

Utilising the e-portfolio during teaching practice as a reflection strategy within a blended learning approach

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Learning and assessment activity:
e-Portfolios

Learning technology:
Google Blogger and Google Suite

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Context

Background overview

The e-portfolio formed part of the Teaching and Learning 774 module (Teaching Practice) in the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme. There was 195 students in the programme, but only 11 participants were identified for this experiment. These 11 students have already graduated and most of them has a fairly good competence in utilising technology.

The project was implemented when the students visited the schools in the third term during their teaching practice. The project was funded by the Teaching Development Grant, along with staff capacity development, postgraduate supervision development, tutorial support and implementation of the department's language plan.

Intended learning outcomes

The purpose of this project was to inform Stellenbosch University and the Faculty of Education of the critical enablers necessary for the sustainable and sensible implementation of e-portfolios as reflective tools for learning within the given context.

Established practice

Teaching and Learning 774 forms part of the whole PGCE programme. Students have to submit a portfolio after the school visit. Reflection forms a major part of this portfolio. For this project, students still had to comply with the criteria for the portfolio, but the e-portfolio focused on the reflection aspect.

The challenge and possible advantages associated with the integration of technology

The portfolio is an important learning strategy, but it tends to become overwhelmingly large. The e-portfolio therefore not only tried to address this issue, but was also seen as an effort to apply the blended learning approach towards learning. This project speaks to the world of the student who works with technology on a daily basis. It can enhance blended learning. It is also a more "green approach" towards learning.

Other relevant role players

Three academics were involved as mentors. The project also had a technical assistant whose availability to attend to technical matters and support, was most valuable.

Learning and assessment activities

Learning activities

As part of the e-portfolio project, Gmail accounts were created for all students. Students designed a blog and reflected regularly on their teaching practical. The students could insert photos and audio clips in their reflective entries. They could also share their blogs and interact with other students on their blog.

Assessment activities

e-Portfolio entries were made available to lecturers and mentors. These entries are then marked with the rest of their teaching practical portfolio.

Feedback practice

The lecturers and mentors hoped to communicate with the students regularly on their e-portfolio entries, but some technical problems prevented them from connecting with each other through their blogs. This will be eradicated in the future.

Student self-regulation

Students had to design and develop their blogs individually. They had the flexibility and freedom to create their blogs and there were no restrictions. They could thus pace themselves and even set their own standards. Which they did.

Learning environment

Learning took place in the authentic school context and online using the e-portfolio platform. Google Blogger and Google Suite Apps were used for this purpose.

Collaborative settings

There were no tutor groups, but students could communicate and collaborate with their fellow-students and the three staff members involved. They also had technical support from a dedicated person who



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were available to them at all times.

Support challenges

The technical support did create some challenges as everyone could not access the blogs of the other students. They would invite each other and then some technical problem would prevent them from doing so. This problem will be addressed in the future.

Student experience

Student feedback

Formal interviews were conducted with the students and the following main trends emerged:

Theme	Subtheme
Digital literacy	Mobile Literacy Skills Role of Tablet
Reflection	Student preparation in reflective practices Real time feedback from facilitators Value of reflection
Value of e-portfolio in teacher practice	Impact of peers' blogs Value for novice teacher

Students required more training since they lacked technical skills, especially in blog creation and Google Hangouts (communication tool). The ubiquitous nature of the tablet also required further enhancement of literacy skills in order for them to thoroughly understand and value the role of the tablet.

Students must be prepared to engage in reflective practices. Students were unsure in the difference between writing a journal entry as opposed to a weekly reflection. Some also found it difficult to become skilled in being a critical friend. Students asked for real-time feedback from facilitators.

Although finding it challenging to "reflect" in the true sense of the word, students did, at a conceptual level, appreciate the practice of reflection. Students find the reflection valuable. Lecturers are aware that this was a

self-selected sample and it will be interesting to see if this will be positive with a different sample.

From the student feedback, it was apparent that students valued the use of e-portfolios in teacher practice. Access to peer's blogs provided ideas and challenges to try something new to the students. It also gave students an overview of different types of school contexts and an opportunity to critically assess the context they would like to work in. Despite the differences in school contexts, students were aware of the common challenges in different types of schools, which is valuable for novice teachers.

General

Opportunities

Overall, the project worked well and students reported that they have learned a lot. The following aspects will be addressed in the future:

- Training and support for students with regard to
 - Conceptualisation
 - Reflective writing
 - Creating an Online community of practice
- Assessment of digital literacy skills must receive attention as not all students have the same level of skills and knowledge.
- Mobile learning digital skills - an integrated approach in teacher education is appropriate.

