



Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence Professional Paper

Developing a Professional Portfolio

“A portfolio provides an opportunity for each individual to shine, to share what matters to them, to illustrate what it is that makes each individual so delightfully unique.”

~ Sheri Everts Rogers and Kathy Everts Danielson, 1996
Teacher Portfolios: Literacy Artifacts and Themes

BENEFITS OF PORTFOLIOS

Self-knowledge has been known throughout the ages as a critical outcome of learning. Greek philosophers engraved their temples with the credo, “know thyself.” The portfolio experience may be in essence the modern day equivalent of knowing thyself—the what, why and how one has learned throughout one’s career (Brown, 2002).

Teacher portfolios can capture the complexity of teaching like no other tool. Although portfolios require an investment of time to create and review, they can also promote professional growth through on-going self-evaluation and reflection.

Portfolios help teachers to set personal goals for themselves and students and provide information for future professional development. “The objective is not to create outstanding portfolios, but rather to cultivate outstanding teaching and learning” (Wolf, 1996, p. 36).

Portfolios can play a significant role in the development of pre-service, novice and professional teachers, and in the evaluation process (Andrejko, 1998; Reis & Villaume, 2002, Wolf, 1996).

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

Lyons (1999) used portfolios to shape the emerging practice of pre-service teachers. The portfolio in this case is a history of learning, a collaborative effort of

peers and mentors. It is a body of evidence based on goals for teaching and student learning. Most often it is the novice teachers who become responsible for the continuation of the portfolio process in their first teaching positions. It is the hope of Lyons and other pre-service educators that beginning teachers will carry forward the portfolio process as a habit of mind and to strive for improved practice through reflection on teaching and learning.

TEACHING AND THE PORTFOLIO PROCESS

Dietz (1999) views the portfolio process as a professional development endeavor that can contribute to building learning communities. As teachers proceed through the process of portfolio development, they naturally become involved in “rich conversations, reflections, inquiry and observations about work in their school” (p. 45). Portfolio development rarely occurs in isolation from peers.

Portfolios are seen as examples of authentic assessment that may be used in the clinical setting as a substitute for formal observation and evaluation. Portfolios empower teachers to become active participants in their professional development. Teachers construct knowledge and apply it to their classroom while engaging in a collaborative process of dialogue and reflection (Hibbard & Van Wagenen, 2002; Zepeda, 2002).

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PORTFOLIOS

Types of Portfolios

- Process
 - To evaluate a person's progress over a period of time
 - New teacher induction
 - Product
 - Designed for judging based on common criteria
 - National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
 - Showcase
 - To meet a specific goal, attain a license, or contend for a prize
 - Teacher of the Year awards
- (Painter, 2001)

Four Basic Components of Portfolios

1. Fulfill a specific purpose
 2. Prepared for a specific audience
 3. Provide evidence in the form of work samples
 4. Written reflections on work
- (Painter, 2001)

ORGANIZING A PORTFOLIO

The purpose of the portfolio will often determine how it is organized. Usually the contents are sorted by goals, standards, or domains. All portfolios should have a title page and a table of contents with clearly identified sections. Each of these sections should be easy to locate and marked by tab dividers or colored paper to indicate sections.

The first section should be an overview or introductory section that explains how the portfolio is organized. Teachers often add a resume and/or statement of philosophy in this section. Portfolios that will be reviewed by many people may need plastic protector sheets to reduce damage to pages. Plastic protectors may also hold oversized items that can be folded and inserted into the sleeves. Large capacity plastic protectors that hold fifty sheets of paper are available in office supply stores.

Most portfolios are compiled in a three-ring binder, and black or white is viewed as most professional.

A plastic sleeve on the outside of the binder is recommended to provide clear identification.

Occasionally, a portfolio may require bulky items and an expandable folder or plastic file box with a handle is most suitable (Phi Delta Kappa, 2001).

REFLECTION AND QUALITY OF WORK

A portfolio without reflection is merely a scrapbook (Painter, 2001; Lyons, 1999; Phi Delta Kappa, 2001). Reflection is the substance of the portfolio and guides the reader through the portfolio. A quality reflection requires teachers to think deeply about what they are doing in their classroom. Key questions should include:

- Why am I doing this?
- How am I doing this?
- What are the outcomes?
- How can I use this information to improve my instruction and student learning?

“Reflection is the process of looking at information or events, thinking about them and analyzing them, and then using the results to change or enhance future events” (Phi Delta Kappa, 2001, p. 21). These reflections should consist of three vital components:

- Description – Who, What, When Where, and How?
- Analysis – Break the whole apart and look for patterns.
- Planning – Write about the evidence and how it will affect future actions.

USING PORTFOLIOS TO CONNECT TEACHING AND LEARNING

Colton and Langor have developed a process for “teams of teachers to focus on individual teachers and students’ growth” known as the Collective Analysis of Student Learning or CASL. Through a combination of action research, assessment, study groups, and cognitive coaching (Costa & Garmston, 1994), teachers analyze student work samples and describe the relationship between teaching and learning in a portfolio.

The CASL process involves a change of paradigm for a teacher's view of student work. Instead of collecting student work for grading and evaluation, teachers study student work samples over time to analyze growth and learn about their instructional practices. Student work becomes the focal point of teachers learning about their craft. This principle reflects the National Board for Professional Standards proposition for accomplished teachers—those who “think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.”

Another guiding principle of the CASL process is the provision of professional development through on-going collaboration for planning, developing classroom assessment skills, and dialoguing with other professionals within and beyond the school. The CASL portfolio is a vehicle for organizing teacher thinking and learning (Colton, Goff, & Langor, 2000). Using the CASL model, the following is a framework for organizing:

Portfolio Contents

Part I

- Description of the class and three selected students
- Target learning area's goals and objectives

Part II

- Documentation of three students' progress as delineated in Part I
- At least one analysis of a video taped teaching

Part III (12 weeks later)

- Concluding reflections

Framework for Teacher Reflection

Professional Knowledge Base

- Content – Concepts tapped by project
- Student – Characteristics, interests, prior knowledge of student
- Pedagogy – How instructional practices are used in teaching
- Context – School and community use of scientific method
- Prior Experience – Results the last time this concept/content was taught

- Personal Views and Values – Scientific reasoning and personal affectations at time of teaching
- Scripts – Automatic language used by teacher; goal is to develop automatic self-questioning script that draws on the base information (listed above) related to teaching.

Constructing Knowledge and Meaning

- Observe, gather data
- Analyze the meaning of observations
- Hypothesize and decide action/no action
- Act on decision

Personal Characteristics

- Social responsibility – Believes in justice and fairness in schools and a professional obligation to help others
- Caring – Cares about others and motivated to reflect and learn
- Efficacy – Feels one can make a difference
- Flexibility – Can understand others' position and has the ability to use a variety of methods

Collegial Environment

- A place of trust and honesty
- Sharing ideas is the norm

CONCLUSION

A portfolio is a tool that can be used for a variety of purposes including professional development for pre-service and in-service teachers. Through the creation of the portfolio, the teacher participates in self-reflection and evaluation of personal teaching practices. The professional portfolio process requires deep reflective thinking, which is often enhanced by collaboration with another more experienced teacher. A collaborative process can bring about significant change in teaching practices and ultimately student learning when there is a complete analysis of assessment, instruction, classroom organization, and planning through the portfolio development process.

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FLaRE is a Project of the University of Central Florida College of Education and administered under a grant from the Florida Department of Education and Just Read, Florida!

