

## Chapter 98

# Creating an Authentic Space for a Private and Public Self through E-Portfolios

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### ABSTRACT

*The chapter reports work that investigated the use of e-portfolios developed by teaching practitioners as part of an award-bearing academic development programme in the UK. The project aimed to enable teaching practitioners to access and gain familiarity with pedagogically sound e-portfolio opportunities. The project was designed to foster a reflective approach, promote critical thinking focused on learning and teaching, and enhance continuing professional development. The outcomes of this project are discussed in terms of an appreciation of e-assessment by the teaching practitioners involved, recommendations for an e-portfolio environment that uses technology enhanced learning resources to foster a reflective approach that can enable and enhance continuous professional development for academic staff.*

### ASSESSING LEARNING THROUGH PORTFOLIOS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

As use of technology enhanced learning has developed in higher education, so too has the opportunity for e-assessment. In its broadest sense e-assessment involves the use of informa-

tion and communication technologies for any assessment activity. As Gipps (2005, p.174) has argued, “if teaching and its associated resources become electronic, then assessment too will need to take that route, to ensure alignment between the modes of teaching and assessment”. However, this ‘constructive alignment’ (Biggs, 1999) and its rationale need to be based on sound pedagogy rather than merely the availability of e-assessment software which many believe does not occur

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(Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004). There is a danger that without such, the flexibility and full facility offered by electronic resources may remain largely unfulfilled, and many argue that has already been evident (Reynolds & Patton, 2012). Therefore it is important that before including technologies in teaching that teachers have an opportunity to understand and experience their application for themselves (Tomei, 2011; Rienties et al, 2012).

In the UK, stimulated by a series of national policies (Dearing Report, 1997; HEFCE, 2003; Browne Report, 2010), the pressure on academic staff to demonstrate continuing professional development in teaching has grown. Whilst Becher (1996) has shown that academic staff recognise a range of development activities, such as attending courses and networking, demonstrating how any new knowledge gained from these engagements has informed practice has remained problematic (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004). The portfolio, already used in a range of professions to demonstrate the maintenance and development of learning (Beetham, 2005), has increasingly been turned to by those in higher education in an effort to resolve this difficulty. The rationale for using portfolios for assessment of academic practice has been further encouraged by the recent framework of national professional standards that the UK's Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2011) has developed. For teaching practitioners in the UK, the HEA has been the body that accredits teaching and their focus has increasingly been on methods to demonstrate continuing professional development following the format used by a range of professional accreditation organisations.

The motivation for academics to engage in the construction of a portfolio may however be complicated by a range of factors. First, engagement may be affected by the extent to which the portfolio is seen by an individual to support career progression. In all institutions, but in particular research-led universities, reflective approaches towards teaching are often overlooked because the perception is that career progression is more

dependent on research output than evidence related to teaching performance (Moses, 1986; Young, 2006; Parker, 2008). Second, as many disciplines are unfamiliar with the concept of a portfolio there are questions over the validity of an approach that requires practitioners to understand and develop a discourse that may be unrecognisable within their own discipline (Challis, 2005). This raises concerns over the authenticity that can be achieved. Even in disciplines where portfolios are considered an effective tool for promoting continuing professional development and demonstration of competence, they can sometimes be little more than a cumulative collection of loosely connected experiences. For those unfamiliar with the construction of a portfolio the task is even more challenging.

Despite these concerns, it is clear that the use of portfolios as an assessment tool is increasing, particularly in teacher training programmes. A 2002 study of education programmes found that 89% of the respondents used portfolios in their outcomes assessments (Salzman, Denner & Harris, 2002). It is therefore important to consider how portfolios are utilized in relation to frameworks of formative and summative assessment. Roberts et al. (2002) suggest that in order to optimise reliability they should be carefully introduced to well-prepared learners and should be of uniform content, although many would argue that this potentially limits the creativity that exponents of portfolios argue that can bring. Cambridge (2012) suggests that the uniformity may actually lessen the authenticity and herein lies one major challenge. The portfolio typically provides an opportunity to assemble a number of artifacts for a specific audience (Garrett, 2011). When you offer the portfolio to different audiences due to assessment, the notion of privacy is removed and this is likely to influence how an individual develops his/her artifacts and displays them. Although recent research has suggested that an e-portfolio has potential as an effective assessment tool (Barbera, 2009; Wang, 2009), Cotterill et al (2005) warn that there may

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