Owning The Future: The Impact of ePortfolios on the Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education

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EDLD 5315: Assess Digital Learning and Instruction

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September 28, 2023

Introduction

There are more high school students eligible for post-secondary school than ever before (ScienceDirect, 2017). Through the evolution of technological resources, today's students have the ability to obtain knowledge and develop skills at an increasingly fast rate. However, there is a discrepancy between the number of college-eligible students and those that actually follow through with their post-secondary applications, specifically with students of disadvantaged backgrounds (including ethnic minorities, low socioeconomic, first generation, etc.). To address this issue, educators must explore creative and innovative solutions that uplift their students and cultivate a sound support system. The focus of this literature review is to explore how ePortfolios allow students to take ownership of their learning and how this, in turn, inspires those students to reach higher and further their education. This will be supported through discussions regarding barriers for disadvantaged students, understanding ePortfolios, owning the future, self-motivation and achievement, and implications of innovative technological practices. It is the goal of this literature review to provide evidence of ways the implementation of ePortfolios impact students in their pursuit for secondary education.

Review of the Literature

Barriers for Disadvantaged Students

Prior to exploring solutions, we need to better define the barriers that students may face when contemplating and pursuing a post-secondary education. These barriers at a minimum may include the economic stress, confusion regarding passions and how they can be applied to a career, lack of an informed support system, intimidation on the application process and the paperwork required to successfully submit it, and so on. Even though more students are eligible to attend post-secondary school, those who are less privileged are far less likely to even apply to

college (ScienceDirect, 2017). This issue is rooted in lack of access to accurate, transparent information and resources for both disadvantaged students and their families (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). Students are more likely to apply for post-secondary school when provided access to accurate college application processes and logistics (ScienceDirect, 2007).

Additionally, another massive component to evaluate regarding this issue is the impact of family members on a student's choice to apply to and then attend post-secondary school. Family members are directly impacted by a student's choice to attend post-secondary school and their insight can be incredibly beneficial to the application and selection process. Therefore, it is critical for family members to also have a clear understanding of the application and attendance process as well as all of the logistics that go along with them, especially location and cost (Roksa & Deutschlander, 2018).

Understanding ePortfolios

In order to understand the impact that ePortfolios can have on students and their families through the application process, it's important to understand the educational foundations that reinforce the effectiveness of tools such as an ePortfolio. John Dewey insisted that students preferred gaining an experimenting with knowledge that would be applicable to the real world, not just the classroom. He equated "the ability to use knowledge learned in the real world" as pragmatism (Dewey, 2001). Furthermore, Dewey expressed that educators need to be intentional with their teaching - that they must address the ever evolving world and evolve alongside it. In conjunction with experiencing educational moments in an applicable way, it's essential that students have the ability to self-reflect and evaluate their own and others' work to a high level. Horn & Staker (2001) enforce the importance of reflection throughout the learning experience by saying "reflection over time increases a learner's ability to make sense of a concrete experience."

Through these foundational concepts, it is clear that ePortfolios (to be effective) must provide their contributors the opportunity to own and apply their knowledge. However, it must also reinforce the idea that life in a continuous learning experience and self-reflection is a key component of that experience. Students that utilize ePortfolios are able to explore their own individual learning goals while collaborating with peers and qualified educators so as to learn and grow as a community.

Owning the Future

Beyond acquiring impactful knowledge and skills, students buy into the intrinsic motivation of working towards their future while utilizing an ePortfolio, "instigating cognitive function for a person wanting a positive, quality learning experience" (Muhammad et al., 2020). Students are able to contribute to the materials and skills required to get into post-secondary school and find success beyond it, therefore they see the value and are more invested to see the payout. Students are able to make their learning personal, they are in control of what they develop and they own their learning process and its outcomes (Harapnuik, Thibodeaux & Cummings, 2018). Subsequently, ePortfolios wonderfully exhibit personalization through learning by having students engage with resources provided by facilitators and determine how to implement them and their individual learning experience. Then, through collaboration and a willingness to share ideas and feedforward, students are exposed to other perspectives which can promote a strengthening in one's own abilities and humility to learn from others.

Additionally, beyond learning theoretical components, ePortfolios tie in the technical component of developing their ePortfolio into an innovative technology that best suits their needs. Students need exposure to various technologies to be prepared for any career field they enter into, and the incorporation of intentional group work adds another level of sophistication to

the continuous learning experience. In an ever evolving world where the future is uncertain, skills such as creativity and adaptability are just as critical as technological savviness.

Student Achievement

Students need to learn about themselves and identify their marketable interests so that they may discover potential career options for their future. By exposing students to various career opportunities and paths through the implementation of ePortfolios, students are able to highlight some proximal and distal goals and this serves as a major motivator for them. Through the development of self-advocacy, determination and stress management, students build self-confidence and are able to stride towards achieving those established goals. This is especially true with disadvantaged students. Achievement motivation is a result of performance, ability, expertise, and intelligence (Smith, 2007), all valuable and applicable skills to be developed and practiced throughout life, beyond the initial ePortfolio.

Assessing Effectiveness of ePortfolios

In order to gain a well-rounded observation of the students throughout this process, one must look at the impacts on the whole student. This includes both formative and summative assessments, evaluating quality of writing as to be used on college applications as well as technical skills that could benefit them regardless of the field they pursue, and affective domain analyses evaluating students personal journeys along the road to post secondary school. To ensure future success, students need to be solid in regards to their writing and technical literacy, but also have strong problem solving skills and approach issues from a grander perspective. Appropriate methods to assess progression and promote peer collaboration include student admissions essays with collaborative feedback/reflection pieces, affective domain reflective

pieces, technical skills assessments (i.e. development of a resume, cover letter, website development, areas of interest/major essay, and formal requests for documents and emails).

To get a true assessment of the progression of students through this program, it's necessary to evaluate their academic developments and growths through standardized, skill-based assessments that are black and white. However, educators know that the whole student needs to be considered when assessing. Therefore, there will additionally be more subjective, individualized assessments of students depending on their goals and personal definitions of success as established at the beginning of this course. A student that wants to go to trade school differs from a student that wants to only apply to ivy leagues. They have different goals and require different learning pathways, however there are still some foundational, base skills that could benefit all students as they pursue a profession.

Implications of Innovative Technological Practices

It is through ePortfolios that students are able to access carefully curated, accurate and transparent information gathered by professionals to become better informed on post-secondary school. Beyond just gaining knowledge, the impact of innovative technologies like ePortfolios is that they create the need for greater digital competency in their users. In order for ePortfolios to be successful in application, the facilitators involved must design materials and allocate resources that allow ePortfolios to be a conduit for learning. Technology shouldn't be used just to use technology, its purpose is to promote learning. Students that properly use ePortfolios to learn and apply the knowledge gained to strengthen the application materials housed within not only grow academically on their own, but they also have the opportunity to directly impact the education of their collaboration peers within their learning community.

Summary

This literature review highlights some of the benefits of utilizing ePortfolios as a tool to promote ownership of learning in a facet that is commonly unexplored. Often, education is focused on K-12 education or post-secondary school, but the transition between the two is overlooked. Students with a disadvantaged background are especially overlooked in most capacities. However, this literature review has provided connections between the potential barriers some disadvantaged students and their families may face regarding post-secondary school applications and how the enriching experiences of ePortfolios can catalyze a change in perception of furthering education.

The most beneficial component that could be added to this literature review would be a legitimate case study. Many references were analyzed and incorporated for the development of this research and, furthermore, the action research plan that will follow. However, each piece of research analyzed to contribute to this piece does not include all of the variables that are being addressed. They either analyze disadvantaged students, their parents, the collective population looking towards post-secondary school, or the educators that serve them. On the other hand, the research backs theories and applications that should work universally. Yet, a study that addresses all of the components discussed in this review doesn't exist. Therefore, completing a case study or two and evaluating the results will provide valuable insight to educators, students and families as to how the implementation of ePortfolios and the specific assessment methods discussed impact the post-secondary school application process.

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