

Chapter XXII

Capacity of an Electronic Portfolio to Promote Professionalism, Collaboration and Accountability in Educational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is the result of an investigation into the capacity of an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) to promote reflection and collaboration in a process of educational leadership. A cohort (n=11) of volunteer aspirant and current school leaders participated in the trial of an innovative software package designed to facilitate the creation of an electronic portfolio. The research has followed the development of the volunteer group as they underwent the process of constructing an e-portfolio, in an effort to understand the efficacy of an electronic portfolio as a tool for demonstrating self-reflection, analysis of personal leadership, and collaborative practice. The trial members recorded their reflections regarding their experiences as leaders into their portfolios using the parameters of the “Leadership Framework” as the conceptual guide. This chapter focuses on the results of a content analysis conducted on individual reflections, which found collaborative practice as a key performance indicator in the discharge of educational leadership responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

The Professional Portfolio

Pressure is increasing on Australian schools to respond to rapidly changing conditions brought about by improvements in technology and a shift in emphasis towards a more pluralistic and accountable approach to administration. School leaders are being asked to demonstrate how they are responding to these challenges and to demonstrate the ways in which they are improving their leadership to meet the enormous demands made upon them. Brown and Irby (1996) emphasised the complex, multifaceted responsibilities of school leadership, and studies by Joyce and Showers (1995) have demonstrated that educational leaders must develop continuously as professionals and instructional leaders to optimise learning conditions for student success. Each of their studies suggested that a professional portfolio created by educational leaders had the potential capacity to develop and showcase their skills and capture the complexity of their task.

A professional portfolio has a number of definitions depending on its use: “[...] a thoughtful, organized, and continuous collection of a variety of authentic products that document a professional’s progress, goals, efforts, attitudes, pedagogical practices, achievements, talents, interests, and development over time” (Winsor & Ellefson, 1995, p. 1).

According to Simmons (1996) and Wolf and Dietz (1998), there are three main functions of the portfolio: learning, assessment, and employment or professional presentation. The first two are more student-oriented, whilst the third is meant to demonstrate professional development, containing (for example) a resume and artefacts of *best practice*. The third type of portfolio includes a statement of teaching philosophy, letters of recommendation, awards, official documents, curriculum innovations, lesson plans, reflections, and personal evaluations (Hurst, Wilson, & Cramer, 1998).

A professional portfolio is an “organized collection of complex, performance-based evidence that indicates one’s growth, goals, and current knowledge and skills needed to be competent in a role or area of expertise” (Campbell, Melenyzer, Nettles, & Wyman, 2000, p. 151, cited in Heath, 2002). Heath, (2002) elaborates further that, a portfolio must be more than an organized collection of artefacts, but should also indicate areas of proposed future growth based upon assessments of past performance and current strengths. These assessments, says Heath, are made as a result of personal reflection both on personal performance and on the selection of artefacts on which reflections are based where “[...] the act of reflection, which is a critical element of portfolio content, further defines the professional portfolio as our own” (Heath, 2002 p. 19).

Creating a leadership portfolio according to Meadows and Dyllal (1999, p. 3) is “[...] a culminating experience in the educational leadership program assisting prospective administrators in the areas of performance appraisal, professional growth, and career planning.”

According to Salend (2001), however a portfolio is organised or prescribed, professional leadership portfolios should be both process and product oriented with a focus on the collaborative and reflective process of the teaching and learning experience.

The Western Australian Context

The Western Australian Department of Education and Training developed its Leadership Centre in partnership with several associations of school administrators in 1998. The mission of the partnership was to establish and foster “the growth of leadership in a school centre and to encourage the sharing of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of leadership between leaders” (Leadership Centre Web Site, 2004). Furthermore, the leadership centre positioned itself with three strategic broad aims:

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