
IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EDOSSIER FOR THE EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO

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Abstract: The educational reform in Europe fosters the use of the new Information and Communication Technologies for formal learning in the classroom and for informal learning outside the educational centre, according to the initial policies for lifelong learning (European Union, 2002) and the Program of Lifelong Learning 2007-2013 (European Union, 2006). With regard to the learning of languages, the European Community promoted an eLearning program that considers language learning a preparation for the active use of language for communication, as social interaction. One of the first actions in this field was undertaken by the Council of Europe with the design of the European Language Portfolio (ELP, 2000), developed from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001). This is the compendium of the components and competences that intervene in the learning of modern languages. The ELP has become common use with the application of new technologies to its implementation, with the Europass initiative. We want to contribute by completing the process of a digital Portfolio with the implementation of an eDossier that digitally enables the original idea of being a collection of evidence. This is done by using the ELP official templates in our Web2.0-based learning environment generator called AIOLE, An Interactive Online Learning Environment.

Keywords: ePortfolio, eDossier, Language Learning, Personal Learning Environments

ePortfolios

Portfolios are a collection of evidence which shows the experience, abilities, competence and knowledge of its owner. The origins of portfolios were in the field of art and architecture. They were used as samples for the evaluation of artists' and architects' work. They aim to show evidence of the quality of their work to potential customers. They were finally used in education to assess the learner's achievements and competence. Some outstanding developers of this new trend highlight the aspect of learning tools to the main feature of elements for demonstrating the abilities, experience and knowledge of portfolio users: Cambridge (2001) establishes them as contextual, developmental tools for learning through a selection of experiences and self-assessment. Portfolios measure learning and development over time (Barrett, 2000). Their features can be summarised as follows: they are user-centered, customizable, flexible, reflective, easy to use, goal-oriented, career-centered (McCloud, 2004). Some (Barret et al, 2004; Hiebert, 2006) point out four main processes in the use of a Portfolio: Reflecting, Collecting, Connecting, Publishing. Others establish similar activities in the process of creation of a Portfolio: Selecting, Presenting, Sharing, Collaborating, and more. And the main action to focus here is the customizable, flexible, reflective, easy-to-use edition itself. To achieve this, the best way is by using the technology currently available, this is, the Web technology. This is the basis for ePortfolios.

The European Language Portfolio

EPortfolios seem ideal for "deep learning, which involves reflection, is developmental, is integrative, is self-directive, and is lifelong" (Cambridge, 2004). This is also presented in the original Principles and Guidelines for the European Language Portfolio (2004), which reads: the ELP "concerns with the development of plurilingualism as a lifelong process, the development of the language learner, and the development of the capacity for independent language learning". Here the ELP presents itself as a developmental portfolio focussing on lifelong learning for language learning as a personal learning tool, promoting the learner's autonomy, owned by the learner. It has a pedagogic function and a reporting function. It is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) and focuses on reflection as 'awareness' of their development. The CEFR is the

compendium of the components and competences that intervene in the learning of modern languages. It aims to be a reference for the design of activities and tasks to the development of the communicative skills of a language: speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is useful for the educational authorities, for course designers, for the teacher and for the learner, since they all take part in the process of learning at different levels. The ELP works as a standard with coherent transparency, offering “common features which make it recognisable and comprehensible across Europe”. The three basic components of the ELP are the template documents for the Europass, the Linguistic Biography and the Dossier. Although initially limited to language learning, its success has made it extensible to the Europass CV, which comprehends a wider scope of abilities and work experience.

AIOLE

This paper proposes the implementation of such an electronic Portfolio from the validated ELP template documents of the Europass official site, using them with AIOLE, a system for online community and personal learning environments.

Personal learning is a great endeavour, very difficult to achieve. However, the shift in the new Web (the so-called Read/Write Web or Web2.0) to provide more pedagogically designed learning opportunities on the Web has produced a new focus on learning design, and tools for personal learning are beginning to appear. For this, some structuring or patterning is required and some Web developers (Johnson et al., 2006) have established new reference models as technological frameworks based on Web tools following certain patterns for services: network patterns with RSS feeds for offering access to content and learning resources, temporal patterns to manage agendas, conversation patterns to establish coherent communication, workflow and resources patterns to upload and download files, images and materials, language tools and activities and the integration of a most effective tool for personal learning in a social pattern, the use of portfolios (Fig. 1).

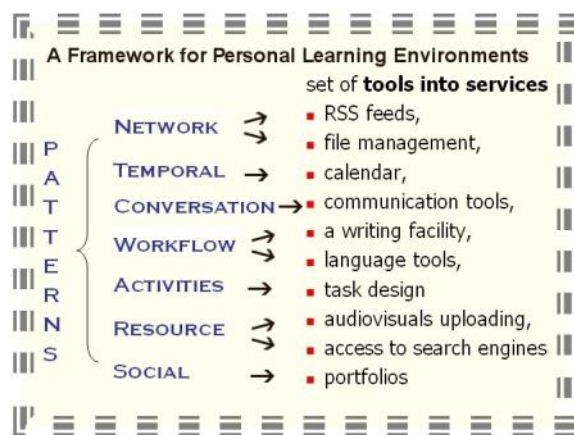


Figure 1. A Reference Model for Personal Learning (Johnson et al., 2006)

AIOLE (An Interactive Online Learning Environment), with its capacity to write on the Web, tries to integrate all these services and makes the personalized edition of the above mentioned documents possible. These documents facilitate the selection of evidence and self-assessment (with the Europass) and reflection (in the Linguistic Biography) from the descriptors analysis of the four communicative language skills established by the CEFR. The most important innovation of AIOLE is the production, not only of the Europass and of the Linguistic Biography in a stable, and simultaneously flexible and adaptative form as a service, but also the edition of an eDossier as an electronic dossier, where to include (creating, connecting and uploading on the Web) the whole evidence that demonstrates the linguistic experiences of the user by means of multimedia facilities, such as scanned certificates, scanned or digitized photos taken with digital cameras and mobile phones, documents written on the Web, sound and visual documents of all kinds. And all this is done easily by the user from anywhere at any time with the use of the AIOLE system.

The initial work of some teachers of languages offering web pages with content has led them to use the Learning Management Systems, for the creation and dissemination of courses online. However, due to the limitations to distributing contents (some of them are digitally translated from textbooks and have their own copyright), the difficulty of their use and the additional training needed they are not sufficiently used in language learning where the learner must actively take part in communicative activities. As an improved evolution, Online Learning Environments provide learning contexts with more interactive resources and services, since they offer the distribution of contents, together with interaction of learning tools arranged in online services where learning design works as the key factor to reach the ultimate objective of Lifelong Learning. The integration of all these tools into services provides the main feature of Personal Learning Environments (PLE; Johnson et al, 2006; Sanchez-Villalon et al, 2007a; Fig. 1) where the learner can take control and responsibility of their own learning. These learning environments have a series of characteristics that we want to point out:

- They are easy to use for teachers and learners who are not expert users in programming or in computer science,
- They are accessible at any time and from anywhere (this means they offer ubiquitous access to contents and resources),
- They make it possible to follow-up, control and guide the learning,
- They allow collaboration (collaborative character in the synchronous and asynchronous communication) in certain necessary communicative tasks.

Thus, AIOLE is “an online learning environment generator where the learning design of any activity can be easily described and later the learning experience reported as evidence in an ePortfolio by directly writing on the Web.” (Sanchez-Villalon et al, 2007b). With the AIOLE system the teacher can design activities for learning a language, selecting contents on the Web or developing some on their own, classifying them as automatically as possible and putting them at the disposal of their learners, guiding them as their learning process advances. Simultaneously the system can offer all the functionalities to the learner, who, after being initially guided by the teacher, can acquire a series of skills in the use of ICT as the agent of their own learning, designing their tasks, controlling their process and ultimately realizing the self-assessment of their own learning process. These are services which make use of a set of learning tools (Sanchez-Villalon et al, 2007c) such as the AWLA writing learning appliance and the WebWriter2.0 tool for the task editor and the test editor (Fig. 2).

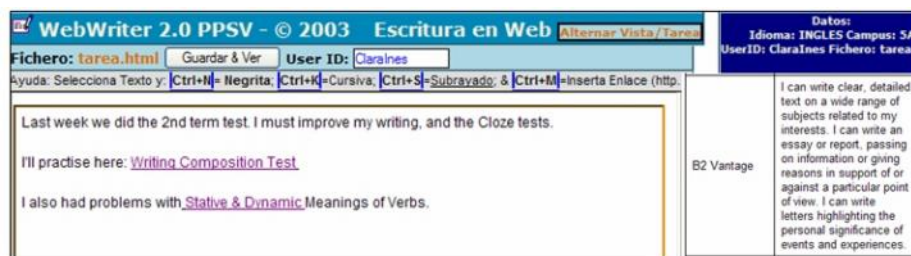


Figure 2. WebWriter 2.0 to edit learning plans and write tasks and activities.

The AIOLE eDossier

This integration in AIOLE includes the ELP services based on the learning design standardized by the descriptors and levels developed by the linguistic authority of the CEFR (2001). It can be of help simultaneously for the learner, used as evidence in the academic area, for the teacher, to follow-up the language learning process, and in the labour world for the manager of human resources to ultimately value the suitability of a user for a working position that needs certain levels of knowledge and abilities in foreign languages. The integration with AIOLE tools provides the ePortfolio with the following features:

- The learners can *collect* the elements developed throughout their language learning process with AIOLE, mainly the texts written with AWLA writing learning appliance, and the tests done with the WriteOnLines facility, which respectively show the writing and assessment

- experience in the target foreign language. They can copy them as links on the Web to later paste them in their eDossier.
- They can *upload* any other multimedia element with the file manager facilities. They can copy their URL address to later paste them in their eDossier as a visual reference or as a link.
 - The Task edition facility with WebWriter 2.0 allows both the tutor and the learner to design the learning with lesson *plans* and learning *objectives* (Fig. 2). A permanent access to the CEFR institutionally-based set of the descriptors and levels of their learning achievements helps them together with the tutor's task-based learning design. It also provides them with the control of the learning. The tutor can have control in the first stages of the learning and of the use of the AIOLE environment, as an intermediate solution leading to the definite learner's autonomy.
 - The Europass (Fig. 3) and the Linguistic Biography help the learner keep reflecting on the evolution of their learning and the ability to edit them gives them control over the report of their learning.
 - WebWriter 2.0 allows the permanently flexible, updatable *edition* of the Europass (Fig. 3) and the eDossier (Fig. 4) from the ELP Europass and Dossier Template documents and the *publication* of the learners' achievements on the Web.

All this provides an always available, lifelong updatable version of the learners' ePortfolio, following the European Language Portfolio standards in a transparent, coherent, easy-to-use, HTML/RTF-based interoperable version of the report of their learning.

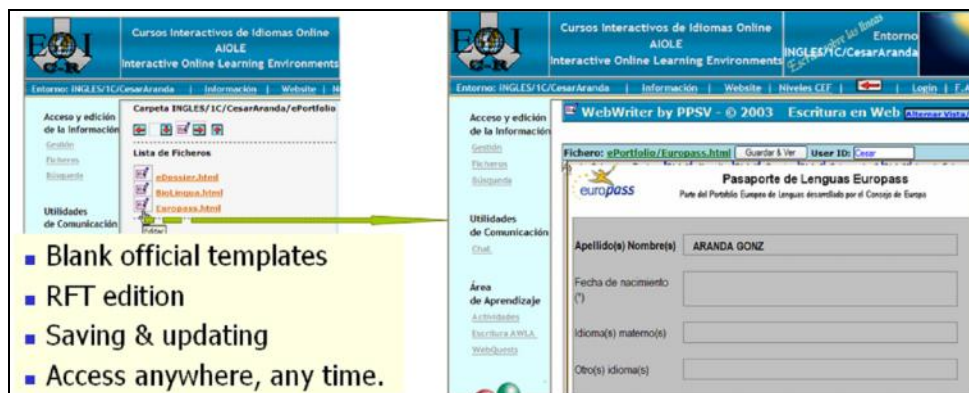


Figure 3. WebWriter 2.0 to edit and update the Europass (with features).

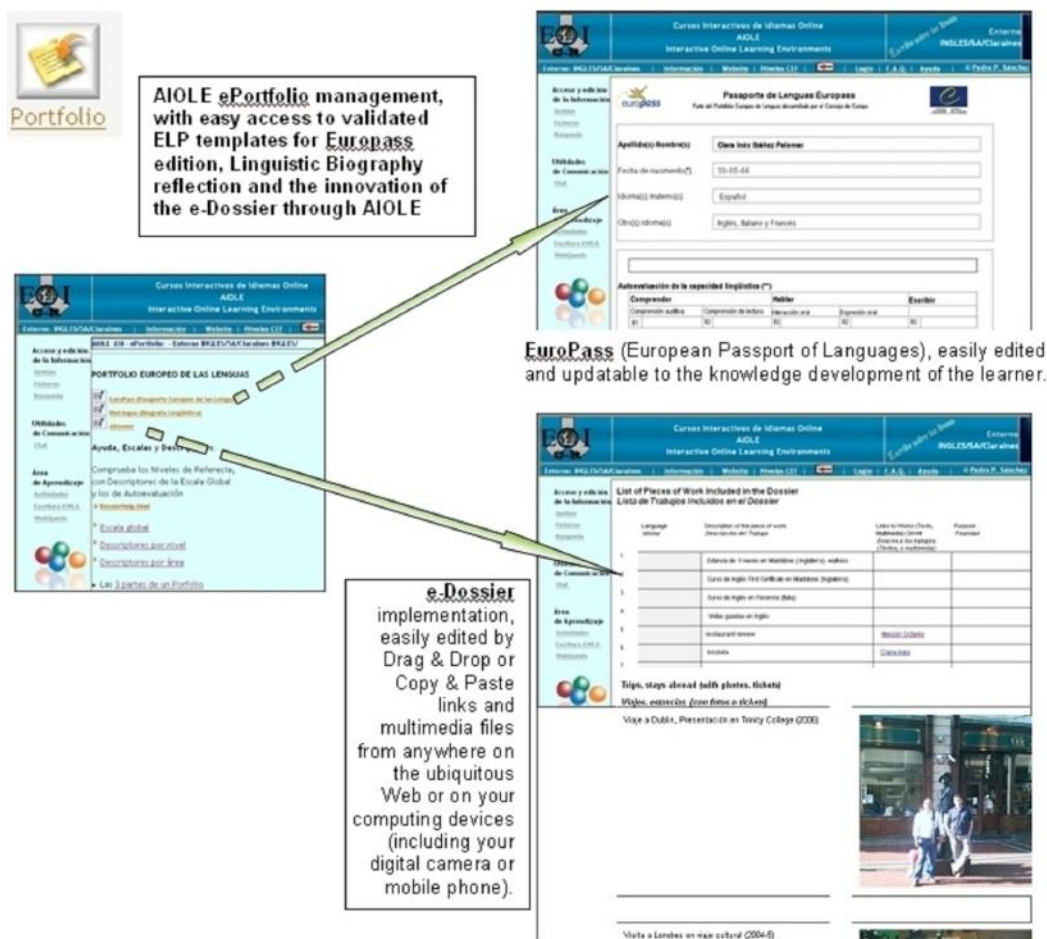


Figure 4. ePortfolio in AIOLE with access to the Europass and eDossier

The eDossier has been used since February 2007 by 10 students at the Basic Level and 5 students at the Proficiency Level. Some have made use of visual files, consisting of images of scanned documents and photographs. However, most of them mainly used only textual descriptions and links to access the original files published on the Web. By reporting their URL address they can easily show their achievements in the learning and use of a foreign language, following the standards and requirements of the European Language Portfolio.

Conclusion

eLearning has shifted from the distributions of learning contents mainly achieved by using LMS systems towards the use of online learning environments, where the provision of learning resources and communicative, interactive services is crucial. In language learning, these resources are mainly concerned with the development of the communicative skills. Writing is one of these and one of the new facilities the Web 2.0 offers. With AIOLE, supported with the appropriate frameworks (such as PLE, CEFR and ELP), both tutors and learners can design learning plans, tasks and activities, and organise them in standardised electronic portfolios. The aim of this paper has been to report the experience of extending the ePortfolio into the edition of an online eDossier, with multimedia and hypertextual information as evidence of their learning, easily reportable as a URL address.

Further use and analysis will be undertaken in the near future. Additional facilities for other Europass documents, such as the Europass CV, and the Europass Diploma Supplement, will be implemented in AIOLE.

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