

Chapter 20

The Professional Handbook: Developing Professionalism and Reflective Skills while Connecting Theory and Practice through Technology

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ABSTRACT

The Professional Handbook is a teacher education assignment that allows preservice teachers to use technology to connect theory and practice while also developing their reflective skills and professionalism. The assignment involves compiling information in an easy-to-use website that preservice teachers can access while engaged in their semester-long student teaching experience and once they are employed as inservice teachers. This chapter describes the Handbook's essential goals, discusses its use in an instructional methods course, and makes recommendations for modifying the Handbook's format for use in any teacher education course while preserving the framework provided by the assignment's essential goals. The chapter serves as a resource for teacher educators looking to use technology to enhance the quality of teacher preparation assignments.

INTRODUCTION

What kinds of assignments allow prospective teachers to *truly* learn sophisticated theoretical frameworks as well as research-based approaches for teaching so these approaches will not be overlooked in favor of invention or trial-and-error¹ when they enter the classroom? How can assignments be designed so they require positive interdependence among prospective teachers so they learn how to

work as collegial professionals? What kinds of assignments allow prospective teachers to develop technology skills they can use with their students once they begin to work in public schools? How can reflection be meaningfully included in teacher education assignments? The search for answers to these questions led to the development and refinement of the Professional Handbook, a teacher education assignment that allows preservice teachers to use technology to develop reflective skills and professionalism while also connecting theory and practice. The assignment is pragmatic because it

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involves compiling information into an easy-to-use website that preservice teachers can access while engaged in their semester-long student teaching experience and once they are employed as inservice teachers. The Handbook offers great potential but has yet to be formally validated, although preliminary action research evidence supports the efficacy of the assignment.

It is important to point out the distinction between the Professional Handbook and a teaching portfolio. Teaching portfolios are a holistic assessment that allows preservice teachers to demonstrate their professional competence, growth, and academic achievement through a thoughtfully prepared collection of materials (Hill, 2003). Hill also explained that portfolios are intended to be a more authentic source of information about preservice teachers' abilities to teach than their transcripts, scores on professional licensure exams, and check-list student teacher evaluations. In contrast, the Professional Handbook is a tool preservice teachers can use while student teaching and as inservice teachers. A Handbook might be a meaningful artifact to include in a teaching portfolio, but its primary purpose is utilitarian. It is not a holistic assessment of professional competence.

This chapter provides a background to issues related to the Professional Handbook; introduces readers to the context and components of the Professional Handbook, including the assignment's essential goals; and describes the results of preliminary action research about the assignment's effectiveness. The chapter also makes recommendations for modifying the Handbook's format for use in any teacher education course while preserving the framework provided by the essential goals; describes issues, problems, solutions, and recommendations; and discusses future research directions. The chapter serves as a resource for teacher educators looking to use technology to enhance the quality of teacher preparation assignments.

BACKGROUND

This chapter is grounded in two beliefs about teacher education assignments. First, assignments can have a pragmatic purpose yet also help preservice teachers learn sophisticated theoretical frameworks and research-based approaches for teaching. Second, one assignment can be designed to achieve multiple goals that support the preparation of beginning teachers. The Professional Handbook is such an assignment, and it has three overarching goals: 1) reduce the gap between theory-based teacher preparation experiences and inservice teachers' practice, 2) increase preservice teachers' technology skills, and 3) foster the development of preservice teachers' reflective skills and professionalism. These goals provide the overarching framework for the Handbook, and this section reviews related literature. The term "student teaching" is used throughout this chapter, and for the sake of clarity it is defined as a culminating, semester-long field experience in which a teacher candidate ultimately assumes responsibility for (nearly) all of the planning, curriculum, and instruction in a classroom under the supervision of a mentor teacher and a representative from the teacher preparation institution.

Goal 1: Reduce the Gap between Theory and Practice

The first goal is fundamental because of the gap between theory and practice that has been prominent in the literature for more than three decades (for examples, see Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Flores, 2007; Goodlad, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Lortie's seminal book *Schoolteacher* explored how teachers' professional isolation contributed to the gap between theory and practice, and many of the problems Lortie identified over thirty years ago remain. More recent studies reported how beginning inservice and preservice teachers often failed to implement teaching techniques they are taught in their preparation programs (Feiman-Nemser;

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