Chapter 12

ePortfolios for Higher Education: A Hong Kong Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the current situation regarding eportfolios in the government-funded universities of Hong Kong with particular focus on the authors’ local institution, City University of Hong Kong. Despite some attempts at collaboration, there is as yet no unified approach across the universities regarding the use of eportfolios for learning, self-development or career preparation. Major challenges to achieving an eportfolio culture identified in the chapter are multiple perceptions of what eportfolios are; difficulties with teacher and student motivation; a lack of planned pedagogical support; varied and rapidly changing eportfolio enabling technologies; and the lack of consistent funding. Solutions explored include institutional commitment, multi-level collaboration, continuous research, training and support, and comprehensive promotion. Finally, the authors outline possible future directions for the eportfolio movement in Hong Kong.

INTRODUCTION

Portfolios for learning, self-development, and career preparation facilitated and enhanced by computing and Internet technologies have taken hold particularly in the West; the use of ePortfolios is now gaining momentum in some Asia Pacific regions. This article discusses the issues of and solutions to ePortfolio adoption in the Hong Kong higher education context. It provides an example of a bottom-up approach, working towards an institution-wide adoption of ePortfolios at City
University of Hong Kong (CityU), one of the eight government-funded universities. Reference will also be made to practices in other Hong Kong universities.

BACKGROUND

Three initiatives in 2005 influenced the current status of ePortfolios in Hong Kong. First, at CityU, the Office of Education Development and General Education (EDGE, formerly known as the Education Development Office, EDO) and the English Language Centre (ELC) collaborated to research, develop, and integrate ePortfolios into language courses.

Secondly, the broader Hong Kong educational context changed in significant ways. The University Grants Committee (UGC) issued a directive to all local universities in Hong Kong to adopt outcomes-based approaches to teaching and learning. In addition, the then Education and Manpower Bureau published a report to drive the implementation of a new academic structure, seen as an opportunity for both universities and secondary schools to review their curricula. The new 3-3-4 system reduces senior secondary education by a year and expands university education from three to four years, thus aligning its system with those of mainland China and the US.

The new structure was expected to open the way for secondary schools to broaden and diversify their curricula, to encourage students to keep records of their learning achievements in Student Learning Profiles, and to encourage participation in other learning experiences as a way of developing the whole person.

At the tertiary level, the curriculum was expanded from three to four years, and a new suite of general education courses were designed and piloted to enhance and broaden students’ learning experiences and perspectives. The ensuing discussion among and within the universities has been keen as reflected in both public symposiums and internal activities about questions such as:

- How should we define graduate outcomes/attributes?
- In what ways should the curriculum change to enable students to accomplish these outcomes?
- What evidence is needed to assess the accomplishments?
- What support and resources are required to assist students with the transition from, first, secondary school to university and, later, from university to the workplace?
- How can educational technology help with these emerging needs?

Thirdly, a joint-universities project on Student English Language ePortfolios acquired funding to develop a web-based learning and/or exit ePortfolio project. Thus, all eight English language centers from the government-funded universities started to investigate the technology and pedagogy of ePortfolios. Although regular meetings and sharing sessions were conducted, universities selected different applications or even custom made their own ePortfolio platforms. In addition, varied approaches and contrasting ideas about the content and structure of the language ePortfolios emerged. When all of the universities finally reached consensus, however, a common language ePortfolio template was designed. Nevertheless, the funding was withdrawn. Since then, in an ad hoc approach to ePortfolio research and development, universities continue to investigate and use ePortfolios with alternative sources of funding.

Meanwhile, other academic and administrative units in the respective universities, some unrelated to the English language project, were beginning to understand the relevance and benefits of ePortfolios for learning, development, and employment. A small number of investigative projects started emerging from bottom-up/grassroots enthusiasts.