

Reflective Ongoing Project and Journal Blog

Introduction

This paper has been written based on notes, emails and the author's memory at the time that events took place. It was written between June and July 2010. The events have been placed in chronological order, starting with the creation of the artefact (August 2009) and concludes with the near completion of the Journal Paper and the ePortfolio (July 2010). Final editing took place on the 31st August 2010.

August 2009

Throughout August 2009, the artefact (Information Technology Course Website) was created. The reasons why I choose a website, as opposed to Mahara (DIT's preferred option) can be viewed in a paper, titled "**Ready Made or Made to Measure – A comparison of two ePortfolio platforms**". The completed website can be viewed at **www.brentfloyd-at-ait.com**. It was based on an original eBusiness Course Website, which was built in January 2008. It contained:

- The Information Technology syllabus.
- Weekly Lessons covering weeks 1-12.
- An Assignments page covering the four assignments.
- Lecturer Contact details.
- Latest News section.
- Timetable of the course.
- Several pages offering links to free web stuff.
- Assignment marks page.
- A page for hosting student's websites.
- A page showing Coursework marks.
- Access to past papers.
- Access to Links (author's other websites).
- A statistical counter.

Information Technology
(Year 1)

Latest update: 12th December

Syllabus Weeks 1-12 Assignments Contact

Latest News
All Assignments marks are now available.
Most Projects can be viewed in Student Sites. A few require some adjustment, which will take place next week.
Check exam timetable in case of changes.

Welcome to Information Technology
My name is Brent Floyd and I will be teaching you the Information Technology Module. My aim will be to:
(a) introduce you to the concepts of Information Technology and Communications.
(b) introduce you to common business software.

Timetable

Day	Time	Room
Monday	2.00 - 4.00	IT7
Wednesday	9.00 - 11.00	D2284

Students will need to bring a USB and computer headphones to every practical session.

Web Stuff Student Sites Test Marks Past Papers

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The reason why the content was chosen is explained in an unpublished paper that I wrote in May 2008. This was a Reflection Assessment, titled “Does a teacher created website, to host student websites, lead to regime of shared student led learning?” for the “Learning and Teaching in a Modular Environment” module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Third Level Learning and Teaching (DIT). [A shortened version can be viewed](#) in a paper that was submitted to the LIN Conference in September 2008.

Research on lecture material, video clips and exercises also took place during this month. As August was the lecturer’s holiday, it was done whenever he was in the mood.

September 2009

Throughout the month, I prepared the weekly teaching sessions containing a variety of learning/teaching artefacts. These included lecture notes, links to tutorials, exercises, video clips, etc., a WebQuest, online quizzes, word search and crosswords. A CamStudio video on Excel was obtained from another lecturer. Only the present week and past weeks were available to the students. This gave me flexibility with the future weeks to change content based on interruptions to the timetable or if further work needed to be done to aid students understanding of a particular topic. It also stopped the students rushing ahead and gave them time to learn the content.

I also prepared the pre-course questionnaire. On reflection I believed that both the pre-course and post course questionnaires should have been prepared at the same time, so that a similar format would have been used throughout and that the right questions would be asked at the beginning and then tested for validity at the end. For example, I posed the question, which one of these options do you, prefer (pre-course) and then asked them to rate the options from 1-5 (post-course). I found that having two methods of extracting information lead to some difficulties in establishing firm statistical results for the various options.

The Course Website was demonstrated to the students on the first day (14th September 2009) of the course. The first year students do not come to the Institute until the second week. No opinions were expressed or questions asked by the students in the classroom. This was not surprising as students during the first few weeks of a new course tend to exhibit shy and timid behaviour and interaction with the lecturer is limited until a relationship is established with the lecturer and/or the student’s peers (Hermann & Foster, 2008). The pre-course questionnaire was issued and collected. The students were shown website links to tutorials and exercises relating to PowerPoint. They were also given links to computer hardware websites for research purposes. They were also given instructions on the website for their first coursework assignment, where they had to prepare a PowerPoint slideshow on computer hardware.

The pre-course questionnaire was analysed over the weekend (12th/13th September 2009). It was a useful guide as I found that the majority of students had good knowledge of working with computers and applications, although three students did not. This method allowed me to identify quickly those students who might require more help.

In Week 3, the students were introduced to a website authoring software package through a lecturer demonstration. They were follow-up links to website creation tutorials and resources. An Online Quiz on hardware was also available to reinforce and remind students of the

previous class. The questions for the first Online Quiz were created on ProProfs Quiz Maker. This software allowed me to create the questions and supply the answers and scoring system. It also allowed the students to take the test in a secure environment and finally the program, questions and answers were stored on the ProProfs website, thereby saving space on my own website.

Around the end of September, the hosting company went down for approximately one hour during class time and meant that students were unable to access the Course Website and/or connect to any links. It eventually turned out that this was the only time that the course was interrupted because of technical difficulties. It made me think that I should prepare a back-up system of the website on a DVD. The students usually saved their work to their own USBs and the combination of website resources on DVD and their own saved work would keep disruption to a minimum.

On the 23rd September 2009, a “One-to-One Supervisor Online Discussion” line was set up with Dr Kevin O’Rourke. The discussion board was established as an online supervision logbook, designed to record our meetings and my progress on the MSc in Applied eLearning.

October 2009

I had pondered about using either a bulletin board or Facebook when I was setting up the website. However, rumours that Facebook was to be taken off the college network materialised on the 9th October and I was not sure that an alternative bulletin board would serve any useful purpose, particularly as the course was only twelve weeks. This meant that a community of practice and social constructivism were not going to be active ingredients in this study. In early December a college Facebook was placed on the AIT website, however this meant that it was open to all students and not to students on individual courses.

The next two weeks in October was spent completing Assignment 1 and learning and practising Website design and creation of a simple website. In the third week, the second and third assignment based on (2) Design and (3) website creation was given to the students.

In mid October, I also received a visit from some mature students who wanted more lecturer demonstrations and less elearning. I obviously did not want these students to suffer because of my research, so some blended learning was introduced in areas that I had reserved for elearning. I thought that this might affect my quantitative analysis. I reported these developments to Kevin in an email, who commented that this was a well-known fact that mature students would have the confidence to identify their own learning style and needs.

November 2009

During November, I was due to meet Kevin to discuss my Journal Paper; however, I was experiencing two problems. A heavy workload schedule (my workload is front ended and I have to teach 20 hours a week before Christmas and approximately 10 hours a week after

Christmas) and the fact that my word length for my paper was triple the size it should be. I was worried that by losing some sections would distort or not comply with the DIT Journal Paper requirements. After some analysis I removed some sections that I thought were irrelevant and the word length started to approach the required limit.

In early November, a CamStudio demonstration was obtained from another lecturer. It showed a number of learning points over a period of 20 minutes. Later the students questioned the worth of the CamStudio demonstration. They would have liked more videos, but of a shorter duration, that is, a few minutes on specific topics, as opposed to a longer video covering a number of topics, spread over a longer period. Also in early November, students were given online links to Excel tutorials, exercises and the CamStudio demonstration video. The fourth assignment on Excel was also issued during this time. In mid November, an online quiz on software, a crossword on software and a word search on websites were made available to the students. The crossword was created by free software, which asked for the words and clues and then created the crossword for you (crosswordpuzzlegames.com). The word search used a similar approach, where again you had to give them the words and they would create the word search puzzle (www.toolsforeducators.com). Later questionnaires showed that the crossword and word search were not attempted or enjoyed by most of the students. I believe that I had placed them too late in the course when they already had a lot of coursework to complete. I also believed that their function to act as reinforcement on “keywords” was not understood. They were there as an “aide to memoire” rather than a learning tool. The following week, an online quiz on business, a word search on data communications and a crossword on networks were also made available with the same results as the previous week.

The twelve teaching weeks of the Information Technology Module finished on the 27th November 2009.

December 2009

I met up with Dr Kevin O’Rourke at Upper Mount Street, Dublin on 1st December 2009. We discussed the Journal Paper. He had made many corrections. I then discovered that he had been a Proof Reader for many years. My English is not particularly good and for many years, I had managed with the use of word processing programs that use grammar and spell checkers. Therefore, I had mixed emotions with this news. While I wanted my work to be as good as it could be I knew that despite my best intentions, there were likely to be many corrections heading my way. I also discovered that while the grammar checkers would accept some of my sentences, particularly when commas, colon, semi-colons were involved, Kevin had corrected them using alternative ways. As Kevin’s credentials were impressive I could only come to the conclusions that they were several ways of using grammar and that it was down to personal choice, or that the grammar checkers weren’t as accurate as I thought they were.

I sent Kevin an email thanking him for his comments on 2nd December 2009. One suggestion for a future presentation was very useful where upon I revamped it to include a tour of my website and resources, and include some graphs on the most important issues that came out of my interviews and discussion group.

Students had until the 4th December to complete the final Coursework. The Students sat the End of Module examination, on the Information Technology Module on 16th December 2009.

I went to the DIT in Dublin and presented a PowerPoint slideshow of my project to my peers and DIT staff members on the 17th December 2009.

I received an email from Kevin on the 18th December 2009.

“Well done on your presentation on Tuesday. I made some notes on the day as follows (the headings are dictated by the form provided by Roisin):
Structure: For the benefit of those who are not familiar with your subject area (i.e. IT for music students) some further information on this (e.g. outline syllabus) and the rationale for your approach would be useful.
Evidence of critical and analytical approach: Good evidence of reading and contextualising of your study. Again, making your theoretical framework more explicit would be useful.
Presentation: Well done overall!
Questions & Discussion: Again, nicely done.
Overall impression: Some explicit discussion of similar studies would be useful.
General comments: Overall, well done: you are on the right track. Keep reading around the topic to contextualise your work, and make this context more explicit. Include a rationale for your approach. I am very interested in seeing what your final results and conclusions are going to be.”

I was pleased to receive this note and felt that things were going smoothly at this time.

January 2010

The examination papers were marked. Data was collected from the examination papers and the results. Afterwards the raw data was placed within the “Findings” section of the Journal Paper.

March 2010

During March 2010, I analysed the qualitative and quantitative results from the questionnaires and examination results. I felt disappointed upon first inspection, as the results revealed very little difference. Further analysis a few weeks later showed that students had no problems and felt comfortable working with technology. I also noticed that there had been a change in attitude regarding blended teaching. Finally, the results also demonstrated a slight improvement when the students were taught by elearning or blended learning, compared to being taught only by traditional teaching. My mood greatly improved when my results were compared to previous case studies and I found that my findings were comparable to these cases.

April 2010

In April Dr Charles Juwah (<http://www4.rgu.ac.uk/celt/staff/page.cfm?pge=5698>) from the Robert Gordon University was available on Webcourses to answer any questions regarding writing to Journals.

I wrote to Charles on the 14th April 2010

“As mentioned previously I have results from pre/post questionnaires and coursework/examination results. Most of these have been placed into Excel graphs. For a Journal Paper should they remain as graphs, with a bit of wordy text explaining what they are about? On the other hand, should I give an approximation in terms of figures (e.g. 8 out of 10 liked the concept of a VLE), or is there another method. Presently they are about 20 graphs.”

Robbie (student) replied:

“No Brent I do not think you can use appendices in a journal paper. I managed to get a good bit of information into my table which did save on space so ye I think it would be worthwhile experimenting with this idea. If the Journal of Further and Higher Education is the one you are going for just have a look at some of their latest papers and see if they have graphs and tables.”

Shortly afterwards Charles replied:

“As you suggested, it is perfectly alright to tables, graphs and images. I have checked out the JFHE (UK) you can use all three formats to present information/data.

Appendices are not allowed (Please see excerpts from the JFHE's instruction to authors below):

Tables and captions to figures and illustrations. Tables must be uploaded as separate files and not included as part of the text. The captions to figures and illustrations should be made clear. Tables and figures should be numbered by Arabic numerals. The approximate position of tables and figures should be indicated in the manuscript. Captions should include keys to symbols.

Figures. Please supply all figures electronically, preferably as a JPEG or TIFF file, and at a suitable resolution for reproduction.

Good luck with packaging your graphs.”

I presented the latest work on my Journal to my peers and staff at DIT on the 27th April 2010.

Kevin sent the following email the next day.

“Good to see you finally yesterday, and I hope that you are feeling fully recovered from your flu bout by now.

I must be honest and say that I was disappointed by your presentation yesterday, as I saw very little evidence of progress since we last spoke. I realise that you said you did not have had the most up-to-date version of your presentation, and that you have been busy with other things. However, what concerns me is that the questions you pose and the issues you are addressing do not seem to be developing or changing, as I might expect them to had you been reading around the topic.

I suppose I am getting the impression that there has not been a lot of effort involved on your part to date. I hope that that will change now: we have just four months until you are due to present, and I certainly cannot support you in submitting work that is not going to get you this MSc. In addition, to do that, you will need to evidence your work a lot better than you did yesterday.

I am sorry if this seems a little harsh, but I believe that you can do this project well and I for one would very much like to see you graduate in October/November. To that end, I believe that we must meet up soon to plan how you are going to achieve this. If you forward me anything that, you have been working on and your bibliography as compiled to date, then that would be a good starting point. Perhaps we could meet in the week beginning May 10th, and you could send me this by the end of next week?”

This email was certainly a low point during my second year. However, I did feel Kevin had a point. I had not done as much work as I could have done. Due to a mixture of mostly work related issues, such as, completing a teaching schedule in the second semester, coursework and examination marking and a programmatic review of all computing related courses. Even the weather didn't help as Ireland seem to get a lot of dry, sunny days, especially at the weekends and I found myself doing outside jobs, instead of sitting at my computer indoors.

May 2010

I met up with Kevin on the morning of 13th May 2010. We discussed the Journal Paper.

Kevin wrote a further email that afternoon and pointed out the following:

“Just to follow up on our meeting this morning, Brent. One thing that I could have been more explicit about during our conversation is that, in using sources, you will need to be more careful in how you attribute. I mean that where you use a wording from a source almost verbatim, as you do with some of the stuff from Chang & Tung (2008), you should either quote directly from the source and give a page reference, or re-phrase their argument entirely in your own words.

For example, on p. 5 you say, "Perceived usefulness is the degree to which a person believes that using a technological system will enhance his / her performance. Perceived ease of use is the degree to which a person believes that using the technological system will be free from effort." Looking at C&T (p.75) I read "Perceived usefulness is the degree to which a person believes that using a technological system will enhance his or her performance" followed a paragraph later by "Perceived ease of use is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system will be free of effort."

Similarly, you say on p.5 in your discussion of Carie Windham (2007) "They are more oriented to visual media than previous generations – and prefer to learn by doing rather than by telling or reading. They teach themselves how to use technology – or learn it from peers." which I find verbatim in the Becta Report on Emerging Technologies for Learning which I mentioned to you. This is not acceptable. As I said above you should either make clear that this is a direct quote from the source (put the word in quotation marks and give a page reference), or else re-phrase their argument entirely in your own words, not just with a change of a word here and there. Please, please be very careful here: you do not want to be accused of plagiarism, however unintentional it may be on your part!

Similarly, as I hope I made clear, you should either go back to the original sources used by C&T, or speak of them as cited in their article."

I am normally very wary of plagiarism. Coincidentally I had spotted the first case when I was talking to Kevin that morning and kept quiet, hoping to correct it later. The second case was taken from a source several years previously and without checking it out I would have been completely unaware. I tend to avoid using the same words as the original author and prefer to rearrange it using my words. However, sometimes it can be very difficult particularly if the authors have created their own language. For example, "perceived usefulness". The words seem to say everything about the situation and any adaption of those words that I tried seemed to give it another meaning.

I presented the latest work on my ePortfolio to my peers and staff at DIT on the 25th May 2010.

June 2009

On the 1st June, Kevin sent the following email.

Hi Brent thanks for your presentation last week. Your ePortfolio is shaping up nicely, and I am sure that the article and project are doing likewise.

Can I suggest that you should now put together a plan for the coming three months so that all there elements - paper, project and ePortfolio - are in good shape by 1 September? You may have already been doing this, and if so please let me know what your milestones are going to be. As I will be here for the most of the summer (although away for three weeks from 26 July), it would be good if we could agree to meet up every few weeks to make sure that everything is on track.

Let me know what you think. Let me know how you want to proceed.

Later on in the day, I replied.

Hi Kevin,

Thanks for your email. I have been correcting and adding new stuff to my Journal Paper. I have also been checking any plagiarised statements. I may have tripped up on my own short cuts. When I like a statement I sometimes copy and paste it to my paper, then proceed to alter it so that is my perception of what they are saying. The trip-up comes when I do not alter it enough, or if I get distracted, so it stays the same - dangerous practice!

The Journal is part is taking some time as I am only on page 8 of my paper. The ePortfolio is "going grand" - beginning to sound Irish after 10 years. It just requires some reflections, video and link checking, etc. The Project is probably going to stay as it is (double check linkage), as it is an accurate record of what the students saw and experienced. Your idea regarding a plan is fine. I will devise one over the next few days. The URL was probably a typo error on my part.

On 10 Jun 2010, Kevin replied to an earlier email regarding a meeting later in the month.

Make it 10.30 on Tuesday 22, as the morning session of the summer school starts at 10 and I can slip away afterwards. You'll probably find me in the rooms opposite the library entrance in Aungier Street, or give me a call on my mobile when you get there (number below) and I'll meet you in the coffee area. And please send me your work plan and whatever else you've been working on by the end of next week.

On the 22nd June 2010, we met up at Aungier Street and discussed the progress since our last meeting. I demonstrated my ePortfolio and we went through the Journal paper. I felt pleased with my progress and subsequent comments from Kevin. It was a hot day and I walked several miles through the streets of Dublin to where I had parked my car in a positive mood.

On 13 Jul 2010, I wrote:

Hi Kevin,

I have just returned from a relaxing holiday in Greece. This morning I have added the Update link (for you) to my ePortfolio. Don't be in a rush to view new things I haven't added these yet. However, as tomorrow is forecast to rain all day that should give me an opportunity to add more work. I think we have arranged to see each other next week. I am waiting to see the five-day forecasts (from Friday). If a good day is forecast, then my family will go to Dublin Zoo afterwards and if it is forecast to rain all week, I will just go there and back.

From the 14th June, I added an Update link to my ePortfolio informing Kevin what I had done. I do not intend to publish everything; however, I have produced the following three days as an example:

Example 1 – 14th July 2010

14th July 2010 Added Update link to Index and created Update page. Added Petcha PowerPoint slideshow in PDF format to Project page. Added Text notes (PDF) to go with PowerPoint slideshow to Project Page. Final Supporting Communities Paper and Supporting Communities Podcast now available within the Supporting Communities webpage. Plus some corrections made on Support page. Authoring page updated and tested. Trends updated & tested, including adding links to the Horizon Report and Twarled Report. Password given in Entry page to enable quick access to Assignment. Reflective Project & Journal Blog.

Example 2 – 15th July 2010

14th July 2010 Added Update link to Index and created Update page. Added Petcha PowerPoint slideshow in PDF format to Project page. Added Text notes (PDF) to go with PowerPoint slideshow to Project Page. Final Supporting Communities Paper and Supporting Communities Podcast now available within the Supporting Communities webpage. Plus some corrections made on Support page. Authoring page updated and tested. Trends updated & tested, including adding links to the Horizon Report and Twarled Report. Password given in Entry page to enable quick access to Assignment. Reflective Project & Journal Blog.

Example 3 – 17th July 2010

17th July Wrote opening video script - completed. Later will video me reading it and place it on the index page. Will continue with Reflective Blog at 11.00am - adding Roisins emails and student actions throughout the course. I hope to finish most of this Blog today. For most things with Work in Progress attached to it, the latest version will appear shortly after I have discussed updating it. I have added the text script of the opening video to the Index page. Corrected an error on the Index page. Script for closing video on the Index page is completed. This will describe my future ambitions.

I researched various journals on the 18th July and decided to go with the "e-learning and education (eleed)" Journal (<http://eleed.campussource.de/>). My reasons were that it offered unlimited words, APA, caters for my area, it had a half-German - half English content but had a preference towards English and changes in formatting were not required. Which meant that my paper had already matched their criteria?

The reflective videos were loaded up on YouTube on 20th July and then linked to my ePortfolio. I find YouTube extremely useful for displaying videos. It is easy to use, where the

user only has to upload it to YouTube and adjust the size of the screen. It also saves space on a website, as it is stored at the YouTube site.

I had a meeting with Kevin (AM) in Dublin, on the 21st July, where we discussed the ePortfolio and Final Paper. The feedback from Kevin gave new ideas, further research opportunities, amendments and a feeling that a positive outcome of my work would now happen at the end of the course. Kevin and I discuss the format of the website links. He suggested that I should follow the “universal access” format of spreading the link across a number of words. However, when I analysed the situation I thought that the website would look unattractive with large amounts of linked text being displayed across the screen compared to individual words. Therefore, I decided to remain with the format (found in most websites) that I am used to. Also looking at my ePortfolio on a large overhead projector, we noticed that the Index page showed a slight variation in colour in some text passages. Later, that day I checked it out. It was hard to notice the colour change on my monitor, but I could make out from the source code that a slightly darker blue colour had been used in some areas.

During the remainder of July and August, the ePortfolio and Journal Paper were amended and completed.

References

Hermann, A., & Foster, D. (2008). Fostering approachability and classroom participation during the first day of class: Evidence for a reciprocal interview activity. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9, 2, 139.