



# The Teaching Portfolio as a Tool for Professional Development in Higher Education

Poumay, M. & Dupont, C.  
LabSET-IFRES, University of Liège, Belgium  
m.poumay@ulg.ac.be  
chantal.dupont@ulg.ac.be  
<http://www.formasup.eu>

## 1. OVERVIEW

The Formasup curriculum<sup>1</sup> aims at stimulating professional development by combining reflection and action: questioning oneself as a teacher, designing and implementing a classroom research/intervention, evaluating that action and taking a step back to analyse it critically.

One of the assessment processes consists in writing and presenting a teaching portfolio.

Tutors and peers are available to facilitate this process: participants are guided by an individual tutor for formative evaluation throughout the year. They can appeal to the tutor anytime they feel ready to submit their production and/or reflection. They have several opportunities to share their experiences with their peers during face-to-face exchange seminars or online communications.

### Description of theme

- Great designs for assessment

## 2. INFORMATION ABOUT THE CLASS, MODULE OR PROGRAMME

In September 2002, the University of Liège (Belgium) launched a postgraduate degree (called Formasup) in Higher Education Professional Development. This degree is coordinated by LabSET (Support Lab for Telematic Learning). Formasup is a 1 or 2 years programme (60 credits) targeted at professors, teaching assistants, trainers or educational supervisors in any institution of higher education. Most of the participants are working full time. Although it is possible to achieve Formasup in one academic year, we advise to split the degree over two academic years.

42 teachers have completed the programme and are holders of the diploma since 2003. 17 participants are registered for this academic year.

**2.1. The programme's objective** is to help those involved in higher education to become teaching professionals, by combining classroom research and communication about it:

- use resources and refer to specific and scientific literature about Higher Education;
- lead a pedagogical action and regulate this action on the basis of objective and subjective gathered data;
- identify a research-intervention question from their reflections (it has to be linked to their pedagogical action) and answer that question;
- analyse their vision of teaching and establish a connection to existing scientific trends;
- communicate about their work at a local and/or international conference.

---

<sup>1</sup> Postgraduate degree in Higher Education Professional Development, that will be transformed into a Complementary Master in 2007-2008, following the "Bologna" agreement. A first Master title is mandatory in order to register for this type of continuing Master



## 2.2. The programme's components:

- The "Action" module (20 credits), where participants design and develop a project in their classroom, in relation with one of the three offered options (see below). They regulate their actions, on the basis of objective and subjective data. The 3 options are :
  - Problem Based Learning
  - eLearning
  - Reflection-Intervention (wider option, more divergent, for those teachers who don't fit to the two first ones)
- The "Research" module (20 credits), where the participants will answer a research question related to their pedagogical action, including gathering and analysing objective and subjective data.
- The "Critical Analysis" module (20 credits), where the participants, in their teaching portfolio, will state and explain their vision of teaching, reflect and analyse critically their previous and current experiences, explain their foreseen actions and plan their further professional development.

## 2.3. The programme methodology:

### 2.3.1. Project driven curriculum

In Formasup, the participants' personal projects supply:

- points of anchorage for a theoretical construction;
- a basis for reflective activities;
- avenues of realization for individual efforts.

### 2.3.2. Blended learning

The curriculum is organised partly at a distance for local participants and fully at a distance for international participants. They have access to the course contents on the WebCT platform, fulfil activities and have interactions with tutors in real or virtual face-to-face sessions.

During their self-managed working time, participants benefit from different resources:

- online course (theory and illustrations)
- online activities
- lectures via videoconferences
- video recordings, archived on VIPS (interactive system developed by the University of Kaunas, Lithuania)
- tutorship via forum - e-mail
- a Competencies Management Tool (CMT)

### 2.3.3. Community of practice

Face-to-face sessions are limited to a maximum of 3 times 1 week over the year, to allow participants, who all have a full-time professional activity, to fit them into their usually very tight schedule.

During these sessions, emphasis is put on presenting work progress, exchanging best practices or reflecting together on the questions raised (exchange seminars) as well as discussing aspects of higher education and debating these together with invited speakers.

### 2.3.4. Close coaching

Each participant is in close contact with a tutor: the *sherpa* (Poumay 2003, Poumay 2007). On regular base, they meet (physically or online) and work together on the project/research development, step by step. The courses develop through an iterative process closely followed by the *sherpa*, allowing for confidence to grow between those actors who know and appreciate each other as they become close partners, sharing common goals. The *sherpa* coaching also facilitates the respect of intermediate deadlines and the communication between the participants, the LabSET technical team and the graphic designers. We really consider this *sherpa* coaching as one of the key success factors



of this combination of training and course development. The close and personalised relation with the *sherpa* is mentioned by the participants as one of the best points of this (although very demanding) experience.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

Three productions will be assessed and will be taken into account for the final grade:

- Submissions to the Competencies Management Tool (CMT), where quality of personal project can be assessed. This evaluation consists of the validation of the competencies acquired regarding the implementation of 21 selected items into their project and their pedagogical justification.
- 
- Teaching portfolio, where participants take a step back and analyse their professional identity and development, give critical account of their action, answer their research question and describe the possible regulation and perspectives.
- 
- Oral defence, where each participant will have an hour to defend his/her teaching portfolio in front of a jury of 3 people.

In this case study, we will only focus on the teaching portfolio. The CMT will be described in a separate case study.

In the table hereafter (see annex), we present the four main sections of the portfolio, broken down so as to provide a framework when submissions are being made by participants who believe that they have made relevant progresses. The different parts of the portfolio are evaluated (in terms of pass/fail) by various evaluators at the end of the programme as well as on a formative basis: participants have opportunities to submit their work-in-progress several times during the academic year.

To plenty benefit of these formative opportunities, minimal deadlines have to be met.

- Anytime, they can submit a draft version of their teaching portfolio or selected parts of it to their tutor. We recommend at least, to submit part 1 (presentation) for month 4 (M4).
- They can present their work during exchange seminars. There are 3 occasions to do so during each academic year (M1, M3 and M6). Each participant is dedicated one hour time during each of the exchange seminars to present the progress of his/her project, research and portfolio. During these face-to-face sessions, they will receive feedback from their peers, their tutor, LabSET staff and possible guests. Participants who are splitting the curriculum over 2 academic years have to participate to at least 3 exchange seminars but are welcome to present their work in the 6 of them if they wish so.
- They have to submit their teaching portfolio for certifying evaluation to a jury of 3 people and present it orally in front of that jury during a public session (1 hour, M9 or M12).

### 4. RATIONALE IN TERMS OF EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

The teaching portfolio is a tool which is increasingly widely used in the accreditation and formal recognition of teachers' acquired experience.

We shall employ the definition of Doolittle (1994), who describes a teacher's portfolio as "*...a collection of work produced by a teacher, which he chooses to maintain and structure to highlight his knowledge and skills in teaching.*"



Such a collection may be electronic or non-electronic, and may have various objectives, which will determine its structure and contents. Van Tartwijk & al. (2005) offer an illuminating classification of electronic portfolio types which we repeat below:

- Assessment portfolios
- Presentation portfolios
- Development portfolios
- Reflective practice portfolios
- Combined portfolios

In Formasup, the portfolio combines components of both assessment and reflective practice. It's of a "combined" type.

In general terms, the portfolio picks up on the concern with an evidence-based approach. Proof of progress must be provided. Thus, under various headings, each teacher will be required to justify what he/she says with test results, teaching assessments and online activity tracks. Even in the work samples section, the teacher needs to provide proof of the progress he/she has made.

The purpose of these requests for proof is not to call into question what teachers say, but rather to enable exchanges among professionals: you can only recommend a method, approach or tool to a colleague if you can claim that it has had a positive impact on your own students, and have evidence to back up the claim. And even then, the knowledge transfer is far from guaranteed ...

In Formasup, the teaching portfolio has a special emphasis on reflective practice (Schön, 1983) but also including the necessary elements of presentation. Indeed, in order to make it possible for experiences to be shared, colleagues need to know a certain amount about each individual's context and developments.

This portfolio is consistent with the competencies teachers have to demonstrate at the end of the programme. It is largely based on the principles of *Fellowship* and *Associate Fellowship* of the professional association in the UK, SEDA<sup>2</sup>, the competencies proposed by the international consortium ICED<sup>3</sup> and those proposed by the Australian association HERDSA<sup>4</sup>, as well as the recommendations of authors like Wright (2000) and Border (2002). It combines the two major components of any teaching portfolio (reflective commentaries and work samples, cf. the Cornell Teaching Evaluation Handbook<sup>5</sup>). It borrows numerous items from the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) movement, particularly in that it requires teachers to communicate with others, especially their colleagues, about their results and progresses. We are not asking for communication of an international standard, which teachers would be unable to achieve in the same year as working on their research question and their personal project; what we are asking for, however, is at least some sharing with colleagues at departmental level.

Among the sources cited, we have drawn more direct inspiration on the 'HERDSA check-list'. Our decision to align our requirements with tools that have been tested over several years by a renowned professional association is of importance for the recognition that we thereby hope to confer on teachers who wish to improve their practices.

This portfolio involves collecting subjective and objective evidence of the impact of the teacher's reflection/intervention. For example, with regard to the impact of an action, teachers need to provide evidence situated on level 2 as defined by Kirkpatrick (1983), i.e. they must not confine themselves to collecting the views of students on their degree of

---

2 Website from SEDA : <http://www.seda.ac.uk/>

3 Website from ICED : <http://www.osds.uwa.edu.au/iced>

4 Website from HERDSA : <http://www.herdsa.org.au/>

5 At Cornell University, a chapter of the "Teaching Evaluation Handbook" is devoted to portfolios, offering structures and teachers' comments <http://www.cit.cornell.edu/resources/teh/ch2.html>



satisfaction with the changes that have been made, but must actually measure the learning that those students have achieved, or better still the improvement in their learning.

Finally, we should note that the portfolio offers teachers the chance to provide details of previous training attended and credits such past experiences, provided they are subjected to reflection and critical analysis. This also enables everyone to capitalise on the various courses, workshops and conferences they have attended in their own institution, thus providing extra value for these local educational initiatives.

## 5. EVALUATION

In Formasup, the portfolio is used as a support for the final evaluation of the professional development of each participant. Some rubrics are mandatory but there is still some space for personal differences and creativity in the productions.

We notice differences in the quality of the productions (in the project section and in the research question section, but even also in the presentation section), resulting in unequal grades. The degree of reflective practice is also unequal in our groups, as well as the time needed in order to reach the Formasup objectives: some teachers (our participants) can easily, in one academic year, build upon their questions and regulate their project, undertaking continuous research in their class, others can barely imagine a project and really need two to three years in order to step back and reflect.

A number of participants still seem to have difficulties to grasp the real purpose of a teaching portfolio. They are immersed in their practice and find it hard to stand back to reflect on their action as a whole. This might be due to cultural aspects or to a lack of previous experience of formalizing reflective practice.

In general, they don't tackle the teaching portfolio progressively, building upon it during their training, despite the opportunities we give them to do so. They take it more as a final report for certifying evaluation.

We will redefine the rubrics in order to make them clearer and propose some more activities to illustrate the meaning and the use of such teaching portfolio.

At the level of the institution, the existence of Formasup and its portfolio has contributed to a wider wish, expressed by a group of teachers and teaching assistants, to take into account those professional development proofs as an important factor in the career advancements and tenure processes. A simplified version of the portfolio has been submitted for approbation and might be used in 2008 by several departments, in parallel to the research criteria used in the disciplines.

Professional development and reflective practice in teaching are on their way to become valorisation tools for teachers at the University of Liège, as well as in several other institutions in Europe.

## 6. REFERENCES

- Border, L.L.B. (2002). The Socratic Portfolio: A Guide for Future Faculty, *American Political Science Association, Apsanet*, volume 35 (4), <http://www.apsanet.org/PS/dec02/toc.cfm>
- Doolittle, P. (1994, April). Teacher portfolio assessment. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (n° ED 385 608).
- Kirkpatrick, D.A. (1983). *Practical Guide for supervisory Training and Development*, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Poumay, M. (2003). Keys to Promote good practices in ODL by a TECCC approach (Training Embedded Coached Course Construction) - illustrations through a postgraduate degree and an annual competitive call , *Educational Media International*, 40, 3, 233-241.



Poumay, M. (to be published in mai 2007). Pour professionnaliser le métier d'enseignant du supérieur : le Master Complémentaire FORMASUP. *Revue Internationale des Technologies en Pédagogie Universitaire*.

Schön, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Van Tarwijk, J., Driessen, E. & EPICC Team (2005). *Typologie de portfolios électroniques*. EUN, retrieved on July 10th, 2005, from [http://www.eun.org/eun.org2/eun/en/Celebrate\\_LearningObjects/content.cfm?ov=33515&lang=fr](http://www.eun.org/eun.org2/eun/en/Celebrate_LearningObjects/content.cfm?ov=33515&lang=fr)

Wright, W.A. & Miller, J. E. (2000). The educational developer's portfolio. *International Journal for Academic Development* , 5 (1), 20-29.

## 7. ANNEX: THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO OF FORMASUP

| Formasup teaching portfolio  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Presentation (to present yourself as a developing professional, you include a selection of significant experience of yours)   | Your vision of teaching and your goals as a teacher.<br><i>E.g. Your professional ideal, your sources of motivation, your value system.</i>   |
|  | Your courses, practical works, lab works and various responsibilities related to teaching (including committee work).   |
|  | Your teacher training: degrees/qualifications, workshops, conferences, seminars, individual supervision, communities of practice, and anything else that demonstrates your commitment as a teacher.   |
|  | Your educational presentations or publications (if too many, choose the most significant)   |
|  | (optional) What those around you think of your teaching: your students, your colleagues, your head of department, etc.  |
| 2. Reflection-Intervention (to demonstrate your ability to benefit from your pedagogical work, your classroom projects, for the continuous improvement of your teaching) | Your efforts to improve your teaching: summary of what you regard as the most decisive changes in your teaching practice.<br><br><i>E.g., Twists and turns in your teaching career, analysis of significant periods in your teaching, reasons why you have changed methods or attitudes, any input from experiences during Formasup, etc.</i>   |
|  | A detailed example: the Reflection-Intervention conducted in connection with Formasup. Adopt a critical viewpoint as you present the main strengths of your intervention (your online course, PBL development, etc.). If justified, attach a copy of the detailed description of the qualities achieved by your product.<br><br><i>Briefly describe your project (your online course, your PBL development, etc.) and analyse its value, its benefits (your project as a product) and what working on it has done for you (your project as a process). Adopt a resolutely critical viewpoint in presenting its main strengths and weaknesses.</i> |





|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p>Starting from a research question, your specialisation in a subject related to teaching. <i>We advise you to present this section in the form of an essay or academic article, which you can subsequently publish.</i></p> <p>This reflection must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 - Set a problem and show how it is significant for learning</li><li>2 - Demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the chosen field, including the academic literature</li><li>3 - Show how these references have been used in your work</li><li>4 - Evaluate the impact of your action</li></ol> <p><i>Our requirement: Kirkpatrick level 2 measurements (impact of your action on your students' learning) and inclusion of an appendix containing your data collection tools and your quantitative and qualitative data tables, including at least objective data, but often subjective data too.</i></p> <p>5 - Open up new perspectives/orientations/questions (directly related to your research question).</p> |
|   | <p>Briefly, summarising data used earlier where appropriate, provide a few indicators of the quality of your teaching:</p> <p><i>You can present these fairly briefly and reuse items you have already discussed in previous sections. The main thing is to deploy the "clinching proof" for each of the 6 requested indicators (3 specifically requested + 3 left to you to choose).</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 - Evidence that your teaching takes your students' learning process into account</li><li>2 - Evidence that your evaluations encourage and support your students' learning</li><li>3 - Evidence that your teaching progress is based on various types of data, including objective data</li><li>4 - 6 Evidence demonstrating that you have made special (and effective) allowance for at least a further 3 of the 47 criteria in the HERDSA good practice table</li></ol>  |
| Perspectives<br><i>(to show that you have ideas about how to go even further ... since you never really get there...)</i> | <p>Your unresolved questions and next steps in connection with your professional development.</p> <p><i>E.g. Are you planning to conduct other actions next year or later on? Which ones, exactly? Taking part in seminars, reading academic articles? With what idea in mind exactly? How does your progress fit in with the policy of your faculty/department/school? Will you find this latter a favourable setting for your ongoing professional development? Etc.</i></p>  |
| Public communication <i>(to share your</i>  | Date, place and target public for the oral presentation of some of the above elements (according to your choice), mentioning at least your research question  |



|            |   |
|------------|---|
| expertise) | Brief comments on this presentation.<br><i>E.g. Reactions from participating colleagues, questions asked during your presentation, what you think about these questions, prospects for further sharing.</i> |
|------------|---|

#### LabSET

Directrice et responsable académique : Marianne Poumay , Chargée de cours.  
Co-responsable académique : Dieudonné Leclercq, Professeur ordinaire.  
Boulevard de Colonster, 2 - B9 4000 LIEGE - Belgique E-mail : [labset@ulg.ac.be](mailto:labset@ulg.ac.be) -  
<http://www.ulg.ac.be/labset>  
Tél. +32 4 366 20 93 - fax +32 4 366 34 01



This work has been made available as part of the REAP International Online Conference 29-31 May 2007 and is released under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License. For acceptable use guidelines, see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Please reference as:

Poumay, M. & Dupont, C. (2007). The Teaching Portfolio as a Tool for Professional Development in Higher Education. *From the REAP International Online Conference on Assessment Design for Learner Responsibility, 29th-31st May, 2007*. Available at <http://ewds.strath.ac.uk/REAP07>

Re-Engineering Assessment Practices in Scottish Higher Education (REAP) is funded by the Scottish Funding Council under its e-Learning Transformation initiative. Further information about REAP can be found at <http://www.reap.ac.uk>

---