
MOSEP- MORE SELF ESTEEM WITH MY E-PORTFOLIO SUPPORTING NEW COMPETENCIES FOR E-PORTFOLIO TUTORS

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Abstract: In this article, we want to show that the implementation of e-portfolios as a method in an educational institution is neither a matter of tools (which is already known and accepted by the community), nor is the sole introduction of a new method (accompanied with e.g. guiding material and explanatory media) sufficient to implement e-portfolio as a sustainable measure to enhance the self-directed learning. In the article, we want to outline new competencies of teachers and tutors needed in order to support learners in their individual learning process. In order to support the teachers and tutors, a new training concept has been developed.

Keywords: e-portfolio, self-esteem, competencies

Introduction: e-portfolio is not a question of tools.

In recent times „e-portfolio“ has become the buzz word for individual, self-directed and lifelong learning. The e-portfolio hype is unbroken and many educational institutions are addressing the question on how to implement the concept of e-portfolios in their curriculum. In this discussion, many other questions arise too: How can an institution integrate the e-portfolio in their current educational programme? How can the e-portfolio software interact with an existing learning management system? What does the interaction between tutors and learners look like? How can the portfolios be assessed? How can the portfolios be maintained? Who owns the data? What is the technical solution for the interoperability?

All these questions are important and (with many others more) need to be addressed when implementing e-portfolios in an institution and into a curriculum. But from our point of view „the“ crucial question is: How can teachers be trained to being able to support learners in their e-portfolio process? What kind of competencies do teachers need in order to guide learners through their individual competence development?

In this article we want to show what kind of competencies are required by teachers to guide learners through their portfolio development process and furthermore, we want to demonstrate a course design, addressing these questions.

New competencies needed by teachers

That teachers and trainers have a key role in the implementation of e-portfolios is clear, at least it has been since the case studies of the MOSEP project. Teachers, trainers or counsellors have to support the young learners with the development of their e-portfolio. And „learning“ in this way means a constructive approach on learning. Learning with an e-portfolio has to be active, constructivistic and has to be monitored by the teacher or trainer who follows the rules of enabling didactics. With an e-portfolio the result of learning isn't unimportant, but the focus is on the learning process itself.

According to Graham Attwell (1997) and in respect to the implementation of e-portfolios the new teacher has to be able to:

- provide technical support,
- organize the contexts and communities of learning,
- formulate organisational objectives,
- facilitate the structure of portfolio contents,

- facilitate reflection,
- guide and monitor the students advancement through the integral cycle of investigative learning,
- help evidencing competences,
- support planning,
- interact and conduct conversation with the students,
- plan and assess the overall process“ (Attwell, 1997).

Out of this vision of a „perfect teacher“ we can deduce that working and learning with e-portfolios requires a set of competencies. Now, one question seems to be obvious: How can we ensure that a teacher gets most of these competencies? One way is maybe to have teachers to develop their own e-portfolios, too. In that way it is possible to ensure that teachers are working actively and builds up experiences. This may help them later to identify and solve problems of their students. In addition to that, an own e-portfolio may give a trainer the possibility to own those „skills of participation“, which Henry Jenkins (2006) mentioned.

- Play – the capacity to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving,
- Performance – the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery,
- Simulation – the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes,
- Appropriation – the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content,
- Multitasking – the ability to scan one’s environment and shift focus as needed to salient details,
- Distributed Cognition – the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities,
- Collective Intelligence – the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal,
- Judgement – the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources,
- Transmedia Navigation – the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities,
- Networking – the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information,
- Negotiation – the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms” (Jenkins, H., 2006, p.4).

These skills and the experiences gained by working with one’s own e-portfolio, might be very useful to understand the new role of a teacher and use this knowledge in practice. Furthermore, a teacher or trainer will be able to foresee and understand problems which may appear while working. These difficulties may be caused by problems of understanding or be of technical origin. But if the teacher has solved those problems once by himself, it may be more probable that he/she can guide his/her students through the same or similar problems much better than without.

But who trains the teachers? This question leads us to a challenge which has been approached by the MOSEP-Project, too. To present possible solutions on the above mentioned issues, we have to have a look on another bundle of proficiencies a user of an e-portfolio should have. “ICT literacy” is a term, which consists of a set of competencies and knowledge, figured out by the ICT Literacy Panel in 2002.

Components of ICT Literacy*

Proficiency	Definition
Define	Using ICT tools to identify and appropriately represent an information need
Access	Collecting and/or retrieving information in digital environments
Manage	Using ICT tools to apply an existing organizational or classification scheme for information
Integrate	Interpreting and representing information, such as by using ICT tools to synthesize, summarize, compare and contrast information from multiple sources
Evaluate	Judging the degree to which information satisfies the needs of the task in ICT environments, including determining authority, bias and timeliness of materials
Create	Adapting, applying, designing or inventing information in ICT environments
Communicate	Communicating information properly in its context (audience, media) in ICT environments

Fig. 2: ETS 2007

A team of experts tries to work out a solution, which probably has the best chance to ensure that e-portfolios can be accepted and introduced. A set of self-explaining tutorials, supported by multimedia contents ought to help teachers to handle the problems. The tutorials consist of a number of sessions enabling teachers to work through all aspects step by step, in groups or alone (and) in a linear or non-linear way.

But apart from all the opportunities, we would like to reflect on the topic critically. At first, we assume that not all teachers are familiar with these skills and competencies, required for a successful portfolio implementation. Secondly, even if teachers start to work with e-portfolios and try to own most of these competencies, we have to anticipate that especially the older ones might not be able to cope because the young learners are digital natives and would handle an e-portfolio faster than most of the adults.

But that is exactly the point, why a teacher has to see themselves not longer as a teacher in the “old” way and needs to anticipate the new role.

Another point is that learners in general have explicit expectations what teaching and learning should be like. A new learning method like e-portfolio might be confronted with some difficulties.

The last point we would like to mention is that competencies can only build up individually. So expansive learning is a precondition for owning the proficiencies we described. The problem which may appear is that imposing e-portfolios on students might prevent expansive learning e-portfolio avoids expansive learning (Engeström, 1987).

The MOSEP project

MOSEP means “More self-esteem with my e-portfolio” and is a European project, funded by the European commission – Leonardo da Vinci. It has 9 partners from 6 European countries, including Austria, Germany, UK, France, Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria.

The main objective of the project is (besides a basic study) to design a course concept for the use of freely available materials for teachers and vocational counsellors. The course concept addresses the question which competencies of teachers are needed to support learners in the portfolio process.

All materials in the course are self-explanatory and can be (freely) downloaded and used by institutions without a „guiding“ expert. This will be realised by the use of multimedia material, videos and screencasts which can be freely accessed and used by the course participants via the project website.

The course will be tested and evaluated in 6 different countries, in order to prove the didactical concept and the developed course materials.

- The media didactical concept is based on the assumption, that the course should be
 - suitable for different target groups (teachers, trainers, tutors, vocational counsellors, ...),
 - usable by the teachers, without external guidance,
 - adaptable according to the institutional needs,
 - freely accessible and available,
 - software independent.

Furthermore, the content of the course should be „modularisable“, which means that the topics and the assignments (if they are not appropriate for the institutional context) shall be combinable. This means that the content of the course shall be divided in small „bits and pieces“, which can easily be re-used and (if necessary) shuffled with other activities.

To fulfil those pretensions, a “course philosophy” was created, which brings up the fundamentals of the whole MOSEP tutorial:

Due to the wiki-structure of the course, the participants should be able to fit it into a form adequate to their individual needs, so different target groups can use it. Nowadays, nearly everyone knows how to work with a wiki (or at least knows how to read one), which makes it easy for those different groups to use the course without any external help or guidance. Again, e-portfolio is not a question of tools and it would be inconsistent to use a specific tool or any kind of Learning Management System.

To keep a clear view and to ensure the combinability and re-usability, a “Story-Line” structures the course and its modules (its detailed description can be found below).

The course only suggests timings for single activities or face-to-face situations, which allows the tutor and his/her students to determine the whole course timing freely on themselves. So it can take whole days, may be split up into half-days or after school sessions or even, thanks to the online option, can be accomplished at home, independent of time.

Different kinds of multimedia shall be used, like video-sequences for different purposes, audio podcasts or screencasts.

The content of the modules is derived from the main findings of the basic study which has been implemented by the project consortium at the beginning of the project. The topics of the modules are based on a „classical“ e-portfolio approach, which can be often found in the e-portfolio literature:

planning – selection/connection – reflection – presentation – assessment.

The theoretical background of this process can be derived from David Kolb and combines his learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) with the classical e-portfolio approach:

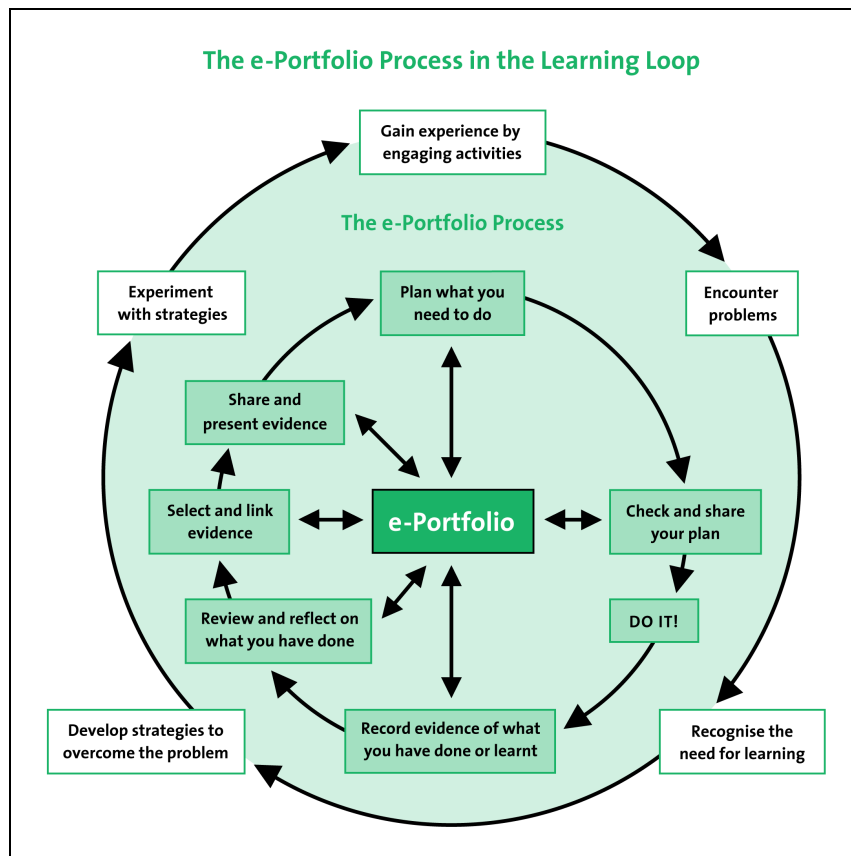


Fig. 3: Pallister 2007

Each module is divided into different sessions, each session consists of information material, resources, web links and multimedia artefacts. Furthermore, practical assignments shall activate the course participants to work on their individual competence development by using the portfolio method themselves.

The course is divided in a foundation module and 4 additional modules.

The themes of the modules are not only described, but also formulated as questions. Participants can easily investigate the purpose of the topics.

For example, the “Founda tion module” is structured as follows:

Foundation module: What is an e-Portfolio and what are its opportunities? How to plan and implement an e-Portfolio?

To start working with e-Portfolios, you'll have to know, what exactly e-Portfolio-work means and how you can plan/implement/use it. Those questions will be answered in the “Foundation module”, which is an introduction into the whole topic and which also should be the first module to read.

- Introduction | Why e-Portfolio?
- Working with young learners | How can I support young learners?
- Digital Technology in the construction of identity | Why might learners need it?
- Integration of e-Portfolio process with young learners | e-Portfolio and curriculum – which barriers, which strategies?
- Planning and implementing an e-Portfolio | How to plan and implement an e-Portfolio?
- Validation.

The complete course covers the following topics:

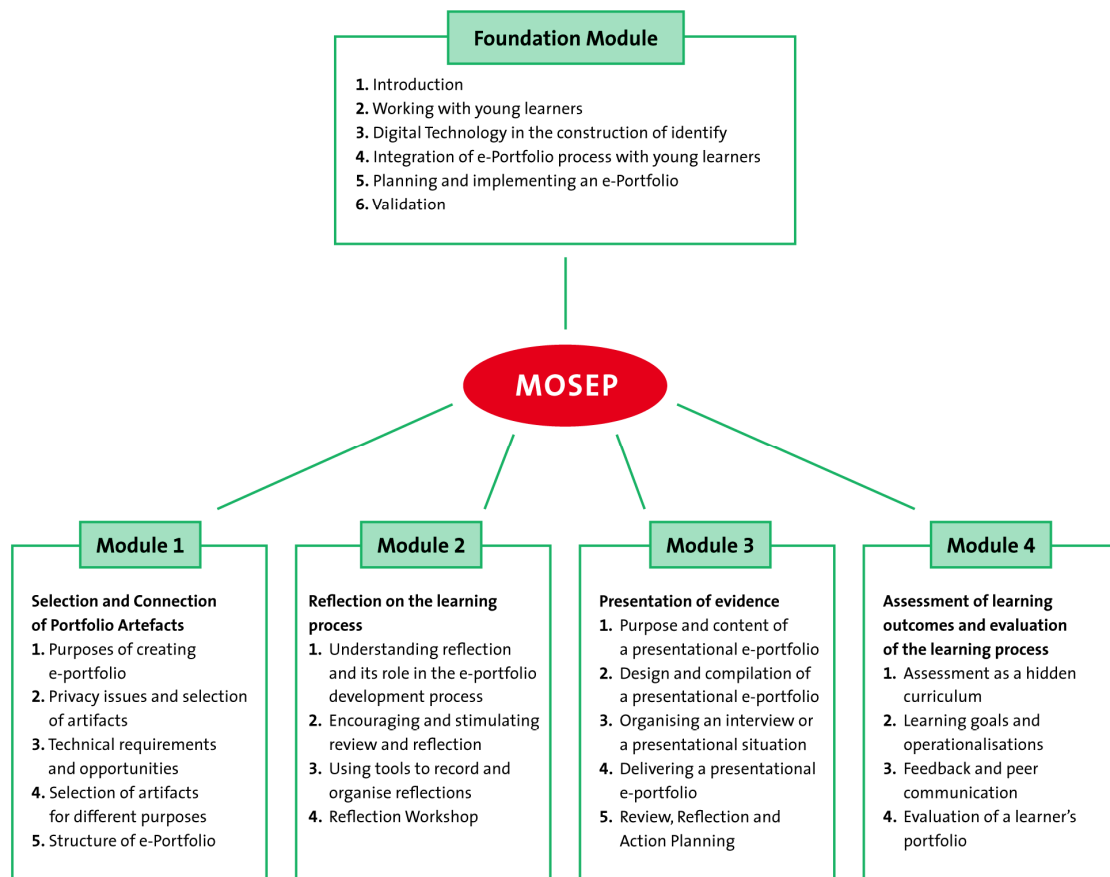


Fig. 2: Ulrich 2007

Technical approach or „Which e-portfolio software shall I use?

As it is impossible to name a prototypical e-portfolio software tool which is appropriate for a generic e-portfolio usage, the MOSEP philosophy tries to develop the course as platform independent as possible. In order to fulfil this requirement, none of the practical assignments require a certain functionality, as long as the basic e-portfolio functionalities are available.

For the concise usage of the MOSEP course and the practical implementation in an institution, the course provides guidelines and tutorials for the usage of two different open source e-portfolio tools: Mahara (<http://www.mahara.org/>) & Elgg (<http://elgg.net/>). Both are available as open source products and cover the main requirements for a basic e-portfolio process.

Conclusion and Outlook

As shown in the introduction, the implementation of e-portfolios is neither a question of using a specific tool nor of a specific method. New competencies of the tutors are needed in order to support learners in their individual portfolio development. The MOSEP project provides a set of materials, methods and assignments (as well as multimedia resources and generic e-portfolio tools) to support teachers, tutors and vocational counsellors in their ambition to use e-portfolios as a method for self-directed and (in the end) lifelong learning.

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Figures

Figure 1:

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Figure 2: Ulrich, M. (2007). MOSEP Story-line: Mindmap (unpublished).

Figure 3: Pallister, J. (2007). *The MOSEP e-portfolio approach*. In: Attwell G., Chrzęszcz A., Hilzensauer W.; Hornung-Prähasuer V.: Grab your future with an e-portfolio - study on new qualifications and skills needed by teachers and career counsellors to empower young students with the e-portfolio concept and tools (in print).

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