E-portfolio as Intercultural Cognitive Environment to Enhance Teachers' Professional Development and Personal Growth

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Abstract

In teacher education, portfolio has been described as an educational measure and alternative assessment instrument, generally qualified as tools for enhancing learning and development. However, there is a growing call for reconsidering its value in reflective practice. It seems that the structure of the e-portfolio places emphasis more on the portfolio as product than the portfolio as an approach, thereby allowing reflection on the learning process. Using the Interconnected Model for Professional Growth as theoretical framework, we explore the appropriateness of the life story metaphor as a structure for an intercultural e-portfolio environment. The authors will present their prototype and put forth anticipated research questions.

1. Introduction

There are several interrelated reasons for the increasing interest for the portfolio in teacher education. Probably the most fundamental reasons is that the portfolio may serve two of the main concerns and considerations facing teachers' education: supporting teachers' professional development and growth and teacher certification.

Viewing the portfolio as a tool to measure and assess learning is supported by recent trends and recommendation for authentic and situated learning assessment. Since the portfolio is a compilation of work that highlights and demonstrates teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching, it is clearly a tool to measure teachers' content knowledge, intellectual and problem-solving abilities, pedagogical skills, curriculum knowledge, and knowledge of learners.

Moreover, as a performance-based, goal-driven, selective and structured product, as mandated dossiers to evaluate performance in relation to external evaluation requirement, the portfolio serves also teachers' certification. Furthermore, because it is a mean for a situated assessment, developed over time, recording authentic tasks gathered across time and across context, which documents and portrays the learning process, the portfolio may become a rich database that could guide and orient educators in structuring and supporting teachers' professional development and growth, and thus contributing to teachers' continuing education.

The portfolio is said to be valuable for its pedagogical potential because it is hypothesized to support active and self-directed learning and reflective practice. However, these potential benefits often fail to materialize fully [1] [2]. It seems that the outcomes of what was seen as tool and instrument to develop reflexive practice, learner's control on learning process, etc. tend to be summarized as a standardized and uniform presentation and structure of documents, a list of technical reflection, and a performance achievement than competency acquisition and development. The predominance of descriptive and emotional language to represent teachers' experience, value and feeling, and teacher focus on presenting their favorable image through their portfolios, did not exhibit any language functions pertaining to the level of critical reflection [2]. Moreover, the kind of reflection on experience, the form of problem-solving wherein continuous cycles of thought, action and reflection, make it hard to distinguish between development and evaluation.

Does the portfolio design affect its use as a tool and should we approach it more as cognitive environment than as tool? What we know about the professional development that we did not consider while designing the portfolio? What are some of the factors that should been considered in the portfolio design to attain its pedagogical and educational aims? How can we exploit the mosaic of cultures that characterizes the current learning environment to favor a constructive
and proficient intercultural interaction among peers and teachers from diverse cultures and backgrounds?

Our reflection will focus on these questions and expose the strategies used to enhance the pedagogical and educational potential of the e-portfolio in teacher education.

2. Our theoretical framework for the design

The design of the prototype is grounded in the interconnected model of the professional growth [3] and supported with recent empirical findings on the impact of e-portfolio on teacher practice and reflection, the potential of e-portfolio for promoting intercultural interaction and impact of the e-portfolio structure on the quality and nature of the interaction among peers and tutors. The strategies employed in the design of the e-portfolio environment have considered:

1- The necessary balance between the e-portfolio as an assessment tool and the e-portfolio as an approach centered on reflection on learning process with particular attention for the language and form of interaction (e-portfolio as structure) and for the appropriate tools to illustrate and narrate the process and dynamic reflection (e-portfolio as approach).

2- The importance to promote intercultural interaction as opportunity for preservice teachers to be aware of the cultural scripts- different ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting- that shape their actions [4].

3- Preservice teachers use spontaneously life story metaphor to create their portfolio. This metaphor, principally in multicultural learning context, may permit and illustrate diverse ways of interaction with experience, errors, lesson, and comprehension of development and growth, but also one's theory of teaching [5] The intercultural interaction among peers and tutors will be a space of rich exchange and thus bring the main ingredient for reflection: make meaning in interaction with and among other actors and thinkers.

3- The importance of considering all domains that represent teachers' change environment: domain of practice, domain of consequence, personal domain and external domain and afford the environment with cognitive tools that engage teacher in diverse sequence of change and growth network.

3. Prototype of an intercultural e-portfolio

Based on the theoretical design framework discussed above, the intercultural e-portfolio is designed to scaffold preservice teachers to express and articulate their personal patterns of development and growth. The system contains a case library that provides diverse illustrations of the rapport that different cultures have to experience, errors, lesson, learning, growth, etc. (African, Asian, Occidental, Amerindian, etc.). The metaphor, the cognitive tools and the case library of cultural conception and anecdotes may create a rich interaction environment: social, cultural and physical, that should help on one hand to personalize and support teachers monitoring and coaching, and on the other hand, to enrich each preservice teacher with others knowledge, experience and cultural scripts.

4. Conclusions

We are still in the process of refining the metaphor and designing and identifying the necessary cognitive tools for the intercultural e-portfolio. It is hoped that the system shell can be adapted to support teacher education in variety of cultures.

5. References


