

## Researching around the world: Developing an International Reference Group for ePortfolios in Higher Education

**Kathryn Coleman**  
Deakin Learning Futures  
Deakin University

**Judy Williamson Batson**  
Vice-President  
AAEEBL

**Trent Batson**  
President/CEO  
AAEEBL

**Nan Travers**  
Director of the Office of College-wide Academic Review  
Empire State College

This poster presents the newly developed International Reference Group (IRG) for eportfolios in Higher Education as part of the work by The Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning (AAEEBL) 2012 Research Committee. The purpose of the poster is to highlight this initiative, to share the AAEEBL mission, and to recruit interested individuals to join the IRG. AAEEBL is the international professional association for the eportfolio community with the mission to develop learners and to transform institutions with eportfolios. AAEEBL seeks to accomplish this by serving the global eportfolio community as a non-profit, service organization that offers membership benefits to institutional members and opportunities to corporates to share practices, research and industry developments supporting eportfolio implementation.

Keywords: eportfolio; International Research Group; research; higher education; AAEEBL

### **ePortfolios as a catalyst for connections**

ePortfolio community leaders recognized in 2008 that eportfolios, as a technology, and as a body of theory and of practice, had emerged as a promising influence and direction for education. As such, the eportfolio movement needed its own professional association to catalyze the implementation of eportfolios in education. AAEEBL deeply believes in the value of eportfolios for assessment as learning, life-long and life wide career success and professional readiness. Members of the global eportfolio community formed AAEEBL in 2009 to serve educators and learners in order to address the growing need to underscore advances in knowledge about eportfolio use and to recognize the emergence of eportfolios as a field of specialized research and practice. AAEEBL promotes authentic, experiential and evidence-based learning for an international community of eportfolio users, researchers and educators.

As the recent research of Oliver (2008, 2010) and Oliver and Whelan (2011) suggests, the relevance to higher education student learning in providing evidence for graduate employability is becoming increasingly warranted. As Oliver et al. (2009) indicated, eportfolios are “an interface for collecting and sharing evidence of learning and professional development” and demonstrate “recognition that learning happens both within and beyond the formal classroom” (p.1). This growing importance of demonstrating graduate capabilities and competencies necessitates a revision of traditional assessment practice. The emergence of technologies to support eportfolios allows not only the aggregating of material in a wide range of formats, but also the embedding of peer review and selective sharing via social networks. While the potential of eportfolios has been recognized for over a decade, eportfolios as a catalyst for research connections still needs further development.

Penny-Light, Chen and Ittelson (2012) delineate an eportfolio implementation framework that they describe as “an iterative process” (1). It is significant that a number of the eight critical issues they identify in this process include attention to a variety of research-related activities: 1.) Defining learning outcomes; 2.) Understanding your learners; 3.) Identifying stakeholders; 4.) Designing learning activities; 5.) Using rubrics to evaluate eportfolios; 6.) Anticipating external uses of evidence; 7.) Including multiple forms of evidence; and 8.) Evaluating the impact of eportfolios.

This poster presents AAEEBL's mission to develop learners and transform institutions with electronic portfolios alongside its desire to establish an International Reference Group (IRG) of researchers. AAEEBL is a service organization that offers conferences, resources, community connections, a newsletter, and consulting to institutional members and corporate affiliates.

### **If we build it – will you come?**

With affiliations and collaborations among a wide array of worldwide eportfolio initiatives, projects and organizations, AAEEBL helps delineate the new field of eportfolio scholarship and research. Its offices are located in North Kingstown, Rhode Island, USA. A Board of Directors oversees AAEEBL's activities and serves as a governing board. Members of this board include prominent leaders in the field of eportfolio implementation, publication and research. The development of an International Research and Reference Group aims to provide integrated knowledge and strategic advice on future research investments, including in the areas of education and higher education, professional development and collaborative activities.

### **Future directions - Developing an International Research Group**

The mission of the IRG is to establish collegial connections and to disseminate educational research while developing international collaborations on research projects. The IRG aims to have impact by encouraging effective and innovative models of partnership through joint research, conferences, and publications, which will be shared locally, nationally and internationally.

ePortfolio conceptions vary from country to country. Likewise, sources for support to implement eportfolios vary from country to country with full governmental funding available in some instances and the barest of institutional funding provided elsewhere. Therefore evidence gathered from eportfolio research and assessment data is often uneven and lacks meaningful synthesis upon which to "close the loop" as Clemson University's Gail Ring (2012) suggests in order to "share assessment data in ways that significantly improve learning outcomes."

In the USA, eportfolios are employed in several ways, the most prevalent being for: career/showcase; assessment; learning; and advisement according to a report compiled by the Connect to Learning Project (C2L Leadership Team, 2012). Other widespread emerging uses for eportfolios in the US include professional accreditation and institutional credentialing. The focus is therefore primarily on learning and assessments with a developing focus on employability.

In the UK, eportfolios are seen as "recording achievement," demonstrating learning, workforce development, with an incipient focus on learning.

In Europe, eportfolios have little traction except as the Bologna process tries to align certification across the members of the EU: What does a college degree mean in France as compared to the Netherlands?

In Australia, eportfolios are seen as both reflective and life long learning spaces. They are used in courses and programs to enable students to reflect on their learning, performance and /or achievement in both formative and summative assessment, while encouraging independent learning. They also serve for students to present evidence of achieving program outcomes through artifacts that demonstrate transferable skills in capstone courses and programs that require professional accreditation.

To connect these international foci, The AAEEBL-facilitated IRG will encourage innovative approaches to eportfolio assessment and evaluation in training, education, professional development and research-focused activities. The IRG aims to develop a coalition of international, regional and national eportfolio bodies whose members contribute in sharing eportfolio research findings and thus widening the field of eportfolio implementation and investigation. The IRG will keep abreast of changes and innovations in eportfolio research and share these updates. Sites for sharing include international, national and regional conferences and webinars, the new publication, *International Journal of ePortfolio*, a variety of social media, and the creation of a collaborative online repository for research findings and discussion. AAEEBL's bi-monthly newsletter, *The AAEEBL Learner*, will dedicate space for highlighting resources and for sharing write-ups about research initiatives and upcoming events that seek to explore how international eportfolio research can be shared more widely in the community.

How to get involved: Expressions of Interest for the IRG are to be addressed to the authors. For information about joining AAEEBL, contact Judy Williamson Batson ([judybatson@me.com](mailto:judybatson@me.com)).

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## Links

- AAEEBL – [www.aeebl.org](http://www.aeebl.org)  
AAEEBL Research Committee – [www.aeebl.org/research\\_2012](http://www.aeebl.org/research_2012)

### Author contact details:

Kathryn Coleman, [kate.coleman@deakin.edu.au](mailto:kate.coleman@deakin.edu.au)

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