Chapter 28
Showing a Human and Professional Face to the World:
An ePortfolio Design Strategy for a Sense of Self

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ABSTRACT

The online learning space can appear to be cold and impersonal for Higher Education students. The aim of this chapter is to show the progress of a teaching and learning design using a "sense of self" model, which is being used in ePortfolio creation in two Higher Education institutions. This chapter demonstrates that an ePortfolio can be a tool for showcasing students' levels of achievement in regard to a "sense of self". The authors intend that the positive results from the outcomes of the two pedagogic approaches to the ePortfolio process should encourage other users of ePortfolio to engage with flexible and creative approaches to the production of showcase and reflective ePortfolios with students at all phases of a degree program. Academics can positively affect the human connections between students and teachers, emerging professionals and the profession, by encouraging multi-faceted aspects within an ePortfolio as the interface between the online and the professional world.

INTRODUCTION

There are the two major approaches to implementing e-portfolios, which could be represented by Janus, the Roman god of gates and doors, beginnings and endings, and hence represented with a double-faced head, each looking in opposite directions. (Barrett, 2009)

The popularity of ePortfolios, electronic documents providing an interface between Higher Education study and the professional workplace, is increasing (Hallam et al., 2008, p.32). Advances in the online environment mean that a student can use a multitude of digital artefacts to add a human and individual dimension to their online persona. Students can project a human face into the electronic environment in order to look backwards and forwards, reflecting on past learning as well as visualizing themselves in their chosen profession.

The online or virtual learning space can appear to be a cold and impersonal place for Higher Education students when contrasted with the perceived attributes of a physical face-to-face environment. Students have reported feeling isolated in the online environment when left without interaction from others in tasks or projects that have not been designed with due care (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012; Shepherd & Bolliger, 2011). In response, there is a growing body of research into how to design an effective Higher Education degree program, specifically into how to create an effective ePortfolio for students straddling the years between study and profession to make them more employable (Pellicone & Dixon, 2008; Wakimoto & Lewis, 2014). Particular strategies in design can enhance a student's online "presence", and enable them to project themselves as having personable traits that are desirable to employers. Strategies for learning that include the use of visual images, such as metaphors or symbols, can ensure students fully communicate ideas and intentions to a prospective viewer of the ePortfolio. The authors have been working with students engaged in ePortfolio design in two Australian Universities where ePortfolios are created for different purposes at various points in a degree program. A common aspect of their embedded designs, the use of metaphor and symbols, has been shown to develop the students' individual persona, which assists in projecting themselves into their future profession.

This chapter looks at humanizing the online environment from the point of view of students who, in particular, are preparing for a professional world and need to report on their involvement in the online learning space. It explicitly investigates how the emerging professional may engage with peers, teachers, and employers through the creation of an electronic ePortfolio, and by using their own voice through a learning process, using images and metaphors in order to personalize their online presence.

After a short review of the literature informing ePortfolio use in the two Higher Education Institutions, the assessment tasks designed by the authors from each of the degree program is described. These include:

- Relating the Sense of Self model (Rowley & Munday, 2014) to student learning;
- Describing the learning design for students to use metaphors and symbols that enable personalizing of their ePortfolios; and
- Reporting on the two research studies that revealed the students perspectives of professional "face".

The effective outcomes of the ePortfolio tasks and research will also be discussed. These include:

- Describing the benefit to professional self-development through engaging in ePortfolio process;
- Alignment of employability, learning, and graduate capabilities for managing professional development;
- Encouraging the use of more visual and other alternative types of documentation in ePortfolios;
- Personalizing the virtual learning space for students;
- Flexibility of communication with all stakeholders (peers, teachers, employers); and

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