

The Q-folio in Action: Technology Integration in Inquiry-Based Language Learning

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Abstract:

Presenter will share an approach to re-inventing the pen and paper portfolio and the traditional research project with the Q-folio, a web-based electronic portfolio designed for language pedagogy courses taught at the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech.

The "Q-folio" courseware tool was originally designed for use in portfolio-based writing instruction. The principals employed in that design include: (1) a web-based platform for communication; (2) a "user-centered" approach in which users of the tool are invited to participate in the design of the interface; and (3) "day one productivity," meaning the tool should require a minimum of training before it can be used productively. The Q-folio acted as a robust document management system both for delivering content to the students as well as archiving drafts of their work. The system also allowed them to build multimedia files with full HTML capabilities for presentations. The tool was built in a web-database environment using Cold Fusion, allowing administrators to develop the tool rapidly and make changes easily. Cold Fusion's close adherence to HTML standards and its relatively straightforward commands for manipulating databases were found to be effective for instructors with little knowledge of programming.

In supporting the Heuristic Quest research project in "Language, Literacy, and Culture," the Q-folio provides students the opportunity to develop their own research agenda and to use inquiry to teach themselves and their classmates in an authentic research process. Using hypertext, interlinks across heuristics, and web links, students create a sophisticated road map of inquiry into the nature of language and effective language instruction. They document their process and their findings, which are being archived for future students and eventually for public access. Although customized for this course, the Q-folio is being used in other courses at the University of Virginia as well as Virginia Tech. Ultimately, the tool can be used to support any content area and grade level where teachers want to enhance and integrate the research, writing, language, and conversational practices of their students.

Comments:

The evaluation study informing this presentation was conducted on the electronic portfolio mentioned and examined students' experience of the tool to support both their research processes and products. This study sought to address the need for information regarding: 1) how preparing teachers perceive the technology they are being asked to use; 2) the extent to which electronic portfolios enhanced content learning for these students; 3) how students might collaborate with instructors and technicians on the design of the technology intended to support their work; and 4) how experiences of technology in teacher education affects student plans for integrating technology in subsequent learning environments.

The data (from surveys, interviews, lab and classroom observations) derive from a course focused on language, literacy and culture, wherein the subjects used the specific electronic portfolio tool to further a research question of their own choosing related to language pedagogy in the English classroom. The case study method and analytic induction were used to arrive at the findings regarding students' perception of the tool and associated tasks, the impact upon content learning, the potential for collaboration on instructional design, and the impact upon student technology use. Findings were used to revise the course and refine the tool for this course as well as additional course settings.

I had difficulty in deciding on a presentation category. The presentation would include a talk integrated with a demonstration of the tool and some of the student work archived there. I am open to suggestions for altering the presentation category should this be a concern.

Possible co-presenters may include Margo A. Figgins, Associate Prof. of English Education at the University of Virginia, and Yitna Firdyiwek, Faculty Instructional Technology Advisor at the University of Virginia.