

Digital Portfolio: A Strategy for Teachers Professional Development

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Abstract—Teachers have to work with e-portfolio with their students. This is a very demanding task because they never were educated with e-portfolio themselves. Therefore a European Comenius project was submitted in 2005. In this approved project a whole week formation (april 2007) was offered to nineteen teachers from all over Europe. A year later they will meet again to see in what way the course has had effects on their work with e-portfolio and students. Most interesting to notice was that the basic ICT-skills of teachers are nowadays realized. However teachers are still busy with text and text-files. Rarely they uploaded multimedia, like e.g. photo's, video's, youtube-movies, ... in their e-portfolio. The essential element of an e-portfolio, the personal and professional development plan, that forms the backbone of the e-portfolio and offers the possibility to make the e-portfolio an effective learning instrument was unknown.

Index Terms—E-portfolio, ICT, PPDP (Personal and Professional Development Plan).

I. INTRODUCTION

During a contact seminar in Dublin (2004), several representatives of European institutions for higher education and training - APS (Associação de Professores de Sintra) (PT), The Hague University of Professional Education (NL), Turku School of Economics and Business Administration (FI), University of Helsinki (FI), VCLB-Organisation (BE), Katholieke Hogeschool Limburg (BE), St. John's College (Teacher Training College and Centre for Ecological Research & Education) (CZ) and the Psychology-faculty of the Lisbonne University (PT) - realised that teachers, lecturers and trainers have an urgent need for practical training in the use of e-portfolios. This resulted in an approved Comenius 2.1-project Digifolio, Digital Portfolio, as a strategy for teachers professional development (2005). Main elements of the project are offering an international European course and one year later meeting again with the participants in an international seminar to see what the effect of the course had been on the daily teaching practice.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Through the use of portfolios teachers and students can develop a shared understanding of what constitutes quality work and acquire a common language for evaluating students' accomplishments. The process of developing digital portfolios can foster and document evidence of competencies and guide long-term professional development and are recognized as a reflexive and

practive means to achieve a global vision of one's learning path with the advantage of increasing students' skills and competences in the use of ICT.

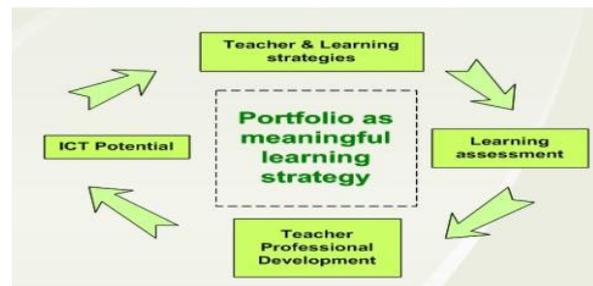


Figure 1. Elements of a portfolio as meaningful learning strategy (Costa, 2006)

In fact digital portfolios promote active participation of the learners by helping them to assume a sense of ownership and control. Web-based systems for computer supported collaborative learning enable constant processes of feedback and updating and set teacher and student communication on a closer, more flexible and more effective level. Although the process of creating a digital portfolio may be considered the crucial point, the student's responsibility as to content and form is also at stake, since the public display of his/her work will inevitably expose him/her before a wide range of readers/consumers/users.

III. OBJECTIVES

The consortium aims to develop materials that will help teachers all over Europe to integrate the new approaches in their own education and training practice, by learning by doing or by means of active learning. In the project the various elements are studied of how to realise the portfolio as a meaningful learning strategy. Then there are the necessary elements to set up a meaningful overall learning strategy by using digital portfolio, such as the development of specific teaching and learning strategies, digital didactics, learning assessment and learner's assessment, the teacher's own professional development and ICT-potential. This may be illustrated in figure 1.

So the main objective of the digifolio project is to use the educational possibilities of portfolios supported by ICT and give them a place in the teacher's professional development. This, as a consequence, will lead to the writing of new competence profiles, and the development of new approaches in the teaching and learning methodologies in order to achieve these competences. Accordingly, there will be a shift in the teacher's role since the focus will be on student centred rather than

teacher centred learning environments, with the subsequent increase of student responsibilities and motivation, giving empowerment to the student to manage the own learning experience.

The project also brings to light that European higher education faces the same educational changes, both in the 'old' and 'new' Europe, in the north as well as the south. The concept of the e-portfolio is known everywhere, and the need how to learn from it and how to integrate the e-portfolio in education systems is a major challenge for European education institutions everywhere. As is the matter how to motivate the teachers. This is confirmed in what was earlier researched and reported: the new ways of teaching and learning are very demanding, because the teachers have no or very little experience in this field and more often than not are they unable to reflect on their own often outdated training (Peters, 2000). Therefore this Comenius project does not only focus on theoretical elements alone, such as developing a common knowledge database on the theory of portfolio usage based on research. The main objective will rather address the practical training issues that matter right now. The objective is to guide and counsel European teachers to develop an own e-portfolio, an activity which may serve as the basis and the inspiration for an applied learning strategy to further their own professional growth. A specific objective is that the teachers will experience both the benefits and the difficulties their own students experience when using an e-portfolio and PPDP.

IV. OUTCOMES

Meanwhile one of the most important outcomes of the project, namely the organisation of an international course to learn teachers to develop and maintain a digital portfolio to underbuilt their professional development took place in Albufeira (P) in April 2007, with 19 participants from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey.

One of the objectives of the course was also to help participants to build out an e-portfolio that will be maintained until may 2008. In May 2008, participants will have the possibility to meet each other again in Helsinki and present the results of working and learning one year with an e-portfolio. So not only the product – the e-portfolio – on its own, but more important the process of working and learning with an e-portfolio is an objective.

The main parts of the course were:

- introduction into new ICT-technologies,
- development of an e-portfolio, including a PPDP,
- workshop on collecting and editing video evidences,
- workshop on network building and e-collaboration.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Main conclusions of the one week formation were that teachers have sufficient basic ICT-skills to work with ICT (computer, wordprocessing, using internet & e-mail). However it was noticed that the knowledge of **new** ICT-technologies as e.g. WEB 2.0 applications were not sufficiently known for the purpose of using these technologies to develop and maintain the e-portfolio and its content.

The concept of a personal and professional development plan was rather new for the participants. This learned us that the concept of an e-portfolio as a map for

gathering information and results was well known, but not the strategy to learn out of the gathered elements of the e-portfolio. Also the workshop about video-editing learned us that teachers have good basic ICT-skills, but only oriented to wordprocessing. One of the conclusions after this training week was that e-portfolio's will be filled mainly by texts. This won't have to be a problem, but makes the e-portfolio-content rather poor. ICT as multimedia-tool gives just an extra possibility to collect other than written materials. Also the workshop on collaboration and networking showed us that participants know the internet, and how to use it, but e.g. are not aware of applications as slide-share, netvibes, eduspaces, elgg, zoho, del.icio.us, blogs, ... what has a rather negative effect on the cooperation between teachers on how to develop and how to learn from each other, what is just motivated by the socio-constructivistic learning theory and asked from students.

Although the digifolio-project has still one year to go, some advices to increase an efficient use of e-portfolios for teachers, and as a consequence also for teachers in relation to their students, can already be formulated:

- don't focus too much on the e-portfolio itself, but focus mainly and the PPDP.
- assessment can be one goal of using an e-portfolio, but using the e-portfolio as a learning strategy is also very important.
- teachers'ICT-skills are good till very good, but an efficient e-portfolio can contain more than text. Think about ICT-formations for teachers as video-editing, presentations, ...
- introduce WEB 2.0-applications, because they can offer teachers the necessary tools for collaboration and learning from each other.

Although from a theoretical point of view e-portfolio is very promising, it is noticed in practice that a lot of formations, cooperation and study-work has to be done until effective and efficient learning from an e-portfolio can be realized on a larger scale.

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