

# ePortfolios as assessment (for learning): The role of feedback

Workshop "Implementation Strategies & Case Studies"

The International Conference on the Potential  
of ePortfolios in Higher Education

Silvia Sippel, M.A.

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Hello everybody! My name is Silvia Sippel. I'm a member of the academic staff at the Institute for Media and Educational Technology at the University of Augsburg. Before we start our discussion I would like to give you some theoretical input on the connections of ePortfolios, learning-conductive assessments, and feedback.

# agenda

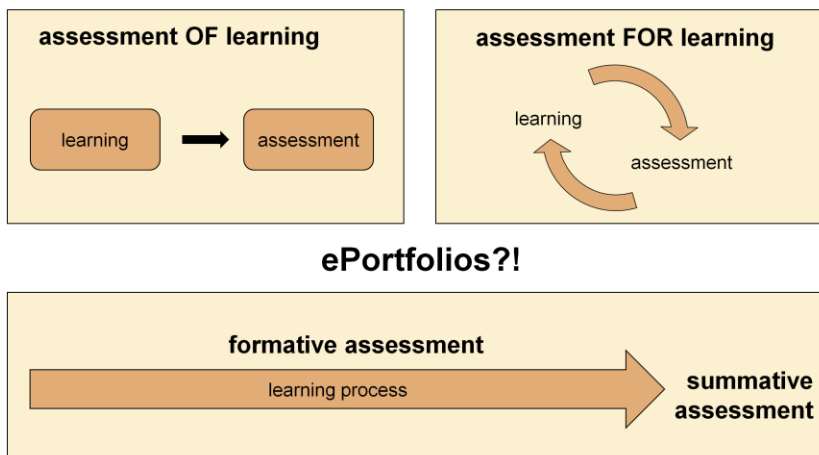
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1. ePortfolios and assessment
2. feedback makes the difference
3. feedback on ePortfolios – empirical findings
4. issues to discuss

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First I'd like to introduce you to the different meanings of the term assessment and show you which suits best when using ePortfolios. Then you'll get to know why feedback is important to implement assessments that foster learning, and what are chances and critical issues when giving feedback on ePortfolios.

# 1. ePortfolios and assessment



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When we're talking about implementing ePortfolios in Higher Education we have to consider what our aims are. Assessment is an important keyword here, because every assignment – even an ePortfolio – serves one or more functions of an assessment.

The first definition distinguishes between assessment OF and assessment FOR learning. In an assessment of learning the purpose is to test, to certificate or to select. Typical methods are multiple choice tests or assignments with a focus on reproducing well structured knowledge (facts). This kind of assessment takes place at the end of the learning process. The purpose of an assessment for learning is essential to help students by providing feedback on their performance which will help them develop and learn. So learning and assessment are linked. Typical forms are performance assessments and problem based learning.

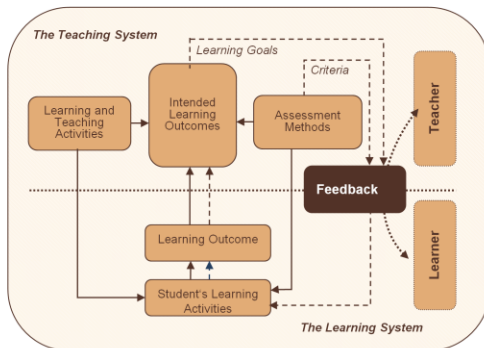
The next definition distinguishes between formative and summative assessment. Basically these terms are equal to assessment for and of learning. But in my opinion this second definition draws more attention to the time of the assessment than to the purpose.

So what kind of assessments are ePortfolios? Even when they are used for the summative purpose of grading I see them as an assessment for learning, especially when they are process oriented like reflective and developmental ePortfolios. But of course, not every implementation of ePortfolios is connected to the goals of an assessment: For example when you offer ePortfolios as an additional service for students (maybe by a career service), or when participants of a course can use them on a voluntary basis.

But how can you make sure, that an ePortfolio fosters learning? And when you use it for grading: How can you make sure that the process of grading is transparent?

# excursus: theoretical background

## constructive alignment



(following Biggs, 2003)

## Revised Blooms' Taxonomy

Knowledge Dimension	Cognitive Process Dimension					
	1. Remember	2. Understand	3. Apply	4. Analyze	5. Evaluate	6. Create
I. Factual Knowledge	→					
II. Conceptual Knowledge		→	→	→		
III. Procedural Knowledge			→	→	→	
IV. Metacognitive Knowledge				→	→	

(following Krathwohl, 2002)

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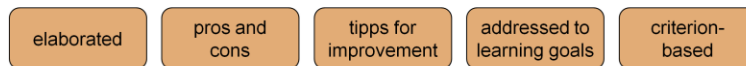
Maybe we have a minute to take a look at a theoretical model. Bigg's concept of constructive alignment shows, that teaching and learning activities as well as assessment methods need to be aligned to the intended learning outcomes. Because both influence the students' learning activities. To diagnose the intended learning outcomes you have to define (cognitive) processes, students have to show in the assessment. For example: When you want students to remember factual knowledge a Multiple Choice Test is suitable. But the more complex the intended learning outcomes are the less simple the diagnosis is. For example: You want your students to reflect upon their actions in a project. You can't judge this with a "right" or "wrong". Because of this you should use a criterion-based feedback in order to to make your decision whether or not a student is competent or not more transparent and – of course – to foster learning.

## 2. feedback makes the difference

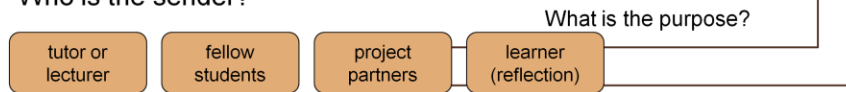
### 1. Why is feedback important?



### 2. What kind of feedback is necessary?



### 3. Who is the sender?



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So you see: Feedback is the area in which we can influence the extent to which our assessment practices are developmental, rather than simply judgmental. But a high quality feedback isn't easy to compose. You should make sure, that it is elaborated, what means that it contains more than "right", "wrong" or the correct result. Important is that pros and contras are balanced. If the feedback is too critical it demotivates the learner. And when you criticize you should give advice for improvement. As said before: The connection to learning goals and pre-defined criteria is important when you provide the feedback in the context of grading.

And of course: There are many sources who can give feedback. The tutor/lecturer, fellow students, maybe (external) project partners and the student him- or herself (reflection as an internal feedback). But in the following I will concentrate on the first two sources.

When you're analyzing the feedback from these two groups of persons you have to ask again: "What is the purpose of the feedback/assessment?"

### 3. feedback on ePortfolios

	type/time of feedback	
feedback sender	formative	summative
tutor / lecturer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Encourages dialogue between teachers and students → role changes from teacher to mentor (cultural change)</li> <li>+ Can enhance student learning</li> <li>+ Fosters intrinsic motivation by satisfying the basic needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci, Koestner &amp; Ryan, 2001)</li> <li>- Is time-consuming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Makes sure, that the grading is transparent</li> <li>+ Can be useful for future tasks (formative) if it refers to „how to do sth.“ (e.g. academic writing)</li> <li>- When marks and feedback are provided at the same time students often don't engage with it (Irons, 2008)</li> <li>- It is difficult to define criteria for reflective ePortfolios</li> <li>- Is time-consuming</li> </ul>
peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Encourages dialogue between students and students</li> <li>+ Fosters intrinsic motivation by satisfying the basic needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness (Deci, Koestner &amp; Ryan, 2001) → high quality feedback</li> <li>+ Reduces amount of work for the lecturer</li> <li>- Informal feedback from a whole group is often to infrequent and of bad quality → tandem learners as solution</li> <li>- Rules for giving feedback must be established → implementation (Värlander, 2008)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Helps to develop students' understanding of assessment criteria (students as senders) (Boud &amp; Falchikov, 2006)</li> <li>+ Reduces amount of work for the lecturer (only if the Peer-Review is not used for grading)</li> <li>- Receivers' acceptance depends on the authority of the sender (Zacharias, 2007)</li> <li>- Peers don't want to judge about fellow students</li> <li>- Peers don't want to be graded for their judgement</li> <li>- Rules for giving feedback must be established → implementation (Värlander, 2008)</li> </ul>

We're running out of time so I want to show you only the most important findings: As already said lecturer-feedback enhances learning through advice for improvement and provides transparency in the process of grading.

But feedback is always time-consuming and one lecturer alone can hardly provide high quality feedback to a large group of students. Furthermore the majority of recent studies on feedback have advocated substantial change from a traditional system where the tutor holds sole responsibility and authority in assessment, towards alternative methods of peer- (and self-) assessment.

So one suggestion is that peers should give their fellow students feedback. The biggest challenge (equally for summative and formative assessment) is to establish feedback-rules, because otherwise the quality of the feedback will be too low.

If this is successful formative feedback by peers can foster learning and intrinsic motivation, but only if it's provided on a regular basis. Informal feedback is often problematic, because no one uses the option to give feedback. Here tandem learners could be a solution.

When peers give summative feedback they have benefits too. By assessing their fellow students' competences they develop their understanding of assessment criteria what is a precondition to become a "self-assessor" and therefore an important competence for lifelong learning. But there are two critical issues concerning summative assessment by peers: Students often don't want to judge their fellow students and learners don't want to be graded by peers.

## 4. issues to discuss

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1. What are your experiences with ePortfolios? (In general and in the context of assessment and feedback.)
2. Should we use ePortfolios as summative assessment (grading)? Does it depend on the type of ePortfolio?
3. How to develop adequate criteria?
4. Should peer assessment on ePortfolios be graded (in both „directions“)? Does it require a cultural change?
5. Is formative feedback from lecturers or peers necessary to foster learning? Or is the students' own reflection (as a internal feedback) sufficient?

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## Thank you for your attention

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[www.imb-uni-augsburg.de](http://www.imb-uni-augsburg.de)

Silvia Sippel, M.A.



Member of Academic Staff  
Institute for Media and Educational Technology  
University of Augsburg  
Universitätsstrasse 10  
86135 Augsburg

Phone: 0821- 598 5576  
Skype: silvia.sippel  
[silvia.sippel@phil.uni-augsburg.de](mailto:silvia.sippel@phil.uni-augsburg.de)  
<http://www.imb-uni-augsburg.de/silvia-sippel>

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