epos – an ePortfolio for Language Learning

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Abstract

Language learning is one of the educational fields where the portfolio approach is well established. Collecting documents written in a foreign or second language, recording the learner's experiences and progress in language learning and documenting the learner's achievements reflects the fact that language learning is an ongoing process of personal development and cultural growth.

Linguistic diversity, plurilingualism and language learning throughout life are promoted on various political levels in Europe since a long time – especially by the Council of Europe. To support lan¬guage learning on an operational level several standards and tools have been developed. Particu¬larly, the European Language Portfolio (ELP), based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), is implemented for different target groups, on different educa¬tional levels and in various contexts, e.g. secondary/higher education, general/vocational educa¬tion/further education, immigrants etc. More than 100 ELPs have been validated by the European Validation Committee, but until now almost all of them have been published as paper versions. Only few are implemented using ICT, i.e. as an ePortfolio. One of the major developments in this area takes place in the epos project in Bremen (Germany), aiming at the implementation of an ePortfolio system, based on a sound pedagogical approach, following an action-oriented, compe¬tence-based and learner-centred philosophy.

The presentation will describe the results of our analysis of existing ePortfolio systems for langu¬age learning in Europe (Minerva project eELP, Bordeaux University project e-PEL, EAQUALS-ALTE project eELP, the Dutch Electronic Language Portfolio etc.) In most cases the systems consist of the three basic components of an ELP: language passport, language biography and dossier. Be¬sides the biography these components focus on the learning results. The development of epos is going to extend this product-oriented approach by a process-oriented perspective, focussing on learning activities: writing of shared stories, recording oral conversations, cooperating in virtual language learning groups, reflecting on one's learning progress by using a learning diary etc. Com¬puters will not simply be used as "reading machines", "document databases" or "certificate stores" but as inter-action facilities which provide learning opportunities and motivational incentives. The second principle of epos is "competence-oriented learning". Learning as well as assessment are guided by the "use of language in context". The digital media components of epos present a varie¬ty of communication contexts in which language learning is embedded.

The technical aspects of the system development will be presented in detail, starting with a de¬scription of the advantages and challenges of adapting the open source ePortfolio (Mahara), con¬tinuing with questions of multi descriptor grid technology, integration of other subjects' competence grids, identity management, multi-client capability, as well as performance and scalability issues. In addition, usability and privacy aspects which widely influence the acceptance of the system will be analysed. The description of innovative components like "digital pronunciation feedback" and "embedded video tutorials" will indicate the next developmental steps of epos.