

EDIPED: the Development of a Digital Appraisal Tool for the Collection and Presentation of Portfolio Evidence of an Educator's Competencies

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Summary

Since 1999 a digital, web-based portfolio has been used for students and teachers in our teacher training college: EFA, the Amsterdam Faculty of Education, part of AIOO. We have contributed our experiences with this instrument in an European context to a project entitled EDIPED: European Digital Portfolio for the Evaluation of Educators.

In this paper we will report about the process in and the products of the EDIPED-project. Our main question is: could the digital portfolio be an instrument for evaluating the quality of teaching and the progress of educators? The teachers that worked with the digital portfolio were inspired by it and stimulated in their activities as educators. They didn't like the idea of using it for formal external evaluation. Our conclusion will be: a digital portfolio is a suitable instrument for self-evaluation and reflection. It fits in an educational system that is competence driven. But: we need more experience with it.

The EDIPED-project

The EDIPED-project is a European project that has been carried out with the support of the European Commission within the framework of the Socrates Programme, action Comenius 2.1. It started in October 2002 and was finished in September 2005. Teachers, teacher trainers and inspectors from seven European countries participated in the project.

List of the partners

Institute	Country
Intercollege	Cyprus
University of Cyprus	Cyprus
Studienseminar Neuss: a Teacher Training Centre	Germany, Nord-Rhein-Westfalen
Birkbeck College, University of London	UK
St. Angela's College	Ireland
Inspection of OberOestereich	Austria
Pedagogisches Institut des Bundes	Austria
Ciencro de Profesores in Cehegin, an institute for inservice training	Spain, region Murcia
Ciencro de Profesores van Molina de Segura, an institute for inservice training	Spain, region Murcia

The project was co-ordinated by Intercollege at Cyprus. The co-ordinator was: Gregory Markrides

In those three years the main activities were:

- analysing the existing appraisal systems in the countries of the project partners
- analysing the tools used for evaluation of educators, in particular Portfolios and Digital Portfolios
- creating a draft Digital Portfolio of achievements/competencies
- having a try out of the draft version of this Digital Portfolio in the countries of the project partners
- creating a final version of the Digital Portfolio of achievements/competencies
- developing criteria for evaluation of the portfolios
- creating an international course for educators in which they learn how to work with the Digital Portfolio.

The results of EDIPED are three products:

1. A report on the Appraisal Systems for educators in each partner country
2. A European Digital Portfolio in five languages: Dutch, English, German, Greek and Spanish. The portfolio is web-based but there is also a stand-alone version. In the portfolio several sorts of files can be stored: texts, pictures and videos.
3. A training course in which teachers learn to work with the digital portfolio.

Report on the appraisal systems

The report on the Appraisal System consists of 3 parts:

1. a brief description of the appraisal system in each partner country, describing the context for the assessment of student and probation teachers, as well as the appraisal of qualified teachers;
2. a comparative study of the appraisal system of each partner country;
3. an overview of the use of portfolios for teacher assessment.

The outcomes were that there are a lot of differences in the appraisal systems of the partner countries. The systems differ in such aspects as: centralisation, formal criteria, consequences and iteration. If portfolios were used it was mostly in teacher training and not for qualified teachers. Digital portfolios were used only in the Netherlands.

The partners agreed on one point: they were all dissatisfied with their current appraisal systems because they did not focus on improvement functions. In the EDIPED project we tried to create an appraisal system with the main focus on continuing professional development of teachers, not on grading and promotional procedures.

European digital portfolio

The portfolio is an instrument for self-evaluation. The philosophy behind it is that self-evaluation based on personal reflection of the educator about his/her job is considered an essential tool for improvement of the professionalism of the educator.

The portfolio has the following structure.

GENERAL	Activities	Assigned Extra Curricular Initiatives in School Other
	Evaluations	By others 1 By others 2 By others 3 By the Headmaster By the Inspector
	Personal information	
	Professional qualifications	Achievements Certificates of Participation Distinctions Participation in training Professional Qualifications
	Publications	

MISSION PHILOSOPHY	Personal	Important goals per school year Respecting differences Views on national educational policy Views on European educational policy
	Views on educational policies	European-National
COMPETENCIES	Administrative	
	Other	
	Research	
	Teaching	
FEEDBACK	Formal Feedback	
	Informal Feedback	By Colleagues By the Headmaster By the Inspector By parents By students
REFLECTIONS OF PRACTICE	Reflections	
	Students	Achievements Attitude Behaviour Participation Relations
	Teaching Methodology	Aids Methodology Planning Technology
	Database	Assigned work Homework Other Tests
	Extra Curricular Activities	Assigned Communication with parents Initiatives at school
	Multimedia	Sound Photos Videos
Other		
LANGUAGE	English Dutch German Greek Spanish	

The most important categories are:

- Personal information: including a complete CV, Qualifications and Publications
- Mission: a personal vision on teaching, on national policy and on European educational policy
- Competencies Files like texts, pictures, sound and videos should give evidence of the competencies of the educator.

REFLECTION on all categories is most important: it should show the growth, the development of the teacher.

Training course

All partners gave a pilot training course in their own country in the period of March until June 2004. An important aim of the pilot was: testing the software: the EDIPED editor. We also wanted to test if the trainees would see the portfolio as a useful instrument, useful for reflection and self-evaluation. The results were not so good. Due to the technical problems the trainees were not too positive about the portfolio. But technical problems can be solved and so they were.

In March 2005 there was an international training course at Cyprus. During one week 21 teachers and inspectors of 6 countries worked with the portfolio in the computer lab of Intercollege in Nicosia. The results were much more positive! There were hardly any technical problems and: the course

had a clear structure. The work programme consisted of three stages:

- Training
- Development
- Completion

In the training part we gave the trainees an introduction in the mission/philosophy and the structure of the portfolio and we practised the necessary ICT skills with the EDIPED editor. The trainees produced their Home Pages.

In the development part we provided feedback to the trainees and we gave tips for content and organisation of the portfolios. The trainees completed their portfolios.

In the completion part each trainee presented his/her portfolio to another trainee and they gave feedback based on the criteria for evaluation of portfolios. In the end there was a group evaluation in 3 groups. The trainees were very positive about the digital portfolio as a tool for self-evaluation. They expressed the opinion that self-evaluation and reflection were important and stimulating for improving the quality of educators, while evaluation by headmasters, inspectors or special committees was not stimulating.

Criteria for evaluation of portfolios

We evaluate portfolios on two main criteria: contents and appearance

Overview

The contents should be complete. The most important categories are:

- Personal Information, Qualifications and Publications: a complete CV
- Mission: a personal vision on teaching, on national educational policy and on European educational policy
- Competencies
- Reflections in all categories

The contents should give evidence

- Qualifications: scans of diplomas, certificates, proof of attendance of in-service sessions, distinctions
- Publications: correct bibliographical references, links to documents and web sites
- Mission: links to activities: assigned, extra curricular and initiatives providing evidence for the mission statements.
- Mission statements: evidence for the coherence of the mission statements
- Competencies. There should be proof for each competence that the owner of the portfolio claims to possess. The proof is always a link. It can be a link
 - to products: teaching materials, publications
 - to activities, especially videos of teaching activities
 - to feedback and reflection documents from students, colleagues, managers or parents

There should be special attention to links to other websites that show products, activities and feedback documents.

The contents should show the growth, the development of the owners of the portfolio.

- How did they develop their career as a teacher?
- What are their strong points? How did they utilise these strengths in their career?

- What are their weak points? How did they try to overcome these weaknesses in their career?
- What plans do they have for the future?

The contents should show suitability.

- The documents in the portfolio are suitable to the different purposes of the portfolio.

The appearance should be attractive, well organised and the digital possibilities should be exploited.

The portfolio should be attractive and lively, especially the homepage.

- The homepage should be an invitation to view the other pages of the portfolio.
- On the homepage there should be a picture of the owner of the portfolio.
- Every page of the portfolio should be well designed as far as the use of fonts, colours and pictures is concerned.

The portfolio should be well organised, clear and accessible.

- Text should be divided in paragraphs with clear titles, in lists, enumerations and in tables.
- The link structure should be clear: it should be clear where the link is going and why. The visitors of the portfolio should not lose their way because it is always clear where they are and how they can go back.
- The link structure should give the visitors the possibility of going quick to where they want to be.

The appearance of the portfolio should be suitable to the different purposes of the portfolio.

What did we learn?

What did we, teachers at the teacher training college EFA, the Amsterdam Faculty of Education, learn from this European project? We had already had three years of experience with a digital web-based portfolio when this project started.

From the analysis of the existing appraisal systems in the seven countries of the project partners we learned that most other countries have more formal, objective procedures for the evaluation of educators. The Netherlands didn't have those formal procedures. But all the partners were of the opinion that the formal, objective procedures were not effective. They all wanted a system for self-evaluation.

From the process of creating a format for a digital portfolio we learned that the partners liked a hierarchical structure in the portfolio. Our EFA portfolio has a more open structure and we prefer that.

In the training course it was obvious that the trainees liked an open structure better: one participant created his own structure!

Very useful is the instrument with the criteria for evaluation of the portfolios. You need criteria for that, especially when the owners of the portfolios are free to create their own structure. At EFA we did not have that instrument.

Conclusion

Our main question was: could the digital portfolio be an instrument for evaluating the quality of teaching and the progress of educators? We do think so. A digital portfolio is a suitable instrument for self-evaluation and reflection. It fits in

an educational system that is competence driven. The teachers that worked with the digital portfolio were inspired by it and stimulated in their activities as educators. They didn't like the idea of using it for formal external evaluation. Maybe they don't like formal external evaluation at all

One of the conclusions of the 30th Annual Conference of ATEE in Amsterdam was that we should cancel the word 'Standard'. It evokes too many (negative) emotions. The trainees in our course in March 2005 at Cyprus responded in the same way. They liked self-evaluation and reflection in the portfolio and were inspired for improving their quality as professional educators. That's why we think that a digital portfolio is a suitable instrument for improving the quality of teaching and the progress of educators.

But: we can't prove it yet: we need more experience with it.

References

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