Eportfolio competitions: Everyone’s a winner

Jacqueline Patten
Centre for Learning and Development, Edith Cowan University, AUS

Chosen theme(s)

- Institution agendas
- Program curriculum
- Unit level implementation

The context

ECU began its PebblePad pilot in Semester 2 2012. The aim was to have it actively used for teaching and learning in each of the 4 faculties. First year and capstone units were targeted and staff were encouraged to use it for their own professional development. Sixteen units opted into the pilot and mid semester analysis indicated approximately 820 active accounts producing creative and diverse teaching materials and assets.

The inaugural ECU ePortfolio competition was held in November 2012, open to both staff and students. The drivers of the competition were to raise the profile of eportfolios designed to enhance students’ learning and increase their employability skills. Was it too soon? Will people enter? How will we judge the eportfolio entries?

Initial research found that implemented correctly, competitions of this kind had met with great success around the world. The City University of Hong Kong held a competition in 2009 with approximately 1000 as a “… celebration of the hard work that teachers and students have put into making eportfolios a success within City University”. They went on to say that “… the promotion of ePortfolios for learning is part of the University's Strategic Plan 2010-2015” (City University of Hong Kong, 2010). This aligned with the strategic approach being taken at ECU. A further competition was held by Clemson University, South Carolina. ‘Clemson’s Best’ claimed that the winning entry was “… the eportfolio that brings together creativity, originality, reflection,
as well as substantive evidence of learning” (Clemson University, 2013). This pedagogy was also high on the ECU agenda. The examples on the Clemson website led us to believe that competitions of this nature yielded high quality results that could be used to showcase what was being achieved.

Full of hope and spurred on by the success of other institutions (City University of Hong Kong, 2009; Clemson University, 2013) the preparations began with 3 categories:

- First Year Students
- Other Undergraduates
- Academic Staff

Surprisingly the entries were diverse and not always from the students who had scored the highest in their PebblePad assessments but from those who valued the personal growth it allowed them.

Another driver for the competition was to raise institutional awareness and use of PebblePad.

By the second year of the competition the categories had been expanded to include:

- Professional Staff
- Graduated Students

**How it was ...**

The rationale for running the competition was primarily to raise awareness of the work being undertaken across the faculties in a public forum. Although part of the ECU strategic plan, PebblePad was still not on the immediate agenda for many academics and it was still felt by many that it could be a passing phase.

A further aim of the competition was to show how portfolio and reflective elements (which had been used as paper based assessment methods) could be incorporated into the curriculum in a new way of learning. PebblePad allows the user to draw upon experiences and assets from across a range of competencies within a course. It was felt that by staff and students actually standing up and showing people living examples of what had been achieved, this message would be cemented in a powerful way.

As part of the preparation for a wider University rollout in 2013, we were delighted to announce the competition open to all staff and students involved in the initial pilot.
The approach

The competition was promoted to staff and students. They were supported through emails and assistance during lectures and tutorials. Where this wasn’t possible they were provided with a slide they could show or send to external online students. Advertisements were also posted on video walls around the campus and information provided in the staff and student electronic newsletters.

Competition

The competition is open to ECU students, and to Academic and Professional Staff. There are three competition categories and entrants are in the running to win a new iPad, one will be awarded to the winner of each category.

How to win!

Submit your ePortfolio (using the ECU Learning Portfolio platform “PebblePad”), entries will demonstrate how well you have used or taught with the platform. The portfolio entry should display your learning, ECU Graduate Attributes, knowledge, skills and abilities. Entries will be judged and shortlisted and the final shortlisted entrants will present their ePortfolio during eCulture on the 7th November, 2012.

Competition 1 – Open to first year ECU students who are enrolled full or part-time in their first degree and are in good standing.

Competition 2 – Open to all other undergraduate ECU students who are enrolled full or part-time and are in good standing.

Competition 3 – Open to Academic and Professional Staff engaged in improving the teaching and learning of students at ECU.

To begin download the instructions on how to enter. Good luck!

‘Submissions must be ePortfolios or workbooks using the ECU Learning Portfolio platform known as “PebblePad”, and take the form of a single link submitted to the competition workspace. See also the How to enter document.’

Rules were devised to ensure the protection of both the entrant and the institution. This was an unforeseen lengthy part of the process as terms and conditions of this kind had to be processed and authorised by the legal department within the university.

The academic staff category of the competition called for webfolios or workbooks that presented how the curriculum had been delivered using PebblePad as the main tool e.g. modelling, demonstration, linking to assessment, formative feedback and technical support.

The student categories asked how the use of PebblePad had enabled them to make meaning of their learning and hence the curriculum across the course not just at an individual unit level.

A PebblePad template was created that acted as the competition entry and ‘How To Enter’ instructions.
How it is now ....

The outcome of PebblePad being incorporated into the curriculum meant that ECU had a pool of staff and students ready to engage in the competition. Not only did these people understand the benefits of gathering evidence and reflecting in this way, they were happy and excited to share what they had discovered with a wider audience and of course they had the chance to win one of a number of iPad and cash prizes.

The annual ECULTURE conference (ECU Learning, Teaching and Research Event) showcased the competition with selected finalists giving a five minute presentation of their eportfolio.

There seemed to be a real buzz and competitiveness about the event and the second year it ran it took centre stage at the conference. A selection panel of academic and industry judges scored the presentations with a rubric based upon the following criteria.

![Figure 2: Competition entry](image)

![Figure 3: Selection criteria](image)

The outcomes of the competition were more users wanting to get on board and start using the software personally, within their teaching and most encouragingly across whole courses. It really was a turning point and the reasons for running it were more than realised.

The benefits

The benefits of the curriculum design could not have been better demonstrated than through the competition entries. As an institution ECU now seemed to understand the value of the software. At the last competition a comment was made by one of the judges that ‘this software really is much more than I thought’.
The first year the competition ran, entries were of a high quality. The second year saw increased categories, entries and sponsorship. The portfolios produced by staff and students were of excellent quality and diversity. This was partly due to increased awareness and confidence but also the increased functionality made available by PebblePad. The ePortfolio competition will continue to be held annually.

Anecdotal evidence provided by the students during their presentations on the value of creating an eportfolio, demonstrated that PebblePad helped them understand their learning, increased their employability skills and gave them confidence in their own abilities.

The second year the competition ran we found out that graduate students were actually using their eportfolio as part of the job application process and they were getting the jobs!

From the teaching aspect, PebblePad enabled lecturers to track students’ work, give formative feedback and ultimately gave them a clear view of what a student had achieved. This was useful for assessment purposes.

A serendipitous result of the competition was that ECU harnessed examples to demonstrate what could be achieved in PebblePad.

**Lessons learnt**

We learnt that in order to have a competition you need people using the software. However, it is not necessary to have whole course wide instantiations. Some of the most powerful presentations were given by first year students. For example, one first year created a collaborative engineering project portfolio and an education students’ portfolio was based around the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards.

Initial barriers were funding for prizes and a lack of certainty that a sufficient number of staff and students would enter.

Next time we would consider somehow involving a more audience participative vote when judging the finalists rather than a selected judging panel. Also on a practical level the entries have so far asked for a published link to the piece of work. This has caused a few issues when the link has expired and we are no longer able to show it on our intranet. Instead we would ask the entrants to ‘share’ their work into a ‘competition’ user account and then we could be in control of creating non expiring published links for the purposes of show casing their work as examples.
In brief – personalising the curriculum

• The staff ePortfolios presented in the competition showed how, through the creation of teaching tools that included reflections, activity logs, blogs and webfolios, the resulting student work was a portrait of themselves in the context of the curriculum agenda.
• The student ePortfolios presented in the competition showed how they had taken the key concepts of an assignment but incorporated a great deal of their own story and journey into it.
• The reflections shown in the presentations were often of an intensely personal nature and demonstrated true learning had taken place “we do not learn from experiences; we learn from reflecting on our experiences” (Dewey, 1938).
References

City University of Hong Kong (2010) CityU ePortfolios Competition from http://www.cityu.edu.hk/edge/eportfolio/competition/

Clemson University (2013) ePortfolio Awards from http://www.clemson.edu/academics/programs/eportfolio/awards.html