

An Exploratory Study of Incorporating Blogfolios Into a College Writing Course

Jerry Chih-Yuan Sun, Institute of Education, National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu, Taiwan

Geoffrey Middlebrook, The Writing Program, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA

Otto Khera, College of Education, Curriculum and Instruction, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, USA

Ho-Yuan Chen, Center for Teacher Education, Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the effectiveness of the customized blog and eportfolio (“blogfolio”) platform, a hybrid tool for teaching advanced undergraduate writing courses at a large research universities in the southwestern U.S. By combining a blogfolio platform and academic writing, this article promotes the development of students’ academic community identity and generates a better sense of identity and commitment among them towards their future career in their professional disciplines. The authors reviewed and synthesized articles and theories relevant to educational blogging and digital portfolios. In addition, the authors examined the impacts of the blogfolio on student learning and professional development based on data collected from surveys, blog entries, and server activity logs.

KEYWORDS

Blogfolio, Career Goal, Eportfolio, Learning

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the customized blog and eportfolio (“blogfolio”) platform (Middlebrook & Sun, 2013), relying on the Movable Type software and designed by the information technology group at a large research university in the southwestern U.S. This university’s “blogfolio” is a web-based blog and digital portfolio platform, and its design concept was to facilitate students’ skills in research, writing, and critical thinking; enhance students’ information sharing, reputation building, and personal expression; and advance students’ academic and career goals.

There has been much work done on Web-based portfolios and online learning in higher education (Cambridge, Cambridge, & Yancey, 2008; Jafari & Kaufman, 2006; Sun & Rueda, 2012; Walsh, Sun, & Riconscente, 2011). However, little has been devoted to assessing what some have called the “next generation” of e-portfolios that merge social networking feature sets like blogging with an online evidence showroom. With a better understanding of how the blogfolio influenced students’ processes and products, the results of this study can be translated into strategies for creating a learning environment that can enhance the professional identity more effectively at the undergraduate level and beyond.

This study investigated the impact of the blogfolio on student learning and professional development as it related to a learner-centered environment that encouraged a collaborative mode

DOI: 10.4018/IJOPCD.2018040101

of learning. The study investigated whether use of the blogfolio helped students to confirm their post-graduate plans and career goals, or enabled students to establish and project a scholarly and professional identity online that advanced their academic and career goals. As a preliminary study, this paper introduces a new teaching method to the writing courses, utilizing blogfolios to encourage students to continue writing academic articles, and discuss and interact with the commenters. With dynamic and open eportfolios, the platform is expected to facilitate the students' reflection on their careers, rather than simply digitalizing their personal portfolio and storing it on an online platform. Therefore, this study aims to combine a blogfolio platform and academic writing to assist students in developing their academic community identity and generating a deeper professional identity and commitment to their future career. The overarching research questions of this study are:

1. How do blogfolios promote students' identity with regard to their profession in advanced writing courses?
2. What might students' perceived usefulness of blogfolios be?

FACULTY EXPERIENCES IN USING BLOGS OR EPORTFOLIOS

In recent years, according to the Campus Computing Project, there has been a tripling of American colleges and universities utilizing eportfolios (Bass & Eynon, 2009). However, the mechanisms for establishing an eportfolio system that allow for student blogging and that are, in the words of Jafari (2004), "sticky" or actually embraced by users (p. 38), have not yet been widely addressed in the higher education literature. Though limited in scope, the literature that does exist is nevertheless revealing. For instance, Lenhart et al. (2008) discovered that pre-university teens who blog are "prolific writers online and offline," as well as cognizant of the importance of writing to their success in later life (p. v). Considering its promise, a growing cohort of academicians has begun to grasp what may be possible with an educative use of the blog apparatus. Maloney (2007) among them refers to the "stars of the second-generation Web," including blogs, as consistent with "student-centered and active-learning models" (p. B26), whereas Burgess (2006) concludes that if wisely deployed blogs can "contribute to a reconceptualization of students as critical, collaborative, and creative participants in the social construction of knowledge" (p. 105), and may additionally assist in "developing literacies and competencies that are appropriate for the technological and social environments in which we all now work" (p. 106). Hsu and Wang (2010) investigated how using blogs in the college developmental reading course affect students' reading comprehension and learning motivation. Although results showed that blogging did not improve student digital literacies and motivation, it increased the retention rate and helped students build a strong sense of learning community. It is therefore not surprising that some, such as Calderón and Buentello (2006), along with Stefani, Mason, and Pegler (2007), take the position that combining blogs with eportfolios "could be truly transformative for students" (p. 140).

AN OVERVIEW OF EPORTFOLIOS

An eportfolio is a centralized management system of all digitalized work or learning outcomes, which enables the integration of an individual's performance in an electronic environment to ensure swift understanding of information related to the individual's performance, thereby promoting improvement and continuous progress (Middlebrook & Sun, 2013). Eportfolios have been used and investigated in various contexts, particularly in the field of social work, where the administrators integrated students' learning experiences with professional development (Alvarez & Moxley, 2004; Fitch, Reed, Peet, & Tolman, 2008). Researchers identified benefits and usage of an eportfolio. For examples, an eportfolio helps students organize their personal lives (Waters, 2008), acts as a content management system that collects, shares, and presents students' learning outcome (Fitch et al., 2008),

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