

**Digital Portfolios and Student Ownership of Learning  
in a Blended Learning Environment**

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Action Research Plan

## **Digital Portfolios and Student Ownership of Learning in a Blended Learning Environment**

This action research plan examines the implementation of digital portfolios within a blended learning environment and their impact on student ownership of learning in a seventh-grade Texas History classroom. The study is grounded in a classroom problem of practice: students often complete assignments and assessments without consistently using feedback, reflecting on their understanding, or setting meaningful goals for improvement. Digital portfolios will provide a structured space for students to collect evidence of learning, examine assessment data, complete written or audio reflections, set academic goals, and document their progress through a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. The study will determine whether these practices help students become more reflective, responsible, and self-directed learners.

### **Fundamental Research Question**

The fundamental research question is: How does implementing digital portfolios in a blended learning environment affect students' ownership of learning in a seventh-grade Texas History classroom? This question is important because student ownership extends beyond assignment completion and academic achievement. It also involves students recognizing what they understand, identifying what they still need to learn, using feedback, setting goals, and making decisions about their next steps. The study will also examine how students' goal-setting behaviors change during the implementation cycle, how portfolio reflections demonstrate ownership, and how students describe their responsibility for learning through written or audio reflections.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

The literature supporting this study connects digital portfolios, self-regulated learning, reflection, student agency, and blended learning. Self-regulated learners actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning rather than waiting for the teacher to make every instructional decision.

Zimmerman (2002) explains that self-regulation involves purposeful processes such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, strategy use, and self-reflection. Research with middle school learners has also linked planning and self-assessment to academic performance, supporting their use as indicators of student ownership (Sink et al., 1991).

Digital portfolios can make these processes visible by giving students a consistent place to organize learning artifacts, explain their progress, and evaluate the quality of their work. Portfolio-based reflection can support metacognition by requiring students to select evidence, interpret feedback, and articulate future actions. Research on ePortfolio-supported self-regulated learning has found that structured portfolio environments can strengthen students' ability to manage learning processes and connect their behaviors to measurable outcomes (Alexiou & Paraskeva, 2020).

Blended learning provides the instructional setting for the intervention. A blended environment combines face-to-face instruction with purposeful digital learning experiences, allowing students to work through content, receive feedback, and reflect with greater flexibility. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) emphasize that effective blended learning is not simply the addition of technology; it requires intentional redesign that integrates online and in-person learning. In this study, the digital portfolio will be embedded into station rotation, assessment review, and reflection routines so that technology supports student choice, ownership, voice, and authentic learning rather than functioning as a separate activity.

The literature collectively suggests that student ownership is most likely to grow when students repeatedly set goals, monitor evidence, reflect on performance, and identify next steps. Therefore, this action research study will measure both students' perceptions of ownership and their observable ownership behaviors. The study will use a manageable set of instruments and multiple data sources to develop a credible classroom-level understanding of how digital portfolios influence learning habits.

## **Study Information**

### **Research Design**

This study will use a mixed-methods action research design. A mixed-methods approach is appropriate because student ownership contains both measurable behaviors and personal perceptions. Quantitative data will show changes in students' survey responses, portfolio rubric scores, completion rates, and assignment submission rates. Qualitative data will provide insight into the content of students' portfolio reflections, their explanations of learning choices, and the ownership behaviors observed during portfolio work. Combining these sources will allow the teacher-researcher to examine the classroom problem from multiple perspectives and compare whether the data support similar conclusions. This design follows Mertler's (2024) view of action research as a systematic process through which educators investigate a problem of practice, analyze classroom evidence, and use the findings to improve instruction.

Participants will be students enrolled in one seventh-grade Texas History class. The teacher will also serve as the researcher. Student privacy will be protected by replacing names with identification codes during analysis and by removing identifying information from any examples shared publicly. Survey responses, rubric scores, reflections, observation notes, and student artifacts will be stored in password-protected locations. Participation in the research process will not negatively affect student grades, and all required campus, district, university, and parent or guardian permissions will be obtained before data collection begins.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data will be collected during an approximately four-week Texas History instructional unit. Three primary instruments will be used: a pre- and post-student ownership survey, a comprehensive digital portfolio rubric, and a teacher observation and anecdotal record form. Formal student interviews will not be conducted. Instead, written, audio, or video reflections already included in the portfolios will capture student perspectives without creating an additional, time-intensive data-collection process.

The student ownership survey will use Likert-scale items to measure students' perceptions of goal-setting, progress monitoring, reflection, independence, feedback use, and responsibility for completing quality work. The same survey will be administered before and after the implementation cycle. The digital portfolio rubric will evaluate goal quality, reflection depth, self-assessment, artifact selection, organization, use of feedback, and completion of the PDSA cycle. The observation form will document ownership behaviors such as beginning work without repeated prompting, locating evidence, using data to establish goals, revising work, persisting, seeking appropriate support, and explaining next steps.

Additional classroom data will include portfolio and reflection completion rates, assignment submission rates, student learning artifacts, and PDSA reflections. These items will not be treated as separate instruments. Instead, they will be analyzed through the portfolio rubric, the survey results, or the qualitative coding process. This consolidation keeps the study manageable while still allowing for triangulation.

### **Implementation and Data-Collection Timeline**

|               |                                                                                                                  |                                                                             |                 |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Before Week 1 | Secure permissions; assign student codes; prepare portfolios; explain study and privacy protections.             | Baseline assignment-submission data and existing portfolio completion data. | Planning        |
| Week 1        | Administer pre-survey; introduce portfolio expectations; students review prior evidence and set an initial goal. | Pre-survey responses, initial goal entry, teacher observation notes.        | Planning/Acting |

|              |                                                                                                                                   |                                                                              |                       |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Week 2       | Students add artifacts during station rotation and complete the Plan and Do portions of the PDSA cycle.                           | Portfolio artifacts, completion data, observation notes.                     | Acting                |
| Week 3       | Students review feedback and assessment data, complete the Study portion, revise goals or work, and explain next steps.           | Written/audio reflections, PDSA entries, rubric evidence, observation notes. | Acting/Developing     |
| Week 4       | Students complete the Act portion of the PDSA cycle; final portfolios are scored; post-survey is administered.                    | Post-survey, portfolio rubric scores, completion and submission rates.       | Developing            |
| After Week 4 | Organize data, calculate descriptive statistics, code qualitative data, triangulate findings, and identify instructional changes. | Data tables, coded themes, comparison notes, findings.                       | Developing/Reflecting |

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative survey data will be entered into a secure spreadsheet and summarized using averages, item-by-item comparisons, frequencies, and percentage change from the pre-survey to the post-survey. Portfolio rubric scores, portfolio and reflection completion rates, and assignment submission rates will also be summarized using descriptive statistics. Individual student patterns may be examined using identification codes, but results shared with others will be reported in aggregate form.

Qualitative data from student reflections, PDSA entries, learning artifacts, and teacher anecdotal notes will be reviewed and inductively coded. Initial coding categories will include goal-setting, self-assessment, responsibility, persistence, reflection, use of feedback, agency, identification of

learning needs, and planning next steps. Additional themes will be added when they emerge from the data. Findings from surveys, rubric scores, completion data, reflections, and observations will then be triangulated. Convergence across multiple sources will strengthen the credibility of the conclusions, while conflicting results will be examined rather than ignored.

### **Developing the Action Plan**

After the data are analyzed, the teacher-researcher will develop an action plan based on the strongest findings. The plan will identify which digital portfolio routines should be continued, revised, expanded, or removed. For example, if students demonstrate stronger reflection but limited goal specificity, future instruction may include goal-setting models, sentence stems, and brief teacher conferences. If students report increased ownership but portfolio completion remains inconsistent, the next cycle may include more structured portfolio checkpoints and protected reflection time. The action plan will include specific instructional changes, responsible individuals, required resources, implementation dates, and evidence to monitor progress. These revisions will begin the next PDSA cycle and support the gradual expansion of the innovation plan to additional units or class periods.

### **Sharing and Communicating Results**

The primary audience for this study is middle school social studies teachers, instructional coaches, campus administrators, and educational technology specialists who are seeking practical ways to strengthen student ownership in blended learning environments. These stakeholders were selected because they can help refine the portfolio process, support implementation, and determine whether the approach is appropriate for broader use. Students and families are also important audiences because they need to understand how portfolios support reflection, responsibility, and academic growth.

Results will be communicated through a final action research report and a dedicated ePortfolio page that connects the action research outline, literature review, action research plan, instruments, findings, and reflection. A concise presentation or professional learning session may also be shared with campus colleagues. The communication will include the research question, implementation process, major quantitative trends, qualitative themes, examples of de-identified student work, limitations, and recommended next steps. Any student examples will be anonymized, and results will be reported in a way that protects privacy and avoids labeling individual students.

### **Final Reflection**

At the conclusion of the study, the teacher-researcher will reflect on both the results and the research process. The reflection will consider whether the instruments produced useful evidence, whether the four-week timeline was realistic, how students responded to the portfolio routines, and whether the findings answered the fundamental research question. The teacher-researcher will also examine personal assumptions and potential bias arising from serving as both the classroom teacher and researcher.

The final reflection will address what should be sustained, what should be changed before the next cycle, and any additional questions that emerged. It will also consider the degree to which the project supported the broader innovation goal of moving students from passive completion toward active ownership of learning. This reflection will be added to the ePortfolio and used in EDLD 5320 as part of the final action research report. The goal will not be to claim that one short classroom study proves universal effectiveness, but to use credible local evidence to guide continuous improvement.

## **References**

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## **Appendix A**

### **Pre- and Post-Student Ownership Survey**

Directions: Read each statement and select the response that best describes you. 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.

|                                                                                |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| I can explain what I am currently learning in Texas History.                   | X | X | X | X | X |
| I use assessment results or teacher feedback to decide what I need to improve. | X | X | X | X | X |
| I set specific academic goals for myself.                                      | X | X | X | X | X |
| I check my progress toward my goals.                                           | X | X | X | X | X |
| I can identify my strengths as a learner.                                      | X | X | X | X | X |
| I can identify areas where I need additional support or practice.              | X | X | X | X | X |
| I reflect on the quality of my work before considering it complete.            | X | X | X | X | X |
| I make changes to my work after receiving feedback.                            | X | X | X | X | X |

|                                                                      |   |   |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| I can begin and complete learning tasks without repeated reminders.  | X | X | X | X | X |
| I take responsibility for turning in complete and high-quality work. | X | X | X | X | X |
| I can explain which learning strategies help me most.                | X | X | X | X | X |
| I can describe the next step I should take to improve my learning.   | X | X | X | X | X |

## Appendix B

### Digital Portfolio Rubric

The same rubric will be used to score student goals, reflections, artifact selection, organization, use of feedback, and evidence of the PDSA cycle.

| Goal Quality | Goal is specific, measurable, connected to evidence, and includes a realistic action plan. | Goal is clear and connected to learning evidence but may need greater specificity. | Goal is general, weakly connected to evidence, or missing a clear action. | Goal is missing or unrelated to learning evidence. |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|

|                             |                                                                                             |                                                                                 |                                                                              |                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Reflection Depth</b>     | Explains learning, challenges, strategies, evidence, and next steps with specific detail.   | Explains learning and identifies a challenge or next step with adequate detail. | Provides a brief summary with limited self-assessment or next-step thinking. | Reflection is missing, incomplete, or only describes the activity.   |
| <b>Self-Assessment</b>      | Accurately identifies strengths and needs and supports conclusions with portfolio evidence. | Identifies strengths and needs with some supporting evidence.                   | Identifies a strength or need but provides little evidence.                  | Does not identify strengths, needs, or supporting evidence.          |
| <b>Artifact Selection</b>   | Artifacts clearly demonstrate growth and are explained in relation to goals and standards.  | Artifacts are relevant and include a basic explanation of their importance.     | Some artifacts are relevant, but explanations are limited or incomplete.     | Artifacts are missing, disorganized, or unrelated to learning goals. |
| <b>Use of Feedback/Data</b> | Uses feedback or data to revise work, adjust goals, and explain the next action.            | Uses feedback or data to make at least one appropriate adjustment.              | Mentions feedback or data but does not clearly act on it.                    | Shows no evidence of using feedback or data.                         |

|                                |                                                                                          |                                                                  |                                                                  |                                                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PDSA Cycle</b>              | Clearly documents Plan, Do, Study, and Act and connects each phase to learning evidence. | Completes all four phases with generally clear connections.      | Completes some phases or provides weak connections between them. | PDSA cycle is missing or substantially incomplete.     |
| <b>Completion/Organization</b> | All required components are complete, easy to locate, and consistently organized.        | Most components are complete and organized with minor omissions. | Several components are missing or difficult to locate.           | Portfolio is substantially incomplete or disorganized. |

### Appendix C

#### Teacher Observation and Anecdotal Record Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class/Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Activity/Portfolio Task: \_\_\_\_\_

|                                                  |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Begins portfolio task without repeated prompting | X | X | X |
| Locates and organizes learning evidence          | X | X | X |
| Uses assessment data or feedback to set a goal   | X | X | X |
| Revises a goal or work based on reflection       | X | X | X |
| Persists through a challenging task              | X | X | X |

|                                       |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Seeks appropriate support when needed | X | X | X |
| Explains a personal learning need     | X | X | X |
| Explains a specific next step         | X | X | X |