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Caught in the Middle

Electronic Portfolios: Integrating Technology for Meaningful Learning

In the Classroom with Bijal Damani

Integrating technology in the classroom can make a vast difference in teaching, learning, and assessment. Being a business studies teacher for grades 11 and 12, I used to receive numerous requests from graduates wishing to have copies of their—as well their peers'—presentations, business plans, case studies, creative advertisements, and other projects. However, it was difficult to preserve every students' projects for future reference.

I began compiling each student's projects and burning them on a DVD for every class. But that did not help much when students wanted something readily accessible from anywhere. Also, collaborating on projects was difficult for students who wanted to work on them during their vacations.

At that time, I came across the blog by Helen Barrett (http://blog.helenbarrett.org), and I felt inspired to create an e-classroom and connect my students' portfolios to it using Google applications. Electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios, allow students to do six Cs: create, collect, connect, collaborate, conserve, and control.

E-portfolios are emerging tools for collecting documents, presentations, videos, photographs, and assessment histories that students prepare and maintain. They can display students' accomplishments, works in progress, and other academic records. Sharing work with peers, teachers, parents, and potential employers—in fact, anyone in the world—is easy with these tools.

I find that using e-portfolios has helped me tremendously in engaging my students in the learning process. Technology gives students opportunities to take ownership of their learning, and showcasing and sharing work with their peers and parents greatly motivates students. From a teacher's standpoint, portfolios help enormously in formative assessment, because evidence collected in them can give a much richer picture of learners' strengths and achievements than a mere test score. (One word of caution for teachers assessing students' portfolios: be clear which competencies you are assessing.)

Using e-portfolios has helped me build my students' confidence with their information and communication technology (ICT) skills, which are crucial at the university level, and also encourages students to reflect on their processes of learning and development. Because e-portfolios are expandable, students can add as many pages as they wish. Plus, the portfolios are easy to update and universally accessible, making them the perfect tool to facilitate student collaborations.

However, e-portfolios aren't appropriate for every classroom. There are potential risks involved in using an

e-portfolio system with students; therefore, you should always check your school's policy regarding online protocols. Also, successful implementation of an e-portfolio system requires access to computers and a high-speed internet connection, which may not be available in many developing and underdeveloped nations. And students' ICT skill level plays an important role in their ability to build and maintain these tools.

Starting off can also be time-consuming for teachers as well as students; but once you've overcome any initial teething problems, e-portfolios are really fun to develop and assess. A tip for teachers interested in using e-portfolios is to make one of your own as a model for students. It can offer evidence of your own academic and professional progress as well. **EU**

Additional Resources

- My own e-classroom, called Masti Ki Pathshala (A Place for Learning That Is Fun): http://sites.google.com/site/bijaldamaniseclassroom

- An archive of my students' e-portfolios: http://sites.google.com/site/bijaldamaniseclassroom/Home/students-projects/projects-of-std--11

- My e-portfolio, an example of a teacher's portfolio: http://sites.google.com/site/bijaldamanisclass

- E-portfolios of my current students in grade 11: http://sites.google.com/site/snk200910/home/students-projects

- Dr. Helen Barrett's E-Portfolios for Learning: http://blog.helenbarrett.org

- ePortfolio Mash Up with Google-Apps: http://electronicportfolios.org/google

- Google site tutorials: www.google.com/nonprofits/sitestutorial.html

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