encourage forward each students’ pedagogical will;
• allow each student his or her authenticity-in-the-making;
• put students in touch with each other and require their intercommunication;
• have a solicitude for students over time;
• offer space to each student to forge his or her own becoming.

• it will be ontologically disturbing and enthralling all at once. It will be electric, as one spark moves another and in unpredictable ways.
(Barnett 2007, p.137-8)
Unpredictable rhizomatic growth
Rhizome as model/map for unpredictability
Lateral, multi-forked root system
Connectivity
Not Western tree-like (ladder)

It's ok (and sometimes very necessary) to grow and stretch below the surface to establish good roots – your roots.

I think what I’ve noticed most is that they sort of carry on without us more if you know what I mean – whereas traditional teaching and learning is very much teacher at the centre, all information coming out through me but what often is seen to happen when using PP is that they can talk to each other, they answer each other’s questions, they take threads of each other’s arguments – really oblivious to the fact that I might be there or might not be there and this for Teacher Education is fantastic because what we see is reflection – it’s reflection in practice, reflection on action in action and it’s going on all the time – it’s crucial. (Maggie)
It’s not a race for nirvana – on playing the game and negotiating the risks

Nov 2007 – on the road to nowhere?
Then, around November, the students were introduced to the webfolio, shown a template and given some instructions for populating it. This was a low point. **Having sensed that we had come to terms with a new teaching and learning tool, I think we all felt – staff and students on the generic route alike – that it was back to square one.** In future, I think we all agree that it would be better to just start with the webfolio from the outset. Anyway, the skill and expertise of Julie, Paul and others – notably Cathie our knowledgeable and informed Skills specialist – helped us through this road block.
David 2008 (Hughes, Lacey and Wise 2008)
How do we begin to explore, conceptualise and theorise identity/perception shifts?

‘I’m only a Teaching Assistant – me, going to University?’

‘...the person that started back in September is not the person I recognise now’ and ‘as I unwrap this part of myself I come to realise I see others as well as myself with different eyes.’

I belong here.

In relation to learning, ontology trumps epistemology. That is to say, the student’s being in the world is more important for her learning than her interests in developing knowledge and understanding in a particular field. (Barnett 2007, p.6)
How our FD students (EYS and SIP) felt at the start of their HE study – fragile pedagogical beings.
Transformation potential – pedagogy exploiting the technology? May 2009. (Hughes, Lamond and Worsley)
Culture shift?

New digital technologies and multimedia are transforming how we teach and learn. They are transforming our classrooms from spaces of delivery to spaces of active inquiry and authorship. New digital media are empowering students to become researchers, oral historians, and cultural theorists in their own right.

Whether constructing their own life stories or interpreting the life stories of others, the digital format transforms students’ capacity to synthesize, interpret, theorize, and create new cultural and historical knowledge. In this way, digital formats potentially democratise learning and produce critical subjects and authors (Weis et al. 2002, p.153).
Theoretical and methodological framework

1. Pass-it-on – the need to grow your own:
   • Importance of developing community/communities;
   • Capacity building through mentoring and support groups;
   • Sustainability beyond the early adopter.
   It’s a marathon not a sprint.

2. Theory/practice nexus:
   • E-portfolio-based learning as pedagogic shift;
   • SOTL;
   • Evidence-informed practice;
   • Focus on the ‘user’ experience/ethnography.

3. Exploring how the use of e-portfolio-based learning might begin to explain the tag-cloud shifts.
A will to learn and pedagogy for uncertain times? (Barnett 2007)

Students/(read teachers also) must come into a felt relationship with uncertainty in a space which supports a “will to learn” (Barnett 2007, p.1).

The main pedagogic task is simple to state and near impossible to achieve. It is that of releasing students that they come into themselves, in relation to their curricula challenges. They become beings-for-themselves... They have their own will to learn. ”

Barnett’s vision (2007, p.7) for HE for the contemporary world inhabits a vocabulary “that includes terms such as excitement, passion, self-confidence, journey, travel, will, energy, being and becoming.”
PebblePad as a space to capture the narratives of becoming

• We do not 'store' experience as data, like a computer: we 'story' it (Winter 1989, p.213).

• Our lives are 'steeped in stories.' (Winter et al. 1999, p.21).

• "What is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversation?" (Carroll (1865), p.1).

• Barrett (2005, p.19) suggests that reflection and “the metaphor of portfolio as story” offer, “a powerful environment in which students can collect and organize the artefacts that result from engaging in these challenging, real-life tasks, and write reflections through which students draw meaning” (Barrett 2005, p.21).
Not the pursuit of nirvana/climbing the ladder

• Working for horizontal spaces for growth - not vertical hierarchy;
• Letting them learn;
• Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn (Heidegger in Barnett 2007).

Enjoying spatial tension – to let learn, to let go (Cathie);
Give them spaces to explore and enjoy learning with others;
Collisions/exchange are necessary.

Students/teachers count as individuals – care and passion are called for in bringing about a continuing pedagogy of air (Barnett 2007, p.170).
E-learning theory – nascent discipline

We must acknowledge that pedagogy needs to be ‘re-done’ at the same time as it needs to be ‘re-thought.’
(Beetham and Sharpe, 2007)

Learners cannot therefore be treated as bundle of disparate needs: they are actors not factors, in the learning situation. (Beetham, 2007)

We need ‘a dialogue between theory and practice, as well as between learning and teaching’
(Beetham & Sharpe, 2007, p.3)
E-learning is often talked about as a ‘trojan mouse’, which teachers let into their practice without realizing that it will require them to rethink not just how they use the particular hardware or software, but all of what they do.

(Sharpe and Oliver, 2007)

We are witnessing ‘a new model of education, rather than a new model of learning’ as ‘our understanding of e-learning matures, so our appreciation of the importance of theory deepens... we see how learning can be socially situated in a way never previously possible’.

(Mayes and de Freitas, 2007, p.13)

Give pedagogy back to the teachers.

(Laurillard, 2008)
Defining Generation Y: towards a new typology of digital learners
Hartley et al. (2008)
University of Bradford
Pedagogy shift - (e)-portfolio ways of being

When teachers began developing portfolios over a decade ago, we knew what we were about – with *process writing* and *collaborative pedagogies* and, not least, portfolios – was pretty ambitious; it was, in fact, nothing short of changing the face of American education. (Yancey & Weiser, 1997, p.1)

Baume (1999, 2003 p.4) conceptualised the developmental portfolio as, “a compost heap... something refined over time, *enriched by addition, reduction and turning over*.“

Messy, non-linear – getting your hands dirty!
Inherent contradictions? Critical reflexivity and framing

To make something available for discussion is to make of it an object (Haug 1987). This suspicion of the intellectual who both objectifies and speaks for others inveighs us to develop a kind of self-reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance despite of our libratory intentions (Lather 1991, p.15).

Shift happens - critical readers/listeners/audience?
As e-portfolio teacher/assessor we need to, ‘change our ways of engaging with text. In a sense we become more than mere graders of the work; we become actual users of a work, a real-life audience interacting with the document’ (Blair & Takayoshi 1997, pp. 364-5).
What is an e-portfolio?
Well it’s...

• A systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the teacher and the student to monitor the growth of the student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes. (Cole et al., 2000)

• What is produced when persons collect, select, reflectively interpret, and/or present their own evidence to support their assertions about what they have learned, know, and can or should do. (Cambridge, 2003)

• Emerging consensus (JISC, 2008 p.6) process and product – digital ringbinder and learning landscape - inherent contradiction?

• a genre and a set of practices supported by a set of technologies. (Cambridge, 2008)
E-portfolio-based learning (JISC 2008)

Behind any product, or presentation, lie rich and complex processes of planning, synthesising, sharing, discussing, reflecting, giving, receiving and responding to feedback. These processes – referred to here as ‘e-portfolio-based learning’ – are the focus of increasing attention, since the process of learning can be as important as the end product.

The use of ...e-portfolios... can promote more profound forms of learning which can improve understanding of the self and the curriculum, engage and motivate learners – individually and as part of a community of practice, personalise learning and promote reflective practice (JISC 2008, p5).
Talking not telling.

A dialogue-based pedagogy and model of/for reflective learning.

Figure 2 A model of e-portfolio-based learning, adapted from Kolb (1984)
Education as dialogue – reflexive learning conversations with self and others

Dialogue is:
collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful.

A meeting of minds and ideas as well as voices; and it is therefore mediated through text, internet and computer screen as well as through face-to-face interaction.

(Alexander 2006a, p15 & b in Coffield, 2008)
The journey reflected again– what it feels like to learn in these spaces

that’s because it’s still ongoing, it’s still ongoing... I think it’s like invisible, I know it’s really strange - I can’t describe I just think it’s invisible this. You think you haven’t moved on but ....you have. Bev (FD 2007)

It’s like emptying a big jigsaw and building it slowly in pieces. Finding pieces of work that fit together and building from there and then maybe trying a different area afterwards. There's no logical, symmetrical or linear route but emphasis upon drawing out the best points and building upon them. Claire (PGCE 2004)
Don’t forget the teachers and their bungee jumping

Learning doesn’t have to take place just in the classroom setting – on the FD when someone’s just posted AAAAAARRRRGGGGHH and that’s been in and – what unit you on? What you doing? Someone’s intercepted to say calm yourself down, it’s fine.

Annie

Needs to be more formalised – feel that they have to respond to every single comment, it’s time consuming – they haven’t understood the idea of just being selective in how you respond – responding because you have something to say rather than responding because you feel you ought to.

Caroline
E-portfolio learning as iterative writing and learning tool – e-portfolio-based learning

Using templates will scaffold and make the evidence explicit for the reader/assessor.

PC3012 Marie Fattorini

UNIT 3:

Part A – Reflective journals semester two.

This is my blog where I have been writing my ongoing reflections throughout this course.

Please include the original copy with tutor dialogue/feedback in your submitted portfolio.

Reflective review of practice

This reflective essay is written to show how I have developed in my journey as a teacher so far. In it I indicate my thoughts and feelings about several aspects of teaching and my experiences of them.

UPDATE PARAGRAPH

I have noticed that my last reflective essay really relied on theory to give it substance. On reading it I realised now how little I actually knew about the process of reflection. I see that Gibbs reflective cycle is simplistic and it bears no resemblance to how I actually reflect on my issues. I view my own process as more of an ongoing process that happens when I need to have a heightened awareness of my circumstances or situation. It is almost another aspect of my self-awareness which was not there previously. I am self-critical but not as much in a bad way anymore. If I engage in this I follow it with an action plan. This happens now almost naturally without having to be implemented intentionally. In short I have noticed that the mere action of observing something in myself and my actions facilitates the process of change in my being. I have seen myself grow from a self-conscious self-critical individual to someone who has finally arrived at their destination. I have finally become a teacher.
Amy as learner, as beginning teacher, as part of an artist collective – ongoing into her CPD as part of her professional formation – lifelong practices.
What do the teachers want to change?

I think it just makes it more... I don’t know what the word is I want to use ... the opposite of disjointed, I don’t know what the opposite of disjointed is – that’s what it’s like.

Get over yourself and do it – you just need to be thrown in at the deep end and give it a go, and I think that most people would be very surprised by how much it benefits them and although it is slightly more time consuming at the beginning eventually it becomes part of your everyday practice and possibly it releases some of the workload from you.

Caroline
Which specific pedagogic interventions were valued? – Stakeholder awareness - ask the right/quick questions

The feedback on blogs from tutors was important to my Personal and Professional Development 98.58% agreed or strongly agreed.

Having the opportunity to reflect ongoing on my PPD was important 92.4% A/SA.

The feedback on blogs from peers was important to my PPD 87.37% A/SA.
Having blog contact with my tutors supported my transition into university 95.03% A/SA.

Having blog contact with my peers supported my transition into university 88.35% A/SA.

The online blogging activities have contributed to my achievements in semester 1 82.53% A/SA.
Lessons learnt

Start with the curriculum and your pedagogic values – be realistic and start with simple activities

Consider

• How might the student experience be enhanced by using some of these tools and practices?
• How manageable is this?
• What support can I and my students access across a differentiated range?
• Is there whole team-buy in and management support for this approach?
• Am I gathering and listening to the student and staff experience?
• Am I acting on it?
• Who can I ask in the e-portfolio community so that I don’t reinvent the wheel?

Mantra to self – it’s a marathon not a sprint
Final thoughts – back to the students of course – the potential

In the second semester we began to share our critical incidents via Pebble Pad. This has proved much more beneficial to me because it meant that I could compose myself, think about the incident and then tell my story. I found the distance to be liberating because I could subdue the feelings of inferiority I had when listening to my peers. I could write down my experiences in my own time, set at my own pace, rather than at the set time given in the face to face discussions. Amy (PGCE 2008)

Help is only just a click away (FD anon)

But it’s not just developing like um a learner, it’s developing as a person.
Transformative potential?
Blending the learning – digitising f2f activities;

Creativity supported and encouraged;

Eportfolio as the link to support integrative and iterative learning;

Archive and collation focus – a PDP (personal development) pool to draw on;

An e-portfolio way of learning and being – LaGuardia Community College;

Collect, select, reflect, connect.

Maggie
it's reflection in practice, reflection on action in action and it's going on all the time ...
References

Alexander, R. (2006a) *Education as dialogue: moral and pedagogical choices for a runaway world*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education in conjunction with Dialogos

Alexander, R. (2006b) *Towards dialogic teaching: rethinking classroom talk*. Dialogos UK Ltd


