# Electrifying ePortfolios for ECE Practicum

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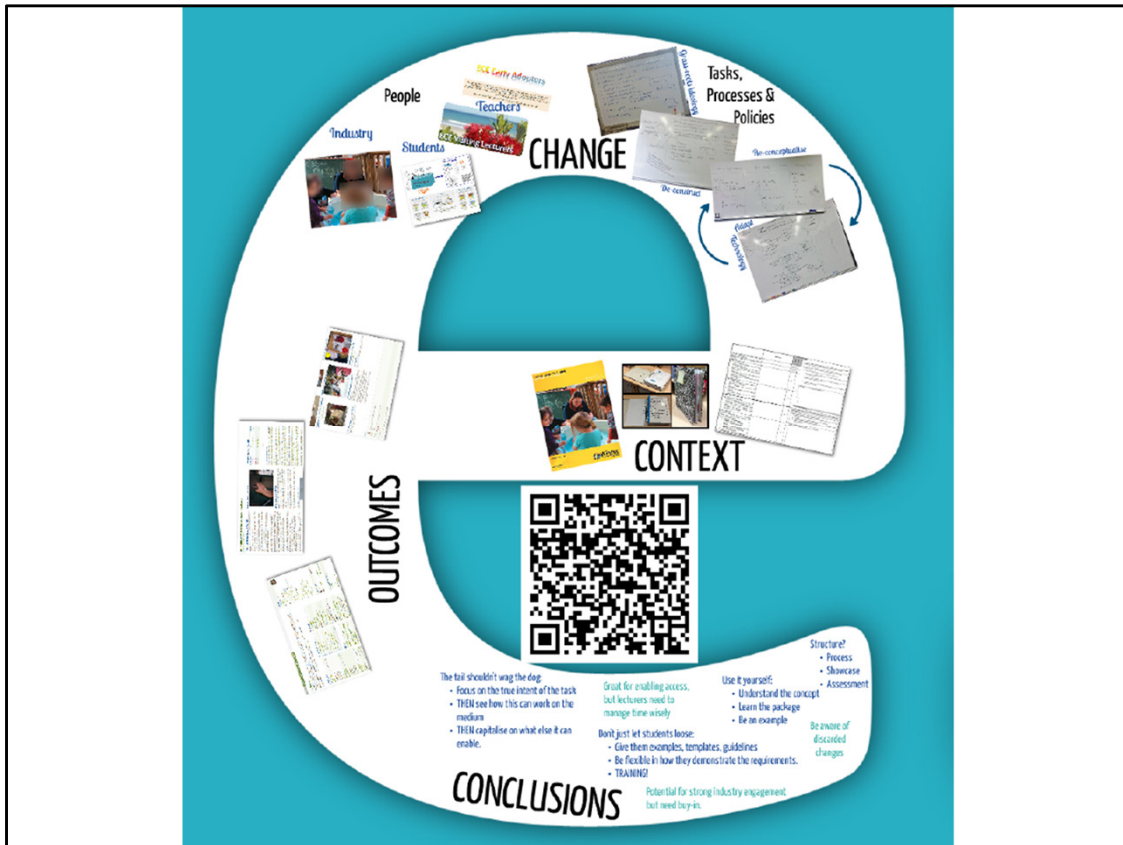
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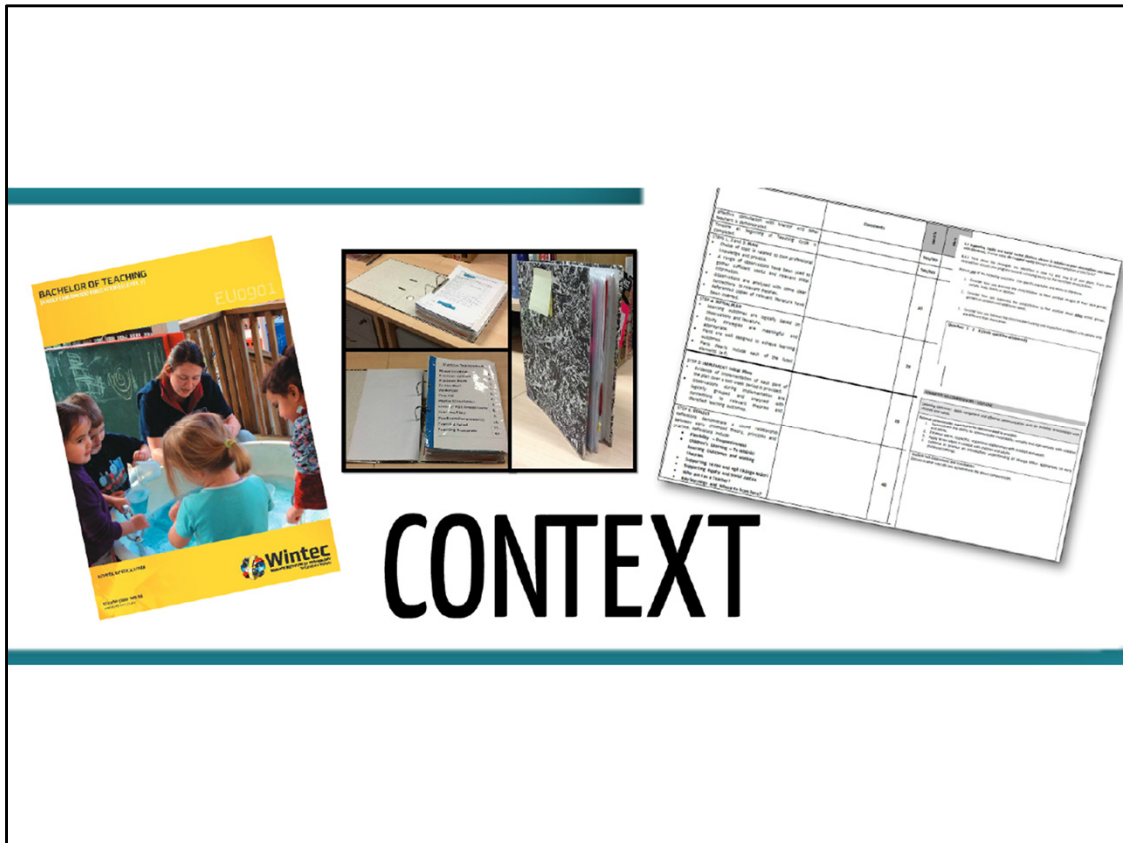
[Scan the QR code for a link to the Prezi presentation.]

Our foray into adapting work placement assessment for the online environment has been:
- Exciting
- Engaging
- Entertaining
- But most of all Electrifying

These are some of the aspects of our experiences that can be used as an example of how adopted ePortfolios for assessment.

The context of this Case:
- Wintec Bachelor of Education (ECE)
- Practical model
    - Teaching Practicum (work placement) 12 hours/week for 30 weeks/year
    - Tasks include various reflection, research and professional activities and assessments.
    - Lecturers visit (3 times/year) to read through paper folder of collected work. Also observe student practice and judge against specific competencies.
    - Based on Action Research Model of Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect, Re-plan…
- Strongly reliant on 'triadic relationship' between student, visiting lecturer and industry based mentor.
    - Apart from visiting lecturers contacting students and providing feed-forward/feedback before/after visits most of the communication happens through student work books and on the visits.
    - Major problems when visiting lecturer arrives for a scheduled visit and the student has 'forgotten' their folder.
    - Majority of visit time spent reading written work.
    - Mentor – visiting lecturer contact is minimal.
- Paper-based folders were filled wit questions and answer boxes
    - The answers tended to be focussed on the questions not necessarily the students' practice.
    - Potential to 'make stuff up' to fit the questions.
    - Answers given were discrete and separate, difficult to integrate learning from each.

- Work was static and took a lot of effort to keep legible (writing, then typing and pasting over, then stapling overflow…).
- Some were very wordy – reports of up to 50,000 words (at undergraduate level!)

While this paper-based system works and staff were generally satisfied with it, we wanted to see what changes we could make, based on identifying the restrictions created by the paper-based system.

After the process we have noticed the different areas of change we focussed on:
- Tasks, processes and policies (i.e. changing the actual content)
- The people involved.
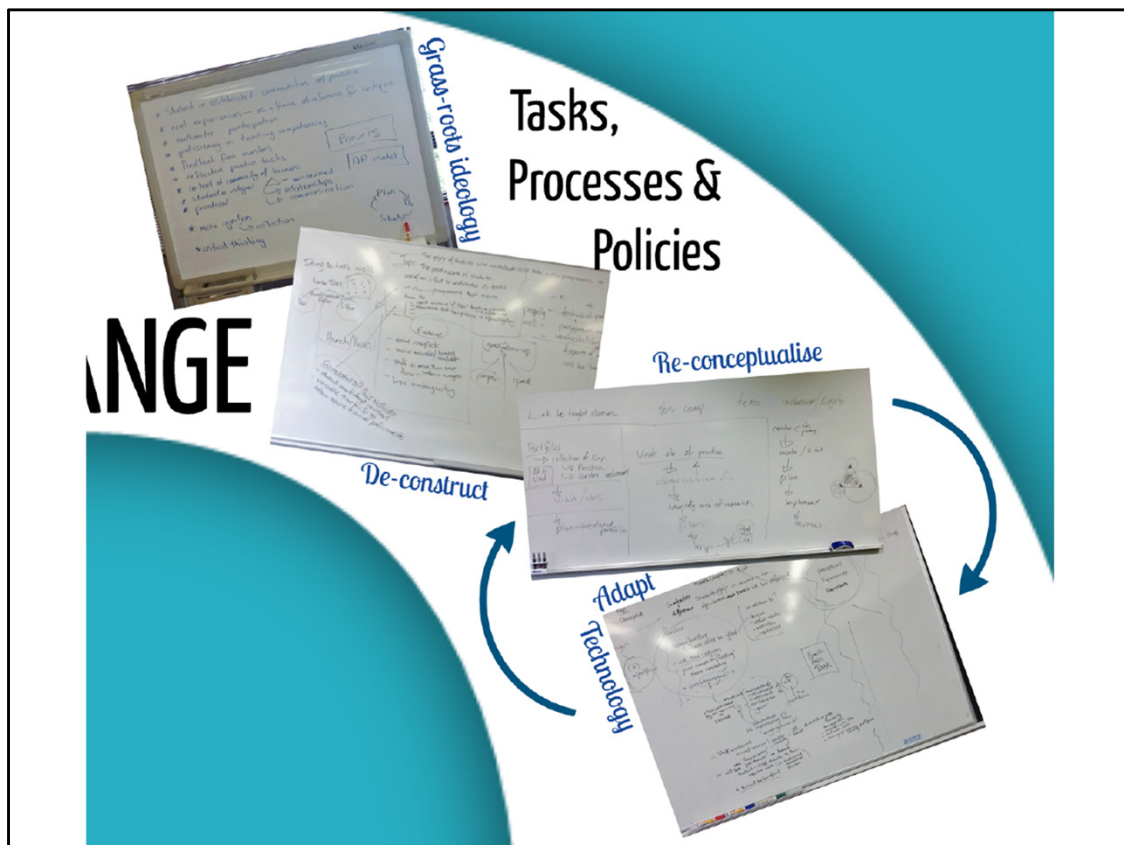
Our change project was strongly supported by our Head of School (i.e. we had the funding and the time)

We organised a group of 'Early Adopters' – staff who are involved with the teaching/visiting/marking.

- This team met regularly to brainstorm and plan the changes.
- First we had to establish an understanding of our 'original intentions' or 'grass-roots ideology' including the core philosophy of the current module tasks.
- Then we de-constructed the current tasks to see which elements were directly related to the philosophy and which were a result of the paper constraints. We asked ourselves the question "do we really need this element"?
- Then we worked to reconceptualise the tasks to see how else they could look and or work. We also asked ourselves what we really wanted – again referring back to the original philosophy of the module.
- Then we worked to see how our ideas/plans could be implemented using the ePortfolio system we had. We would try it out on the system and come back to our brainstorming sessions to see what needed to be changed, tweaked and/or what kinds of instructions/constrains we'd need to provide.
- We followed a cycle to develop, try then tweak in order to come to satisfactory outcomes.

Teachers:
- The Early Adopters were supported by a tech expert (me) who had some experience with the module.
    - They also acted as the pilot group rolling it out so a small group of students.
    - They collected examples of how things were working and brought questions about 'what would happen if?' etc.
    - Each Early Adopter was provided an android tablet to support their ability to access the online portfolios while visiting students.
        - These proved to be very tricky to manage and most of the team switched to their own iPads later.
- After a trial period, the rest of the visiting teaching team were introduced to the system and the new requirements in a two-day workshop.
    - Tablets were allocated to everyone.
    - There was a bit of resistance to change but quickly all staff came on-board.
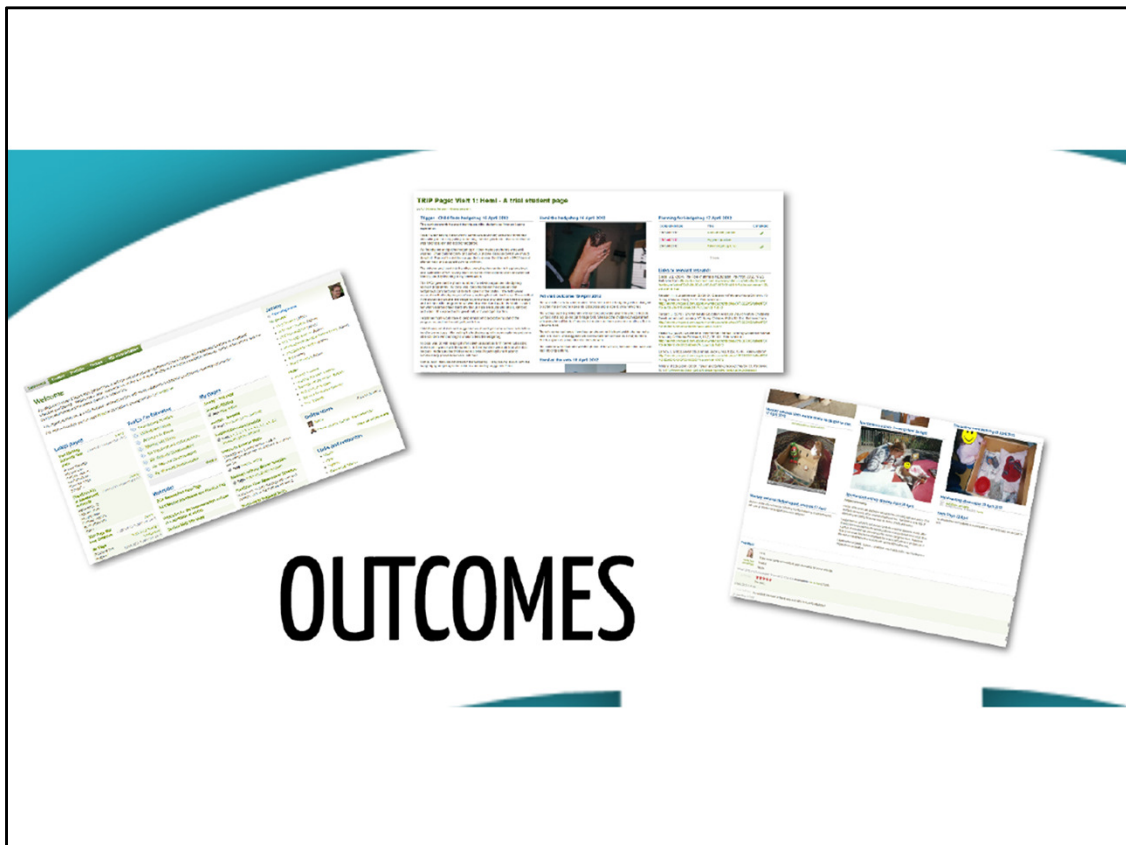
Students:
- A small cohort of students was chosen to test the changes which were introduced in the second semester to a small group of year 2s.
- After providing an amount of training and an extended period of 'trying things out' students started using it for their actual assessment.
- The timing of the introduction proved problematic in that the year 2s were just starting to get their heads around the paper-based system and struggled to understand the new changes.
- Plus we were still relatively new to the system and our help and training processes

and resources were still in infancy which didn't seem to inspire the students much.
- After the trial we saw too much possible benefit to withdraw so we rolled the changes out to the new year's cohort of students and provided much-enhanced training. These students didn't know the paper-system and took to the new system very quickly.
- The training included a lot of the concepts of an ePortfolio as well as how to work the system. Hand-outs, online pages, face-to-face training.

Industry Mentors:
- Once students started using their ePortfolios we had to let their mentors know. The steps for mentors to access and contribute to the ePortfolios seemed minimal (no logging in required) so we saw lots of potential advantage over the paper-based system.
- We experienced less uptake and buy-in from mentors than we expected so we are providing regular training and information sessions to help mentors understand what it is we are asking them to do.
- Still experiencing less uptake than we would prefer but are working with industry to improve this.
- We also had to work through ethical issues in regards to storing pictures of children online. We wrote up policy changes and now require students to sign a form in regards to the safe use and storage of their evidence.
- The ability to record students' practice in Early Childhood Centres has also been discussed with industry representatives and protocols have had to be established.

The results of the changes have presented us with some very positive possibilities.
- The work that is now presented is no longer just answers to specific questions, it originates from and is focussed around students' practice instead of being contrived to fill in the box.
- While students are still given instructions around what to include, they can set it out how they wish and make elements as short or long as they wish. Plus everything is easily updatable – especially good when responding to lecturer feedback.
- Students can use multimedia, text, hyperlinks and other specific information tools to display various forms of evidence of their practice and link these directly to the learning outcomes associated with the module. This helps improve the visibility of students' capabilities and competencies and improves lecturers' abilities to make fair judgement of consistent practice (instead of only seeing it during the visit).
- Links can be made between parts of the ePortfolio meaning the work is less compartmentalised and discrete – one part can be used as evidence or description for other parts, and elements can smoothly lead into following elements (increasing the authenticity of this as an assessment tool)
- No more forgotten folders.
- All parties can have access to the work on demand – which means lecturers are able to review and provide feedback in a much more timely manner instead of only at visits when the student may have completed a large amount of work incorrectly.
- Communication is a big benefit with the ability to post feedback on students work as it's being worked on.  Mentors can also comment inline with the student and lecturer to the three-way communication/conversation can become quite rich and helpful.
    - This is an aspect that isn't being utilised to it's potential because of the poor

uptake from industry mentors.

My suggestions for those investigating ePortfolios for educational purposes:
1) Firstly be aware of the purpose you want ePortfolios:
   a) For documenting students' progress, processes and change.
   b) For showcasing students' attainments.
   c) For assessing students' work and evidence.
2) Teachers should understand the concept of ePortfolios as well as the software package before developing it for students.
   - Its best to develop your own ePortfolio first so you can be an example, know the system and know which elements would be helpful (and not) for your purposes.
3) Make sure there is enough structure before giving students their ePortfolios.
   - Provide examples, templates and incredibly relevant/applicable/useful training.
4) Base the technology around the tasks not the tasks around the technology
   - There needs to be a pedagogically good reason to use the technology (several of which we saw in our outcomes).
   - Start with the true intent of the tasks then see how the technology might help them.
   - Any other benefits are bonuses.