Slide 2

Hello my name is David Sinfield and I am a graphic designer with over 20 years of commercial experience and I now teach graphic design on the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at Auckland University.

This presentation is very much a 360-degree look at how we developed and researched into a platform that would be suitable for our students and teachers alike. By this I mean we started at one point believing we were heading in the right direction and then veering off to another and back to the original source.

So I hope this presentation gives you an understanding how difficult it is to get it just right.

I also believe there isn't a perfect platform for us all to use, but by pushing the boundaries we can start understand what makes a good site and how the ideas can be implemented into different platforms.

Slide 3

So what made me look into this area, after all I am not a systems programmer or a faculty administrator. I am a humble teacher wanting the best for my students.
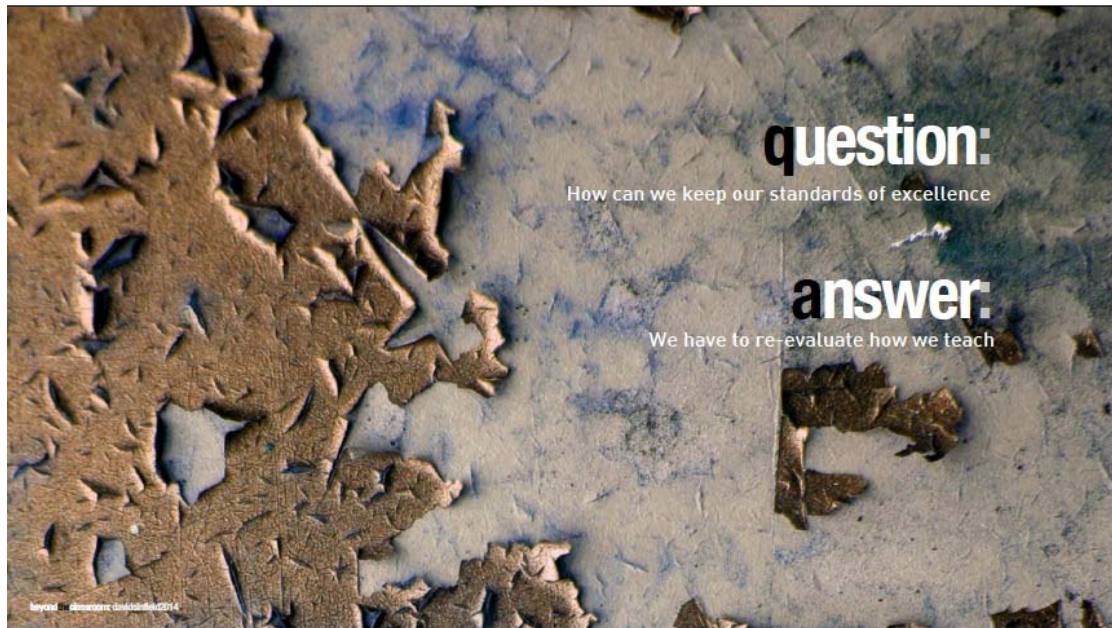
What is becoming more and more alarming is the reduced amount of contact time we have with the students. We are seeing increased class room numbers.   And having to deliver the same content and pressurized to have the same excellent student outcomes.

I teach visual communication, which is a combination of Graphic deign and moving image design and it is very much a tutor intensive learning environment.

By this I mean that the students have more contact tutoring time than say a student studying business or law.
The visual communication student requires a continuing amount of feedback and cannot be taught the practical side of design in a lecture type theatre scenario.

With ever increasing budgetary restraints the learning environment for our students is being pressurized to sit in the same mound as other education programmes that operate on a more financial economical basis.
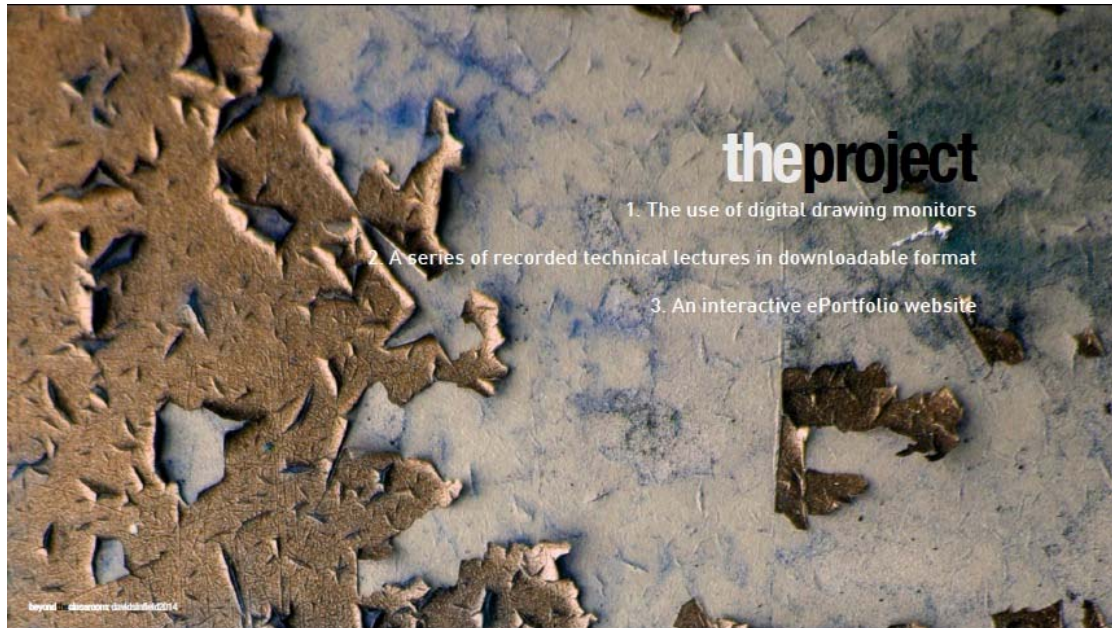
Slide 4

0:25

[CLICK]
Q.So how can we keep our standards of excellence and still provide the level of learning under these conditions.

[CLICK]
A. We have to re evaluate how we teach and adjust our way of contact with the students.   In short we have to teach smarter if we are wanting to maintain the high teaching standards.

Slide 5

I started this project of how to establish ways of delivering content, marking, and improving on the learning environment for the student.

The project involved our Design Staff working as a team to introduce new technologies in learning and teaching.
If you have ever worked with creatives that in its self was a challenge   There are 3 main parts to this project

[CLICK]
1. The use of digital drawing monitors. These are the Wacom Cintiq monitors normally used for architecture/engineering but not usually in the graphic design field.

[CLICK]
2. A series of recorded downloadable lectures. Producing filmed tutorials and publishing these online. These types of lectures are often difficult for the students to follow and take notes at the same time.

[CLICK]
3. An interactive ePortfolio website An area for sharing ideas outside of the classroom environment.

I shall be focusing todays presentation in this area.

Slide 6

The main purposes of this project was to engage in out-of-class communications that would enhance the learning and teaching. This was seen as engaging with an on-line ePortfolio area that was specifically tailored for the students so they could communicate with each other and the tutor of the class. There was also the need for the students to up-load their designs, to obtain critique from their peers and tutors whilst away from class. This would have several benefits as feedback could be given outside of class making the precious time in class much more productive. It also creates a healthy collaborative design community.

To this end several existing ePortfolio platforms were considered and some indeed have been tested and used. Social media sites such as Facebook, Tumblr, Wordpress, Twitter, Blogged, etc. Public sites such as these although good in content and functionality did cause several concerns from both tutors and students alike. These concerns where such as, copyright and placing images in the public domain would then open areas of ownership. Also the students didn't want there working files access by others as these working progressions often change and can be quite rough to beginning, so it is unfair to give comment during this process.

The type of files and sizes were also a consideration and did not want to be inhibited in any way. A lot of the designs the students do, can have very subtle typographical designs to them and by reducing them in size will be to a determinant of their design.

Also interesting to note that there has also become a level of mistrust with existing social media sites such as Facebook and we are seeing students opting out of using sites like these.

Slide 7

So what are the benefits

Online feedback from peers and tutors

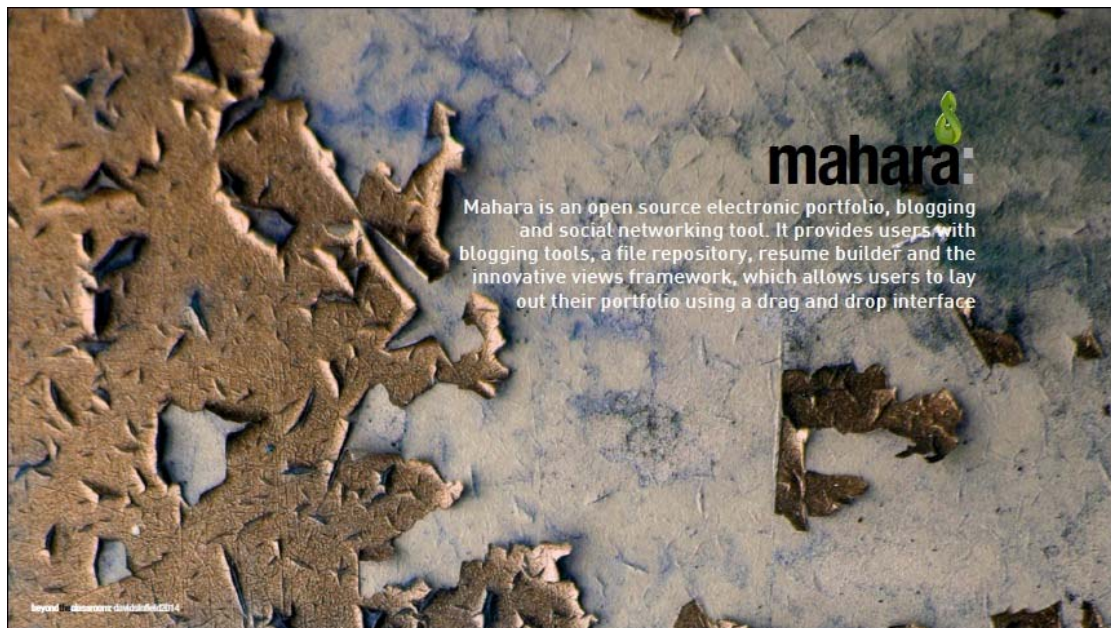Up-to-date notes

Reduced marking

Independent learning

The ability to see all the work collectively (as a group or individual)

On each brief the students are asked to provide a workbook that they have worked on which shows their thinking processes and research on how they developed the final design. This is a process that doesn't necessarily work in practice as the students often produce this after they have finish their project, in other words they are fudging it.

This is a vital process in developing their designs, as the student needs to be able to show the tutor the progression of their designs. By producing these interim progressions through the on line process it will make for better student integration and should also aid in the final marking of these projects as the tutor will not be faced with cart loads of books to have to mark. It will also help in giving vital feedback to students throughout the project.

So it can be said that a continual critiquing process takes place.

Slide 8

To that end we looked at what was on offer within the university and within our university we have Mahara.

Mahara is an open source electronic portfolio, blogging and social networking tool. It provides users with blogging tools, a file repository, resume builder and the innovative views framework, which allows users to lay out their portfolio using a drag and drop interface.

So we trialled Maraha with a group of students and tutors.
The initial testing proved to be somewhat complicated in its functionality and usage for the design students and staff alike.

But it did prove beneficial as it gave us the opportunity to see how we could improve on this.   In our university we are very fortunate to be supported by the Centre for Learning and Teaching which supports areas such as these in terms of research funding and technical support.

So with this great support behind us we where able to delve deeper into this area and see what would be possible.

Slide 9

So one size just doesn't fit all and sites like Mahara may be fine for some people and programmes, but for students dealing with visual content and wanting to upload their large images and moving image files this wasn't suitable at the time.
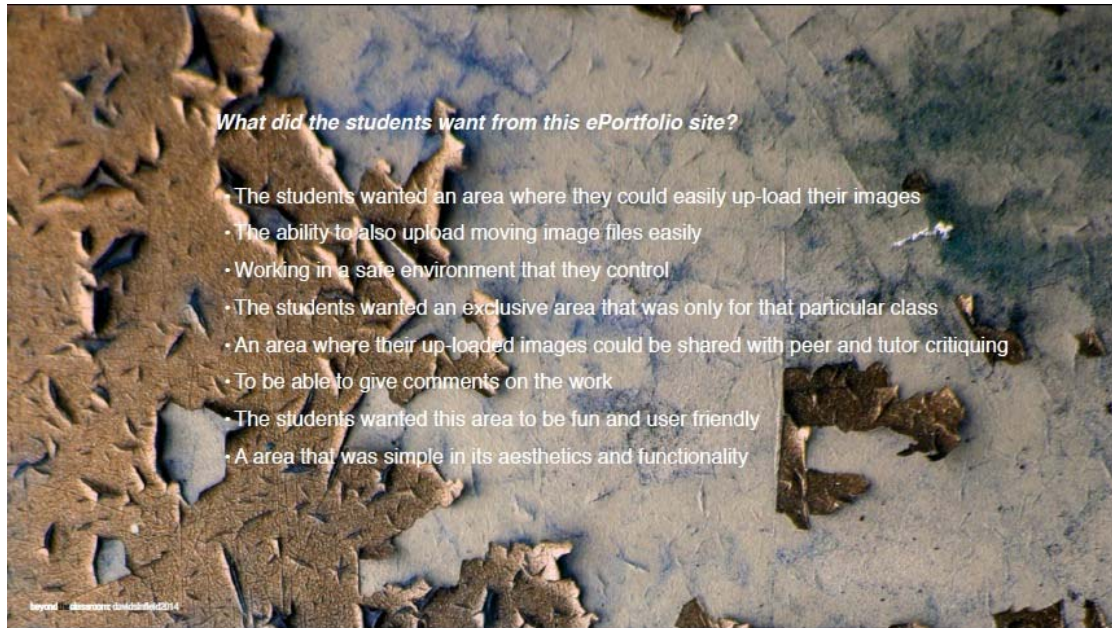
What was discovered at this point is that the students didn't like it as they found it difficult to use.

Now at this point we could have simply said this is what we have and this is what you shall use. But I wanted to find out what they really wanted and if indeed it was possible to build.

Also what did become apparent early on was how visual content needed to be addressed in a different manner in comparison to other content and other areas.

In light of these findings it was established that we would need to tailor make a specific ePortfolio site, as nothing straight 'off the shelf' would do.

Therefore we needed to design an ePortfolio area for the specifically needs of the design student.
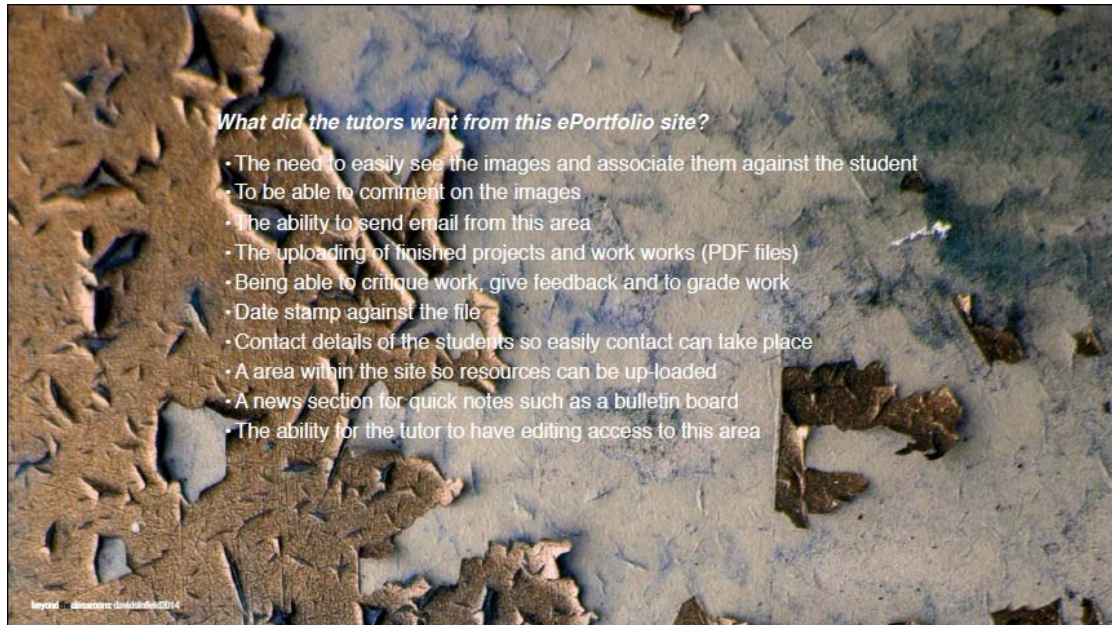
Slide 10

First off we needed to find out from the students what they needed, so we established a small student working party. Interesting to note that we seldom ask our students what they want and rather force on them what we think is right. But students of today are incredibly switch on we it comes to technology, so I believe we should be seeking more advice from them.

What did the students want from this ePortfolio site?

- The students wanted an area where they could easily up-load their images

- The ability to also upload moving image easily

- Working in a safe environment that they control

- The students wanted an exclusive area that was only for that particular class

- An area where their up-loaded images could be shared with peer and tutor critiquing

- To be able to give comments on the work

- The students wanted this area to be fun and user friendly

- A area that was simple in its aesthetics and functionality

Slide 11

Remember we are dealing with academic none technically savvy staff and if it is too difficult then they will not engage.

What did the tutors want from this ePortfolio site?
•   The need to easily see the images and associate them against the student
•   To be able to comment on the images
•   The ability to send email from this area
•   The uploading of finished projects and work works (PDF files)
•   Being able to critique work, give feedback and to grade work
•   Date stamp against the file
•   Contact details of the students so easily contact can take place
•   A area within the site so resources can be up-loaded
•   A news section for quick notes such as a bulletin board
•   The ability for the tutor to have editing access to this area
•   The ability for the tutor to have editing access to this area

Slide 12

At this stage of the research we looked into how we can develop our area for an ePortfolio site. With the support of the Centre of Learning and Teaching we were able to push the boundaries and look into building a small ePortfolio area that could give us the research necessary to find out what would really work.

To this end we looked into the open source platform Moodle, and because our school in the called Art and Design and we were dealing with image content we established the name Arden Imageblog.

Now armed with this information we set about getting the site built and in the next few slides I will show you examples of how this site works

interview1:

The students were asked what they thought about Mahara

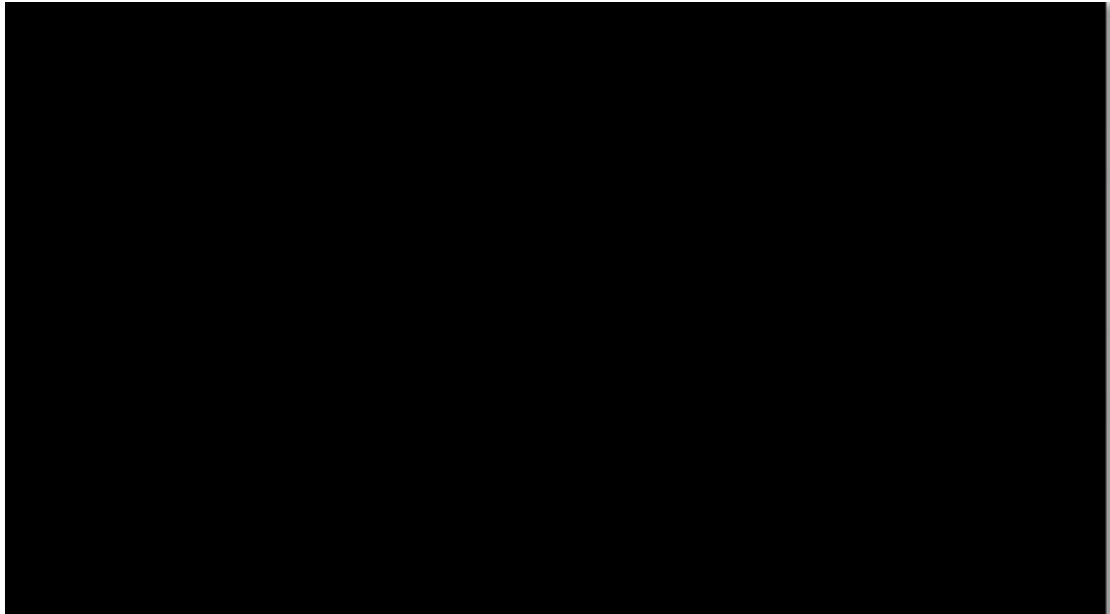beyond the classroom: davidsfield 2014

Slide 13

At the end of the year I interviewed a small number of the students to talk about Arden ImageBlog and to ascertain the outcomes from our new site.

I wanted honest answers to see if we had created a functioning site, which could be used by other groups within our department.

Firstly I asked the students what they thought about Mahara.
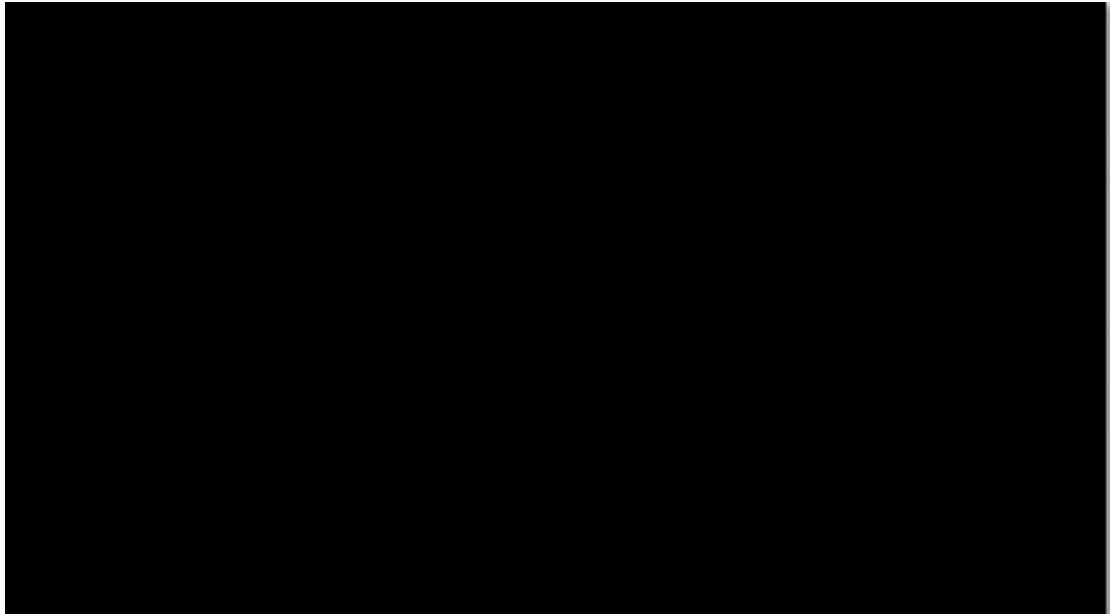
Slide 14

1:21
You can instantly see the hesitation on their faces when asked the question.
So as you can see from the video clip the students where not that enamored with Mahara

Slide 15

0:06
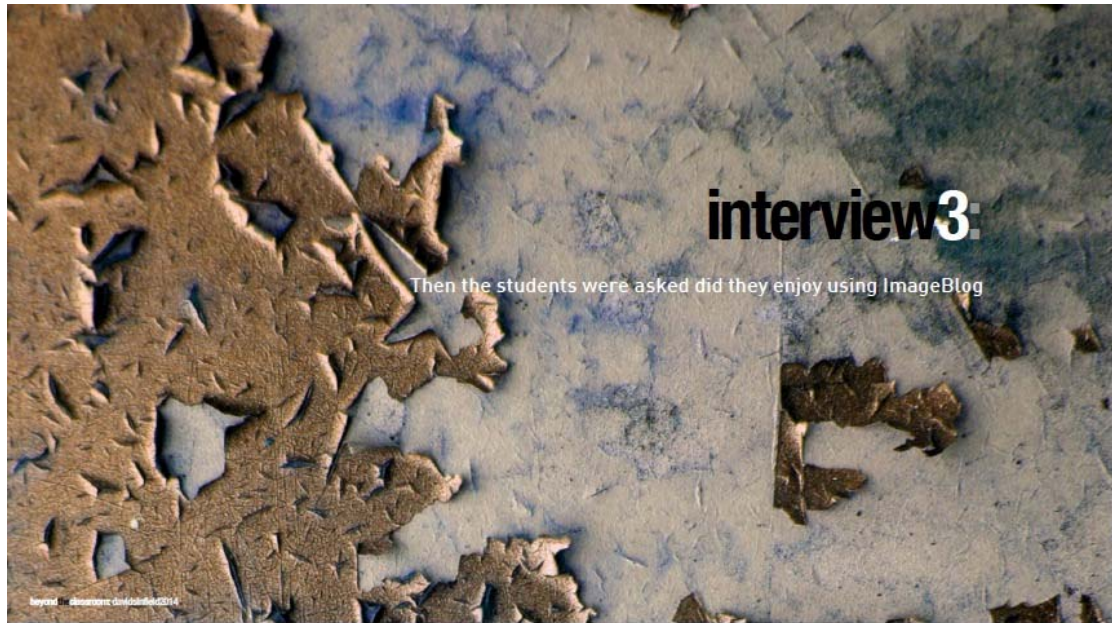I then asked the students about Arden ImageBlog area in comparison to Mahara.

Slide 16
1:11

As you can see from the looks on their faces they immediately acknowledged the liking of this.
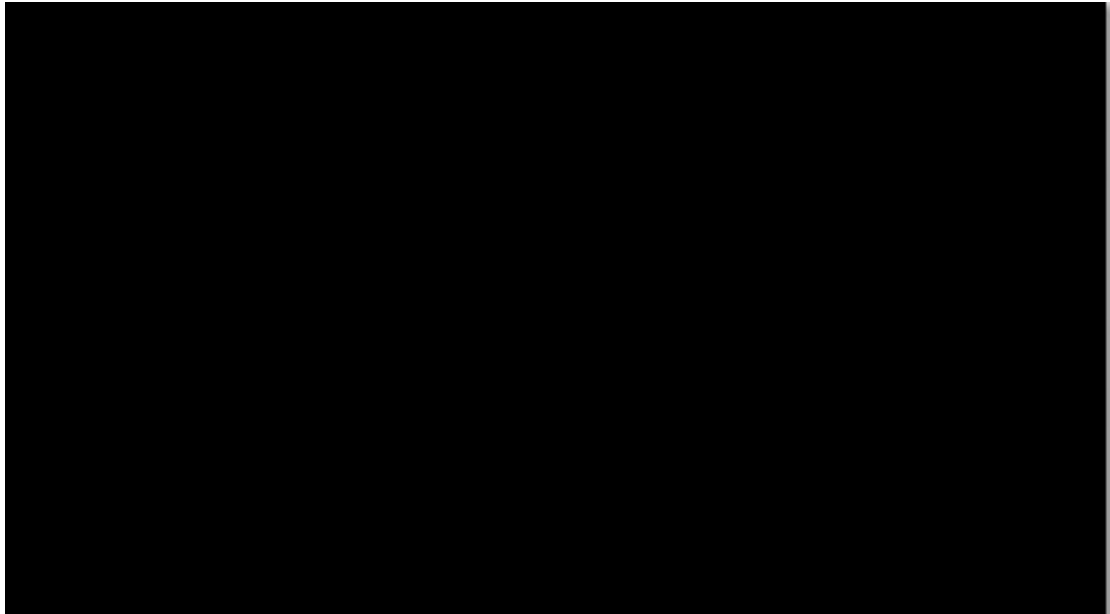
As the students mentioned in the video clip it only took them a day to understand the site and start working with it as a posed to trying to get them to use Mahara over three weeks.

Slide 17

0:06
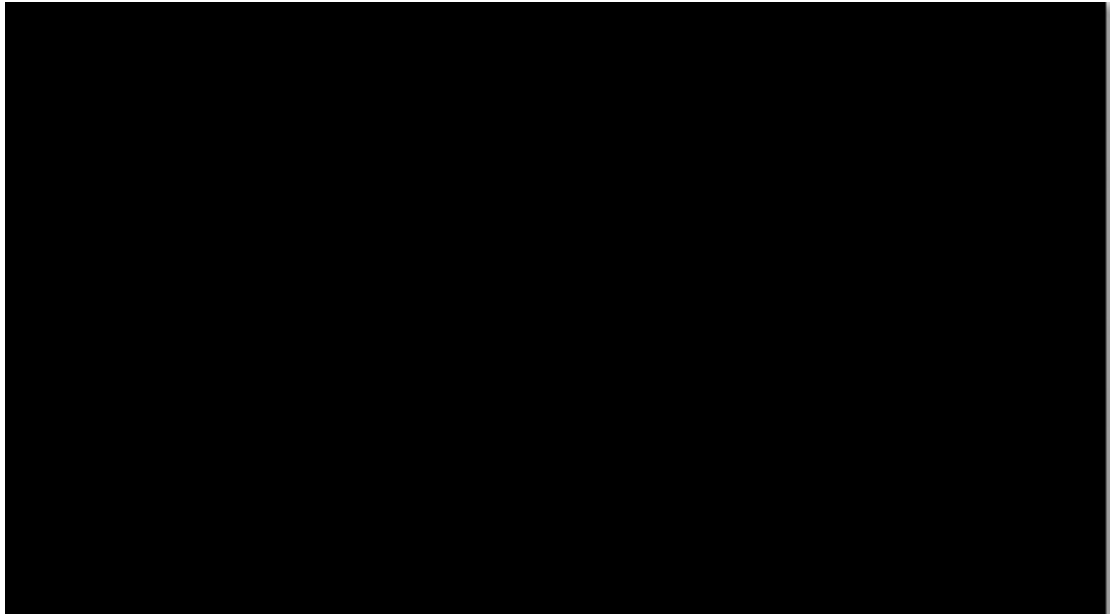Then the students were asked did they enjoy using Arden ImageBlog

Slide 18

0:04
So they seem to like it!

interview4:

Conclusion to the interviews

Slide 19

0:04
Conclusion by the students

Slide 20
2:14

As you can see from the looks on their faces they immediately acknowledged working with this new blog area.

As the students mentioned in the video clip it only took them a day to understand the site and start working with it as a posed to trying to get them to use Mahara over three weeks. This is because we make it much more functional and intuitive.   Also the students question the validity of a site like Mahara in its complexities and it is worth noting that the students will simply not engage in an area such as Mahara if it is too difficult to use.   As educators I believe that we have to make the educational learning pathway fun and easy accessible as possible.

By making it fun and as easy as possible the students will learn and be much more creative in a model like this. We also need to involve the students more when it comes to areas that they will be using.

Slide 21

Please don't let me discourage you from using Mahara it may be perfect for your needs. And I am indeed a supporter and user of Mahara.

Being part of a faculty that has an array of differing educational programmes and students, there is always going to be differing needs required by programme and students alike. This is always going to be a challenging requirement especially when trying to accommodate a resource area that suits all.

It has been made evident that the student's requirements for areas such as these will require a different approach and style as well as functionality.

So one-disciplines requirements will be completely different from another. So why would we expect one ePortfolio site to suit all? By the pure nature of the differing students and the way they think has to be taken into consideration when embarking on such a resource as this ePortfolio site. Design students think in images, colour, shapes and form not in numbers, forms of written texts. Therefore the comparison between these different students needs another approach to construction and functionality.

When we embarked on this research project and the experimentation of existing ePortfolio sites it soon became apparent that students will not willingly engage with areas such as these if is too difficult to use, they simple give up which, is totally the opposite to good learning and teaching and what we are trying to establish.

At the start of my presentation I mentioned that this was a 360-degree journey and what has been extremely beneficial is finding out what is wrong and what is right and how we can improve upon these areas.

By working in this area we can now take back to our university ideas of how to improve on our ePortfolio sites.