

Transferability of e-Portfolios in Education

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Phase one Summary

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Background:

The first phase of this project, evaluating the current uses and designs of e-portfolios in Higher Education Teacher Training courses within the UK, has now been successfully completed. Phase one of the study identified practitioner's views of the successes and failures of implementing e-portfolios into the ITE curriculum on a large scale, in the process investigating the existing e-portfolio packages and tools currently used in education; the current use of e-portfolios in teacher training; and the present use of e-portfolios to support learner PDP. All HEIs currently offering Teacher Training within the UK were invited to take part in the study.

Results:

The findings of the survey outlined that the current initiative taking place in teacher training courses in HEIs across the UK is still very much in its infancy with only a third of respondents reporting that they are using some variant of e-portfolios. It is evident from the study that those practitioners who have engaged with this project are planning to integrate e-portfolios into the curriculum in the near future (52% of respondents). The most frequently reported software used to support e-portfolios identified by the respondents included; Moodle, PDP Progress, Blackboard, PebblePAD and free blogs and wikis.

The results from phase one suggest that respondents feel very positive with regard to the potential e-portfolios offer within teacher training programmes. However, it is clear that certain considerations need to be made at the planning stage in order to effectively implement a fully embedded e-portfolio system into the curriculum. Those considerations highlighted from the respondents are summarised as follows:

- I.T. training for students is imperative for all in the beginning of the course;
- Course Priorities – e-portfolios need to be fully embedded into the curriculum for all students and staff to understand the importance behind it;
- Student choice – in order to support the flexible nature of e-portfolios;
- Time consuming – instructors need to clearly outline the requirements of the e-portfolios to both students and other staff members;
- Instructors have strong aims of what they would like the e-portfolios to achieve;
- Technical implications – planning between instructors and administrative staff on technical support for e-portfolios needs to take place.

Furthermore, the issues raised highlighted anxieties about the gap between expectations and reality when implementing e-portfolios into the curriculum.

Issues of assessment raised by respondents highlighted a number of implications when using e-portfolios as an assessment tool. Reflections of the respondents included the time consuming nature of marking e-portfolios with reference particularly to unclear marking guidelines for the staff. Moreover, there is evidence that learning objectives held by students remain unclear and those students retain a lack of understanding of the task.

The respondents felt the use of e-portfolios in education provided more variety of the types of evidence students can include rather than the traditional portfolio model, while at the same time encouraging the students to develop IT skills which can be passed on to their students once in employment. Subsequently, due to the time spent on teaching

placement by students, developing their e-portfolio allowed them to upload video files, podcasts and pictures demonstrating examples of their acquired teaching skills which their tutor is able to review remotely. This presents the tutor with the opportunity to provide constant feedback to the student throughout their placement in a school. Furthermore this type of evidence promotes reflective learning and in turn creates reflective practitioners as the e-portfolio encourages the student to weave their teaching practice evidence together and identify the relationships which exist between them. In addition e-portfolios provide the students with documented evidence of their teaching skills which can be used to demonstrate the experience of the newly qualified teacher to future employers.

This is highlighted by the feedback from one respondent:

‘Increased awareness of teacher competences and level of progress in personal development as a teacher. Increased use of ICT for storing evidence. Better vocabulary when reflecting on experiences – awareness of what a reflective practitioner is!’

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Ultimately the success of implementation of e-portfolios within Education is limited to how deeply learners engage in the process. That is, they themselves need to identify the benefits and value of developing an e-portfolio (Siemens, 2004). It is important that time is allocated to the training of both staff and students in the use and understanding of the technology (Hall et al, 2005). While learners are interested in how the portfolio will help them gain employment, instructors are interested in promoting the learners professional development (Zeichner and Wray, 2001). In this way the transferability of a teaching portfolio, whether it is electronic or paper based, has caused friction between learners and instructors. In order for e-portfolios to be successfully implemented within the course programme they need to be fully embedded into the curriculum (Challis, 2005), and demonstrate clearly the purpose behind utilising e-portfolios within the education curriculum.

Next Steps:

Phase two of the project involves developing an understanding of staff and learner expectations and actuality of e-portfolios as a teaching and learning tool through:

- surveying students prior to their introduction to e-portfolios (in the beginning of the academic year) about their understanding of e-portfolios, their expectations and anxieties;
- ongoing contact with the learners through a project Blog;
- follow up survey in the second half of the year once students have engaged with e-portfolios;
- surveying staff on the use of e-portfolios.

Potential phase two partners who have been identified include University of Sussex, University of Aberdeen, University of Northampton, University of Exeter, and Newcastle University.

We are currently undertaking a review of various e-portfolio models including; pebblePAD, elgg, Ospi, rcampus, MyPDP (University of Dundee), Newcastle University’s e-portfolio (www.eportfolios.ac.uk) and Pathways CPD (University of Aberdeen).