Reflection on reflection

by [Betsy Damon](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=20904&course=16493) - Sunday, September 29, 2013, 12:17 AM

I think that the tools needed to move us through the maturation process include providing direction, choice, and support as we work through to gain new levels of understanding in regards to eportfolios (or webfolios). Most students are overwhelmed at the idea of creating a portfolio and rely on teachers, fellow students, and examples to set their sights towards their goals. Much like the *Eportfolio HOW* article implies that the good reflection requires that the destination be known in order to reflect on the journey. I find that playing with Web 2.0 tools is not as rich a learning experience if I do not have a defined goal or purpose. For example, I have read about podcasting and even tried it out a little but did not really get too far or gained much confidence until I had to produce a podcast for one of my classes. The only difference between my first experience and this second one is that the professor gave me a destination or purpose and I ended up with a 5 page reflection on the experience while before I could barely relate what I was doing with my future. Much as kids in algebra ask "when am I ever going to use this?", without a destination, the journey is simply wandering aimlessly with little resulting gained knowledge in most cases.

Many school portfolio assignments are on level 2 of the maturation scale provided by Love, McKean, and Gathercoal. Teachers decide which artifacts to use and often design the lessons to have a specific product created to use in the portfolio. There is little to no real choice and students drudgingly perform the tasks required without much enthusiasm or genuine passion for the project or the reflection. It is very important to use the tool of "choice" to move portfolios to the next level of maturity. In the high school science class, students had to answer two questions about matter related to phases and how matter is distributed in each phase. Rather than copy endless, boring notes and regurgitating the facts time and again, they were tasked with producing two projects of different types of their own choice. We saw students get up with enthusiasm to perform their rap or read their children's book to the class. There were posters, comic strips, videos, and poems. The flexibility of the form of presentation was wonderful and the teacher was cognizant of the providing models of past projects so the kids could see what others had done but in enough variety that they didn't feel hemmed in to certain products. Overall, it was an exciting time with great energy and the quizzes that will be taken tomorrow should show a mastery of the material that exceeds that of simply having note-taking and worksheet as the main source of synthesizing the data.

Support is essential for any significant growth to occur. In the projects above, if the teacher hadn't provided examples and encouragement throughout the 3 days of work, students may have faltered and been unable to complete the presentations to the degree that they did. It is much harder during online classes to get that sense of support than in face-to-face classes, but it is just as important that it is there. My professors have all (or almost all) received emails from me when I felt lost or confused that they probably would not have received in a face-to-face class because I would have had more support through proximity of other students where I could discuss what was confusing me or maybe they would have asked the questions in class and we would have all received the answers. Yes we have places to ask questions here and to get support, but it is a little removed and you need to remember to go look and see if there are any questions or answers out there that help you too.

I loved the idea that assessment should be viewed as a "celebration of learning" with the students looking forward to it rather than dreading it!!! Students who want to learn want to know how their doing and see assessment not as a final destination but as a checkpoint along the way on their journey. Of the seven steps that Stiggens speaks about I was most struck by 3  things: students need to know they can reach the student-friendly target, teachers must provide models of strong and weak work, and students need **continuous** descriptive feedback during the entire process. Too many students don't even try because they feel they can't meet the expectations of the teacher and when they have the right support system helping them develop the self-confidence to keep trying they learn they can reach the target and sometimes exceed the expectations of those around them! Showing was good work looks like is very important but it also helps to show weak work. They may not feel they can reach the exemplar but by seeing the weak work they can strive to exceed that which puts them closer to the stronger work even if they can't meet or exceed it! It is also important for teachers to let students know what is going well and what can be improved throughout the process not just after the work is almost or all done. Students feel betrayed and disheartened when they work on a project for a day or two and then find out that they are doing something wrong that threatens the integrity of project. Maybe they are focusing on a minor plot rather than the major conflict or they are writing the answer to number 2 on the line for number 3. The more work that is invested before constructive feedback is received, the greater the degree of failure a student will feel and that sense of failing will tarnish everything the student completes for the rest of the project worktime.

I think the greatest tool available to help move a portfolio through to its most mature state is personal interaction through support as shown through providing direction for the journey while providing choice in the route taken to reach the destination and being there each step along the journey to provide support and feedback that enriches the experience and encourages reflection and personal investment throughout the project and beyond the end of the journey.

  Re: Reflection on reflection

by [Amy White](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=10006&course=16493) - Sunday, October 6, 2013, 12:41 PM

I too loved the concept of assessment as a 'celebration of learning and not a punitive process.'  At my school there is a business teacher who struggles mightly with her class.  She is teaching computers and typing.  She gave a test last week and a majority of the kids failed.  She re-gave the test after offering remediation, and only two more kids passed.(it was the same test, with the questions re-ordered.) She was furtious and frustrated.  I was frustrated too, but perhaps for a different reason.  "The learners are in charge of learning. We need to make them want to learn."  The teacher argued that in a skills based class like hers there is no room for 'student ownership' or 'portfolio learning.'  They either learn it or they don't. If she did a portfolio they would all cheat.  She wouldn't know they actually did they work.  Maybe she is right. But I watched the video about assessments and I thought of her class and I thought "This way isn't working. There has to be a better way."  I'm the new kid on the block. I'm not going to suggest changes right now. But I wish I knew the answer.  What are your thoughts? Do skill based classes need more traditional assessments?  Can there portfolios? What about cheating?

  Re: Reflection on reflection

by [Betsy Damon](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=20904&course=16493) - Sunday, October 6, 2013, 2:54 PM

Kids will cheat if they feel than can get away with it AND ARE NOT VESTED IN THE LEARNING! Yes they need to learn the skills but there are fun ways to make it happen. In our elementary school, there was a real push for kids to master basic math facts at all levels but rather than employ "drill till you get it" activities, they brought in and pushed the Sumdog.com website. The kids were eager to play the games which required them answering math fact questions correctly and the more quickly they answered the more questions they could answer and the more points they earned towards outfitting their avatar. A year later and they are still excited to play sumdog even when other less academic choices are options!

I was sitting in as a para in a grade 9 computer class called "digital connections" and the teacher does a great job of having project-based activities with outcomes that demonstrate student learning. Some activities are done in pairs, some in teams, and some solo. Many activities provide for a basic outcome but how the student completes the requirement is up to them. For instance, when learning Sketch-up (3d drawing program) they were required to draw a chair and had to have certain criteria met but what their chair ultimately looked like was their decision as long as they met criteria. Another example, using a comic strip creation program, students needed to create a 4-pane comic strip that would explain to 2nd graders about a particular element of a computer. They had specific criteria: minimum of 2 characters, 2 panes must have different colors, 1 item must be scaled, 1 thing must be flipped, etc. This project did two things: it showed that they could use the program and it showed that they understood that element of the computer. Even the least interested student had an enjoyable time and really gave them a purpose for learning about the parts of the computer!

I can't give you the link to her Google site but you (or your business teacher) could email her: mbernard@sau73.org and maybe she could give you access to see all the neat things she does to help kids learn skills while still being responsible for their learning!

  Re: Reflection on reflection

by [Amy White](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=10006&course=16493) - Sunday, October 6, 2013, 8:00 PM

All great ideas.  And my quandry comes how to help a 35 year veteran teacher see a different way to teach.  So far, I just share my projects with her and show her how excited and engaged the kids are. Learn by example, right?  But I feel bad for her and her frutration and I feel bad for her kids.  Thanks for sharing your experiences!!

Re: Reflection on reflection

by [Betsy Damon](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=20904&course=16493) - Tuesday, October 8, 2013, 9:39 PM

Can't really help you there - when I share with veteran (anyone in a classroom is a veteran compared to me!) teacher, I usually preface with "I saw this on a webinar" or "when I was observing at XYZ I watched this teacher do this neat thing...." Trying to make it come less from me and more of a "hey did you see this" or "I saw this and thought you would really appreciate how great this is" type of thing.

  Re: Reflection on reflection

by [Doris Buco](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=2913&course=16493) - Saturday, October 12, 2013, 9:43 PM

Hi Betsy,

In my district, as well, our portfolios have been at the Level 2 scale.  We are slowly transitioning from binder portfolios to e-portfolios with our binder portfolios primarily focused on language arts and mathematics.  The Language Arts and Mathematics Curriculum Committees determined what pieces needed to be included yearly in these binders with students doing end-of-the year reflections on these pieces.  There has been this end-of-the-year rush by teachers and students to make sure these pieces were indeed placed in the binders and to complete the reflections so students could take their binders with them onto the next grade on the annual June move-up day.

Our technology director worked with a couple of middle school students last year on a small pilot of e-portfolios so the district could determine the platform to be used for our eventual K-8th grade move to e-portfolios.  What enthusiasm was shown by these students in creating an e-portfolio because of the ownership they felt they had with this project.  They created pages that highlighted who they are as individuals (ex. favorite sports and books), and posted artifacts they felt displayed their growth as learners from each of their academic classes. This small pilot clearly demonstrated that choice, voice, and ownership are key elements to successful and meaningful e-portfolio implementation in our district.

Doris

  Re: Reflection on reflection

by [Tod Guilford](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=21140&course=16493) - Sunday, October 13, 2013, 10:22 AM

Betsy

I agree that personal interaction is the key to e-portfolios.  I stated that parents should be involved but I wonder if we could take it farther by involving other groups.  Groups like businesses, lawyers, hospitals and community organizations to help the students interact with not only their peers and teachers.  Or setting up interactions with older students and younger students to work together on e-portfolios.    I think this would add to supporting students and but also allowing them to feel like they are helping to support younger children.  I think these goals are further down the road but I think these are something to aim for in the future.

 Re: Reflection on reflection

by [Ethel Gaides](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=11461&course=16493) - Sunday, October 13, 2013, 6:08 PM

Hi Tod,

Involving other groups is an excellent idea! What comes to mind is the STEM initiatives for K-12 educators. I think you will find: *ePortfolios: Methodology to Validate and Promote Critical  Workforce STEM Skills*an interesting read*at:*

[*http://league.org/blog/post.cfm/eportfolios-methodology-to-validate-and-promote-critical-workforce-stem-skills*](http://league.org/blog/post.cfm/eportfolios-methodology-to-validate-and-promote-critical-workforce-stem-skills)

**Re: Reflection on reflection**

**by**[**Ethel Gaides**](http://www.plymouth.edu/webapp/courses2/user/view.php?id=11461&course=16493)**- Sunday, October 13, 2013, 6:15 PM**

**Hi Betsy,**

**Yes, "personal interaction through support as shown through providing direction for the journey while providing choice in the route taken to reach the destination" is a key point of ePortfolio success. I am encouraged with the support given by the our online participants "each step along the journey".**