

Chapter 4

The Integration of E-Portfolios in the Foreign Language Classroom: Towards Intercultural and Reflective Competences

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Abstract This article examines the implementation of e-portfolio (ePF) as an innovative and alternative form of assessment in the French and German language courses of the European Studies undergraduate programme at HKBU. It focuses on the potentials of ePF in achieving Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILO): how it helps students improve their language skills and, at a broader level, how it helps students develop their intercultural and reflexive competence in handling an increasingly diverse variety of situations in our increasingly globalized world. To begin with, we believe in the necessity to implement innovative teaching to foster our graduates' capacity for lifelong learning through ePF. A qualitative and quantitative research was then conducted to analyse samples of our students' reflexive and critical essays in their ePFs, along with questionnaires distributed to study their views towards portfolio keeping. The results obtained are in favour of the implementation of ePF in foreign language classes although they also reveal the issue that students could be disorientated in using ePF, which initially requires attention.

Keywords E-portfolio · Foreign language teaching & learning · Intercultural competences · Reflection · Alternative assessment · Students' perception

Introduction

Portfolios (PF), which gained prominence in higher education in the 90s (Lorenzo and Ittelson 2005: 3) and their modern versions, E-portfolios (ePF), which are electronic versions of physical PF that contain digital objects instead of physical

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objects, have become a mainstream activity in education. They “address many issues such as lifelong and personalized learning, flexible and student-centered pedagogies” (Stefani et al. 2007: 7) which are much needed to adapt to new academic, professional, cultural environments. Compiling ePF, which can be defined as “digitized collections of student work and reflections” (Stefani et al. 2007: 17), is “learner-centered (...) and involves higher-order cognition” (Lee 1997: 358). In producing ePF, learners need to “collect, sort, select, describe, analyze and evaluate” multiple concrete artefacts to “demonstrate their skills and knowledge (...) and they must engage in a reflection on these evidences” (Cummins and Davesne 2009: 849). This active process of reflection “enhances learning” (Cambridge et al. 2005: 17), as it can help “turn information into knowledge (...) in moving beyond surface learning to deep learning” (ibid: 3). Hence, it can “cause new types of thinking (...) and expression” (Gibson 2006: 144).

Specifically, ePF play an important role in Foreign Language (FL) teaching & learning, as portfolios can be used to assess both language and culture learning (Allen 2004: 233; Lee 1997: 232). This is with this objective in mind that an ePF pilot project has been implemented since 2013 with the students of both French and German streams of the European Studies Programme of Hong Kong Baptist University, followed by the creation, in May 2014, of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Student E-Portfolios—*REFLECT*—which was established to enable academics from various disciplines to share their experiences on ePF and learn from each other to improve this teaching & learning activity. This article will showcase the intended learning outcomes of this new e-learning activity in our language courses (German and French) and the challenges of its implementation seen through our learners’ comments.

Context

Globalization increases the necessity for higher education institutions to form well-rounded citizens. HKBU’s mission & vision—the Whole Person Education (WPE)¹—is to provide students with a liberal and holistic education.² That is why a drastic change has been operated in the nature of the curriculum and in the teaching and learning activities (TLA) since 2008 in order to acquire the 7 Graduate Attributes promoted by the University (citizenships, knowledge, learning, skills, creativity, communication, teamwork).³ These “softer skills” (Stefani et al. 2007: 27), which could be defined in terms of knowing how to do and how to be, are essential in a world constantly changing, to adapt not only in the workplaces of tomorrow but also in all kinds of life situations. In the language classes of the

¹<http://cctl.hkbu.edu.hk/main/wpe/>.

²<http://vision2020.hkbu.edu.hk/>.

³<http://cctl.hkbu.edu.hk/main/hkbu-ga/>.

European Studies programme which is “multilingual and multidisciplinary” (Hess 2012: 38) as it combines two major axes: social sciences and intensive language learning, either French or German, the approach is a constructivist one: it implies a high level of learner autonomy and initiative through active learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, reflective practices, etc. Each learner is seen as a “social agent”, “i.e. a member of a society who has tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action” (Council of Europe 2001, cited in Cabau 2015: 167). That is why “all language courses (...) have been re-titled “Language in Context” to illustrate that language learning is multi-purposed and context-oriented” (Cabau 2015: 173). French and German teaching & learning puts emphasis not only on the language itself but also on historical, political and social aspects of the French- and German-speaking societies of Europe. That also explains why the teaching & learning method in our courses is based largely on the Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach (Hess 2012: 52) since it offers many advantages such as

building intercultural knowledge and understanding, (...) opportunities to study content through different perspectives, possibility of having more contact with the target language, [increasing] learners' motivation and confidence in both the language and the subject being taught (...) (Cabau 2015: 168).

We can see that TLA such as “spoon-feeding” learning and assessment-oriented teaching are undoubtedly not adequate anymore to acquire these “resilient skills”. That is why ePF have been introduced in our French and German language courses, in order to go beyond “passive learning, knowledge transmission, regurgitation of course content” (Stefani et al. 2007: 20). It is an innovative tool with multiple assets not only for language learning but also to acquire these intercultural competences and reflective skills mentioned above.

Intended Learning Outcomes for E-Portfolios in Language Teaching & Learning

In implementing ePF in French and German language courses as an alternative and authentic assessment, three objectives were targeted in line with the CILO, PILO and GAs: improving language, intercultural and reflective skills.

Language Learning

The benefits of ePF in language learning are well evidenced in the literature. Aydin (2010: 195) presents different studies that all pinpoint the contributions of PF/ePF in terms of language-related skills. According to his own findings:

PF keeping in EFL writing contributes considerably to vocabulary and grammar knowledge, reading, research and writing skills. In other words, it can be stated that PF keeping benefits EFL students' language skills and knowledge, and is useful in developing their rhetorical skills (ibid: 198).

Obviously, while creating their ePF, students will have to investigate and select various resources (e.g. reading materials or videos) for their collection. Then, they will be assigned a written reflection on these artefacts which includes description, analysis, evaluation, etc. In doing so, we can see that students are much more in contact with the target language, and in a much more integrated way than in doing any other kind of “traditional” French or German exercise which mobilizes only one competence at a time, such as in writing assessment tests for example.

Intercultural Competences

Since “learning about FL cultures is becoming an important objective in FL curricula” (Su 2011: 230), teaching and learning a foreign language goes beyond the acquisition of grammatical rules, vocabulary, etc. But neither is teaching culture distributing a list of facts to be memorized (list of people’s traditions, customs, beliefs, behaviours or art, civilization, history, art of a nation, etc.) (Lee 1997: 356). That would lead to simplistic cultural explanations (Dervin and Hahl 2014: 3). Hence, as Abrams et al. underline, teaching culture is challenging as culture is elusive, it is not a solid entity (2006: 80), due to the fact “that language is embedded in a myriad of sub-cultural/social contexts, extremely diverse, depending actually on individual’s affective and attitudinal orientation and interpersonal skills” (Little and Simpson 2003: 4). That is why, although teaching cultural knowledge to some extent is relevant, what should really be done in language classes is to provide an intercultural education understood as a “protéophilic” model (Dervin 2010) which could help appreciate the variety, the diversity of the culture understood as a perpetual social construction. Accordingly, intercultural education should not be understood as a culturalist approach but rather should make understand that “the individual is no longer the product of his culture, he is instead the actor of his culture, he elaborates it, and he builds it, with diversified strategies, according to the needs and circumstances” (Abdallah-Preteuille 1999: 55).⁴ In this sense, ePF projects are “seen as effective tools for integrating these situations of construction, identification and uncertainty” (Dervin & Hahl 2014: 7). In fact, several practitioners who conducted cultural PF projects in Spanish, French, German, Korean or English language classes (Lee 1997; Allen 2004; Abrams et al. 2006; Byon 2007; Su 2011, respectively) pinpointed numerous benefits of PF keeping in terms of

⁴ « L'individu n'est plus le produit de sa culture, il en est au contraire l'acteur, il l'élabore, la construit en fonction de stratégies diversifiées, selon les besoins et les circonstances » (Abdallah-Preteuille 1999: 55).

intercultural awareness. Su summarizes them well: ePF helps gain insight on a specific aspect of the culture; modify one's stereotypical impressions; develop open attitudes towards the target culture; recognize the impact of one's perspectives on understanding another culture; and demonstrate an understanding of target culture from emic perspectives (2011: 233). Indeed, collecting and evaluating multiple sources over time will not only improve language skills as we have seen above. In the same way, the FL learner, facing and confronting all these various information about diverse aspects of the foreign culture, will be more sensible to the fact "that culture is not static and may vary according to the forces at play in the society" (2011: 232). Furthermore, particular attention must be paid to the fact that the reflection of the students is "the fruit of their own explorations, based on both the target culture as well as their own culture" (Allen 2004: 232). In doing so, they engage themselves in "a process of discovery, social construction and meaning negotiation" (Su 2011: 231) in which they can appreciate the complexity not only of the foreign culture but also of their own culture.

Reflection

Students are individuals with their own personalities, habits and beliefs, which influence their way of learning enormously. Therefore, it is hardly possible to design lessons and tasks in which every student can profit best. In other words, teachers have to make students aware of "how they understand their roles as learners, how they work and how they might improve their learning skills" (Kohonen 2000: 4). According to Zubizarreta, "reflective thinking and judgment are effective stimuli to deep, lasting learning" (2009: 10). However, it is important to answer the following questions: what does reflective thinking mean and how does it work?

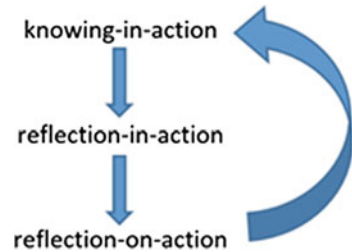
Reflection can be summarized as follows:

Reflection is one way to bridge the divide between thought and action - an opportunity for students to describe their internal processes, evaluate their challenges, and recognize their triumphs in ways that would otherwise remain unarticulated. (Allan and Driscoll 2014: 37).

Figure 1 describes Schön's understanding of a human process in action. To carry out an action, one reverts to prior knowledge but reality shows that changes are made due to reactions or other circumstances. Therefore, a person reflects (un-) consciously on the executing action while this is still in process, which is labelled as "reflection-in-action" by Schön. Following the completed action, a reflection on the whole action takes place that can be done by analyzing and interpreting it, which then leads to a revised "knowing-in-action" step to be applied for a similar situation happening. Figure 1 emphasizes the perpetual process of lifelong learning through experience.

According to Zubizarreta (2009: 24), a learning portfolio "consists of a written narrative section in which the student reflects critically about essential questions of

Fig. 1 Adapted from Schön (1987)



what, when, how, and why learning has occurred”. Doig et al. (2006: 164) describe the advantage of “using an ePF as the basis for reflection [as it] provides a structured opportunity to take stock of personal development, accounted for and justified by reference to evidence”. Furthermore, since the contents of the ePF are generated by the students themselves, it offers them the opportunity to become actively involved in the learning process, which encourages students’ self-evaluation and reflection (Su 2011).

To summarize, our French and German ePF is seen as an alternative and authentic assessment which emphasizes the process of learning. ePFs have a lot of similarities with cultural PFs as described by Lee (1997), Allen (2004), Abrams et al. (2006), Byon (2007) or Su (2011) and contributes to a more effective and comprehensible *reflection-on-action*. Indeed, Stefani et al. (2007) and Farr (1991) point correctly to the fact that by selecting pertinent contents from multiple resources, students will gain an understanding of the ideas and then construct their own responses, conceptualizations and solutions to problems and therefore support their understanding of their role as learners. We will now give a detailed presentation of both ePFs’ structures, followed by concrete examples of ePFs implemented in language courses (French and German) to illustrate students’ achievements.

Case Study 1: French Stream E-Portfolio

Structure

In the French stream, the ePF is divided in three categories.

The first category—*Learning Experiences outside the classroom*—in which students are asked to reflect on something they have seen, read, heard in the target language is directly inspired from the European PF (Little and Simpson 2003) which describes the benefits of such an activity:

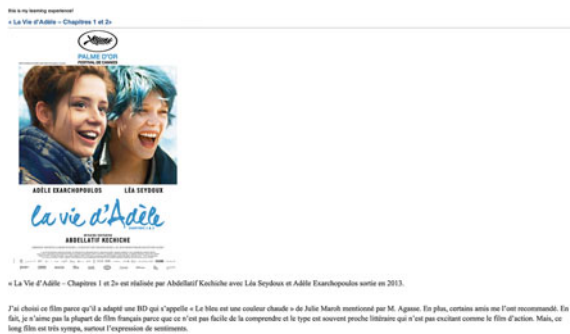
In his ePF, the owner [of the PF] will categorize various sources (painting, music, movie, mass-media...) which contributed to his knowledge of the studied society and culture. In doing so, the learner will articulate his impressions, his observations and experiences whose some of which may be fleeting (for example when watching a film). (...) That will

gradually develop his IC awareness by capturing experiences over time. (...) He will realize also the variety and frequency of such IC opportunities and that will draw his attention to the different ways in which [he/she] comes into contact with the other culture (ibid: 8, 10, 16).

The second category which is called “*Journal*” is used to deepen a topic seen in class. The idea in this category is to restructure and refine the knowledge transmitted in class by collecting and evaluating new data from multiple sources that will provide students with a deeper understanding of the subject. The students conduct an exploration through various media on a specific theme discussed in class. In doing so, they find out—by themselves—new information on a specific topic. In addition, they will make their own perception of the “Other” “instead of relying on outsider’s perception” (Abrams 2002: 149). Indeed, as Stefani et al. (2007: 61) point out, students will relate it to what they already knew, to their own experiences in their reflective essay. In trying to understand by observing, describing, questioning new material they encounter, they will create links to new ideas and, consequently, they will have an overview of the subject much wider and complex than what was presented by the teacher. We think that it will encourage them to be more open to the diversity and to understand “the dynamic nature of the culture” (Byon 2007: 2).

Last but not least, the third category—*Creativity*—is presented in these terms: “anything that you [the student] have created individually or with someone in French; a song, a poem, a video, a comic, an animation, an original translation etc.” To use the words of Duffy et al. (1999: 34), what is at stake in this category is truly “to celebrate the individuality” of learners in giving them a total liberty of expressivity in the target language/culture. It helps them build a personal relationship with foreign language/culture and create meaning of external facts, information (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Screenshot from a student’s ePF



Example 1: Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom

To illustrate the first category, we can take as an example, the ePF of a student who presented three experiences with the target culture: a movie, a graphic novel and a sculpture exhibition. Each artefact related to a specific and different aspect of the French society: the movie was about homosexuality, the graphic novel about police repression and the exhibition was about women's rights. We can say that without the ePF, our student would probably have watched, read, seen this movie, book, exhibition, all presenting a particular angle of France, but she would not have taken the time to pause and reflect on these different facets of society. Although the level of reflection differs from one artefact to another, sometimes failing to go beyond the level of description (we will see later the difficulty of achieving reflexive skills), she can gradually sense the diversity of the target culture she is studying. Thus, the ePF plays its role in increasing cross-cultural awareness through a process of distanciation (Holliday et al. 2004) which consists in describing and questioning different cultural facts. This interrogative approach on the other culture which often leads to take into consideration one's own culture, allows students' interpretations to evolve and to move away from culturalist constructions that essentialize and solidify the other. This is particularly remarkable in the reflection of our student on the graphic novel about a true event which happened in Paris in the 1960s related to police repression. She starts saying that *she wants to talk* about this tragic event because *she found it very surprising*. Then she describes with more details what happened to conclude her first paragraph by saying *she knows now more and better* about this. Nevertheless, she adds that *she was very surprised that such thing could happen* in France and that this story *recalls her* something similar which took place in her own country. This leads her to say that *she would never have thought* that France could do such similar thing because *she always thought that* France was different from her country. We can see through her discourse (highlighted in *italic*), how the ideas she had about France are set in motion and evolve from an image of France rooted in common symbols (*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*) to a reconstructed image which is not as fixed and stable as it was (Fig. 3).

Example 2: Journal

Let us take here, as an example for the second category, the ePF of a student who decided to reflect upon a topic discussed in class about suburbs in France. This decision is motivated by the fact that *the student is surprised* that such a problem exists in France. Therefore, *she would like to know more* to try to get a clearer picture of this aspect of the society. Particularly, she would like to know more about what solutions have been put into place, how the young generation lives, etc. Without an ePF, most likely the student would not have undertaken such a research unless asked to do so for a formative assessment in a term paper or an essay. Here,

Les Banlieues

Dans la classe, on a étudié le sujet des **banlieues**. J'étais un peu surprise que un problème social comme ça existe en France, un pays développé et riche. Je suis très ignorante des affaires arrivent là, les journaux hongkongais n'en rapportent pas beaucoup. Même si je n'aime pas faire les devoirs, c'est une bonne chance pour moi de savoir mieux la france en écrivant ce journal. J'aimerais apprendre plus sur les banlieues, comme le premier pied que je marche vers une image claire de la société française.



Je sais que les banlieues sont originaires construites pour la classe moyenne qui travaillent à Paris, mais comme la condition de vivre n'est pas bien, ils y quittent. Après, les banlieues devient un ensemble de logement sociaux avec beaucoup d'immigrés. Mais la région a nombreux de problèmes, notamment *l'isolement de la société, la violence, le chômage* etc, et les banlieues sont maintenant un problème social en France.

Je voudrais savoir plus comme ce que le gouvernement fait pour résoudre les problèmes, comment les jeunes vivent aux banlieues etc.

Je vais regarder les vidéos de ce sujet sur YouTube et je vais lire les journaux concernés. J'espère que dans l'article prochain je sera plus au courant des banlieues.

Fig. 3 Screenshot from a student's ePF

ePF allows the students to conduct research based on their own interests and questions. That seems to us a positive starting point. Then our student talks about a video she found on YouTube *where she learns more* on how people live in Paris suburbs. In her discourse in this second entry, she says *that this is absolutely what she wanted to know* but she adds immediately after that, *still, she doesn't understand why* nothing has been done to improve the situation. She continues saying that after watching this documentary, *she doesn't feel well*. This aspect of the society does not leave her satisfied. That brings her to *compare* this situation in France to HK and *she notices similar issues that reinforce her discomfort*: how two well-developed countries can leave wide parts of society abandoned? Finally, our student pursues her research citing a French newspaper article highlighting another point of view that puts forward the role that civil society can play in this issue, *an aspect she had never taken into consideration before*. We can see in this ePF, the work (highlighted in *italic*) of a dynamic, critical thinking student that goes beyond the description of a simple cultural fact. The reflection presents the impact that the different perspectives of this fact have on the person, on her knowledge and on her own experience.

The reflective writing allowed by the ePF shows that the way of seeing things has been destabilized. According to us, this is a first step towards acquisition of intercultural competences in the sense of ePF is a means to help us take a non-rigid look at the otherness.



Fig. 4 Screenshot from a student's ePF

Example 3: Creativity

The students, after a class dedicated to French art history, learnt about the scandal of the famous painting of Edouard Manet created in 1862, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (*The Luncheon on the Grass*). The photo below, taken by a group of students to be included in the third category of their ePF, is a perfect example of the learner autonomy and initiative (Stefani et al. 2007: 11) implied in ePF. Students reclaimed, remixed the painter's codes to reinterpret them, to integrate their own subjectivity. This means that, the history, the different elements which compose this masterpiece are not only known by the students but also reused by them in a new product retitled here *Réviser sur l'herbe* (*Revise on the Grass*). Pegrum talks about "appropriation": "in becoming creative actors rather than passive consumer" (2011: 13), they develop a way of learning where the knowledge is no more external, but on the contrary, becomes a knowledge whose they take ownership, that belong to them (Fig. 4).

Case Study 2: German Stream E-Portfolio

Structure

In the German language classes, the tasks are divided into two main parts for each semester. In semester one, students are supposed to watch a movie that dealt with German Reunification and then decide to concentrate their work on a specific topic

taken out of the movie, e.g. the cultural differences between West and East Germany. During this activity, they are expected to write a descriptive text, which was a summary of a movie. This is followed by a brief reflection on why they had chosen the topic and to describe their prior knowledge about it. The core of the second part is research on the topic. A template of an ePF was created as a tool support to help students grasp what the design could look like and to guide them. The documentation of their research task and the reflection on the challenges they faced are also parts of the first semester (cf. [Appendix](#)).

As for the second semester, students now being more familiar with reflective skills, have to document their learning process on their “German identity”: every student is given a year of birth and a German town name, the remaining personal information in provided categories like education, family background, profession and hobbies are completely up to themselves. During class, they had time to present their “lives” and on their ePF, the assignment is to describe their new character in general and concentrate on three categories they did research on. Then, a reflection on what they found out and their process in doing research has to be documented. Concluding the students’ first year of creating an electronic portfolio, they had to comment on what they think was positive and negative (e.g. the tasks themselves, their own learning habits and time management skills) with suggestions how the whole project could be improved or changed. To sum up this class’ first attempt to work with an ePF, the tasks are created in order to support their research skills and especially to stimulate reflective thinking. The task design is to encourage students to work effectively and autonomously in specific. As an in-class stimulus, students are provided with explicit questions on a template they could use as a guideline (cf. [Appendix](#)). Therefore, the provided scaffold was a helping hand throughout their first year with an ePF.

Example 1

Let us take a German stream student’s product as an example for the first semester’s task. The student chose the topic “freedom of travel” as his focus of research after watching the movie “Go Trabi Go” which is about an East German family travelling to Italy for the first time after the reunification of Germany. Figure 5 shows the screenshot of a newspaper and video source he used to explore more about the topic.

After he did some research on this topic, the student compares the situation with his own life, as he comes from mainland China and is now enjoying the freedom to travel to Hong Kong. This is not what his mother experienced when she came to visit in 2003. At that time, she was not allowed to travel on her own but rather was obliged to join a group of other tourists. This task allows the student to recognize the similar situation between Germany and his home country. Therefore, he concludes that the regulations for travel are part of the history and that this sort of freedom he did not use to have allows him now to make new experiences. By

Quelle 6: Reportage in den Zeitungen (Süddeutsche und Die Welt)

Auch heutzutage sind die Reisegewohnheiten von Ost- und Westdeutschen und die Unterschiede Dazwischen häufig zu besprechen. Alle dies können nicht von dem Thema Reisefreiheit getrennt werden. In großen Zeitungen wie Süddeutsche und die Welt kann man Reportage darüber finden, dadrin stehen auch viele Ergebnisse der wissenschaftlichen Studien, die man gut gebrauchen kann.



Quelle 7: Videomaterial

Animation ist eine besondere Art von Film, die schweres Thema immer gut erklären kann. Dieser kurze Film über die Flucht der DDR-Bürger finde ich Interessant.
Link: <http://www.zeitklicks.de/ddr/zeitklicks/schau-mal/video/der-duft-des-westens/>



"Visafrei nach Hahwai(Hahawaii)". Die fehlende Reisefreiheit war eine sehr wichtiger Grund für den Zusammenbruch der DDR. Lassen wir uns von dem damals Parteileiter Günter Schabowski erzählen.

Fig. 5 Screenshot from a student's ePF

realizing this, he describes how he appreciates this privilege and nothing should be taken for granted. Besides this topic-related research, this student explains that this task helps him to improve his language proficiency especially in learning a regional dialect since the main characters in the movie are inhabitants of the federal state Saxony. During his research, he could enhance his knowledge in the usage of synonyms and colloquial language. The whole ePF simplifies the process of returning to one's written texts and realize the progress students made when rereading the artefacts. Due to the online access of his ePF, students can easily return to the first task to reflect on the artefacts which make the student in this example discover his linguistic mistakes. Still, in his opinion he made progress since there are less grammar mistakes by the end of the first semester. In addition to that, how to summarize information is a skill that he could practice with Weebly. It was necessary to do so in order not to forget important aspects while reading a long text. Using an ePF helps the student to realize his own weakness: he now understands how important it is to pay attention to design and layout because he is aware of the fact that someone will be looking at his product. He adds it would be a pity if the content is good but no one wants to read it because of its bad design. So, he suggests adding pictures in order to visualize the content. In his concluding statement, he describes his ePF as a present he made himself and he is happy when realizing his own development in a year. To be more precise, regarding the development, he states that this does not only include positive advancements but also problems he had encountered through the whole activity. Creating an ePF helps

him to perform better in the foreign language (practice of written articulation), to develop research skills (selection of resources), to work autonomously and most importantly how to reflect critically on his own actions. In his opinion, the ePF's value is beneficial for the learning process of both the language and the life style because the webpage allows him to reread it whenever and wherever he wants to recap on his thoughts in the past. A comparison between the past and the present makes changes visible. According to his point of view, the implementation of an ePF in the FLC is not a waste of time at all.

Example 2

In the following, we will take a look at another student's ePF. An excerpt of a student in Fig. 6 shows two of the resources he makes use of, namely a survey and a newspaper article. With this information, he could form an idea on how both parts of Germany see the other side after the reunification. With his documentation, he does not only present the source but also summarizes and draws a conclusion from the content.

Before the research, he would not have thought and expected that the situation between both parts of Germany would be that complicated. He assumed that every inhabitant would have welcomed the reunification. So, he was surprised there are still many people who have a negative opinion about East Germans although this event took place 25 years ago. This fact leads him to become curious about the prejudices within Germany for which he tries to find reasons. In his opinion, prejudices cannot exist on their own: "I think that the media is responsible for the current situation, because people accept these statements if they are confronted with propaganda every day. A lie becomes truth when it has been told 100 times". Furthermore, he compares the reunification with Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997. The relationship between Hong Kongers and the Chinese is not harmonious and both are struggling with prejudices from the other side. A similar atmosphere can be found in Germany between the Eastern and Western part of the country as well. This research task helped him to obtain information about Germany's culture, history and social situation. He has learned that both life and history have an important impact on a society. Nevertheless, the biggest finding was that the feeling of a unity in Germany is not as strong as he had imagined before. When summing up his learning achievements, he mentions that he is really proud to be able to find and handle many resources in a foreign language. Linguistically, the ePF helps him—according to his own perception—to construct long and complex sentences, which he would never have been practised in classroom. Although he thinks that the whole project lasted too long and was too intensive, he noted that he would still continue using this platform for similar tasks in the future.

Through these different examples, we have seen that ePFs offer an interesting and effective interface to let emerge linguistic, intercultural and reflective skills.

Quelle C Umfrage

Top 10 der gesamtdeutschen Vorurteile zu Ossi und Wessis (aus Sicht aller Befragten):

1. Ossi heißen häufig Mandy, Cindy, Sandy, Enrico, Maik etc. 48%
2. Wessis sind Besserverdiener: 46%
3. Ossi können kein Hochdeutsch: 36%
4. Ossi sind sparsamer als die Westdeutschen: 35%
5. Ossi haben alle schon mal Urlaub an der Ostsee gemacht. 35%
6. Wessis würden am liebsten die Mauer wieder hochziehen. 30%
7. Wessis sind arrogant: 28%
8. Ossi sprechen schlechtes Englisch: 27%
9. Ossi meckern viel: 27%
10. Wessis denken nur ans Geld: 25%

Tag der Deutschen Einheit: Top 10 Ossi- und Wessi-Klischees
Presseportal.de 24.09.2013

Die Daten zeigt das Top 10 der gesamtdeutschen Vorurteile zu Ossi und Wessis. Die Umfrage wurde im Jahr 2013 durch Deal.com gemacht. Die Anzahl hindeutet, dass die Deutsche heute noch viele Vorurteile haben, weil fest die Hälfte der beklagte Personen denken, die Wessis verdienen mehr Geld. Es meint, dass die Gesellschaft eine Existenz der Prosperität zwischen die Westdeutsche und die Ostdeutsche glaubt, obwohl die Wiedereingung schon passiert ist. Außerdem denkt jeder dritte Deutsche, dass die Ossi kein Hochdeutsch sprechen können. Es reflektiert die alte Meinung an der Gesellschaft, weil sie scheinen, in der Vergangenheit zu leben, aber der Staat ist jetzt in einer Einheit.

Quelle D Zeitungsartikel

Bilanz zur Wiedervereinigung: Ostdeutsche Wirtschaft hinkt dem Westen hinterher
Fast 25 Jahre nach der Wiedervereinigung zeigt ein Bericht der Bundesregierung den Nachholbedarf in den neuen Ländern auf. Laut "Bild"-Zeitung liegt die Wirtschaftskraft dort noch immer 30 Prozent unter dem Niveau im Westen.

Arbeiter in Porsche-Werk in Leipzig, Industriestraße
Wachstumskerne im Osten

Berlin - Mit milliardenschweren Ausgleichszahlungen soll in Deutschland für annähernd gleiche Lebensverhältnisse in allen Regionen gesorgt werden. Laut einem Bericht der Bundesregierung ist dieses Ziel noch längst nicht erreicht. Denn knapp 25 Jahre nach dem Mauerfall ist die Wirtschaftskraft in Ostdeutschland immer noch deutlich niedriger als im Westen. Sie liege 30 Prozent unter dem Niveau der westdeutschen Bundesländer, berichtet die "Bild"-Zeitung unter Berufung auf den Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung zum Stand der Deutschen Einheit.

Das Steueraufkommen je Einwohner beträgt demnach im Osten 937 Euro, im Westen dagegen 1837 Euro. Der Einheitsbericht soll an diesem Mittwoch im Kabinett verabschiedet werden.

Er könnte auch die aktuellen Gespräche zum Finanzausgleich beeinflussen. Denn bis Ende 2019 müssen Bund und Länder ihre Finanzbeziehungen neu ordnen. Dann läuft der Solidarität II aus, der ostdeutsche Bundesländer derzeit noch mit Milliarden stützt. Bund und Länder verhandeln auch darüber, wie die Einnahmen aus dem **Solidaritätszuschlag** künftig verteilt werden. Die Abgabe war einst mit den Kosten der deutschen Einheit sowie des ersten Irak-Kriegs begründet worden.

Bilanz zur Wiedervereinigung: Ostdeutsche Wirtschaft hinkt dem Westen hinterher
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Dieser Artikel zeigt die Unterschiede in dem wirtschaftlichen Aspekt zwischen die Westdeutsche und die Ostdeutsche nach der Wiedereingung. Eigentlich ist das Gehalt von Wessis doppelt die Ossi, deswegen sind die Vorurteile manchmal richtig. Außerdem gibt der Artikel an, dass es viele Leute gibt, die dem Mauer erhalten wollen, denn jeder vierte sieht den Mauerfall wie einen Nachteil. Es meint, dass nicht alle Menschen die Wiedervereinigung haben möchten.

Fig. 6 Screenshot from a student's ePF

Views of Our Students on This New TLA

At the end of the semester, we have conducted a survey that was provided by the Centre of Holistic Teaching and Learning (CHTL) to examine students’ feedback about the ePF’s implementation. In Figs. 7 and 8, graphs present the distribution of the classes’ reply of 15 and 18 students in French and German, respectively.

- Q 1 *Overall, I found constructing the e-Portfolio valuable to this course.*
- Q 2 *I acquired useful skills in creating my e-Portfolio.*
- Q 3 *The e-Portfolio helped me improve my writing, reading and listening skills.*
- Q 4 *The use of the e-Portfolio as part of the course helped me learn French in a meaningful way.*
- Q 5 *The process of developing my e-Portfolio increased my awareness of aspects of French/European culture.*
- Q 6 *The process of developing my e-Portfolio increased my awareness of my own culture.*
- Q 7 *I was able to engage with e-portfolio interface in a worthwhile manner.*
- Q 8 *The process of creating my e-Portfolio helped me to take responsibility for my own learning.*

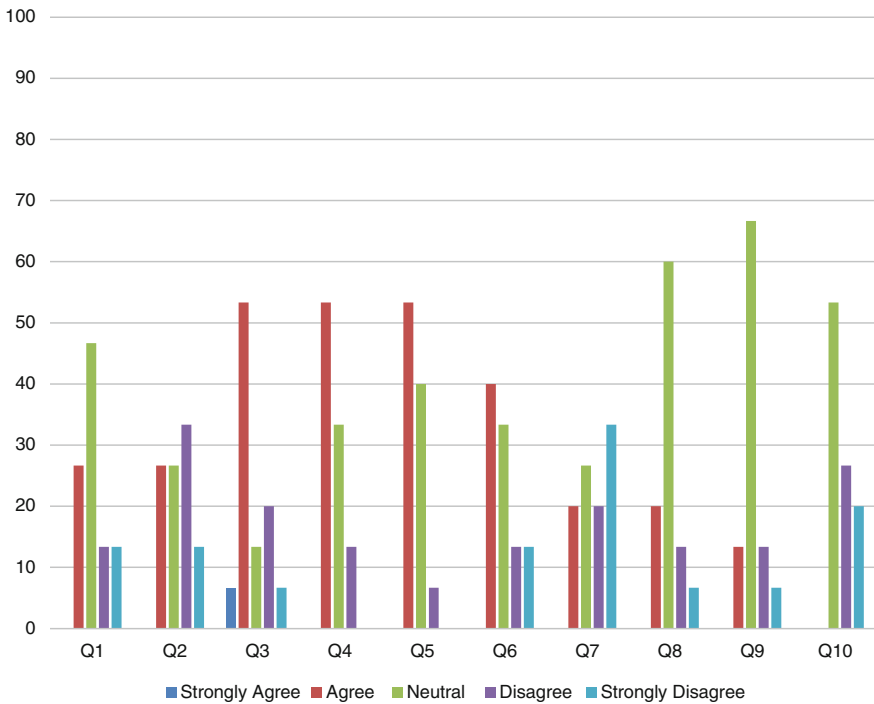


Fig. 7 Feedback results in French class

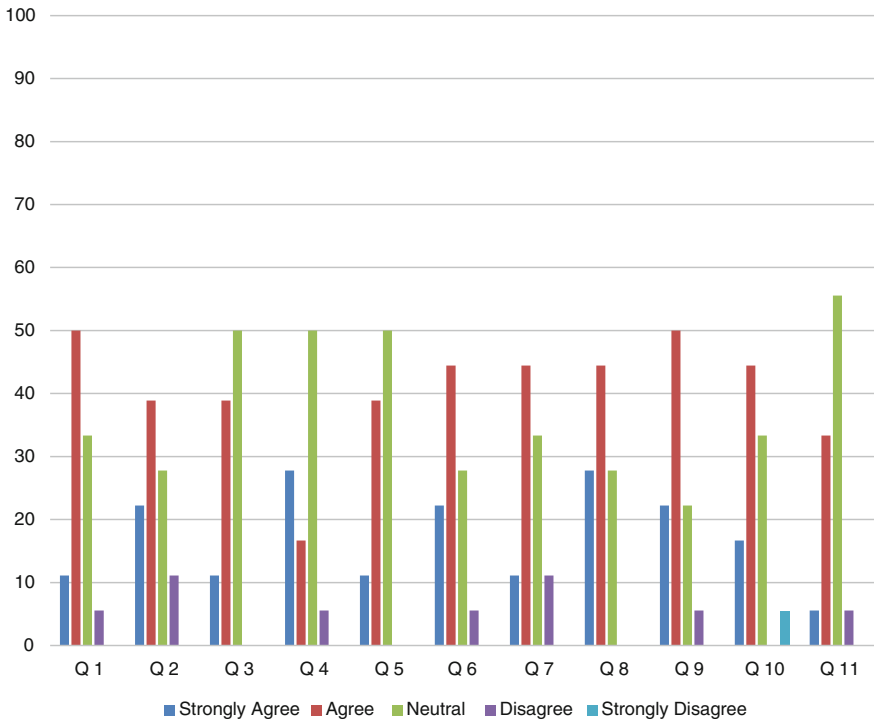


Fig. 8 Feedback results in German class

- Q 9 *I became more aware of my learning process.*
 Q 10 *I have a generally favourable attitude toward using the e-Portfolio.*
 Q 1 *Overall, I found constructing the e-Portfolio valuable to this course.*
 Q 2 *I acquired useful skills in creating my e-Portfolio.*
 Q 3 *The process of creating my e-Portfolio helped me to take responsibility for my own learning.*
 Q 4 *Showcasing electronic media (i.e. text-based, graphic or multi-media elements) in my e-Portfolio allowed me to demonstrate a more meaningful understanding of my course.*
 Q 5 *Overall, I valued the integration of the e-Portfolio into this course.*
 Q 6 *Overall, I am satisfied with the way my learning is assessed using the e-Portfolio in this course.*
 Q 7 *I was able to engage with e-portfolio interface in a worthwhile manner.*
 Q 8 *I could exercise choice in how I customized my e-Portfolio entries.*
 Q 9 *Constructing the e-Portfolio helped me to reflect upon my achievement.*
 Q 10 *I have a generally favourable attitude toward using the e-Portfolio.*
 Q 11 *Using the e-Portfolio enhanced my effectiveness in learning.*

According to our students' views and feedback comments, we can recognize the potential of an ePF although it includes challenges as well. Some of the negative comments were about the "user-friendliness" of the platforms and that the implementation of such an ePF only means "extra work" and is "really time-consuming".

Platforms

At first, the French and German streams worked with the platform Mahara. However, after one year, taking into account various technical difficulties reflected in students' feedbacks (e.g. "(...) the interface could be more direct, simplified and user-friendly"), both streams decided to explore different tools to integrate students' reflection. The French stream decided to opt for an ePF platform integrated in the Learning Management System (LMS) of the university—Blackboard (Bb)—which was put in service in 2014. This decision echoed the view of Stefani et al. on the ePF part in students' task:

the most important way to make the ePF an integral part of a learner's daily routine is to ensure that the software is integrated into the tasks students regularly perform for their courses in their electronic learning environments (2007: 59).

Indeed, instead of multiplying the interfaces (Bb for their courses and Mahara for their ePF), we thought that students would find it a lot easier and more stimulating to compile an ePF in an environment they are used to work with. But still, complaints increased with the Bb platform as students mentioned that the ePF interface was not convenient, too slow to use, not intuitive enough to upload documents or too complicate to share them with their instructors and peers. If we refer to question 7, related to the interface of the French students' feedback (cf. Fig. 7), one can see that almost half of the students were unsatisfied with the Bb platform and this although one session at least was spent at the beginning of the semester to go through the different technological aspects of this software. Students and instructors got support from the ITO and the CHTL officers who came to our class to show in detail how to log in, how to insert documents, how to share them, etc.

Stefani et al. (2007) discussed these disadvantages. Regarding the use of technologies, for example, the researchers pointed out the importance of interfaces for ePF: they need to be usable, accessible, and to inspire confidence if we want ePF projects to be successful. Unfamiliar and unfriendly technology will discourage the use of ePF and may act as a brake on ePF implementation (ibid: 33). That is why the German stream, observing that "the reflective components of ePF have great similarities with blogging (...) and that a personal webpage carries many of the presentational functions of ePF" (ibid: 16), opted for Weebly. The assumption here was that students were much more familiar with a "blog type" platform which allows much more space for freedom and creativity. Other reasons for choosing Weebly were the easy access (log in with a Facebook or Google+ account), the possibility of possessing the product after graduation, the intuitive usage and the

attractive interface with its large variety of designs. If we refer now to question 7, related to the interface of the German students' feedback (cf. Fig. 8), one can see that more than half of the students were here satisfied with the Weebly interface. We are inclined to think, from these results (Q. 7 and 8 in Figs. 7 and 8 respectively), that technology played a significant role in the implementation and in the success of maintaining our students' ePF: if we refer to Q 10—*I have a generally favourable attitude towards using the e-Portfolio*—(cf. Figs. 7 and 8), we can see that, in the French stream, not a single student out of 15 agreed on this, whereas, on the contrary, 60% of the German class that used Weebly as their ePF platform were of the mind that they have a favourable attitude towards using this tool. Taking this vast contradiction into account, we believe that an unsatisfactory technology, like Blackboard in our case study, might have had a great impact on students' perception and their exposure to ePF.

Meaningful Assessment

Practitioners also pinpoint another important issue to be addressed to achieve the full potential of ePF: the necessity to promote ePF to the learner as a purposeful activity, “not something bolted on to their studies as an added extra” (Stefani et al. 2007: 34). Students need to be made aware of the benefits of ePF production for them (Lee 1997: 34) if they want to think that it is worth to spend time on it and to motivate them (Cummins and Davesne 2009: 858). Hung (2006: 7) also gives an example of an unsuccessful tentative of ePF which was due to unclear explanation of the purposes, criteria and outcomes. That is why, in both streams, instructors spend a great deal of time at the beginning of the semester to introduce this new e-learning project. We insist on the specificity of this assessment because, as Stefani et al. remind us, we “need to be careful that students don't see the PF as just another chore with no real value for them” (2007: 21). Despite this, we can find some particularly critical remarks from students that do not find any interest in completing their ePF: “E-Portfolio is really useless and a waste of time. I don't understand the meaning of doing this”. Or “E-portfolio used in this course is useless, waste of time and adding unnecessary workloads to the students, we found that the e-portfolio has nearly no effect in improving our language level”.

This difficulty could come actually from “students' unfamiliarity with PF assessment”, as underlined by Hung (2006: 7). Certainly, reflective thinking is not easy and it can be quite challenging and painful (Zubizarreta 2009: 10) because it goes beyond collecting and simply presenting representative samples of experiences. Students may lack the skills of reflection (Moon 2006). This is particularly well shown in the surveys conducted with our students of both streams: we can see that for the questions related to reflective thinking [Q 3, 4, 5 & 11 for German stream (cf. Fig. 8) and Q 8 & 9 for French stream (cf. Fig. 7)], more than half of the

students have a neutral opinion regarding this issue. The ePF is not seen for them as a specific tool to improve one's reflective skills. Thus, becoming an autonomous learner who takes initiatives does not happen by itself. Students need guidance not only for the tasks to be accomplished but also for the understanding of reflection in an academic context (Stefani et al. 2007). Zubizarreta (2009: 10) points to the importance of prompts and rubrics in the teacher's guidance task: "To guide students toward the metacognitive work necessary for strong critical thinking skills, one's need directed questions for reflection". Prompts and rubrics play a crucial role to orient students in an activity they are not familiar with and to raise cross-cultural awareness. Yet, the provision of particularly detailed guidelines (cf. Appendix) is not sufficient for some students, as exemplified in the following comment: "Maybe we can spend more time (...) working on our (...) e-portfolio together [students and instructors] so that we have more instructions, which can also reduce our stress".

Nonetheless, a large majority of students see the benefits of an ePF as part of their learning. In the German stream for example, over 60% of the students declare to be favourable toward the ePF, a TLA that they find valuable (Q 1 & 10) (cf. Fig. 8). In the French stream, a large majority appreciates the ePF as a TLA helping them to learn the target language in a meaningful way (Q 3, 4 & 5) (cf. Fig. 7). In this sense, despite important issues that need to be addressed, it seems to us that "ePF can act as a vehicle for meaningful formative assessment" (Stefani et al. 2007: 21). This is also the feeling expressed in some students' feedbacks. One wrote for example that "writing/constructing his ePF allowed him to showcase his skills better than in class or assignments as it is a bigger project in which he spent more time on it". Another described an ePF as "a good medium as it is environmental friendly and students can review their works easily after". At the end, the satisfaction, when they look at their products after two semesters, seems to overcome their frustration. Once they realize what they are actually able to master in a foreign language, they portray their work for their ePF as a "proud moment".

Outlook

Although we were facing many challenges, we observed the success students achieved by the end of their work. So if teachers decide to implement ePF, they need to be aware of the fact that it may frustrate students at some point, but all in all the benefits will predominate.

Surely, ePFs have several advantages. One is definitely the online access which makes the students able to show how much they can master multimedia and digital literacies which are key components nowadays. Furthermore, the ePF is also a strong potential support tool for the acquisition of intercultural skills which are essential in an increasingly multicultural world. And finally, to have a product that documents students' learning process and progress makes it worth through the enhancement of lifelong learning skills. This trend is corroborated by a research done by Chaudhuri in 2014 in our programme. In his article, in which he analysed

the distribution of 14 German language students’ responses using the same template as our CHTL survey, he observed a predominant agreement concerning students regarding the work with ePFs as useful in the sense of encouraging their autonomy and self-directed learning (Chaudhuri 2015: 113). For us, it is the biggest asset of this TLA in line with the GAs of our university mentioned at the beginning: enabling students to stand on their own and show their creativity and versatility.

Appendix: Prompts

| French | German |
|---|---|
| <p><u>What to write in learning experiences?</u> In this category, you are required to reflect about an experience you had in the target language (movie, documentary, article, blog, Facebook post, book, radio program etc.). You are required to write at least two entries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you see/read? • Names: director, author, actors, main characters, year of publication/production • Write a short summary • Why did you choose this film? Why did you read it? • What is the main theme of the film/book? • Your comments: this is your reflection. (ca. 150 Words), e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What surprised you? – What did you not understand well? <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you think about the topic, the characters? Is it the same/different in your country? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Did you read more about this topic? – How much of the language did you understand? Did you use the subtitles? – Was there a dialog/a sentence or a word that you would like to use in your everyday life? <p><u>What to write in the journal?</u> In the journal you are required to reflect in depth about a topic seen in class. You are required to write at least three journal entries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell us what topic you chose and why? • Tell us what you know about this topic and what you would like to know further. <p>What resources are you going to use to learn more?</p> | <p><u>Part 1: About the movie</u> There are three movies on the list that deal with “reunification”. Choose one of them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go Trabi Go • Good Bye, Lenin! • Sonnenallee <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write a summary after you have watched the movie (200–250 words) 2. Describe and explain the topic of the movie 3. Answer the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you like the movie? What exactly did you like? What did you not like? • How difficult was it to understand the movie? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you choose this movie? • Have you encountered anything about the movie or the topic itself before watching? • How difficult was it to recognize the topic of the movie? • What do you already know about this topic? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which information do you want to explore? <p><u>Part 2: Research</u> You are expected to do a research on your chosen topic and establish a contemporary connection. Use as many resources as possible (literature from the library, literature from the internet, audio files, videos, contemporary witness reports, interviews with German-speaking students, ...) Document and reflect this activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you done at the beginning to get more information? • Which resources helped you the most to get information the easiest? • How did you select the information? |

(continued)

(continued)

| French | German |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell us what more you have now learnt about this topic. What resources have you used till now? • Tell us what more you have now learnt about this topic. What is the difference in your knowledge now than it was in your first entry? • Tell us how you feel about this topic now? Was it an important topic? Did you find enough resources to learn more? Do you want to know more still? Or is this enough? <p><u>What to write in creativity?</u> You need to produce an artefact that show you're using creatively the target language/culture and you need to reflect on your 'creation' in a short text (±200 words): why did you choose to do this, what did you learn doing so about the language, the culture, how was the process of the creation</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which challenges did you encounter? • Did you expect these challenges? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could you cope with them? <p><u>Part 3: Learning process</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you benefit from your prior knowledge? • What did you learn about the topic with the research? • To what extent is this topic of current interest? Describe this in detail. • Did you learn anything about the German language? • Do you think, you could enhance your intercultural competence? If so, how? If not, why not? • What did you learn that you definitely want to keep for your next research task and which aspects need to be changed, improved or neglected? |

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