My Journey through Electronic Portfolio Development and Assessment

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Reflecting on my journey in this course also needs to touch on this semester’s journeys through two other courses: LM 5040 Integrating Technology in School and CE 5120 Integration of Digital Technology into the Common Core Standards. All three courses are interrelated and things I worked on/within one often informed my understanding in the other two. This course was the first of the three to open this semester so I started off this new chapter in my college career scared as hell about creating this eportfolio. Mahara seemed very confining to me. I see the benefits of having a system where you just plug in the correct pegs (artifacts) into the preset holes in each page. I’ve learned from my years of experience that me (and my life) usually don’t fit into preset holes easily and that’s how I felt about my chance of success with Mahara. Even the concept map was confusing and a small part of me began wondering if I’d made a mistake but I reached out to my professor and was assured that what I saw as the project for the week’s assignment (create a concept map) indeed fulfilled what was expected. I started to feel better about myself and my future in the program.

Week 2 saw informative readings and looking at my x-factors (transportability, accessibility, and security), e-pets (effort-based virtual rewards), and personal connections between learner/viewer and learner/material fostered by eportfolios. Elsewhere in my college world came the opening of LM 5040 including making a short introduction video. I felt uncomfortable doing the video since I really dislike my appearance. The viewer can tell pretty easily that I am reading from a script. I felt that was necessary to make sure it fit in the 60 sec time limit. When I tried to upload, there were tag-positioning issues and I had to quickly find a way to turn my video right side up and post it as an MP4 file. There were a few tense moments but everything was turned in on time in the right format without having to turn your computer upside down to watch! Getting into the rhythm of college again was a great feeling. This week provided my first artifact and reflection from my new college career that I would include in my portfolio. Understanding the structure of LM 5040 gave great hope that I would have lots of Web 2.0 tool artifacts with reflections to include in my portfolio that I was becoming more excited about creating!

Week 3 included more readings about balancing the workspace and showcase of portfolios while more thoroughly looking at artifacts I wanted to incorporate and how the portfolio might be organized. This is the point where I really had to embrace Mahara or find something else to use for my portfolio. Exposure to audio tools was the focus in LM 5040, and CE 5120 opened with discussions of the brains of our digital natives and the fast pace of changes brought about by advancements in technology. The reflections on the audio and video tools included my own personal discomfort at being seen and heard in a recorded (and replayable) source along with how that same discomfort may occur within the student population and the CE 5120 discussions of the pros/cons of using technology with children including lack of face-to-face contact and brain “rewiring” based on neural atrophy. I think one thing all three courses had in common this week is the idea that technology is a TOOL that we need to use appropriately so we are not USED BY the tool with a negative developmental impact.

Week 4 included readings that strengthened my resolve to provide personal interaction through support when dealing with students and colleagues especially when using portfolios and a decision to use WIKISPACES for my eportfolio. The newest Web 2.0 artifact came from exploring presentation tools in LM 5040 and saw a fictional open house Prezi presentation created and ready to be upload to my new Wikispaces portfolio, while we discussed creativity a la Sir Ken Robinson and looked at the possibilities of technology integration into curriculum in CE 5120. I also created my first artifact for portfolio inclusion for CE 5120. The great thing about this artifact is that it includes many elements that are useful to looking at assignments in the classroom. This artifact began as a Grade 9 English Foundations opening activity sans technology! Being a paraprofessional in the classroom, I was intrigued by the assignment of choosing 5+ visuals that represent yourself but the connection should be less literal and more figurative and imaginative and then write a paragraph explaining the visual representation. I saw how overwhelmed the freshmen were by the assignment. I took on the challenge of creating my own visual and writing the paragraph and then took it a step further. If I were going to present this to a class, it would be great to use Prezi’s versatility to really link the visuals with the written word and I created a presentation that I submitted as the Web 2.0 assignment for CE 5120 and later added to my portfolio. Back in portfolio class, here is where I started really playing with my format and deciding what I thought it should look like while experimenting with different Web 2.0 tools and looking at how I could transfer what I’ve learned and tried into a classroom setting to enhance student learning and engagement.

Week 5 saw my portfolio skeleton almost complete with many of the “bones” fleshed out, had me evaluating research tools in LM 5040, and in CE 5120 we shared resources for blogs, wikis, and Twitter pages that we find useful while we examined Common Core Standards and how to use blogs, wikis, and Twitter to keep our “Networked Student” connected and engaged while giving them the freedom to create their own learning support system. This last discussion mirrored what was going on with our portfolio class as we had the freedom to create our portfolios as we saw fit while utilizing our colleagues as our support system in this process.

In Week 6, I continued to add to my portfolio and looked at other students’ work-in-progress while working on collaboration tools in LM 5040. In CE 5120, we reviewed the Smarter Balance testing that will be in place for students in the near future. This demonstrated a marriage between technology and assessment as tests include videos, audio, and simulations for a much richer experience than simply reading the question and filling in the right bubble. Eportfolios, too, can provide a richer experience through a combination of media and tools.

Week 7 saw me exploring more peer portfolios which strengthened my contentment with my vehicle of choice for presenting my own portfolio, while incorporating the “preparing professional development information” project happening in LM 5040 with the creation of a page in my portfolio “Best Practices in Using iPads in the Classroom” that enhances the handout created for the weekly assignment, and creating my first artifact in CE 5120 that would be included in my portfolio while we explored Digital Storytelling (and I used that medium to demonstrate how we dealt with a family tragedy as we lost our first pet.)

Week 8 brought the very uncomfortable feelings of reviewing and being reviewed, discomfort at having to “surprise my professors” with my skills in LM 5040, and the sense of rejection as my requests for a collaboration partner were either discarded or overlooked in CE 5120. My portfolio review caused great unease since I didn’t fit the mold of the expected which was fine overall but did leave me feeling that my portfolio might be lacking in content on certain points. It was also hard to review others’ portfolios because they were all different in content and intent. The challenge of portfolio evaluation/assessment is that these are personal stories of growth and development and just as each person is unique, so is every portfolio. There is no real right or wrong just different and we have to be careful we are not judging the difference but instead are applauding the uniqueness while providing insight on making the product better while keeping it true to the unique individual’s personal story. Part of the unease of the portfolio review was caused by not fully “knowing” what the final product was expected to look like and that same cause resulted in the discomfort I experienced during LM 5040 this week. I got to create my own scenario using a Web 2.0 tool that I hadn’t used in the course before but for me (and for many students in classes I will teach in the future!) the lack of a model or guideline representing exemplary output in the eyes of the teacher produces paralyzing fear rather than freeing inspiration. I needed more feedback from my professors before I could really begin the process and reassurance that the output met their standards before I could put the project to bed. I ended up needing my professor in CE 5120 to be my collaboration partner since my direct requests were rejected and my blanket ask was ignored by the rest of the class. Again this is something to keep in mind when having kids choose partners. This week provided lots of opportunities for me to feel uncomfortable or on the outside but also showed me once again that my uniqueness is an asset that shouldn’t be molded to fit the flock but should be developed through interpersonal interaction and feedback from others.

Week 9 and this term’s journey is reaching an end along with this reflection essay, producing a personal learning network plan and a personal reflection in LM 5040, and finishing three major projects in CE 5120. As I started planning this reflection, I realized that it was impossible to separate the three courses and I decided to document them together as one. My portfolio was an excellent resource to return to and review what happened in each event as I hope it will be a resource to trigger memories and ideas that can inform me in the future. The personal reflection for LM 5040 was not as extensive as this one and focused more on how to use information about technologies to come as documented by the Horizon Report which was a relief since CE 5120 had three major projects due at the same time. I added a Collaboration project/reflection, an Assistive Technology Lesson Plan/reflection, and a Flipping the Classroom write-up to my portfolio and had discussions online about 21st Century students and using Web 2.0 tools to create book trailers. I learned lots this term and loved all my coursework but reaching the end of the term is a relief and getting great grades validate my sense of doing good work plus I have a portfolio to show others that I am very proud of.

Just like life doesn’t exist in a vacuum, my journey through Electronic Portfolio Development and Assessment influenced and was influenced by the other two courses I took concurrently as well as webinars I took and curiosities of mine that I explored. I feel I have a much better handle on what I want my portfolio to be and how it should present itself – AND PRESENT ITSELF IT WILL! I have given it a life of its own and it is continuing to grow and develop just like a child. And just like a child, the growth and development of the portfolio will continue as my personal story and learning continue. This personal understanding will also inform how I work with students and their own portfolios.