

Chapter 7.18

Electronic Portfolios and Education: A Different Way to Assess Academic Success

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ABSTRACT

The use of electronic portfolios for students as an assessment tool is explored in this chapter. Portfolios have expanded from use in the arts and humanities to the field of education. Teachers, administrators, and students understand the benefits of portfolio assessment. The age of technology has improved the use of portfolio assessment by allowing the portfolio information to be transmitted and shared worldwide. No longer are portfolios limited to the single assessment of one person. Based on the current literature on electronic portfolios, the simplicity of creating electronic portfolios, the efficiency of collecting and organizing massive amounts of work, the ease of worldwide transmission of portfolio material, and the promotion of candidate-centered (student-, teacher-, professor-centered) assessment through

the use of e-portfolios, the author hopes to promote the electronic portfolio as a beneficial way for the student, teacher, and professor to highlight their achievements for assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Portfolios have been used in a variety of careers including art, architecture, photography, and modeling. The portfolios are used to display a person's skills and talents. Portfolios have opened the doors to many opportunities for the person who has a professionally organized display of their finest works. Portfolios are strong representations of the identity of the person. Portfolios can help describe the person and his/her talents. Looking through a person's portfolio provides insights into the person's thinking and personality. The architect's portfolio allows the prospective builder to look at

what the architect has designed and determine if the designs match the building ideas wanted by the builder. The artist can demonstrate types of art that he/she has produced to get commissions from buyers. Models get jobs with their best pictures and poses placed in a portfolio. Advertisers search for certain looks to sell their products to a target audience. The model's portfolio projects the different looks of the model so that advertisers can match their products with the appropriate model. Portfolios display the best products of the person creating the portfolio.

Education has been behind the times in the use of the portfolios. For many years, teachers have had only one way for students to show their knowledge. The one way typically used by teachers to find out what a student knows is through a test. Tests can be standardized or informal but only provide one way to show knowledge. A student must be able to read the questions and be able to write the answers to show what they know on a test. This type of assessment is a linguistic approach according to Gardner (1994), who has written many articles and books on the theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner believes that a person is born with not one, but several intelligences. The intelligences include intrapersonal, interpersonal, musical, linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, and artistic. Gardner states that a person has a dominant intelligence that is the best way to demonstrate a person's knowledge. For example, a student may be studying about crustaceans in biology. A typical test may not be the best way for a person to show what all they know about crustaceans. The person may be able to draw and label the crustaceans to visually show what they know or show his/her knowledge through some form of music.

The learner-centered philosophy of education recognizes the need to provide choices for students to show their knowledge. They may not be able to linguistically present their knowledge. Typical tests require the learner to show what they have learned through the linguistic intelligence.

Recently, educators have begun using portfolios to allow students to show off their best works as well as show what knowledge they have gained. Educational portfolios give students choices in the way to present their knowledge. An educational portfolio is "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas" (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). A portfolio gives a broader picture of what a student has achieved than typical assessments. Herman and Michael (1999) argued that portfolios shift the balance from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. The student takes the responsibility of selecting what products best display their learning. The students also decide how to professionally present their materials.

The K-12 setting is ideal for the introduction of portfolios for assessment. In the early years, students love to show off their work to anyone who will listen! As a first-grade teacher, I endlessly sought ways to keep and display students' artwork and important writings and math assignments to show parents and students the progress that they made throughout the year. The introduction of portfolios at this level enables that collection and display of work, as well as provides a forum for students to present their portfolios to parents and other students. As the student grows and matures, he/she wants to show off his/her work, but does not know how to do it without looking childish. For elementary and middle school children, the portfolio offers the opportunity to display their work in a professional manner. High school students are able to add their creativity and computer knowledge as they develop their portfolios and even display those portfolios electronically. The opportunities for portfolios do not end in high school. Many colleges are requiring students to have writing portfolios to demonstrate their writing proficiencies.

Students are not the only people who can use portfolios to exhibit their achievements. Teachers and professors can create portfolios to highlight

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