
Let's E-Portfolio! - Electronic Portfolios as Collaborative Learning Tool for Developing Learner Autonomy in Higher Education

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Résumé

Learner autonomy is one of the buzzwords in contemporary foreign language learning research. Nevertheless, teachers are often reluctant when it comes to implementing principles of learner autonomy in their classrooms. The aim of this talk is to dispel the myth that learner autonomy is a synonym for self-instruction, self-direction, or even learning without a teacher. Quite on the contrary, it will advocate autonomy needs to be understood as constructing meaning in the social context of the learning process, or, in other words, in collaboration with others. Digital media in higher education can have a plethora of purposes as they potentially provide a more authentic framework for foreign language learning. In addition to this, the rapid technological development and the need for competencies and skills involved in life-long learning pose fundamental challenges to foreign language learning. Against this background, it will be argued that learner autonomy provides the ideal framework for using digital media in foreign language learning and that digital media tools, in return, can promote autonomy. Supporting this argument are the results of an action-research project investigating the potential of formative developmental e-portfolios for developing learner autonomy and collaborative learning within a blended-learning Master's degree programme in English as a foreign language at a German university, which will be presented. While portfolios have been around for a long time, e-portfolio use has not yet been fully embedded into blended-learning curricula. In short, an e-portfolio is a digital collection of a student's multi-media work (artefacts), including essays, posters, websites, or videos. The great advantage of e-portfolios, in contrast to traditional paper-based portfolios, is their potential to transform rather static information into dynamic, flexible, growing information, which can be shared, recontextualised, and developed from anywhere, at any time and by anyone. It will be shown how using e-portfolios can encourage learners to participate actively in the learning process in co-operation with the teacher and other students to reach agreement on objectives and methods and engage in peer leaching and peer assessment so as to progress towards autonomy.

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