

## Chapter 33

# Individual E–Portfolios: Can a Classic Tool for Teachers and Students be Merged with Web 2.0 Tools for Reflective Learning?

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### ABSTRACT

*Electronic portfolios experienced a surge of public interest and funding from 1999 to 2003, but implementation of programs involving the utilization of this tool has been mixed since then. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the current practices related to the use of e-portfolios and to examine some of the latest Web 2.0 tools with the goal of assessing their potential for facilitating possible implementation of e-portfolios. First, we examine the historic concept of portfolios in general and of the e-portfolio in particular within the context of teacher education. Then, we look at the gaps between theory and practice in regard to the utilization of e-portfolios and explore some of the proposed reasons for these gaps. Characteristics of existing e-portfolio tools and emerging Web 2.0 tools are examined for their potential in helping to close these gaps and in facilitating the reflective power of e-portfolios. Finally, we suggest options for students, teachers and administrators in search of sticky and portable e-portfolio solutions.*

### INTRODUCTION

More than a decade ago, Shulman (1998), a pioneer in the development of portfolios, penned an interesting “Larry Cuban” story:

*At the time of his promotion to full professor at Stanford, Larry asked if he could refuse tenure.*

*This, of course, created a crisis in the provost’s office. The prompt reply was, “No.” Larry argued: “I don’t want tenure because as soon as you give me tenure, you give up your obligation to provide me with an intelligent review of my work. I refuse to work in an organization that does not take responsibility for reviewing the quality of my work regularly and providing me feedback on it.” After*

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*an exchange of letters, Larry accepted tenure and, in turn, had a letter put in his file signed by the dean and the provost, saying that every 5 years, as a full professor, he would receive a careful review of his work by colleagues (p. 32).*

Significantly, Cuban's desire to have his work reviewed on a regular basis is generally considered one of the primary reasons why portfolios came to be regarded as useful tools in educational environments. Another reason for using portfolios is the fact that they serve as a means or vehicle for self-reflection and self-organization of personal achievement. A third important reason for creating portfolios is pave the way for beginning teachers to provide a thorough and concrete record that supports their success in meeting state standards for performance in their fields (Strudler & Wetzel, 2005). Due to the limitations of the paper-based portfolio and the emergence of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, the format of portfolios has been moving in the direction of portable convenience and efficiency for students, faculty, and administrators, which will ultimately result in shifting to a digital world under the tag of e-portfolios (Barlett & Sherry, 2004; Woodward & Bablohy, 2004).

However, unresolved challenges still exist due to the disparity between institutions' ideal aims and students' practice. Students tend to consider e-portfolios as a one-time assignment that they have to complete in order to graduate. For example, in a quasi-experimental study with 75 students, Arnold and Vito (2007) reported that 93.3% of the students did not update their e-portfolios once they completed them. Wiseman (2004) found that the process of preparing e-portfolios might become mechanical, rather than stimulating students' reflection and critical thinking. As Jafari (2006) succinctly states, "the current e-portfolio solutions and systems are not 'sticky' to the end users" meaning that the e-portfolio is potentially essential enough to students' success to justify that students continue to come back to their online work (p. xxxiv).

Due to the introduction of more advanced and effective Web 2.0 tools, new possibilities are in reach for e-portfolios (O'relly, 2005; Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008). By examining the current research data and results, the authors of this article found that little research has been done regarding the connection between the traditional idea of portfolios and the obvious opportunities for the application and utilization of e-portfolios in an educational context (Ritzhaupt, Singh, Seyferth, & Dedrick, 2008). In addition, there has been very little follow up research on the possible "stickiness" of e-portfolio that would serve either to validate or to mitigate the work of Barrett, who initiated research studies on whether Web 2.0 tools can be an alternative form of e-portfolios (Barrett, 2004; Jafari, 2004).

Thus, we propose to examine in this chapter the connection between the classic concept of portfolios and the effective utilization of e-portfolios through Web 2.0 tools. We also describe issues of stickiness as they apply to e-portfolios and Web 2.0 tools, as well as the feasibility of their use in creating e-portfolios in pre-service teacher education contexts. In short, we discuss how changes in the literature, practice, and Web 2.0 tools since 2004 are influencing e-portfolio development.

## **DEFINING THE PORTFOLIO AND E-PORTFOLIO**

The original meaning of portfolio can be examined through the analysis of the structure of the term: "port" means "to carry"; "folio" or "folios" pertains to pages or sheets of paper. Etymologically speaking, the meaning of portfolio refers to a portable case for carrying loose papers or prints (Avraamidou & Zembal-Saul, 2002). The concept of portfolios is not a new one, especially in other professions. Artists collect their best work samples into "portfolios" for presentations. Teachers develop teaching "portfolios" for professional development. Students create their "portfolios" in

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