

The implementation of Eduportfolio 3.0 in Canada and Greece: Advantages and Challenges for Future Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Our changing society, which is increasingly dependent both socially and economically on information and communication technologies (ICT), is generating new educational needs along with new teaching methods. New waves of students have fresh needs and expectations, which are particularly manifest in academic environments such as universities. Nowadays, higher education programs face ever-more challenges: the growing diversity of student profiles, the advent of new technologies, and the multiplicity of university courses. In connection with the primary theme of the ED-MEDIA conference, this presentation aims to (1) shed light on the development and features of an eportfolio system that would truly benefit everyone involved in education, both learners and educators; and (2) examine the eportfolio impact (advantages and challenges) on future teachers both in Canada and Greece.

FROM PORTFOLIO TO EPORTFOLIO

The portfolio was not initially used in the education sciences, let alone in teaching training. It was borrowed from the fields of architecture and the arts. For example, architects used portfolios to showcase their creations, abilities, and achievements. Similarly, the portfolio was used to trace the evolution of an artist's works and career.

The portfolio first appeared in educational circles in the late 1980s when it surfaced in the works of Paulson and Paulson (1990). Traditionally, it was a way to present a variety of information describing an individual's education and achievements. Starting in the early 1990s, the electronic portfolio began to assume new forms: an educational newsletter, a collection of written works or projects accomplished, and so on. Lately, the portfolio has been put to a variety of new uses, including assessment, accreditation, job search, skills certification, to name a few. The virtual encyclopedia Wikipedia reports that tens of millions of people—not just in the education field—use portfolios, and that in Great Britain alone, almost four million people possess a portfolio attesting to their various talents or demonstrating their skills and accomplishments.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, with the phenomenal growth of the Internet and its online contents¹, the portfolio was also marked by the information technology and communications era. From the portfolio sprang the eportfolio (*electronic portfolio*), which gained in popularity in educational and professional circles. For instance, many professions require their members to have a portfolio. Similar initiatives have led the European community to seriously contemplate implementing a European portfolio for all students. In fact, the European Language Portfolio was

¹ Note, for example, that the number of Internet surfers leaped from 16 million in 1996 to 700 million in 2006, and that over 9 million web pages are created every day.

developed and piloted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe. It was launched throughout the European Union during the European Year of Languages as a tool to support the development of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism².

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUPORTFOLIO

In an effort to promote the pedagogical use of e-portfolios in teacher education, a team at the University of Montreal, Canada, created an electronic portfolio called eduportfolio.org (Eduportfolio 3.0), specifically aimed at the educational community. The idea was to develop a user-friendly tool that would be embraced by the entire gamut of educational stakeholders, from university professors to preschool children.

To do so, a team of 50 professors and graduate students worked intensively to design and develop a tool that would directly respond to the needs of the educational community. Of course, computer specialists (programmers, webmasters, and network specialists) contributed their valuable input, but the project was led by the professors and learners. Moreover, we must emphasize that some ICT-phobic university professors and students were included on the team so that we could develop a tool that would appeal to the widest possible range of users. We should also clarify that the eduportfolio.org tool was designed to motivate university professors to incorporate ICT into their teaching.

The portfolio in education

We now address the portfolio in terms of its use in education in general, and more particularly, its pedagogical uses for university teaching. Originally used by artists to showcase their works and represent their career path, the portfolio has been co-opted for a number of further uses, including the following:

- Exposure function: The educational portfolio showcases students' learning and progress with examples of their achievements (Eyssautier-Bavay, 2004). Its progressive nature allows insight into both learning processes and outcomes, as it represents the students' learning path. This function can also be exploited at the professional level: job candidates can show potential employers how their skills have evolved.
- Assessment function: The portfolio is often used as a complementary assessment tool. Because it provides access to both process and outcomes, it can be used for both ongoing formative as well as summative assessments. It also provides teachers with an additional source of information with which to confirm or qualify their student appraisals. Furthermore, the portfolio can be used as a self-assessment tool to foster learner autonomy and responsibility for the learning process (Little, 2005). Some portfolios are accompanied by a self-assessment grid for this purpose.
- Reflective function: The above-mentioned self-assessment function is part of the reflective function, whereby students adopt a critical attitude toward their learning strategies. Aside from the use of predetermined self-assessment

² The Europass Language Passport, an electronic version of the standard Language Passport for adults developed jointly by the Council of Europe and the European Union, may be filled out online or downloaded from the Europass site at: <http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/>.

grids, students can develop a reflective attitude by writing frequent feedback reports (e.g., “What I have learned;” “My strengths and weaknesses;” “If I could do it over”) (Eyssautier-Bavay, 2004). Moreover, students must exercise their reflective capacity in order to select the most representative examples of their learning. The portfolio therefore departs from a simple archival record in that students must continuously select and input relevant, representative content.

- Social function: The portfolio also provides a social function when it acts as a mediation tool between learners, teachers, and parents. Importantly, it enables parents to gain a better understanding of their child’s learning path, which may encourage them to get more involved in the process.

Pedagogical use of the portfolio in university teaching

The above-presented functions of the portfolio demonstrate its strong potential to support learning in any subject, and particularly at university. The portfolio allows students to review their learning progress by consulting their portfolio and reflecting on how they have improved and advanced with time.

There are many ways to organize portfolio content. For instance, it could be arranged according to assessments of university subjects. To illustrate, following the competency-based approach that is widely used in Canada, a student’s portfolio could be organized to reflect the different competencies specified in the university program. Students could then select accomplishments that are directly related to the required competencies. This would also make it easier for professors to appraise the different competencies.

EDUPORTFOLIO.ORG FEATURES

Launched in October 2007, Eduportfolio.org is available in seven languages: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Catalan, Greek and Korean. Currently, it has 40,000 users in over 60 countries. Eduportfolio.org offers several benefits. First, it is extremely user-friendly, for both learners and professors. This aspect was central to the development of this tool to ensure that “lack of time” would not head the list of reasons cited for not using it. Our eportfolio uses electronic technology to warehouse a vast store of information (e.g., scanned documents, audio and video files, images and graphics). Eduportfolio.org handles a treasure trove of text, audio, and video files so that creative students and professors can unleash their imagination without technological constraints. Version 3.0 continues to innovate. For instance, it now offers the possibility of sharing portfolio content via social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), URL customization, and the possibility of creating multiple views to display various contents. For example, students can create a professional portfolio while maintaining an academic portfolio for their coursework. Users can also create multiple views in which to display both existing and newly added content. Version 3.0 supports a variety of content formats, and it facilitates information organization, exchange, and search. It also offers multiple protection levels (public, protected, and archived) and a group administration interface. It also includes several functionalities that actively promote the pedagogical integration of ICT in the classroom. For instance, with a few clicks, teachers can create portfolio sets for their students and access all their students’ portfolios on a Web page. Primary school teachers working

with very young students can even use a teacher interface to correct the content of the students' portfolios.

Note that eduportfolio.org is not rigidly structured. On the contrary, it is very flexible and adaptable so that students and teachers can create new sections and subsections within their individual portfolios. This function is particularly useful, and it clearly sets Eduportfolio.org apart from other, less flexible systems, in which students (and teachers) have to fill out a number of sections that are not necessarily relevant to their subject or project.

Portfolio owners (students and teachers) can also publicize or password-protect certain sections, or archive them to deny all access. Eduportfolio.org is interactive, a benefit that further demarcates it from similar tools. Visitors can post their comments about the various portfolio items (in text, audio, or video format). And with a simple click, users can select a graphic-enhanced model. Because Eduportfolio targets both teachers and students, the presentation models are designed to meet diverse needs. In addition, Eduportfolio includes high-tech functions such as automatic RSS (Really Simple Syndication) integration, which is used by the major online journal *newyorktimes.com*. It also includes a search engine so visitors can find the information they want quickly. Finally, eduportfolio.org is downloadable,³ so users can present their portfolios without Internet access.

THE EPORTFOLIO IMPACT

Since the inception of eportfolio, we have observed its impact on higher education students enrolled in a variety of departments and faculties. In this study, more precisely, we will present the results of an empirical study in which we compared the uses of Eduportfolio 3.0 among Greek and Canadian future teachers. In order to achieve our research objective, we conducted a study in which we used both online questionnaires and online (Skype) individual interviews. The results will help us understand both the advantages and challenges inherent to the use of Eduportfolio 3.0. Although the results of this preliminary investigation are still under analysis, it is noteworthy that the great majority of students and professors using this version of the tool found it "very user-friendly." Eduportfolio.org therefore appears to have had a substantially positive impact, on both graduate students and professors. Eduportfolio.org also appears to promote reflection (see Schön, 1994), a required skill in many professions.

CONCLUSION

By developing an electronic portfolio jointly with a team of professors and students, we have produced a tool that promises to be a contender, given the difficult challenges of pedagogical ICT integration. Of course, we have not presented all the preliminary results obtained, yet. However, the conclusions obtained to date, along with the growing popularity of similar tools in teacher education, offer a glimmer of hope that this tool will be used more regularly to train teachers in future.

³ The entire portfolio may be downloaded and saved on a USB drive or CD-ROM.

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