

A Narrative Biographical Study of Faculty Collaboration in E-Portfolio Development

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ABSTRACT

Since an e-portfolio system was adapted at the authors' college, the faculty has been encouraged to use e-portfolios in various areas from professional development to instructional purposes. In this paper, they describe two cases of faculty to discuss how they became collaborative partners who support each other in conceptualizing e-portfolios as an instructional tool, designing learning activities for graduate courses, and they reflect on their own practices for enhancing teaching and learning based on the results from interviews, reflective essays, questionnaires and participation in broader learning communities, and a review of their signature e-portfolio assignments. Additionally, they argue how broader teamwork at the college level helped them as faculty to continue their efforts, often supported by the administration. In conclusion, the importance of faculty partnership as well as a continuous support system for faculty in adapting a new technology will be discussed.

KEYWORDS

E-Portfolio, Faculty Collaboration, Professional Development, Technology Adaptation

INTRODUCTION

As technology is considered indispensable in current society, its pedagogical use has become one of the crucial foci in education (Buckingham, 2003; Cable in the Classroom, 2006, November; Marsh & Millard, 2000; Potter, 2005). For teachers to use technology to enhance their growth and adopt the technology for student learning, they must build knowledge and critical perspectives on using technology, beyond acquiring skills of using it (Kellner & Share, 2007; Leu & Zawilinski, 2007; Semali, 2003). The mere presence of technology in educational settings does not mean they are critically assessed and integrated into teaching and learning (Cuban, 2001; Kist, 2005). Therefore, it is important to support teachers to learn essential knowledge and develop perspectives on new technology for their teaching.

While there have been discussions and research on the use of e-Portfolios in higher education for student learning and growth (Lin, 2008; Young, 2002) as well as assessments (Shephard, 2009; Liu, Zhuo, & Yuan, 2004), few research on faculty and professional development is available, especially addressing challenges in using e-Portfolios for teaching and research (Luera, 2016; Hyland, 2012). In order to effectively support faculty in learning new technology, it is imperative to understand the experiences of faculty in the process. In this paper, we examine our own experiences in the process of learning and implementing an e-Portfolio system. Specifically, we, two faculty at a mid-sized college

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near a metropolitan area, will narrate our experiences when we explored the e-Portfolio, applying it to their teaching and professional development. We will discuss how our professional partnership helped us to go through the important steps in learning, planning, and applying technology to our teaching. Additionally, we will explain how our participation in a larger faculty learning community which was also supported by the college administration has helped us to grow as e-Portfolio users, reflective practitioners, and researchers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adaptation of e-Portfolios in Higher Education

Many higher education institutions have adapted e-Portfolios for various purposes, as Cohen (2008) assesses. Some universities and colleges encourage students to make showcase e-Portfolios to highlight their strengths and demonstrate core abilities in academic work as well as from their experiences (e.g., University of Michigan, University of Iowa), and other institutions focus more on administrative purposes including marketing and the support of faculty development and teaching (e.g., Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Virginia Tech).

Current college students are recognized as those who are ready for creating and compiling work on computers and digital networking (Ciocco & Holtzman, 2008). With web-based e-Portfolios such as Taskstream, their work will be digitized, stored, and readily accessible for future presentation to potential employers. More importantly, using e-Portfolios, students can share their creative work and documented experiences with faculty or peers who are willing to provide feedback moreover, they could do a self-assessment of their learning and growth, which usually happens in a timely or even an instant manner. Additionally, digitalized student work goes beyond the form of a word document, to include multi-media formats such as slide shows, digital videos, and links to external resources.

Not only for students but also for faculty, e-Portfolios can be a useful tool. With the right support system, faculty can overcome the limitation of time and space and monitor the progress of students over a course or a program, which allows ongoing feedback and evaluation (Ciocco & Holtzman, 2008). In short, both faculty and students can benefit from making and sharing e-Portfolios because it allows and encourages self-assessment, timely feedback, reflection, improvements over time, and verification of learning and growth. In a phenomenological study examining faculty points of view in using e-Portfolios, Zeller and Mudrey (2007) found out that faculty in different fields implement them for different purposes, but there was a common agreement on the importance of having “clarity of purpose, coaching students in the reflective process, providing feedback throughout the process, addressing technological issues and evaluating whether a course is well suited for a portfolio” (p. 426). They, therefore, argued that the role of faculty is very critical in making the e-Portfolio assignment meaningful and purposeful.

Faculty Collaboration and Professional Development

Faculty in higher education need opportunities for professional development in an era of rapid and continuous change. However, as most higher education institutions have limited resources available for their faculty, collaboration among faculty is seen as a vital tool to motivate faculty learning and promote professional development. As Baldwin (1990) identifies, a substantially larger percentage of faculty saw collaboration among faculty as vital in various academic activities. More importantly, collaboration is a key to successful initiatives in areas of rapid change such as technology because collaborative faculty development enables individual faculty to step out of their comfort zones and learn how to work productively in tandem with others (Baldwin & Chang, 2007). Therefore, collaboration is the process as “an effective interpersonal process that facilitates the achievement of goals that cannot be reached when individual professionals act on their own” (Bronstein, 2003, p.299). Higher educational institutions can greatly benefit from collaborative faculty development as it can help to

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