Using e-portfolios to capture and assess transversal skills: tensions in theory and praxis

Conference Abstract

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How to cite this publication:

Walland, E., & Shaw, S. (2020, November). *Using e-portfolios to capture and assess transversal skills: tensions in theory and praxis*. Paper presented at the 13th annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation, Online.

Background

E-portfolios are increasingly used in innovative ways, particularly within higher education (HE), as they have the potential to transform teaching, learning and assessment (Donaldson, 2018; Scully et al., 2018). Given that students are learning in a hypertextual, digitalised and multimedia world, there is a pressing need for assessment to be more authentic, engaging and to develop transversal skills (Cumming & Wyatt-Smith, 2009).

Research aims

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the extent to which e-portfolios can be used to capture and assess transversal skills such as collaboration and reflection in a fair, reliable, and valid way. We aimed to critically analyse the challenges and opportunities of e-portfolios for teaching, learning and assessment in secondary school and HE settings, with a view to developing concrete recommendations for implementing e-portfolios.

Method

A comprehensive review of the literature on e-portfolio theory and praxis was conducted. Approximately 95 documents were evaluated, which were published between 2000 and 2019, written in English, and from across Europe (with a few notable studies from the US). Of these, a subset of approximately 70 documents were deemed to be of sufficient relevance and quality to include in the review. The review included books, conference papers, research reports, doctoral dissertations, personal communications from experts in the field, and articles from peer-reviewed international journals. The search primarily covered primary and secondary school and HE contexts, with the majority of research derived from the HE sector.

Results

Analysis of the literature identified several tensions relating to e-portfolio theory and praxis, which have not been explicitly expressed elsewhere in this manner. The tensions were grouped according to three broad themes:

- the theory and research underpinning e-portfolios;
- the uses and purposes of e-portfolios; and
- the challenges and opportunities related to e-portfolio implementation.

Notable tensions include those between:

- "product" versus "process" conceptualisations of e-portfolios;
- control versus autonomous and individualised learning;
- student versus teacher information and communication technology (ICT) skills;
- summative versus formative assessment;
- pedagogy versus technology; and
- engagement versus perceived burden.

Implications

Conceptualising e-portfolios in terms of these tensions provides an enriched understanding of e-portfolios as pedagogical tools for the capture and assessment of transversal skills. Several challenges and opportunities for teaching, learning and assessment in secondary school and HE settings were identified, along with internationally relevant and practical recommendations for embedding e-portfolios into programmes of study.

References

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