ePortfolios: From Masters Project to Student Notebook "How a Masters Project Created a New Way of Teaching in a Paperless Classroom"

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Background

In July 2011 I completed my Master of Education Technology Degree from the University of British Columbia. The final project for this degree was an ePortfolio of the work completed throughout my coursework based upon a theme. As I am also a senior history teacher at a boarding school I used the school year as my theme. To create the project I used website maker Weebly.com. The reason for choosing this was that I needed a website creator that easily allowed me to add components and multi-media without having a strong knowledge of computer programming. While this was helpful for me, in the back of my mind I had always envisioned using this with my students.

Application

In September of 2011, I began to use Weebly in my classes. From the beginning I had only imagined that I would use the tool as a note-taking function in order to replace our paper notebooks. However, after creating a rubric with my students, we soon realized that the multi-media aspects of the web site could replace our textbooks (which it has). While the skills taught in the note-taking stage, which students do during class on their laptops, were the primary focus, it soon became apparent that there were far more in-depth skills that the students were learning from these ongoing projects. With the share editor functions, this became a collaborative project that included summaries and subjunctive questions (only added this month!) as the project continued to evolve and take on new life. Having the students learn the art of embedding and being critical of the websites they were linking to became a major focus of their research.

Moreover, a year ago I made the decision to move to open-Internet assessment. This has been the best shift in assessment strategy I have made in my career and I now have the results from a full cohort to support this move. I recently presented on the topic of ePortfolios at the annual Independent Schools of British Columbia Professional Development Conference. The presentation I gave explained how the move to ePortfolios has allowed my classroom to be paperless over the past two years. Some of the other topics for discussion in this presentation include the use of technology breaks, the devices used in delivery, and open-Internet assessment. Furthermore, one of the key changes has been the addition of social media to the project. Incorporating and embedding Facebook, Twitter, Animoto and memes has further enhanced this project. The following links are exemplars of student work from my senior world history classes (some are still in progress):

Exemplars

Nahanni

Joe

Georgie

Analysis

This project has allowed students to take responsibility for their own learning. I have found that limiting the guidelines has allowed for more identity and expression to occur and with the help of social media, students have branched out beyond this assignment and I am pleased to see them sharing their work with the world. Many students have continued to use the tool in their post-

secondary education and still refer to their notes while studying future history classes. Prior to this project, these were only things I hoped for from my students.

Conclusion

While I propose that this presentation will be about the use of an ePortfolio in the classroom for note-taking, I expect to tie in many other aspects of educational technology. As the Chair, of the Technology Committee at Shawnigan Lake School, I have also been heavily involved in creating the policies needed (compulsory 2:1 laptop and smart phone program, campus-wide wifi, embedded educational technology skills and practices in our curriculum, open-Internet assessment) in order to make this project happen. I suspect that sharing some of the experiences will be of some value for those looking to incorporate similar projects at their schools or work places.   The presentation is designed for an hour and a half; however, I have managed to do condensed versions lasting 30 minutes for our Board of Governors. I look forward to hearing from you.

*Note: All links are active in digital format.