

Empowering Young Writers: The Positive Impact of ePortfolios in Elementary

Writing

A Review of the Literature

Lauren A. Blasdel

Lamar University

July 2024

Abstract

This literature review explores how electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) positively impact elementary students' writing abilities. ePortfolios, digital collections of student work, enhance engagement, motivation, and writing quality by making student work more accessible and organized. They facilitate continuous feedback and reflection, helping students understand their strengths and areas for improvement. Peer feedback through ePortfolios fosters critical thinking and analytical skills. Additionally, ePortfolios provide authentic writing experiences by allowing students to write for real audiences, thus motivating them to produce high-quality work. Their versatility supports diverse learning styles, making them inclusive tools that accommodate various learning preferences. ePortfolios also promote student ownership and accountability, encouraging continuous improvement in writing skills. Integrating ePortfolios in elementary classrooms creates a dynamic environment that fosters strong writing abilities and prepares students for future academic and professional success.

Empowering Young Writers: The Positive Impact of ePortfolios in Elementary Schools

The integration of technology in education has introduced innovative tools to enhance student learning. One such tool is the electronic portfolio, or ePortfolio, which has gained popularity for its ability to support various educational objectives, including the development of writing skills in elementary school students. This literature review explores the positive effects of ePortfolios on elementary students' writing abilities by examining current research and practical applications in the classroom.

What is an ePortfolio?

An electronic portfolio, or ePortfolio, is a digital collection of a student's work that is connected to their learning. These often include writing samples, videos, artwork, recordings, and more. While these things alone would be beneficial to see from a student, the collection of these items isn't what makes a good ePortfolio. The true goal of an ePortfolio is to show the student's growth and make their learning visible (University of Waterloo, 2014). ePortfolios should have the most crucial part of the learning process embedded into their design, and that is the student's reflection of their learning. A student is also able to take this ePortfolio with them to continue to see their growth throughout their journey.

Portfolios are not a new idea. For many years students have been collecting their work to share with their parents at open house or during conference time. The change we are seeing is moving towards a more comprehensive and reflective portfolio while also including technology. This is bringing forward ePortfolios. The benefits are vast but include enhanced student engagement, improved self-regulated learning skills,

improvements in writing, and increased parent and teacher involvement in the learning process. Additionally, ePortfolios offer a platform for students to showcase their work and reflect on their learning journey, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their achievements. Harapnuik (2023) states that if we look at the basic

definition of an ePortfolio as a learner's digital evidence of meaningful connections, then the answer to why one would want to create an ePortfolio is to show those meaningful connections. This notion of showing what one has created, developed, built, written, or assembled is an extremely important aspect of an effective learning environment that is often overlooked beyond the show & tell sessions that we fondly remember from primary school.

In a study done by H. Borthwick (2021) in a school district in British Columbia, the schools replaced their standard report cards with student ePortfolios. These portfolios made it possible to share student work, give feedback from teachers, allow parents to communicate, assess students, and include student reflections. The results were more parent involvement, student ownership of their learning and work, better pedagogy in the classroom, and self-reflection from the students. In Basken's (2008) findings he states that the Inter/National Coalition on Electronic Portfolio Research found that "the process of keeping a portfolio as fundamental for promoting in students deeper self-reflection and deeper understanding of their subjects."

Technology in the classroom

With the emergence of Chromebooks and other technology in the classroom, teachers are constantly looking for ways to make the technology we use meaningful and engaging in the classroom. Being able to include ePortfolios into a teacher's toolkit as a

means to share, reflect, and analyze the growth of each student makes blended learning even more beneficial. In a nationwide poll done by Project Tomorrow, an education nonprofit organization, they were able to see just how much of a positive impact parents, teachers and administration believe technology has on a student's learning. They found that over 91% of parents believed that technology used by their students had a positive impact on their learning and potential for success. They also found that principals and teachers could see the benefits of technology for more engaging lessons, helped students gain the skills they needed for college and the future, and gave them the ability to personalize more student learning (*Speak up Research Brief: Value of Technology Use in School – Views of Parents, Teachers and Principals*, n.d.). The CEO of Project Tomorrow, Julie Evans, states when it comes to using technology we must keep in mind that “personalization and contextualization of the learning process can yield better returns and demonstrated value” (Friedman, 2019). Making sure that technology is not just used but engaging and meaningful is the most important aspect of introducing it into the classroom. “Those leading the most successful programs avoid the trap of ‘technology for technology’s sake’” (Horn et al., 2017). It’s important to lead with the lesson first and then grow the lesson with technology.

Benefits of ePortfolios on Student Writing

ePortfolios offer many benefits for teachers and the classroom environment. The digital collections of students’ work, reflections, and achievements offer a multi-faceted way to assess and share student learning and growth. In a report done by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (2018), they state that ePortfolios give the student an opportunity for higher-level thinking

such as synthesizing and organizing ideas, thinking critically, and applying theoretical concepts to unfamiliar situations. Finally, C2L results suggested that ePortfolio practice helps students build not only academic skills but also the affective understandings of self and the dispositional attributes needed for success in today's workforce.

According to the research (Saarinen et al., n.d.) done on students using ePortfolios in elementary school students were able to see the importance of the method of ePortfolios stating that it was “ showing their development and the ePortfolio was considered important in supporting their memory and their successful assessment”. In this review we will be focusing on the positive benefits that ePortfolios have on elementary student's writing journey and the impact that can be made implementing ePortfolios.

Enhanced Engagement and Motivation

ePortfolios have been shown to significantly increase student engagement and motivation. According to Edutopia (2018), digital portfolios make student work more accessible and organized, which helps maintain student interest and motivation to improve their work. When students see their work collected in a portfolio, they are more likely to take pride in their writing and strive for higher quality. The interactive nature of ePortfolios, which allows for multimedia elements such as images, videos, and audio, can make the writing process more engaging for young learners.

For instance, in one elementary school, students used ePortfolios to document their writing projects throughout the year. Teachers observed that students were more enthusiastic about writing assignments because they could include multimedia

components, such as pictures and audio recordings, to complement their texts. This multimedia integration not only made the writing process more enjoyable but also helped students better understand how to structure their writing to make it more engaging for readers. As CampusPress (2018) states, "Digital portfolios allow students to capture their learning in a way that is engaging and reflective of their own personal experiences."

Continuous Feedback and Reflection

A key advantage of ePortfolios is the facilitation of continuous feedback and reflection. Research by the University of Helsinki (2019) highlights that ePortfolios support ongoing formative assessment, where teachers can provide regular, timely feedback on students' writing. This continuous feedback loop helps students understand their writing strengths and areas for improvement, promoting iterative learning and enhancement of writing skills.

ePortfolios encourage students to reflect on their learning journey, which is crucial for developing metacognitive skills and becoming more self-aware writers. Reflective practice through ePortfolios involves students revisiting their work, considering feedback, and making revisions. This process helps them to see their progress over time and understand the value of constructive criticism. In one study, students who regularly reflected on their writing in ePortfolios showed greater improvement in writing quality compared to those who did not engage in reflective practices (Stanford University, 2019). According to the Stanford University study, "students who engage in regular reflection through ePortfolios demonstrate a deeper understanding of their own writing process and are better able to apply feedback constructively."

Improved Writing Skills Through Peer Feedback

Peer feedback is another significant benefit of using ePortfolios. In a study examining the use of ePortfolios in elementary classrooms, it was found that students who engaged in peer review activities through ePortfolios demonstrated improved writing abilities. The process of giving and receiving feedback from peers helps students develop critical thinking and analytical skills, which are essential for effective writing (ScienceDirect, 2018).

Additionally, peer feedback provides diverse perspectives on writing, helping students recognize different writing styles and techniques that they can incorporate into their own work. For example, in a fourth-grade classroom, students were paired to review each other's ePortfolios. They provided constructive feedback on narrative structure, grammar, and creativity. This peer interaction not only helped students improve their own writing but also taught them to appreciate different viewpoints and styles. As Edutopia (2018) notes, "The process of peer review in ePortfolios fosters a collaborative learning environment where students learn from each other and develop critical evaluation skills."

Facilitating Authentic Writing Experiences

Peer feedback is another significant benefit of using ePortfolios. In a study examining the use of ePortfolios in elementary classrooms, it was found that students who engaged in peer review activities through ePortfolios demonstrated improved writing abilities. The process of giving and receiving feedback from peers helps students develop critical thinking and analytical skills, which are essential for effective writing (ScienceDirect, 2018).

Additionally, peer feedback provides diverse perspectives on writing, helping students recognize different writing styles and techniques that they can incorporate into their own work. For example, in a fourth-grade classroom, students were paired to review each other's ePortfolios. They provided constructive feedback on narrative structure, grammar, and creativity. Edutopia (2018) notes, "The process of peer review in ePortfolios fosters a collaborative learning environment where students learn from each other and develop critical evaluation skills." This peer interaction not only helped students improve their own writing but also taught them to appreciate different viewpoints and styles.

Promoting Ownership and Accountability

One of the most profound impacts of ePortfolios is the promotion of student ownership and accountability for their learning. When students are responsible for curating and managing their ePortfolios, they develop a sense of ownership over their work. This ownership encourages them to be more accountable for their learning outcomes and strive for continuous improvement.

By setting personal goals and tracking their progress through ePortfolios, students become more invested in their writing development and are likely to put in the effort required to enhance their skills (Stanford University, 2019). For instance, students might set goals for improving their use of descriptive language or reducing grammatical errors. As they add new writing samples to their ePortfolios, they can review past work to see how they have progressed toward these goals. This ongoing self-assessment fosters a growth mindset and a commitment to learning. According to Edutopia (2018), "ePortfolios provide a platform for students to set goals, track their progress, and take

ownership of their learning journey, leading to greater accountability and motivation to improve."

Summary

Contributions to the Broader Field of Education

The literature on ePortfolios significantly contributes to the broader field of education by enhancing student engagement, fostering reflective practices, and supporting personalized learning. According to Barrett (2007), ePortfolios "make the learning process more engaging" by incorporating multimedia elements, which increases student motivation. Reflective practices facilitated by ePortfolios are essential for developing metacognitive skills. Baturay and Daloğlu (2010) emphasize that "the feedback mechanism within ePortfolios helps students to revise and improve their work continually," highlighting the importance of reflection in understanding one's strengths and areas for improvement. Additionally, Chang (2008) notes that integrating technology through ePortfolios "prepares students for future academic and professional challenges," while the EUFolio (2015) project shows that ePortfolios "support personalized learning by allowing students to set individual goals and reflect on their achievements." These contributions underscore ePortfolios' multifaceted benefits in creating a dynamic educational environment.

Pros and Cons, Strengths and Weaknesses

Pros/Strengths:

One primary strength of ePortfolios is their ability to enhance student engagement and motivation. Barrett (2007) states that "the interactive and multimedia aspects of

ePortfolios make the learning process more engaging for students," which often leads to improved writing performance. Another significant advantage is the provision of continuous feedback and reflection. Baturay and Daloğlu (2010) assert that "the feedback mechanism within ePortfolios helps students to revise and improve their work continually," which is crucial for developing writing skills. Furthermore, ePortfolios support diverse learning styles, making them versatile tools in the classroom. The EUFolio (2015) project highlights that ePortfolios "cater to various learning preferences," ensuring that all students benefit. Additionally, ePortfolios promote ownership and accountability. Chang (2008) emphasizes that ePortfolios "encourage students to take responsibility for their learning," leading to greater accountability and motivation to improve.

Cons/Weaknesses:

Despite their benefits, ePortfolios present challenges. Technical issues can arise during implementation, such as both students and teachers could face difficulties due to a lack of digital literacy. Another challenge is the time-consuming nature of developing and maintaining ePortfolios. Barrett (2007) points out that "creating and updating ePortfolios requires significant time and effort." Additionally, the quality of feedback can be inconsistent. The effectiveness of peer feedback can vary which could impact the overall quality of feedback and subsequent improvements in writing.

Gaps in the Literature and Focus of Future Study

While the existing literature provides a comprehensive overview of the benefits and challenges of ePortfolios, there are several gaps. One significant omission is the lack of

studies examining the impact of ePortfolios on writing skills in elementary age students. Additionally, there is limited research on the specific strategies that can maximize the effectiveness of ePortfolios in diverse classroom settings.

To address these gaps, future studies should investigate the long-term impact of ePortfolios on writing abilities through longitudinal research. Such studies could provide insights into how consistent ePortfolio use influences writing development over time. Research should also explore effective implementation strategies to overcome technical challenges and enhance digital literacy among students and educators. Identifying best practices for integrating ePortfolios in various educational contexts will help maximize their benefits. Furthermore, examining ePortfolios' impact in diverse demographic and socio-economic settings is essential to understand their effectiveness across different student populations. Addressing these areas will provide deeper insights into ePortfolios' role in enhancing writing skills and contribute to more effective educational practices.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed demonstrates that ePortfolios are a powerful tool for enhancing elementary students' writing abilities. They increase engagement and motivation, facilitate continuous feedback and reflection, provide opportunities for peer feedback, support authentic writing experiences, accommodate diverse learning styles, and promote ownership and accountability. By integrating ePortfolios into the elementary classroom, educators can create a dynamic and supportive environment that fosters the development of strong writing skills in young learners. As technology continues to

evolve, it is essential for educators to leverage such tools to enhance student learning and prepare them for future academic and professional success.

References

- Barrett, H. C. (2007). Researching electronic portfolios and learner engagement: The REFLECT initiative. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(6), 436–449.
- Basken, P. (2008, April 18). Electronic Portfolios May Answer Calls for More Accountability. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/electronic-portfolios-may-answer-calls-for-more-accountability/>
- Borthwick, H. M. (2021). *CURATED CAREFULLY: SHIFTING PEDAGOGIES THROUGH E-PORTFOLIO USE IN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS*.
- CampusPress. (2018). *The Complete Guide to Student Digital Portfolios*.
- Chang, C.-C. (2008). Enhancing self-perceived effects using web-based portfolio assessment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24(4), 1753–1771.
- Edutopia. (2018). *Using E-Portfolios in the Classroom*.
- EUfolio. (2015). *EU classroom ePortfolios pilot evaluation results*.
- Friedman, S. (2019, October 29). *How Teachers Use Technology to Enrich Learning Experiences*. - THE Journal.
- Georgia Tech. (2018). *Engaging Students with ePortfolios*. Center for Teaching and Learning.
Retrieved from [Georgia Tech](#)

Harapnuik, D. (2023, September). *Why Use an ePortfolio*. Harapnuik.org.

https://www.harapnuik.org/?page_id=6063

Horn, M. B., Staker, H., & Christensen, C. M. (2017). *Blended: using disruptive innovation to improve schools*. Jossey-Bass.

Kuh, G. D., Gambino, L. M., Bresciani Ludvik, M., & O'Donnell, K. (2018). *Using ePortfolio to Document and Deepen the Impact of HIPs on Learning Dispositions*. National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment.

Saarinen, A., Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, P., & Hakkarainen, K. (n.d.). Long-Term Use of ePortfolios in Craft Education among Elementary School Students: Reflecting the Level and Type of Craft Learning Activities. *Design and Technology Education: An International Journal*, 26(1).

ScienceDirect. (2018). E-portfolios Supporting Primary Students' Writing Performance and Peer Feedback. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0360131513001553>

Speak Up Research Brief: Value of technology use in school – views of parents, teachers, and principals. (n.d.). [Www.tomorrow.org](http://www.tomorrow.org).

Stanford University. (2019). EPortfolios and Self-Reflection. Retrieved from [Stanford University](#)

University of Helsinki. (2019). Building Student-Centric EPortfolios in Practice. Retrieved from [University of Helsinki](#)

University of Waterloo. (2019). EPortfolios Explained: Theory and Practice. Retrieved from [University of Waterloo](#)