

Chapter II

ePortfolios—Beyond Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on how ePortfolios: (1) shift the locus of control from instructor to student, (2) change curriculum design, and (3) develop social capital. Our contention is that as ePortfolio use gains momentum, the curricula will be scrutinized by persons both in and out of academia, and will evolve to adapt. As business, industry, the arts, government, and so forth influence and shape what is to be assessed, social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is created, thus opening doors for new graduates entering their profession. Therefore, ePortfolios are not only tools for assessing learning and teaching, but more importantly they promote reform of the traditional educational system, bridge the divide between the academy and society, and develop social capital for the best interest of the global community.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of Web technology has brought about the ePortfolio, which is not only an effective way to assess student learning, but it is also a vehicle for knowledge transmission for career building (Napper & Barrett, 2004). This chapter focuses on three main areas: (1) how ePortfolios shift the locus of control—explaining the transfer of learning from being teacher-

centric to student-centric; (2) how ePortfolios change curriculum design—covering the changes in the curriculum and instruction that will take place to match the collaborative learning promoted through ePortfolios; and (3) how ePortfolios develop social capital—addressing the important impact of ePortfolios on students' social awareness and development of social capital, defined by Bourdieu (1986) as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources

which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (pp. 248-249).

In her review of the literature on portfolio assessment, Brown (2002) classifies portfolios as either “capstone experience” portfolios, considered the student’s best work, or “process or learning” portfolios, which document cognitive growth and transference of learning to the workplace. This chapter will concentrate on the latter type, the process or learning portfolio, and the potential it has in its modern form, the ePortfolio.

ePORTFOLIOS SHIFTING THE LOCUS OF CONTROL

Dynamic Student Body

For traditional-age students (those in the 18- to 24-year-old range), ePortfolios can help them make professional connections, allow them to gain experience and understand societal needs, and encourage their lifelong learning. As society moves from the “Second Wave,” the Industrial Revolution, and enters the “Third Wave,” the Information Age, traditional-age students will more than likely experience many careers and will have to constantly learn new information and translate that information into knowledge (Toffler, 1980). Using ePortfolios will help these students document their career and learning experiences.

The second group of students to benefit is full-time working students. Aslanian (2001) has found that approximately “42% of all students at both private and public institutions are age 25 or older” (p. 4). Factors that contribute to older students returning to higher education are “the growth of continuing education programs, economic necessity, the rapidly changing job mar-

ket, changes in the economy, and the simple aging of student populations” (Bishop & Spake, 2003, p. 374). ePortfolios can better assess students with work and life experiences.

Another group returning to college and university are baby boomer (persons born in the United States between 1946 and 1964) retirees who are living longer due to advancements in health and medicine. Second (or even third) careers, soft-skills (computer/technical) training, or education-for-enjoyment will draw pensioners back to higher education, and their life and work experiences will require a different type of assessment. Given these demographic changes, ePortfolios appropriately demonstrate the learning of these non-traditional students and offer them the opportunity to reflect on their life and work.

Adult Learners’ Characteristics

How will institutions of higher education be able to address the learning needs of traditional-age students, working students, and retired students? In his andragogical theory, Knowles (1980) summarizes four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions on which traditional pedagogy is premised. He states that as individuals mature:

1. their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being;
2. they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning;
3. their readiness to learn becomes oriented to the development tasks of their social roles; and
4. their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from

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