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ePortfolios for self-regulated learning: Aspirations, problems & possibilities

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Abstract

ePortfolios in higher education are assumed to be effective at developing and determining complex student competencies and skills highly correspondent to self-regulated learning (SRL). Research validating this assumption, however, is sparse and of varying quality. Drawing on a recent, systematic review of relevant literature by the presenter's research team, this Pecha Kucha explores major trends and gaps in the research into relationships between ePortfolios and SRL. Corresponding areas and approaches for further research are identified, as well.

Sustained academic success requires autonomy, agency, and motivation from the learner to effectively plan and execute learning activities (Henri, Morrell & Scott, 2017; Pintrich, 2004). Due to the correspondence of SRL to these characteristics, higher education practitioners and researchers are increasingly interested in how best to support and determine students' SRL development.

ePortfolios are believed to be a means for accomplishing and evidencing this development. ePortfolios are deliberate, curated collections of work that may provide opportunity for development and demonstration of complex outcomes (Stefani, Mason & Pegler, 2007). This value proposition is based on perceptions that ePortfolios are guided by frameworks for learning rather than predetermined product; centre on active learner engagement and authority; and foster connection and synthesis within and across curricula (Watson, Kuh, Rhodes, Light & Chen, 2016). These criteria strongly overlap with elements of SRL and align with best practices in assessment. ePortfolios are also perceived as a way in which educational technologies may be leveraged to allow students to develop and evidence competencies in innovative ways (Deneen & Shroff, 2014).

The literature supporting such conclusions, however, has recognised problems. These problems range from methodological limitations to a lack of specificity about which activities comprising ePortfolio engagement are most relevant to SRL competencies (Deneen, 2013; Deneen, Brown & Carless, 2018; Rhodes, Chen, Watson, & Garrison, 2014).

This Pecha Kucha presents results from a systematic review of relevant literature on ePortfolios and SRL. The objectives of the review were to identify methodologically sound studies examining ePortfolio use in relation to SRL, systematically review whether, and how ePortfolio use improves or allows evidence of students' SRL skills and propose useful directions for future research and practice.

A systematic, multi-stage review was conducted of relevant, empirical literature. This yielded only eight studies of sufficient quality and relevance to inform understandings of ePortfolios' interactions with SRL. Results support the general premise that ePortfolios correlate to SRL development in a higher education context. Limitations within the literature, however, inhibit our ability to establish more specific or causal connections.

A subsequent thematic analysis of the broader scope of near-acceptable literature yielded a schema of specific,

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SRL-relevant ePortfolio learning tasks and activities. These have potential for informing practice but require further robust and contextually relevant research. The Pecha Kucha concludes by offering specific suggestions for conducting this research.

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