Portfolio assessment: The learner perspective
Orna Farrell Dublin Business School

Introduction

- Portfolio assessment can be a variety of purposes: formative and summative assessment, personal development, demonstrating achievement and supporting learning.
- Assessment has a significant influence on student learning. According to Gibb (2002) “assessment makes more difference to the way students spend their time, focus their effort, and perform, than any other aspect of the course they study, including the teaching.” How do learners perceive portfolio assessment and its effect on their learning?
- Portfolio development can improve learners’ “understanding of self and the curriculum, engage and motivate learners, both personal and learning, and promote reflective practice.” (JSS 2008). What is the learner perspective on the benefits of portfolio development?
- Electronic portfolio vs. Paper-based portfolio: new learning method or new presentation format?

Context of Use: Electronic portfolio vs. Paper based portfolio

- The digitalisation of portfolios has changed the use and potential of portfolios as assessment methods and personal development tools.
- This generation of learners are digital natives rather than immigrants.
- In order to create multi literate learners it is essential to embed technology into learning, teaching and curriculum.

“People who are multi literate can express themselves and make sense of the world through multiple modes: linguistic, visual, aural, gestural” (New London Group 1996).
- New technology is exciting and opens new contexts for learning and teaching however it is the learning activities and environment created by the use of an e-portfolio that are beneficial to education rather than the technology itself.
- A majority of the learners were in favour of electronic portfolios rather than paper based portfolios.
- In the qualitative interviews, the technological functionality of the e-portfolios emerged as one of the strongest themes.

“"When you look at the overall picture together, the sum of the parts were a lot more powerful than the parts alone”

Learning & reflection

- Portfolio assessment can encourage reflection and metacognition
- The process of reflection “deepens learning and enhances practice. The act of reflecting is one which causes us to make sense of what we have learned, why we have learned it, and how that particular increment of learning took place.” (Stake 2007).
- The learners from the three groups were asked an open question “How did you use your portfolio to think about your learning?”
- The responses centred around two key themes: learning styles and consideration of “how I learn”
- Learning styles: “it showed me my learning style”
- How I learn: “It helped me analyse the type of learner that I am, it gave a new perspective on how I go about studying or doing assignments”
- In the interviews, two further themes emerged: the personalisation of the portfolio and the holistic process of making the portfolio.
- The personalisation of an assessment can increase the learner engagement with the process “I thought I had an interesting story to tell, it was something different, everybody will be different but I thought there was a fair bit of unique stuff in my title story”
- Creating links between topics: and creating a holistic picture is an important critical skill: one participant found that the portfolio “eliminated gaps and gave a nice flow to the whole thing”.
- A minority of learners thought that they had learned nothing and that the process was pointless.

Methods

- A multi-method study: Three quantitative surveys supported by two qualitative interviews
- The sample was drawn from three small pilot projects examining the applications of electronic portfolios for assessment and personal development
- Three online questionnaires were conducted using www.surveymonkey.com, using a mixture of likert scale questions and a series of open-ended questions which the participants could and comments regarding their experience of portfolio assessment. These comments were collated and compared with the interviews.
- Supporting qualitative interviews were used to gain more indepth feedback from the groups. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis so it is an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. (Ryan & Morse 2008) Four themes were identified: e-portfolio functionality, personalisation, motivation and reflection and learning.
- As the sample sizes are small and the participants and purposes of the portfolios are very diverse, this study presents its findings with the aim of reflecting the learner experience of portfolio assessment.

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<th>Group</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Summative assessment &amp; personal development</td>
<td>E-portfolio or paper based</td>
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<td>e-portfolio</td>
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<td>American study abroad</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Summative assessment</td>
<td>e-portfolio</td>
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Assessment

The learners opinions on portfolio assessment varied and were effected by the purpose of the portfolio.

Positive features identified were:
- Personalisation
- Stimulates creativity
- Allows for new ways of presenting work
- Interacting and enjoyable approach assessment method

Negative features identified were:
- Time consuming
- Not incrementally enough

References


A model of e-portfolio based learning, adapted from Kolb (1984)