Learning Portfolio

A Useful Tool For Reflect Labs

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Within the framework of the Erasmus+ project Reflect Lab, this webinar aims at making **lecturers** (of social sciences) at universities familiar with the portfolio method

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Overview

X. Context: Aims of Reflect Labs

1. Portfolio
2. Theoretical and practical rationale
3. Advantages and disadvantages of portfolios
4. Checklist for applying portfolios
5. Phases of Portfolios

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X. Context: Aims of Reflect Labs

To support lecturers (of social sciences) to implement the currently discussed approaches of inquiry-based and problem-based learning.

To develop and test socio-scientific teaching/learning laboratories - REFLECT LABs (RL).

To support/train lecturers (of social science faculties) at universities in developing and implementing **RLs** with their students.

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X. Context: Aims of Reflect Labs

Two crucial approaches for **RLs**:

A) Inquiry-Based Learning (**IBL**)

- **Self-directed: IBL** starts by posing questions, problems or scenarios—rather than simply presenting established facts or portraying a smooth path to knowledge

- **Exploration/Expansion of knowledge**: The process is often assisted by a facilitator. Inquirers will identify and research issues and questions to develop their knowledge or solutions

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X. Context: Aims of Reflect Labs

Two crucial approaches for **RLs**:

B) Problem-Based Learning (**PBL**)

- IBL includes **PBL**, and is generally used in small scale investigations and projects, as well as research.
- **PBL** means a given „problem“ is the core of a learning process
- Learning through experience of solving problems
- Development of further competencies/soft skills like
  - the ability to judge,
  - communication, and
  - critical thinking.

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X. Context: Aims of Reflect Labs

The objective is to establish **RLs** as an innovative course structure which fosters self-directed learning and critical thinking of students at Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

Lecturers accompany and support this process and the critical discussion.

As such, the project sets a counterpoint to the widely criticized reduction of learning in HEI to sole knowledge transfer.

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X. Context: Aims of Reflect Labs

How is it possible for lecturers to methodologically reach the goals of the project Reflect Lab?

These goals are:

- to foster critical thinking of students
- to establish **RLs** as an innovative course structure
- to support autonomous research of students
- to develop soft skills among students
- to expand the knowledge of students

One crucial piece of the puzzle is using the portfolio method.

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X. Context: Aims of Reflect Labs

Be Aware!

Are the following things clear:

- Target group of the webinar?
- Aim of the webinar?
- Aims of the project?
- What is a Reflect Lab?
- What does inquiry-based learning mean?
- What does problem-based learning mean

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1. Portfolio – Definition

A Portfolio is a tool for students to document their *self-regulated* learning process within a certain timeframe. It is a "collection of documents and other objects that support individual claims for what has been learned or archived." (Mason & Rennie 2008).

Students are able to collect their own essays, articles, presentations or other material (E-Portfolio: videos, audio, etc.) on a specific topic they are working on.

➔ Developing a *"Personal Knowledge History"* (Stratmann et. al 2009)

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1. Portfolio – Definition

- the focus is on the *process of learning*, not on the transfer and rehearsal of knowledge.
- a *holistic approach* of the whole process of learning in contrast to tests and exams.

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1. Portfolio – Characteristics

- stresses *self-organized learning*
- stresses *self-assessment*
- stresses *continuous in-depth research*
- students are *in control of their own learning process*

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1. Portfolio – Characteristics

Be Aware!

- What is a portfolio?
- What are the central characteristics of a portfolio?

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2. Theoretical and practical rationale

Basic premise: constructivist approach of learning:

- learning is considered a process where learners *actively re- and deconstruct reality*
- learning always starts with *problem-orientation* (John Dewey) as a stimulus
- challenging and complex tasks motivate students and as a consequence foster learning

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2. Theoretical and practical rationale

From a constructivist point of view, learning is a process and by definition open-ended

→ causes an intellectual and emotional response by learners (students)

→ sustainability of learning: Deeper understanding

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2. Theoretical and practical rationale

Be aware!

- What is meant by a constructivist approach of learning?
- What do you think, how does constructivism fit into the concept of RLs and portfolios?

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3. Advantages and disadvantages of portfolios

Advantages:

- focus on individual performances, strengths and achievements of students
- individual assessment of student without comparison to other students
- feedback and evaluation of a student is based on a holistic working process and hence more objective

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3. Advantages and disadvantages of portfolios

Advantages:

- Students take responsibility for their learning process (self-evaluation and reflection)
- presentation of results and interim results are possible and encourage critical self-reflection too

➔ all these advantages are in accordance with the aims of Reflect Labs

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3. Advantages and disadvantages of portfolios

Challenges

- Students are often afraid to express different opinions than the lecturer.

- Students often go along the slightest resistance line.
  - → as a lecturer, emphasize the necessity of impartiality and objectivity
  - → as a lecturer, emphasize that you will evaluate work input and critical thinking and not personal opinion per se, as long as a student does not slide to extremist, unhuman opinions

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3. Advantages and disadvantages of portfolios

Be aware!

- What are the advantages and challenges of implementing a portfolio?

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4. Phases of portfolios

- There is no clear way on how to exactly implement this method in the form of a Reflect Lab. It is a frame, and a lot depends on the agreements made between students and lecturers.

- **see also IO 2** manual for the implementation of Reflect Labs for basic requirements

- *In the case of a Reflect Lab, a portfolio starts by providing students with stimulus material (**see IO 3** for examples of stimulus materials and on a short instruction on how to compose it) and on a certain topic of pressing political and social issues (**see IO 3** research guide on how to deal with research questions)*

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 1: Lecturer and student agree on objectives of the Portfolio together

- structure, e.g. how many essays and reflections have to be written and research to be implemented (**see IO 3** research guide)

- duration, e.g. working on the portfolio for a quarter of the seminar

- which *competencies* will be focused, e.g. competence of justice (**see IO 3**, model of competencies)
- which *operators* will be applied, e.g. outline, justify, explain (**see IO 3**, explanation of operators)

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 1: Lecturer and student agree on objectives of the Portfolio together

- which topics will be focused on? (**see IO 3** stimulus material and the idea of using mind maps in order to structure the material and formulate exact research interests)
- assessment criteria and reflection, e.g. what and how will be evaluated (**see IO 3** self-reflection)
- as this happens within a university, a lecturer is not completely free
  - still, there are criteria lecturers free to chose
  - these criteria have to be applied to all students of the course

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 2: collection, selection and linkage of material by a student

- this includes papers, essays, articles, videos by a student and by other authors, who contribute to a certain topic, etc.
- point of departure is the stimulus material (**IO 3**), which gives a first input. From here they start digging deeper
- every material can be helpful, depending on the questions a student wants to focus on (**IO 3** research guide and the usage of mind maps for finding questions).
- student has to integrate additional material into his/her portfolio (in addition to the **IO 3** stimulus material)

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 2: collection, selection and linkage of material by a student

Crucial aspect are

- usage of mind maps
- essays in the form of reviews and reflections (**IO 3** research guide and guide on self-reflection)
- learning diaries as part of the (self-)evaluation (diaries are useful of a Reflect Lab last for several month)

Lecturers need to support students in this phase

- feedback on diaries, mind maps and essays

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 3: reflections on the learning process (centerpiece)

- focus on reflection and the process of learning (**see IO 3** guide on self-reflection)
- when using E-Portfolios: blog-function useful
- lecturer needs to support students:
  - agree on how to put reflection into writing
  - how often reflection has to take place
  - if and how to present it to other students

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 3: reflections on the learning process (centerpiece)

Possible questions students should ask themselves:

- “Which objectives do I have?”
- “Why did I choose this material?”
- “Is this essay helpful for answering my question?”
- “What opinion do I have on this essay?”
- “What did I reach/fail?”
- “What was good/bad?”
- “Next Steps?”
- **See also IO 3** guide on self-reflection

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 4: Presentation of a portfolio by a student

Lecturer needs to agree with students if, how and when they will present their portfolio.

- e.g. if at the beginning there is an agreement that the portfolio will last for four seminar sessions, there could be a midterm presentation after 2 sessions, 5 minutes for each student.

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 5: assessment of Portfolio by lecturer

Assessment of lecturer needs to recognize the point of view of a students and respect their opinions.

- students selects the material, which will be assessed, but have to give reasons for selection
- students needs to self-reflect and -evaluate their material

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 5: assessment of Portfolio by lecturer

not only at the end (final assessment), but also and more important during the process (on-going assessment), e.g. after a presentation.

- on-going assessment is important for a holistic approach

lecturer needs to assess work done in the light of

- the *competencies* the RL is based on (**see IO 3** Negt; e.g. competence of justice, etc.)
- the *operators* established together at the beginning (**see IO 3** operators, e.g. explain, outline, etc.)

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4. Phases of portfolios

Phase 5: assessment of Portfolio by lecturer

- assessment needs to be integrated into the regulations of the university, e.g. it could contribute 30% to the final grade of the seminar, replaces one essay or an regular presentation

- although there is a contradiction between the actual idea of the method and assessment/grading, for pragmatic reasons, it is accepted within the academic, scientific discourse to use portfolios in seminars and assess/grade them! (Stratmann et all 2009, 97)

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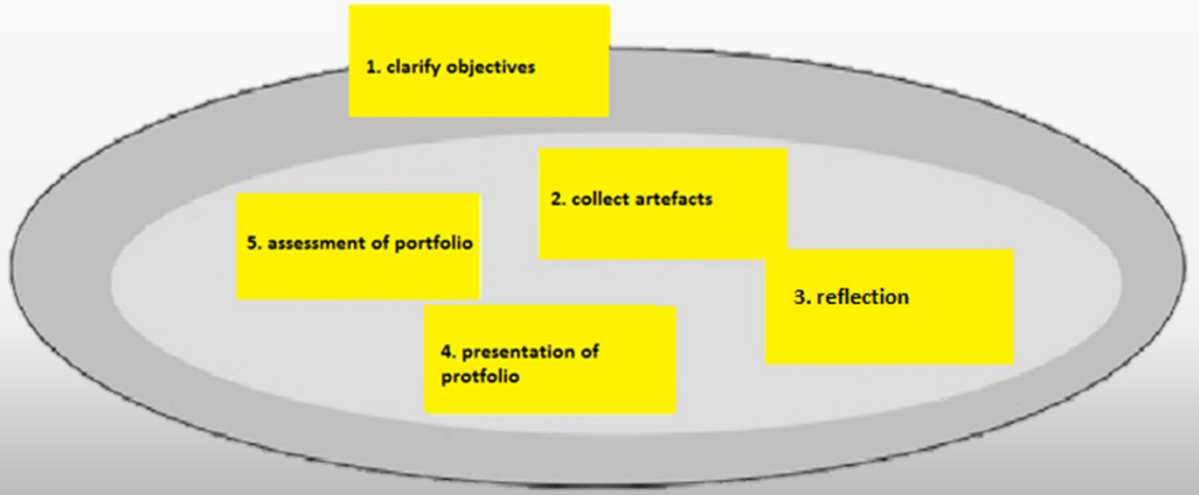
4. Phases of portfolios

➔The differences between phases are blurry

➔Phases 2-5 run nearly in parallel (see illustration, Stratmann et all 2009, 98)



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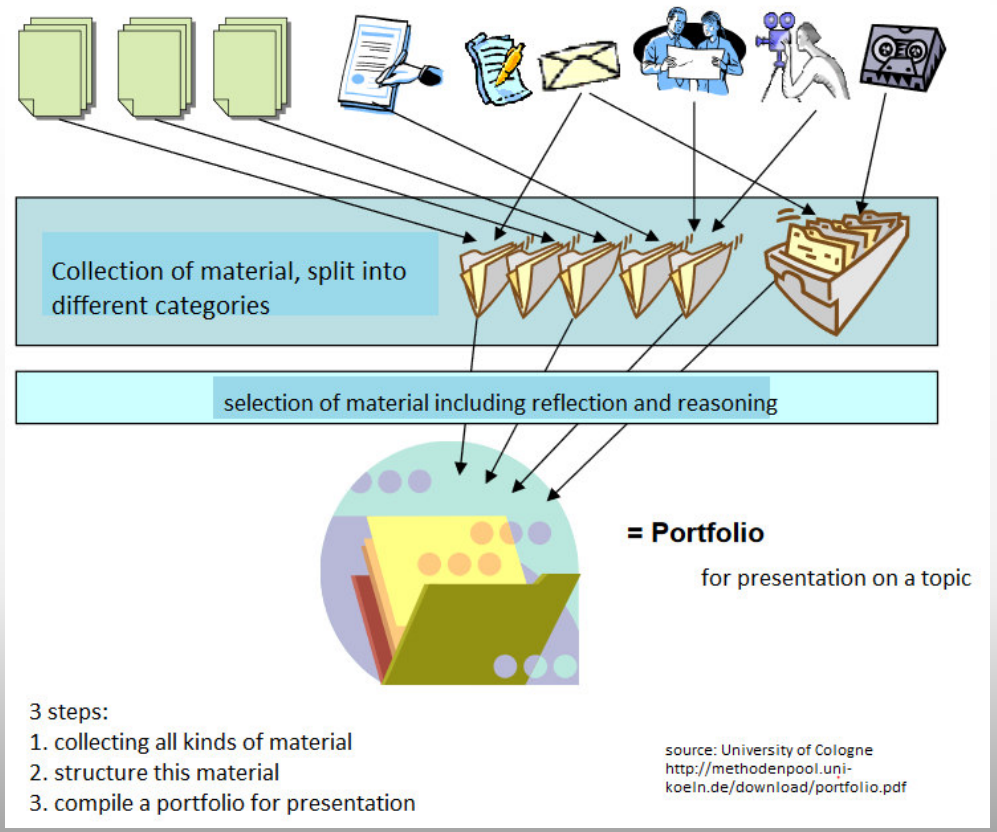
4. Phases of portfolios



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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

- The 5 phases in the previous slide provides a template for an overall implementation of a portfolio within a RL
- The following slide(s) can be seen as supplemental, providing an overview of things that need to be taken into account

➔ **a checklist for lecturers, working with portfolios**

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

1. planning

The students and I…

- plan together as equals within university regulations (**IO 2** manual)
  →It is equally important to explain these regulations to students,

- came to an understanding about assessment and evaluation (**IO 3** *competencies and operators, self-reflection*), structure (**IO 3** mind mapping), content (**IO 3** stimulus material research guide), presentation, etc. of the portfolio

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

1. planning

The students and I…

- agreed on a realistic and useful time period
  - lecturer should advise shorter periods if students have no experience with the method
  - depends on topic/subject, as well as on university regulations
    e.g. doing a portfolio for 4 sessions/weeks (depending on how seminars are organized)

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

1. planning

The students and I…

- Select topics/questions which fits the seminar, but is still decided on by a student (e.g. by using **IO3** mind map methods)
- clarified, which aspects of a topic should be dealt with
  - e.g. student develops an outline of one page (**IO 3** research guide for ideas and support or mind mapping), presenting it to the lecturer at the beginning

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

2. Collecting

The student does…

- **not** collect private documents
- collect essays, presentations, papers, documents, videos, interviews, etc.
- collect his/her strongest material for every aspect only (**see IO 3** research guide on methods of research and on mind mapping)
- know what he/she has to have available for a final assessment of the portfolio

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

3. Reflection

The student considers the following:

- reflection is available in written form
- reflects specifically on the process of learning
- reflects on possible improvements, *competencies and operators* (**see IO 3**)

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

3. Reflection

The student considers the following:

- reflection is available in written form
- reflects specifically on the process of learning
- reflects on possible improvements, *competencies and operators* (**see IO 3**)

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

4. Evaluation

Students and I…

- agreed on qualitative methods of evaluation
  - e.g. dialogue
- agreed on objectives as the main benchmark (**see IO 3** *operators and competencies*)
- agreed on when evaluation will happen
  - e.g. evaluation after certain milestones and/or at the end of a Reflect Lab

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

5. Presentation

Students and I…

- agreed on when the presentation takes place
  - e.g. one short mid-term presentation and one final presentation
- agreed under which conditions it takes place
  - e.g. in front of all other course members or just with the lecturer

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

6. Support

I provided students with the following:

- a timetable both sides have agreed upon
- instructions (available from the beginning , see above)
- all support materials (**see IO 2 and IO 3**)
- mind-mapping program
- a possibility to revise a portfolio, e.g. after an interim evaluation
- continuous and individual support over the course of a portfolio/RL

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5. Checklist for applying portfolios

Be aware!

- Which elements do I have to take into consideration when implementing the portfolio method with students?

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