Chapter XXI

Toward a Framework/Data Model: From ePortfolio Thinking to Folio Culture

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ABSTRACT

In this exploratory contribution, the author proposes a framework for re-mapping ePortfolio research around an emergent model of engagement with information. Through an anthropological lens, he casts ePortfolio implementation within communities of practice in complex networks of actors, artifacts, and flows. His work surveys extant approaches in the ePortfolio research, identifying gaps in the literature, towards an inclusive framework around a new model reflecting the changing relationship with information, grounding the theorizing in his practice, designing and teaching online graduate courses in Cultural and New Media Studies in Education.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE, LOGIC, AND METHOD

This exploratory contribution sits at the intersection of: (1) research investigating implications over applications of technology; (2) background in cognitive sciences/design; (3) experience with initial implementation of computers into the schools; (4) cybercultural studies, artificial intelligence (AI), artificial life (AL), and cybernetics; and (5) action research with implementing ePortfolios in online learning communities. Concerned with gaps in the literature, that we might be forgetting lessons we learned when we first implemented computers into the schools, with an appreciation of the changing ways we are relating to each other around information, this chapter attempts to theorize a conceptual framework and data model that speaks to these concerns.

When conducting literature reviews on a topic, among work that might at first appear as
disparate, it is possible to find commonality. ePortfolio literature is, in this respect, no different. We can group disparate ePortfolio literatures to arrive at broader categories that unfold a measure of homogeneity across approaches. In what follows, I will draw upon this principle to point to an emphasis on applications in the ePortfolio literature, with arguably, consequential gaps for addressing implications. Rather than embark on an exhaustive review to support my claim of gaps in the literature, and my rationale for remapping the field, and theorizing an inclusive framework and model, I adopt a modest approach that samples, in searching for patterns of homogeneity across what appears initially as different approaches to ePortfolio research.

I began with select surveys introducing the basics of portfolios (Easley & Mitchell, 2003; Vancouver School Board, 1993), portfolios as discovery (Deen, 1993), portfolios in terms of self-directed inquiry (Grant & Huebner, 1998), teachers’ voices in applying portfolios in the classroom (Smith & Ylvisaker, 1993), mentoring portfolio development (Freidus, 1998), planning portfolios (Crockett, 1998; Martin & Stollenwerk, 1999), portfolios as tools for learning and instruction (Schipper & Rossi, 1997), or portfolios across the curriculum (Cole, Ryan, & Kick, 1995).

Given the relationship of portfolios to testing, I also sampled the literature introducing large-scale assessments with provincial performance assessment (British Columbia. Educational Programs. Curriculum Development Branch, 1994) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)’s assessments of writing portfolios (Gentile, Martin-Rehrmann, & Kennedy, 1995). On the theme of assessment, I sampled extant literature assessing records portfolios (Sullivan, 1994), the work of children in portfolio practices (Beckley, 1997; Kingore, 1993; Seidel, 1997), portfolios across the curriculum (Cole et al., 1995), development of portfolios for learning and assessment (Klenowski, 2002), rethinking validity for assessment of teaching (Moss, 1998), and balancing between professional development and performance assessment (Synder, Lippincott, & Bower, 1998).

The sampling necessarily recalls the nascent work of Lee Shulman, past president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), on teacher education and professionalism (Lyons, 1998b; Shulman, 1998). Shulman has a special place in our review, as it was through the imperative of teacher professionalism that Lee shifted evaluation to electronic portfolios (Shulman, 1998, 1992). We include seminal texts that capture historical threads in ePortfolios (Lyons, 1998d) with writings of teachers who viewed portfolios as embedded in narratives (Lyons, 1998a), framed the advent of portfolio in terms of concomitant shifts in culture (Teitel, Ricci, & Coogan, 1998; Wolf, 1998), detected problems with portfolios (Klenowski, 2002; Shulman, 1998), and examined possible consequences of portfolio implementation (Lyons, 1998c).

I also sampled the literature under the notable names of Barrett (2005b, 2005c, 2005d), Batson (2005a, 2005b), and Cambridge (Cambridge, Kahn, Tompkins, & Yancey, 2001), who have influenced, shaped, and directed the evolution of the field. I include here writings on significant questions of interest which lie at the intersection of Course Management Software (CMS) and ePortfolios (Batson, 2005a). Then there is the overlap with the reflection literature on the reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983, 1987), reflection in higher education (Moon, 2005), with forming teams (Davis & Honan, 1998), perspectives (KnowledgeLab), and theory (Feng, 2004). Turning to the recent literature, I sample an exemplary foundational piece of work on emerging practices at multiple