

**Perceptions of ePortfolio Use as a Job-Seeking Tool Within At-Risk, Non-Traditional Adult
Learner Populations and the Workforce Development Field**

A Review of the Literature

Jerry H. Yamashita

Lamar University

Perceptions of ePortfolio Use as a Job-Seeking Tool Within At-Risk, Non-Traditional Adult
Learner Populations and the Workforce Development Field

Introduction

While there has been a large database of information produced over the last three decades on the usage of ePortfolios and its implications within the adult learner community in a broad sense, there is much less literature dedicated to at-risk adult learners and their use of ePortfolios as a job-seeking tool. This literature review takes that limitation into account with the perspective that the research that is readily available can still be useful and applied to the focus of this paper. That is, research on non-traditional, at-risk learners—usually envisioned as college students who do not fit the traditional role of attending a 4-year university while living on campus—when examined solely through the lens of andragogy remains applicable because the level of education (e.g. high school versus college) does not matter as much as how the student actually learns. In effect, all of the aforementioned populations could be considered non-traditional learners and these students bring a wealth of experience and previous knowledge into their studies which allows them to approach their learning experience in unique ways (Madden, 2015).

This paper aims to explore the perceptions of ePortfolio use as a job-seeking tool within the at-risk, non-traditional adult learner population and the workforce development field. It is important to first define what an ePortfolio is and what it might look like to both the teacher and the student. The workforce development professional (e.g., job coach, hiring manager) should also be considered as they will be the recipient of an applicant's ePortfolio (given any research exists in this area). Once the ePortfolio is defined, experiences and perceptions on how it is used as a job-seeking tool are studied and its role inside the classroom and out in the workplace is

imagined. Finally, the existing literature will be reflected upon, gaps identified, and next steps will be considered.

The Literature

The main objective of this review is to identify the existing literature available studying perceptions of ePortfolio use as a job-seeking tool within the at-risk, non-traditional adult learner population and the workforce development field, if available. This learner segment is identified as adults over the age of 22 earning their high school diploma and/or receiving job skill training and using the ePortfolio as part of their job search process. The research will explore the historical usage of the ePortfolio, use as a job-seeking tool, and reflection on learner and workforce development professional perceptions.

What is an ePortfolio?

It is important to address the question before moving forward so that a baseline understanding is defined. An ePortfolio, since its rise in popularity and use in the late 1990's, has taken on different definitions for different users and different purposes. Some see the ePortfolio as an online repository for class assignments, others see it as a tool for assessing progress, and many feel it is best used as a virtual resume (Jenson & Treuer, 2014; Kahn, 2014). For the purposes of this paper, due to the nature of our target populations, we will identify an ePortfolio as any student-created online space used for workforce development purposes.

Early days. A portfolio can be described as a collection of personal and professional work used to outline, over time, skills, growth, or development (Kilroy, 2017). The print portfolio, which gathered a large following in the late 1980's and early 1990's, was meant to encourage students to practice self-reflection, metacognition, and self-critique. Beginning in the

late 1990's, with the advent of the modern internet, many schools and universities began implementing ePortfolio requirements and the older print portfolios were transferred online as essentially computer or web-based versions (Bolliger, 2010). Increased penetration of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and steady growth of the internet accelerated the early migration of student portfolios from analog to digital. This coincided with the increased influence of the so-called "assessment movement" and higher demands for evidence of learning from accrediting agencies and governmental bodies. The ePortfolio was seen as an ideal vehicle to meet these demands due to the ability to use digital media to capture work that represented authentic performance (Kahn, 2014).

Present day. There is still debate among practitioners as to what the true definition of the ePortfolio is; different types exist for different reasons: assessment, career exploration, evidence of learning, etcetera. This paper does not aim to land on a single definition, rather it looks at all methods as valid and in many cases the ideal ePortfolio addresses multiple objectives simultaneously (Kahn, 2014). However, the main focus of the ePortfolio as a job-seeking tool will be the primary perspective.

Looking ahead. Goodson (2007) notes that as the ePortfolio is still an emerging genre in education, we as educators are able to participate and shape it. Analyzing research from a study done with middle schoolers in Boston, Massachusetts and undergraduate and graduate students at Salem State College in Salem, Massachusetts, shows that ePortfolios are capable of many things, including organizing, displaying, and assessing student work (Fahey, Lawrence, & Paratore, 2007). However, the authors declare that rather than trying to change the way teachers and students collect and organize their data, they want to change the way they think, discuss, and use

that data. This perspective addresses a prevailing notion that suggests technology is not as important as what one does with it. Stansberry and Kymes (2007) go even further and explore beyond the technology and design of the ePortfolio; exploring self-reflection and taking ownership and agency of the project, it is argued, can be a transformative experience and change teaching beliefs.

Effective Use of the ePortfolio as a Job-Seeking Tool

The purpose of the ePortfolio is as varied as the agency or field that chooses to use it. In addition to educational institutions, many companies have also adopted ePortfolio initiatives in their organizations. Many agencies choose to use ePortfolios to support lifelong learning and lifewide learning as well as a wide range of interconnected purposes with the creator assuming multiple roles (Cambridge, 2008). With this in mind, many employers may be encouraged by applicants who present an ePortfolio as part of the application process.

A Job-Seeking Tool

It is worth noting, however, that because of the wide-ranging variation in how ePortfolios are used there is a lack of research in specific, specialized areas of study such as the one this paper attempts to address. Literature exists that addresses learner perceptions of ePortfolios and ePortfolio use as a job-seeking tool as individual areas of study, but there is little that addresses both in conjunction. This makes it difficult to draw any conclusions on the main research question, but connections can still be made using the existing literature with relatable topics in a more general way.

Career pathways. Utilizing an ePortfolio with a career path in mind can be very beneficial to the user, especially as the traditional job search is moving from the classified

section of the newspaper to the computer screen. ePortfolios are emerging as a popular alternative to the paper based CV or job application (Kilroy, 2017). The trend toward e-business and the popularity of the internet has also contributed to a widespread use of ePortfolios as a way to transfer students' knowledge and ability from the classroom to the workplace (Hsieh, Chen, & Hung, 2015).

The job-seeking process. Learners looking for work may send a link to their ePortfolio to a prospective employer or workforce development professional in addition to the traditional resume or CV. This link may take the viewer to the student's personal information, important educational and career-related content, and examples of authentic project-based learning opportunities created as part of a required course of study, internship, or work experience (Dubinsky, 2003).

Perceptions. A recent study found that recruiters with less than two years experience tended to view an applicant's ePortfolio more often than their colleagues with three or more years experience, but the recruiters' overall perception of ePortfolio use in the job-seeking process was positive (Leahy & Filiatrault, 2017). Some job-seekers, however, do not see an ePortfolio as a useful tool because of the need to tailor an application or CV to each recipient, especially if the applicant is more advanced in their career (Herman & Kirkup, 2008). More objective research has shown that regardless of perception, ePortfolios can give employers a more dynamic view of candidates and improve applicant's relationship with the marketplace (Pires & Rodrigues, 2018).

Effectiveness. Although the focus of the research is on perceptions, it is also important to consider effectiveness within the context. Ring, Waugaman, and Brackett (2017) in summarizing

previous studies on effective use of ePortfolios in the job-seeking process concluded that the work of creating the ePortfolio was incredibly important. Students that received mentoring on ePortfolio pedagogy demonstrated better interviewing skills than students who received little or no intervention. Attribution was given to the process of developing a professional identity through the ePortfolio creation process which translated well in one-on-one interviews.

Possible concerns. There are significant differences in experience and comfort level using technology between younger and older students which may impact learner engagement. Many learners have concerns about the level of digital literacy needed in order to design and implement an ePortfolio, not to mention attempting to use it in the job-seeking process. Similarly, there are instructor readiness concerns related to personal comfort level using various technologies (Wuetherick & Dickinson, 2015).

Conclusion

The literature makes clear that ePortfolios are generally an effective vehicle to display students' evidence of learning, demonstrate understanding of workplace skills, and as a supplement to the traditional resume or CV. However, many sources will argue that there are very specific guidelines that need to be followed in order to achieve positive outcomes, especially as it pertains to job-seeking. Other concerns include availability of technology and adequate levels of digital literacy.

Exploring the existing literature in the field of adult education as it relates to perceptions of ePortfolios as a job-seeking tool suggests that the field of study requires ongoing contributions to research in order to have a well-rounded repository of useful information. Further study may be necessary to better understand the unique nature of at-risk, non-traditional adult learners, over

the age of 22, who are using an ePortfolio as part of the job-seeking process and workforce development professionals who review them.

References

- Bolliger, D. U., & Shepherd, C. E. (2010). Student perceptions of eportfolio integration in online courses. *Distance Education, 31*(3), 295-314.
- Cambridge, D. (2008). Audience, integrity, and the living document: eFolio Minnesota and lifelong and lifewide learning with eportfolios. *Computers & Education, 51*(3), 1227-1246.
- Dubinsky, Ji. (2003). Creating New Views on Learning: ePortfolios. *Business Communication Quarterly, 66*(4), 96. Retrieved from <https://search-ebshost-com.libproxy.lamar.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=11595453&site=eds-live>
- Fahey, K., Lawrence, J., & Paratore, J. (2007). Using Electronic Portfolios to Make Learning Public. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 50*(6), 460-471. doi:10.1598/jaal.50.6.4
- Goodson, F. T. (2007). The Electronic Portfolio: Shaping an Emerging Genre. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 50*(6), 432-434. doi:10.1598/jaal.50.6.1
- Herman, C., & Kirkup, G. (2008). Learners in transition: the use of ePortfolios for women returners to science, engineering and technology. *Innovations in Education & Teaching International, 45*(1), 67-76. <https://doi-org.libproxy.lamar.edu/10.1080/14703290701757468>
- Hsieh, T., Chen, S., & Hung, M. (2015). Longitudinal test of eportfolio continuous use: An empirical study on the change of students' beliefs. *Behaviour & Information Technology, 34*(8), 838-853. doi:10.1080/0144929X.2014.907344

Jenson, J. D., & Treuer, P. (2014). Defining the e-portfolio: What it is and why it matters.

Change, 46(2), 50-57.

Kahn, S. (2014). E-portfolios: A look at where we've been, where we are now, and where we're

(possibly) going. *Peer Review*, 16(1), 4.

Kilroy, J. (2017). From a cv to an eportfolio: An exploration of adult learner's perception of the

eportfolio as a jobseeking tool. International Association For Development Of The

Information Society.

Leahy, R. L., & Filiatrault, A. (2017). Employers' Perceptions of the Benefits of Employment

Electronic Portfolios. *International Journal of EPortfolio*, 7(2), 217–223. Retrieved from

[https://search-ebshost-com.libproxy.lamar.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=](https://search-ebshost-com.libproxy.lamar.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1159830&site=eds-live)

[EJ1159830&site=eds-live](https://search-ebshost-com.libproxy.lamar.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1159830&site=eds-live)

Madden, T. M. (2015). Reimagining boundaries: How eportfolios enhance learning for adult

students. *International Journal Of Eportfolio*, 5(1), 93.

Pires, A. & Rodrigues, M. (2018). How can ePortfolios promote employment? In M. Laurikainen

& I. Kunnari (eds.) Employers' perspectives on ePortfolios. HAMK Unlimited

Professional 3.8.2018. Retrieved from

[https://unlimited.hamk.fi/ammattillinen-osaaminen-ja-opetus/how-eportfolios-promote-em](https://unlimited.hamk.fi/ammattillinen-osaaminen-ja-opetus/how-eportfolios-promote-employment)

[ployment](https://unlimited.hamk.fi/ammattillinen-osaaminen-ja-opetus/how-eportfolios-promote-employment)

Ring, G. L., Waugaman, C., & Brackett, B. (2017). The Value of Career ePortfolios on Job

Applicant Performance: Using Data to Determine Effectiveness. *International Journal of*

EPortfolio, 7(2), 225–236. Retrieved from

<https://search-ebshost-com.libproxy.lamar.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1159904&site=eds-live>

Stansberry, S. L., & Kymes, A. D. (2007). Transformative Learning Through “Teaching With Technology” Electronic Portfolios. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(6), 488-496. doi:10.1598/jaal.50.6.6

Wuetherick, B., & Dickinson, J. (2015). Why ePortfolios? Student perceptions of eportfolio use in continuing education learning environments. *International Journal Of Eportfolio*, 5(1), 39-53.