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Between performativity and authenticity:
researching reflection in doctoral student's electronic teaching portfolios
(summary)

The issue of supporting young academics' professional development through portfolio construction is not adequately explored, and yet new, online learning tools such as electronic portfolios are assumed to become triggers for reflective writing and self-assessment (Cambridge, Cambridge, & Yancey, 2009; Light, Chen, & Ittelson, 2012). In particular, there is a lack of clear understanding of how doctoral students perceive the process of portfolio development and whether it actually increases their capacity for reflective thinking on their teaching and professional development.

Our proposed paper aims to connect the literature on the development of academic conceptions of teaching (Fox 1983; Simmons, 2011), as part of an inquiry into academics' professional development (e.g. Akerlind, 2005), with the theoretical models for reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kreber & Castleden, 2008). Our research aim is to analyse how doctoral students in a specific university context learn to develop (or not) a more complex, coherent and possibly productive mental representation of their own work as university teachers with the use of an electronic teaching portfolio. The students work in a specific learning environment, and were supported with a pedagogical process (including a course, a learning community, an online platform, and mentorship models).

Our conception of reflection is based on the assumption that successful self-inquiry in the domain of teacher knowledge is a transformative process that best proceeds with reflection and conscious self-monitoring of professional growth (Järvinen & Kohonen, 1995; Smith & Tillema, 2001). Reflection, as Freese (1999) defines it, based on Loughran (1995) and Schön (1983), is "the process of making sense of one's experiences by deliberately and actively examining one's thoughts and actions to arrive at new ways of understanding oneself as a teacher" (p. 898). The appearance of teaching portfolios (Seldin 2007, 1997), and related formats, such as course portfolios (Hutchings, 1998) have been lauded as allowing for this type of teacher inquiry to emerge through sustained engagement. An electronic teaching portfolio is often perceived as a "live document" representing progress in development (Oner & Adadan, 2011), scaffolding the whole development process, and promoting a scholarly approach to teaching through the purposeful collection of evidence (descriptions, documents, audio-visual, hyper-texted online materials etc.) of what comprises good teaching (de Rijdt, Tiquet, Dochy, & Devolder, 2006; Doolittle, 1994; Järvinen & Kohonen, 1995). Teaching portfolios also contain reflections on the complexity of domain-specific educational practice.

However, existing texts about the use of teaching portfolios by early-career academics are often somewhat schematic in approach, advice-oriented or manual-like, and rarely based on empirical studies of the experiences of academics who construct them. The exception to this are a few auto-ethnographic

accounts of development that mention the role of portfolios (Blair & Monske, 2009). There is a particular lack of systematic inquiry into how these developmental processes can be pedagogically introduced as part of doctoral training and how they are experienced by doctoral students themselves.

Our research project focuses on early-career academics' reflective thinking processes and mental constructs of the electronic portfolio deployed by doctoral students at Central European University, Budapest as they begin to construct their portfolios using an open source web-based e-portfolio software, which is a learner-centred system (a form of personal learning environment). The development of electronic teaching portfolios is triggered by a dedicated three-week seminar at the Center for Teaching and Learning, followed by a lab session and further mentoring opportunities. The specificity of our context is that the university is a post-graduate and profoundly international institution, which does not fit neatly into any single educational system. The young scholars we work with are social scientists and humanities doctoral students. They are preparing for employment in any number of different targeted educational systems, both European and non-European. In doing so they have to deal with high levels of career uncertainty and contradictory mentoring models and career advice deployed by their departments and supervisors coming from different educational models.

We have the following main research questions: Does the creation of electronic teaching portfolios allow for the construction of self-reflective teaching identity in this context? What are the actual thinking processes of reflective thinking during portfolio development and to what extent do these correlate with existing theoretical models? What are the most productive and least productive mental constructs of this work?

The project is designed as a case study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994) relying on a qualitative approach, which allows for the analysis, explanation and interpretation of the underlying processes (Chi, 1997). It best suits our aims since it is anchored in real life; it focuses on a particular situation, or phenomenon and allows for the investigation of the process (Merriam, 1998). Case study design has proven extremely useful in studying educational innovations (such as the use electronic portfolios) since it can bring about understanding that may affect and improve practice (Merriam, 1998).

In relation to our research questions, we first analyse (through multiple inductive and deductive categorisation and coding processes in which qualitative data will be also quantified) fifteen semi-structured interviews with 15 students from the first four cohorts. In the future this will be supplemented with an analysis of texts and underlying conceptual choices made by students in developing their entire early electronic portfolios. The students were found to move between performative and authentic repertoires and used distinctive constructs of portfolios that can account for varying degrees of development in their capacity for critically reflective teaching and lifelong professional development. We will discuss our findings in detail and with a focus on implications for professional development of early-career academics in specific cultural and institutional environments as well as for studies of doctoral education (cf. Walker, Golde, Jones, Bueschel & Hutchins, 2008).

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