

E-portfolios for Scotland's teachers – background paper

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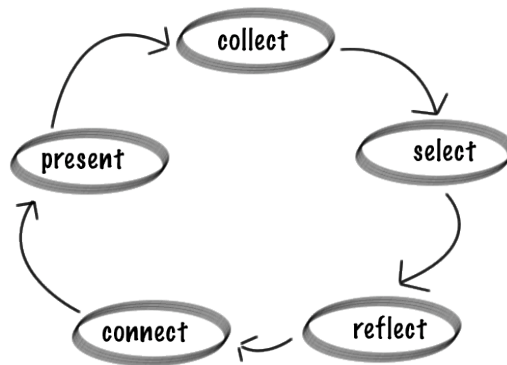
The landscape of professional development for teachers in Scotland has shifted dramatically in recent years. *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century* says that “continuing professional development (CPD) should be a condition of service including every teacher having a commitment to CPD, with individual CPD plans agreed once a year with the immediate manager, and teachers maintaining a personal record of CPD”. Along with these requirements, reflective practice at all stages – from initial teacher education onward – is acknowledged to be an important aspect of the professional and personal growth of teachers.

The electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) is one way of providing training teachers and teachers with a virtual ‘space’ in which to store and reflect on evidence of their development throughout their career - and potentially making transitions easier at several key points along the way.

What is an e-portfolio?

An e-portfolio has much in common with a ‘traditional’ or paper-based portfolio. It can be used to store evidence of and reflections on learning and development. However, unlike a traditional portfolio, an e-portfolio is web-based, and accessible through any internet-enabled computer via a browser. Evidence can consist of any kind of file – including text, graphics, sound and video – as well as links to other web-based content. Evidence which is not in digital form can be referred to in an e-portfolio (by means of photographs, written accounts, etc).

In addition, e-portfolios emphasise process. This is sometimes visualised as a circular progression through various stages. For example:



The technology allows the e-portfolio creator to repeatedly revisit these stages. An e-portfolio need never be a fixed, finished product. Rather, it is a ‘work in progress’ which can grow and change over time, and be presented in a number of different configurations for different audiences and to meet different requirements.

Why an e-portfolio?

This flexibility makes an e-portfolio look like an ideal tool for recording teachers’ professional development, which is also about process, growth and change. In theory, an e-portfolio could support and facilitate professional development by being an ongoing, accessible record controlled by the teacher to serve his or her particular

needs at any given time. At different stages of a teaching career, the e-portfolio could:

- allow teachers to map their development against a set of professional standards;
- provide a convenient way of submitting work for assessment;
- support and provide a space for reflection;
- help teachers structure their CPD records and identify training needs;
- promote continuity as teachers move through different stages (from ITE to induction, etc);
- enable collaboration through sharing and commenting on artifacts and reflections;
- link in with other systems (university records, SSDN, GTCS profiles, CPD course registration systems) to streamline and cut down on repetition of work.

Issues and challenges

Some issues and questions arise as we try to translate these theoretical benefits into practice:

- **ICT literacy:** not everyone will find e-portfolio systems easy to use;
- **ICT access:** not all teachers have the same level of access to computing equipment and internet connections;
- **interoperability:** teachers will almost certainly need to move between different e-portfolio systems as they progress through their careers – how can they take their e-portfolios with them?;
- **efficiency:** how can we ensure that e-portfolios offer benefits in terms of efficiency for teachers?;
- **confidentiality, data protection, freedom of information:** how are teachers' legal and ethical rights and obligations affected by storing potentially sensitive information electronically?
- **the future:** should we be moving towards a single e-portfolio system for the whole profession?

There are also some fundamental questions which are not related to technology, but rather to the purpose and process of recording professional development:

- **ownership:** whose records are these?;
- **supporting reflection:** how do we encourage and support teachers to take the time to regularly reflect on their professional development?

The “E-portfolios for Scotland’s teachers” seminar will provide an opportunity to discuss these and other questions in more detail.

Some additional links and references

Clarke, R and D Robson (2005). *Enhancing Professional Practice and Standards through Continuing Professional Development*. Paper presented at the BERA Annual Conference, September 2005. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/143745.htm>

ERDEE links page - <http://www.erdee.org.uk/links.htm>

JISC e-portfolio briefing paper, March 2006. http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/JISC-BP-ePortfolio-v1-final.pdf

McAlpine, M. (2005). E-portfolios and digital identity: Some issues for discussion. *E-learning*, 2(4). http://www.wwwords.co.uk/elea/content/pdfs/2/issue2_4.asp#7

Tosh, D., Light, T. P., Fleming, K., & Haywood, J. (2005). Engagement with electronic portfolios: Challenges from the student perspective. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, 31(3). <http://www.cjlt.ca/content/vol31.3/tosh.html>