The Development of E-Portfolio Evaluation Criteria and Application to the Blackboard LMS E-Portfolio

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to develop e-portfolio evaluation criteria which will be used to review the Blackboard LMS e-portfolio being used at one Higher Education (HE) institution in the UK as evaluation criteria for reviewing e-portfolio provision does not exist in the literature. The approach taken was to initiate a wide literature search which involved reviewing over 600 articles by their abstract dating from 1995 to 2010. The findings show that little has been written about the development of e-portfolio effective practice frameworks. Therefore e-learning effective practice frameworks were used as a basis from which to design and develop an e-portfolio evaluation framework and then apply it to the university case which uses a Blackboard e-portfolio to support Personal Development Plans. The research provides a starting-point for further research into the development of robust e-portfolio evaluation models and frameworks.

Keywords: Blackboard, E-Learning, E-Portfolio, Effective Practice, Frameworks, Guidelines, Learning Management System (LMS), Personal Development Plans, Web 2.0

1. INTRODUCTION

Not all improvements in technology equate to significant advances in educational outcomes as was the case with the introduction of electronic learning (e-learning) in relation to the implementation of educational policies and effective practice (Weaver, 2002). The institutional infrastructure of tertiary educational establishments provide the support needed for this new form of learning to function, as well as, access to technologies which can in many cases be beyond the control of the teacher and is dependent on a wider range of services than courses that do not use e-Learning (Deepwell, 2007). Further and higher educational institutions are now providing more support for this type of learning as well as more training for teaching staff who are required to engage with new teaching technologies.

With the government set to adopt the widespread implementation of Personal Develop-
ment Plans (PDP) using e-Portfolios as a means to fulfill the 2010/11 aim of every student in the UK having a PDP e-portfolios as part of the criteria for the completion of a certificate, diploma, or higher degree and in preparation to replace the honours classification (Burgess, 2007, p. 9). It is crucial that educators, institutions, and other stakeholders have evidence in relation to the performance of e-portfolios as a learning medium. This paper will review the available literature of e-portfolios success within education to: (1) identify which aspects of e-portfolios have been evaluated as a learning tool; (2) describe the evaluation strategies used; (3) synthesise the findings; (4) present an example of an e-portfolio project conducted in a higher education institution within the UK; and (5) discuss educational implications and future research directions.

The research has highlighted the need for an e-portfolio effective practice framework based on the findings evidenced in the evaluation of an e-portfolio project for a higher educational institution within the UK. As well as evaluating the existing Learning Management System (LMS) from which the e-portfolio was situated the evaluation also involved building a Personal Development Planning (PDP) portfolio using the postgraduate templates provided by the institution, as well as linking the institutional PDP e-portfolio to external Web 2.0 social networking sites such as Bebo, MySpace, and Wix (http://wix.codeplex.com/). This evaluation report identifies a need to develop an evaluation LMS e-portfolio framework based on the findings of other studies.

This study will be of interest to educational policy and programme developers, teaching staff, e-Learning and e-portfolio developers, faculty heads, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Lifelong Learning partners. The evaluation framework developed for this study was adapted from previous studies of e-learning best practices and virtual campus review frameworks. The adapted model was assembled for the purposes of improving monitoring and development processes to enhance the overall quality assurance of e-portfolios.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE CASE STUDY

This review evaluated e-learning system criteria at a higher educational institution in the UK, their initiatives for implementing and facilitating Personal Development Plans (PDP), and the Blackboard Learning Management System (LMS). A literature search was conducted to ascertain an evaluation framework that could be used to review the institution’s provision for LMS e-portfolio templates. This was because at the time of conducting the literature review there appeared to be a lack of evaluation criteria for assessing e-portfolios. As a result of this it was decided to review the e-learning literature as a basis for identifying e-portfolio assessment criteria that could be incorporated into the development of an e-portfolio evaluation framework. An e-learning framework was adapted from a previous study carried out by Stansfield and Connolly (2009) which has been recently developed and implemented in a multi HE campus environment and deemed suitable for our purposes.

3. HISTORY OF E-PORTFOLIO EVALUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Electronic portfolios (e-portfolios) were first reported to assist in learner development in further and higher education in the late 1980s (Schwartz & Bridwell-Bowles, 1987). In relation to the benefits of using portfolios Armitage (1988, p. 16) affirmed that digital-portfolios can help students learn more efficiently due to increasing levels of motivation and facilitating the publication of their work, which in turn has led to higher levels of self-confidence. Other supporters of e-Portfolios (Kimball, 2005; Hatzipanagos & Lygo-Baker, 2008) claim that these methods improve on traditional paper-based methods of reflection due to the learner having: (1) more control over content; (2) attained higher levels of reasoning and self-
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