Student ePortfolios: John Kilroy Video 3

Benefits and challenges

Benefits

Outside of the, just I suppose having a tool to showcase themselves, it's also the skills that they develop on the journey. So they might have started off by maybe having low levels of IT skills, but even the process of developing an ePortfolio can be a very good way of developing your IT competence as well, if you get the support structure. And equally, I mentioned earlier about self-reflection; that is a skill you developed as you go through it as well. But even skills like time management, you know taking time out to do your portfolio, project management, communication skills, like, you know, even the whole area of communications, if you are doing a huge amount of videoing or if you are even doing blogs, that's a form of communication. Or if you are connecting with people, you are communicating as well. So there's a huge amount of soft skills that are developed as a result of going through the process. And again, they are probably things that need to be, and I would kind of tell them at the start, you know, this isn't just about the end product, it's also about your own personal development as well.

Challenges

There's probably two challenges we have when using ePortfolios. The first one is that digital literacy piece. Because I suppose we are dealing primarily with generation X in terms of the work force. So they are not necessarily au fait with a lot of the social networking tools that are out there. So there is, I suppose, particularly with some of the job seekers that I have been working with, there would have been an age profile of maybe 40+. And I found that trying to get them to, particularly to develop digital content that's not kind of I suppose heavily text based. So stuff like video-based content and uploading videos and I suppose trying to integrate social networking tools. And one of the benefits I found is using maybe quite a simple system, like an institutional ePortfolio now, whether it's your Mahara or whatever it might be to start off on that. And then transition then into a more personalised one or more that kind of one that they could have for life. So there definitely is, I suppose, a lot of support needed up front around the kind of IT side of things. And there might even need to be some IT training done up front. But the other challenge then is the whole kind of self-reflection skills. I do tend to get quite a lot of push back around how do I write a blog or how do I self-

reflect? It's a skill in itself. And I think that can be taken for granted as well. Like sometimes we dive into ePortfolios and don't necessarily provide the support that's needed around self-reflection. So they are probably the two main challenges. And I suppose I have learned from my mistakes from that point of view. And I spend an awful lot of time now before I start an ePortfolio development programme, making sure that people are a) comfortable with the technology and b) comfortable with doing self-reflection.

How do you help them self-reflect?
I mean what I kind of encourage them to do is, I suppose, give them a sense of how to structure their reflections. So it might something like, you know, describe a particular scenario or situation that they encountered in work, describe their role in the scenario, describe what happened, describe the process, and describe the outcome. And then describe what they learned from it. So I generally try and break it down into those four areas. And once you give them a structure to work off, once they have developed a few blogs and done a few self-reflections, they get much more comfortable with it then, and ideally you also encourage them maybe to move away, maybe from a text-based approach to maybe using video blogs and you know integrating as much digital and multimedia content as possible. But you have to kind of start small with it, but giving them a sense of potentially where they could go.