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NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONAL TEACHING CULTURE IN IMPLEMENTING LANGUAGE EPORTFOLIOS

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ABSTRACT

Our article presents the case of ePortfolio use for university-level language learners in foreign, second, and heritage (L2) language classes. It outlines the multi-year initiative of a language center in a private university in the Northeastern U.S. to introduce and support the use of ePortfolios in language classes across its campus. The article takes the form of a narrative in two parts, and in two voices. First, the authors outline the rationale, stages of planning, faculty training initiatives, and technical considerations from the vantage point of the language center's ePortfolio initiative. The second narrative portrays how this ePortfolio initiative took shape in one semester of an Advanced German course. There, the instructor experimented with ePortfolios to showcase students' language skills and intercultural achievements, while cultivating their digital literacy. We argue that the potential for students to take ownership over their ePortfolios as tools for deeper academic and personal development resides significantly with their instructor's pedagogical assumptions and approaches. Further, we suggest that language learners' sustained and deeper use of ePortfolios can be best supported not by a single classroom instructor acting alone, but through coordinated pedagogical, administrative, and technological support across the institution.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

At first glance, the idea of the *electronic portfolio* seems quite straightforward: Al Kahtani (1999) has defined it as “a purposeful collection of a student’s work that is made available on the World Wide Web or a recordable CD-ROM” (p. 262); in their more recent handbook on technology enhanced language learning, Walker and White (2013) gloss the ePortfolio as “a personalized website in which people can record their individual achievements with supporting evidence such as video or written documents” (p. 184).

Despite this ability to quickly characterize the more objective nature of ePortfolios as artifacts or tools, however, the question of cultivating individuals’ longer-term, agential, and developmental practices of engagement with these tools raises a much larger set of challenges. Viewed synchronically, an ePortfolio can be put to use in any number of school and work settings, for widely divergent purposes such as educational development, academic assessment, career advancement, and showcasing achievement (see, e.g., Johnson et al., 2009, p. 6-7). Viewed diachronically—over the course of development and transitions in an individual’s schooling, career, or life—a key strength of the *online* format of ePortfolios is their ability to be reorganized over time (Cummins & Davesne, 2009, p. 849). Yet, as we hope to show in this practice-based study, supporting learners in institutional settings to invest in and take ownership over their ePortfolios both within and beyond the classroom is a challenge that is both great and worthwhile, requiring careful planning and coordinated support from multiple actors.

Our article presents the case of ePortfolio use for university-level language learners in foreign, second, and heritage (L2) language classes. It outlines the multi-year initiative of a language center in a private university in the Northeastern U.S. to introduce and support the use of ePortfolios in language classes across its campus. We argue that the potential for students to take ownership over their ePortfolios as tools for deeper academic and personal development resides significantly with their instructor’s pedagogical assumptions and approaches. Further, we suggest that language learners’ sustained and deeper use of ePortfolios can be best supported not by a single classroom instructor acting alone, but through coordinated pedagogical, administrative, and technological support across the institution.

Following a short literature review, the article takes the form of a narrative in two parts, and in two voices. First, the authors outline the rationale, stages of

planning, faculty training initiatives, and technical considerations from the vantage point of the language center's ePortfolio initiative. Coordinating such a project for L2 classes that take place in departments with varying curricular priorities and traditions exposes several tensions in the culture of L2 learning in many U.S. universities, including that between teacher-fronted and student-directed learning. The second narrative portrays how this ePortfolio initiative took shape in one semester of an Advanced German course. There, the instructor experimented with ePortfolios to showcase students' language skills and intercultural achievements, while cultivating their digital literacy; she found that these efforts achieved significant but limited success over the course of the semester, and suggests strategies for greater classroom integration of ePortfolio-related activities. The article concludes with an overview of next steps for the language center's ePortfolio project, paying special attention to ways in which multi-tiered support can encourage students to assume greater autonomy and control over their ePortfolios as a resource for language development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language teachers have for years encouraged the use of ePortfolios for many of the same reasons as have been documented in the educational literature more generally: to assist students in self-regulating their learning (Cheng & Chau, 2013); to support their writing abilities (Acker & Halasek, 2008; Mazlan, Sui, & Jano, 2015); to encourage reflective learning practices (Brandes, Gabriella Minnes, & Natasha, 2008; Gao, Coldwell-Neilson, & Goscinski, 2014); to track students' learning progress (Wickersham & Chambers, 2006), and thus to serve as an alternative assessment tool (Cummins & Davesne, 2009).

ePortfolios may be said to have particular value for L2 learning in that language is both the object and the medium of the L2 learner's ePortfolio; that is, in the very act of documenting, assembling, and presenting evidence of their learning in a rich multimodal context, students are also demonstrating competent use of the target language. Cummins and Davesne (2009) remark on the aptness of the digital medium for demonstrating L2 learners' proficiency and adaptability, in that it supports a variety of media artifacts, boasts flexibility in organization, ease of sharing and interacting with selective or general audiences, and interoperability with other online sites and social media. Baturay and Daloglu (2010) argue that, in addition to facilitating learners' reflection on their own language development, ePortfolios provide a means for assessing language use in ways not easily captured by standardized tests, in part by supporting

students' performance of real-world tasks. One such area of real-world language use suitable for (both electronic and paper-based) portfolio-based documentation and assessment is the demonstration of intercultural competencies through artifacts showing growth in cultural awareness, self-reflexivity, and change in stereotypes (see, e.g., Allen, 2004; Rantz & Horan, 2005; Su, 2011).

In practice, ePortfolios are widely if disparately used in contexts of university-level L2 teaching and learning, and informal guides with lesson and activity ideas can readily be found (e.g., Erben & Sariéva, 2013, Ch. 15). As indicated by Cummins and Davesne (2009), ePortfolios in use both for documenting personal growth and reporting of language competencies to external entities (academic institutions, potential employers, etc.) can often trace their lineage back to the European Language Portfolio, with its three-part structure (Language Passport, Biography, and Dossier) including "can-do" self-assessment checklists based upon the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (*Council of Europe*, 2001). In the U.S., institutions such as Lafayette College have conducted in-depth, longitudinal reviews of assessment practices across the curricula of their institution's various language programs, and in response implemented ePortfolio-based programs grounded in the standards, goals, and learning outcomes defined by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Standards (ACTFL, 2006; see Geoffrion-Vinci, Lamb-Faffelberger, and Toulouse, 2013).

Crucially for the interests of the present article, Geoffrion-Vinci, Lamb-Faffelberger, and Toulouse's (2013) detailed discussion of the development of Lafayette College's LaFolio initiative highlights the importance of student, faculty, and departmental participation in authoring and customizing the goals, outcomes, and instruments of an ePortfolio program in recursive fashion. Indeed, as we elaborate below, the Lafayette College example demonstrates the benefits of an approach coordinated across multiple institutional levels and scales—from individual students, to classrooms, to departments and (in their case), to the college itself.¹ As we discuss further in our "Next Steps and Conclusions" section, such an approach has implications not just for the planning of

¹ The goals of LaFolio were "to enhance language learning and assessment, to promote reflection and reflective practices for both students and faculty, to connect evidence of student learning with the Standards and other nationally and internationally recognized assessment guidelines, and to provide an opportunity for our department to articulate its own standards, goals, and learning outcomes or what we refer to as Can Do's" (Geoffrion-Vinci, Lamb-Faffelberger, & Toulouse, 2013, p. 41)

administrative and technological support to classroom users of ePortfolios, but also invites a reimagining of the ways in which reflective language learning may be the achievement of a community.

EPORTFOLIOS: A UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE CENTER'S CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

At our university, the ePortfolio was introduced by the language center as an attempt to help language faculty and students approach their learning in a reflective way and to assess their achievements holistically. The language center chose a reflective tool like the ePortfolio because it was felt that much of the assessment of language learning was limited at our university to traditional classroom and achievement testing, with an emphasis in most language departments on mastery of grammar and forms. The ePortfolio, ideally, offered a chance to develop a more holistic picture of the language learner, for herself and for her department. First, the ePortfolio works well with current communicative methods of language learning, in that the artifacts tend to be dynamic and multi-modal (photo essays, recordings of interviews in the target language, student-driven projects and skits, etc.), promoting communication through multiple means. Second, the tool invites the learner to take control of her learning, through the generation and selection of artifacts, and through commentary on them. Finally, the artifacts in the ePortfolio tend to be reflective in their conception, in the sense that the primary artifact (an essay, photo journal, or multi-modal project) requires some contextualizing in order to make it fully legible to an audience outside the course. Thus, the nature of the student output that becomes part of the ePortfolio is skewed towards project-based learning, self-reflection, and multi-modal communication, all aspects of strong communicative language learning.

The first wave of the ePortfolio initiative at the university's language center was conceived of as a partnership with language faculty, to be launched in their classes, but intended for students' use and reflection. While the ePortfolio started as an exploratory project, it was implemented in part as an additional assessment tool by some courses and programs. The center introduced the ePortfolio during a week-long post-semester workshop for 10 faculty members, each of whom had submitted a proposal detailing how they would use the tool in their classes. The proposals were part of the competitive selection process (the workshop afforded a modest stipend) and allowed us to get a sense in advance of how faculty viewed the purpose of the ePortfolio. The language center saw, through reading the

proposals, that if faculty tended to use paper portfolios or to employ reflective tools, such as language learning autobiographies or self-assessments, they recognized the ePortfolio as a student-driven tool, which they happened to be launching in a given class. On the other hand, if faculty had no such experience with approaches that promote reflection and autonomous learning, their conception of the role of the ePortfolio was more traditional: They conceived of it as taking the place of the current learning management system, acting as a container for students' work during the semester. Only a few of the faculty members recognized the potential of the ePortfolio to be a truly student-driven project, one that could serve a student's entire learning trajectory while in college. Most faculty saw it as time-bounded (the semester) and as faculty-directed, with the instructor directing what goes in the ePortfolio.

The week-long ePortfolio workshop itself provided a learning opportunity for the center, as well as the faculty. The center had approached the workshop with certain ideas in mind: that the ePortfolio should be student-driven, that it could be either a developmental or showcase tool, and that students would include work from across their academic endeavors, not just their language study for a particular course. During the workshop, however, all of these questions—Who “owns” the ePortfolio? What should go into it? How polished should it be?—were open for debate in a lively discovery process that helped us, by the week's end, to recognize the multiple challenges that present themselves in the implementation of such a multipurpose tool.

The first question the language center tackled was the design of the ePortfolio. What should it look like and how should it telegraph its status? After discussions with faculty and consultations with others in the language ePortfolio field, the center decided to create an ePortfolio template that included the following main categories: “Compositions,” “Reflections,” “Experiences,” “Courses,” and “Assessment.” The first element would be defined in a broad way to include traditional written compositions, but also video and audio recordings, as well as photo-essays and other kinds of multi-media projects. These compositions, of whatever design, would provide evidence of the student's achievements in the language and material that formed the basis of the reflections. Indeed, since the purpose of the ePortfolio is to help students to further their language learning by raising their awareness about their own development, it only makes sense to see “compositions” and “reflections” as two sides of the same coin. For “experiences,” the center likes to emphasize as wide a range as possible, beyond the study abroad experiences; thus, we encourage students to include reporting and reflection on any kind of community-based

learning they have done, including volunteering as a translator or interviewing the native speaking population in a given urban area. For “Courses,” the center encourages students to think widely about what to include here, showcasing not just language courses, but courses that cluster in fields related to their language study, such as political science or international relations. Indeed, ultimately, we hope that students will see the ePortfolio as a chance to reflect on and record their experiences across their academic career. Finally, the center encourages students to think about “assessment” in the conventional sense (including proficiency test results), but also in the sense of “self-assessment”: As in the case of the *LinguaFolio* and *Global Language Portfolio* (see Cummins & Davesne, 2009), we point students toward the “can do” statements from ACTFL or CEFR, so that they can think in a self-directed way about their own progress in the language.

In developing its ePortfolio template, the language center also considered whether it made sense to start students out with a blank slate or with a template. On the one hand, the ePortfolio is a student’s tool, and, as such, should emerge from the student’s perspective and reflect her interests and preoccupations. On the other hand, the center was aware that, despite the many platforms for self-presentation students engage with regularly online, they do not understand what the ePortfolio is and how it might be useful to them. The center ultimately decided to outfit the ePortfolio as discussed above, based on a similar model from Lafayette College, which was discussed above. Despite our choice to establish a template, however, the language center continues to work to minimize its control over the tool in order to encourage students to see the ePortfolio as their own space. For instance, the original template included boilerplate language to illustrate what might go in the different sections, such as a sample phrase on the “profile” page or a sample entry on the “evidence” page. Seeding the ground with prepared text may help students in a setting where faculty members are working directly with individual students. The language center found, however, that the sample language neither served the project goals—to encourage students to see the ePortfolio as their own—nor our working conditions (a less individualized approach). The language center encourages students to adapt the ePortfolio in any way they like, from changing the style by selecting a new template to adding in new menu items and taking others out. Those who have done the most with the ePortfolio have tended to change its original look and feel to suit their own tastes.

The second question for the teacher workshop was how the ePortfolio might fit into a semester-long course. One of the things the center learned through the

process of the workshop was that teachers had very different views about the ePortfolio and its relation to their existing pedagogy. What would be the relationship of the ePortfolio to the other kinds of student products already assigned in the class? Would the ePortfolio be graded, or treated as “extra credit” work? Would time be given to it during the class, or would it be worked on outside the boundaries of class time? It became clear that the teachers fell on a continuum, with some thinking of the ePortfolio as an adjunct to classwork, a sort of replacement for the content management system. In these cases, the ePortfolio was seen as a static container for student work, a showcase where final products could be displayed for viewing and grading. These faculty members tended to subsume the ePortfolio into their existing curriculum and teaching practices without considering how the existence of a student-driven tool might realign these practices. On the other end of the spectrum were teachers whose pedagogy already included portfolio work that allowed students to show what they had learned in multiple formats. These faculty members tended to include the ePortfolio organically into their curriculum, encouraging students to upload material to the ePortfolio and building the creation of the site itself into their assessment of student progress.

A similar division existed over the question whether the ePortfolio belonged to the class, that its duration or importance should be mapped onto the duration of the semester-long class, or that the ePortfolio should continue to exist beyond the class in which it was introduced. This concept of a learning and assessment tool that persists across multiple classes was foreign for students, as well as teachers, but is one of the key aspects of large-scale language portfolio initiatives (e.g., the European Language Portfolio) and was attractive to the language center from the start. The center feels strongly that students who see their developmental trajectory as continuing across multiple classes, and, ideally, spanning their entire academic career at the university, are more likely to take ownership of their learning and have a greater sense of self-awareness about their growth. In practice, though, teachers on the more traditional end of the spectrum tended to treat the ePortfolio as an aspect of the class, like the assignments and tests, rather than taking the long view. And, in fact, the notion of a learning and assessment tool that spans many semesters runs counter to the conventional college division of student achievement into so many semesters. In our first iteration of the ePortfolio, the decision to introduce the tool through classes run in particular semesters had its value, not least of which was enlisting faculty in thinking about what the tool should look like, but also had its limitations, in particular, the natural tendency of the faculty and students to think of the ePortfolio as bounded by the semester.

Underlying these divisions over how to use and grade the ePortfolio was a more profound division that emerged only through the experience of the workshop and subsequent engagement with faculty. The center came to understand that the tool itself acted as a lens through which to view different approaches to language teaching, highlighting, in particular, the difference between more teacher-fronted and student-centered language teaching among our faculty. The ePortfolio itself privileges self-presentations through student productions, the more various and ambitious, the better. In classes where student projects take center stage, the ePortfolio seemed like a natural fit—these faculty encouraged students to upload their projects and share them with one another, and, in some cases, introduced a global or extra credit grade for the ePortfolio as a whole. These faculty already tended to assign student projects that called on multiple media—students wrote and filmed their own short scripts, they interviewed native speakers in the community, or created mash-ups and websites based on their research—so the ePortfolio reinforced these practices and gave new outlets for student creativity. In other words, student-centered teaching meshed nicely with the affordances of the ePortfolio as a learning and assessment tool. The idea of adding reflective, student-centered practices, such as self-assessments (the CEFR), a language-learning autobiography, or a strategy inventory for language learning, was not a big step for this group of faculty. At the other end of the continuum, however, the more teacher-fronted methods (traditional compositions, tests, and homework assignments) of some faculty members did not lend themselves to the ePortfolio as a learning tool. These classrooms tended to emphasize formal mastery and accuracy, rather than communicative fluency in language learning. The ePortfolio, with its emphasis on learner autonomy and its privileging of fluency-promoting, but imperfect student productions, runs counter to this mode of teaching. Students in these classes had little in the way of projects to load on the sites, and, more importantly, were not schooled in the kind of self-driven learning that would prepare them to make the most of the tool.

The ePortfolio itself, then, does not exist in a vacuum, as a tool that can be “added” to classes by well-meaning teachers without reflection on their current teaching practices. Our attempt to introduce the ePortfolio revealed the uneven development of faculty members on a path towards more student-centered language teaching and highlighted the need for pedagogical development at our institution. These findings pushed us, at the language center, to shift our teacher development—brown bags, individual consultations, and speaker series—in the direction of project-based learning, broadly construed. Since the ePortfolio

workshop a few years ago, the center has used programming to promote project-based learning, task-based teaching, digital storytelling, learning in the community, and communicative language testing, among other topics, as a way to help faculty move toward the kind of teaching that the ePortfolio serves—recognizing students as agents in their language development who should be assessed on what they can do with the language, not just what they know about it. The attempt to introduce the ePortfolio showed us that it is not a context-free tool, that it necessarily operates within a set of practices and assumptions about language teaching and learning that are bound up in its ultimate success.

CLASS EXAMPLE: INCORPORATION OF E-PORTFOLIOS IN ADVANCED GERMAN

ePortfolios were implemented as a pilot project into an advanced German class (third year German) in the university setting described in the preceding sections of this article. After having learned about ePortfolios at the week-long workshop of the language center, which introduced participants to the WordPress blog format for building a simple ePortfolio, the instructor of the advanced German class decided to incorporate ePortfolios for one semester into her third-year course.

There were several reasons for the decision to test the use of ePortfolios in college-level language classes. In addition to facilitating students' reflective, self-regulated learning and self-assessment practices through writing and other communicative modes (see Literature Review, above), ePortfolios appeared to offer significant potential for extra-academic development as well. Students in this particular advanced German class were typically junior or senior college students and would soon apply for jobs, internships, or other positions outside of the university, and the instructor wanted to give them the opportunity to showcase their German (and potentially other language) skills and (inter)cultural experiences in an attractive electronic format. This was seen as advantageous as students could simply provide a link to the ePortfolio with their application materials. Students who were considering graduate school could also benefit from having designed an ePortfolio that summarizes their relevant language and culture background, especially if the graduate degree was in the humanities or a field that values intercultural learning. Lastly, the instructor strongly believed that enhancing students' digital literacy skills is an important goal of foreign language instruction and the ePortfolio project provided a new way to help students sharpen their electronic literacy, as well as a place for them to showcase

and store the products they regularly produced for their German classes. Having worked with a variety of technology projects and being well-trained in language teaching with technology, the instructor felt well prepared to try out this new project.

Description of the Project

At the beginning of the semester students were informed that the course would utilize an ePortfolio on which they could collect their work over the course of the semester as well as publish relevant material from other courses, study abroad, and further relevant language and cultural experiences. During the third week of the semester, all students received a training session at the university's language center where they were introduced to the WordPress sites. The platform for the blog was not integrated with the university's course management software, but students did log into the wordpress site with their student ID and password. This way they did not have to create a separate account. Formatting the ePortfolio, changing the layout or themes, and adding or removing components was fairly simple and students had the freedom to make any stylistic changes that they liked. Working with the platform did not require the download of any programs – students worked directly within the browser. A technology specialist explained how to modify the sites that were pre-created for all students on the university server. The instructor had created a template for the ePortfolios so that all students' ePortfolios had the same structure. Even though students could adjust the headings and sub-pages according to their own preferences, the idea of providing a template was to give students an idea of all the relevant information that could be included in this ePortfolio. The ePortfolio template consisted of the following pages: Profile, Experiences, Courses, Assessments, Evidence, and Reflections.

The menu was created with these pages being static, and categories were added to appear as subpages under these headings, so that students could quickly add new content by writing a post with the relevant category. The Experience page contained four categories: Community Service / Outreach, Study Abroad, Other Experiences, and Extracurriculars. The Courses page contained three categories for first-, second- and third-year German, as most students had taken those courses at the college. The Assessments page contained the two categories: Intercultural Competence and Language Competence. On the Evidence Page, students had categories for: Projects, Written Compositions, and Other Achievements. The Reflections Page consisted of a category for Language

Learning Autobiography and one for Reflections. During the in-class technology workshop, students were shown how to change and add categories, delete, add, or re-organize the order of the pages, and add content to the ePortfolio. All students had been asked to bring a digital picture of themselves for the session and were shown how to add this picture to the profile page of their ePortfolio. The workshop also gave students tips on modifying the theme and changing fonts and other optic features of their website, so they could personalize it and take ownership of their ePortfolio.

Throughout the semester the instructor encouraged students to add content to their ePortfolios on the pages where they already had experiences or products to showcase. Additionally, the course was designed so that students created several products in-class which were immediately added to the ePortfolios to show students the kinds of materials they could collect on the sites. The following section summarizes the projects that were completed as part of the class and subsequently added to students' individual ePortfolios.

Language Learning Autobiography

The advanced German class dealt with issues of identity and one of the first sessions was dedicated to exploring students' own language identity. After having read Emine Sevgi Özdamar's short story *Mutterzunge*, in which a Turkish woman reflects on what it means to speak a foreign language or have a different mother tongue than the country in which one is residing, students composed a linguistic autobiography in class. With this Sprachlernautobiografie students were encouraged to reflect on the contexts in which they had learned foreign languages, what these languages meant to them, and how they influenced their thinking and being. Writing this reflection prompted students to consider the value of languages and other cultures for their own lives and for the plans they had for their future. What role would other languages play in the jobs they were seeking after college? How did their previous travel experience impact their career choices or plans for the future? What does it mean to learn and know another language? This reflective writing piece was then added to the ePortfolios as background to the students' language learning experiences.

Cross-Cultural, Collaborative Final Project

As part of the course, students collaborated with a partner class at a German university. The exchange mainly took place on a Moodle (learning management

system) project website, but students also communicated outside of the platform. Each student had a tandem partner and they completed several communicative tasks together through e-mail, text-chat, voice-chat, and also group-to-group and class-to-class videoconferences. The collaboration culminated in a joint project between the tandem partners in which they created a Weebly website together on a cross-cultural topic of their choice. Students worked with their German partners on diverse topics including: What does it mean to live in another country, people and prejudices, Christianity, stereotypes, racism, patriotism, humor and language, politics and family, critical incidents, being young in Germany and the USA, and holidays. The websites were created collaboratively in both English and German and presented to the class at the end of the semester. The products were very thoughtful, critical, and insightful cultural reflections and students added links to the Weebly Sites to their ePortfolio projects site.

Final Paper & Writing Task

As their final paper, students wrote a composition about identity and history. The paper consisted of several parts that were due at different points throughout the semester. It included an interview with a German person, background research on an historical event, and speculation about the effects of this event. The paper included academic research and advanced language constructions due to the specific task and was added to the ePortfolio under the written compositions category. It was a great example of students' competencies in crafting academic research papers in another language.

Students also completed smaller writing tasks throughout the semester that they could post on their ePortfolios, as they composed weekly reflective posts on a course blog. Some of these were very culturally insightful and could easily be added to the ePortfolio to showcase the students' abilities.

Speaking Tasks

Several times during the semester students completed speaking tasks online. They were given a prompt related to the in-course materials and used an online tool (typically vocaroo.com or recordmp3.org) to record their oral response. The instructor motivated the students to select the best of their speaking responses and post them as examples of their spoken language ability on their ePortfolio website. Unfortunately, it later became clear that the majority of the online tools

selected for the oral tasks did not keep the recordings online indefinitely. In the future, other tools need to be selected for the speaking tasks to ensure that the recordings will remain available on the ePortfolios for as long as students need them.

Extracurricular Events and Outreach

Throughout the semester students were expected to attend three cultural events in the German Department. The Department has a rich extracurricular program for students that includes weekly tea-time gatherings, movie screenings, guest speakers, semester celebrations, and much more. Attending these events allowed students to practice the target language outside of the classroom and become members of a German-speaking community. Students were encouraged to write about these events on the Extracurricular Experiences page. Similarly, students were given the opportunity to assist with a cultural outreach program which was held at the local public library for children of the community. This program taught children aged 5-13 simple German words and phrases while at the same time offering them a glimpse into the German culture by presenting fairy tales and celebrating a typical German carnival, for example. Students from the advanced German class had the chance to help with these events, and write about their service-learning experience on the Outreach page of their ePortfolio.

In addition to the course components summarized above which were posted on the students' ePortfolios, students were reminded of other relevant experiences that they could share on their ePortfolios. The instructor often used the beginning of class when students were coming to the classroom to ask students about previous study abroad or travel experiences and made suggestions of relevant material that could enhance the students' ePortfolios. However, students had to add the content to their ePortfolio outside of class. As will be discussed below, this sometimes led to missed opportunities for showcasing a student's full range of experiences and abilities.

STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF THE PROJECT

Overall the project was an interesting initiative to show students how they can build an ePortfolio and to give them concrete suggestions for relevant content. It also provided students with ideas for other areas where they could strengthen their experiences to expand their knowledge and skills and become

more inter-culturally and cross-lingually competent. However, the main challenge of the project was its lack of systematic incorporation into the classroom. In spite of the instructor's efforts to remind students and encourage them to update their ePortfolios with the projects completed for class and other relevant materials, students essentially had to complete the posting of content at home. With the exception of the initial workshop in which students posted their picture and changed the layout of their ePortfolio, no class time was dedicated to students actually adding content to the ePortfolios. Even though the instructor believed students would complete this task at home after the sessions in which content was completed in class, it turned out that the majority of students forgot or chose not to maintain their ePortfolios outside of class. The strongest lesson learned from this pilot project was therefore that class time has to be made available for students to work on their individual ePortfolios. This could also give students the opportunity to see what type of content other students are posting and they could exchange experiences and ideas for furthering their language and culture learning. There are in fact many communicative tasks that could be connected to the in-class use of ePortfolios that could enhance students' awareness of the value of language learning and exposure to other cultures. This would tie the ePortfolios more strongly to in-class activities and would help students take charge of their ePortfolios. In future projects, the ePortfolios will become a regular part of in-class activities to ensure that students have the time and guidance to create a successful and effective ePortfolio.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS

In order to integrate ePortfolios successfully into language courses, it is important that the instructor and students have technological support. In this pilot project, it was very helpful that students did not have to create an ePortfolio from scratch but that a template was provided and a website prepared for them. Even though not all sections were relevant to all students, for the pilot project it saved a lot of time to have an outline to work with. The instructor should also have some skills in building an ePortfolio so that he/she can assist students when questions arise. Secondly, it is crucial that the ePortfolio content creation be made part of the class. Students should not be expected to add all content to their ePortfolios outside of class, because it is likely that not all students will make the best use of the ePortfolio if it is not a mandatory course component. Dedicating in-class time to maintaining the ePortfolio will greatly enhance students' reflective and learning practices. Lastly, it would be helpful if instructors

collaborated with other departments and/or the study abroad office to help students expand their ePortfolio to other language and culture experiences. This could truly enhance the ePortfolio as a tool for student reflection as well as showcasing their language learning journey, their achievements, and their intercultural development.

NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the university's language center has outfitted over 100 students with ePortfolios through the course-based model, some fifteen percent of whom used the tool extensively, it became clear that a diversified approach will better serve our purpose of helping language learners to take ownership of their learning. The course-based model allowed us to reach a group of students with a similar goal and to rely on the natural coalition-building that happens in a classroom. As illustrated in the case of the third-year German class, however, the successful integration of ePortfolios into existing curricular contexts is not a straightforward matter: adjusting learning outcomes, adapting classroom activities, and expanding out-of-class collaborations are among the matters that must be considered.

While continuing to support these experimental practices at the course level, the language center plans in its next phase to develop support for individual students within special-interest groups. Our language center runs two specialized language learning programs for students, both of which give the learner up to two hours per week of one-on-one time with an educated native speaker of the language the student wishes to learn. This directed independent language study gives students the chance to study languages not taught at our university or to study a commonly taught language in a specialized field (e.g., French and Economics). Students in these programs tend to be highly motivated language learners (they get no course credit for the program) and they tend to have a clear sense of why they are studying the language (for research abroad, the senior thesis, or graduate work). They are often multilingual and committed language learners, with a clear sense of their learning strategies and skills. The center outfits all participants in the cohort of students chosen to pursue the specialized language program at the beginning of each semester and then follows up with a series of workshops that introduce them to the platform and explain the purpose of the ePortfolio. These workshops include instruction in how to write a language learning autobiography, how to take a self-assessment questionnaire, how to upload video and audio clips that give evidence of language learning, and what

kinds of other projects belong in the ePortfolio. The center expects that highly motivated students who have ambitious plans for using their languages after college will recognize the potential for personal and professional growth that the ePortfolio offers. In the future, research into student experiences with and expectations for using ePortfolios could shed more light into the affordances of this tool.

For the language center, one of our main goals for this group of special-interest students is to broaden the array of available assessments, so that the center can understand students' experiences and work to improve these programs. Both of the self-directed language programs have a long history (one has been in existence for 12 years) and they already require that students take a standard oral proficiency assessment once a semester to measure their progress. While the oral proficiency test is valuable, it gives us only one point of data to measure student progress and, as an external rating, it has a limited effect on students' sense of their own agency as language learners. The ePortfolio will give us a more holistic view of student achievement in the programs, including the nature of student engagement with their language partners, the pathways to proficiency that students take, and students' changing identity in relation to the language. These questions—to do with process and subjective experience—are more properly understood through self-evaluation and reflective practices than through proficiency tests, and the center plans to use the training sessions as ways to raise students' awareness about their own language learning. We hope that students will see the ePortfolio first as a developmental tool—where am I in my language learning and where would I like to go?—and later, as they leave the program, as a showcase of their achievement that they can use for academic and professional purposes.

As language instructors, language center administrators, and instructional technologists who collaborate with scores of others to support second language learning in our departments, across our university, and in dialogue with colleagues in institutions elsewhere, we are committed to the notion that the success of ePortfolios depends on nuanced collaboration among an extended community of practice. In addition to the needs of individual students and teachers, we believe that there is a need for greater attention to the classroom, institutional, social, and material conditions enabling learners' deep and reflective learning through ePortfolios. Creating and nurturing such conditions will require the conceiving of flexible models for supporting diverse pedagogies and learner interests, a greater openness to dialogue about learning goals and

methods, as well as a commitment on the part of all participants to cycles of reflection and growth that continue far beyond the length of an academic term.

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