

SHOWCASING NEW TEACHERS: ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS

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INTRODUCTION

The use of portfolios as a means of measuring student progress has become increasingly popular in the educational arena. The Northwest Evaluation Association describes a portfolio as "a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements" (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991).

Although assessment is the primary focus of most educational portfolio systems, portfolios in the business world are used primarily as a marketing medium for the job applicant. They are employed as powerful tools for showcasing the scope and quality of an individual's experience and training. A well-constructed portfolio far surpasses the traditional resume by allowing applicants to provide concrete examples of their work and evidence of their accomplishments.

The appeal of a portfolio system that plays a dual role - one of assessment and one of showcasing new teachers - is the impetus behind the development of a professional teaching portfolio for University of Idaho, Boise Center preservice teachers. The portfolio will provide assessment data which include authentic and performance-based measures; moreover, the assessments will be based on the attainment of the Idaho MOST Standards required for certification of Idaho teachers as well as other national standards.

More pertinent to the preservice teachers, however, is the ability of the final portfolio to include artifacts that showcase their accomplishments and specifically address the hiring concerns of school district administrators. As can be expected, preservice teachers are more enthusiastic about the development of a portfolio that will assist them in attaining their first teaching job.

THE ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

The decision to utilize electronic media to assist in the development and display of the professional teaching portfolio is an essential one. Electronic portfolios contain much the same information as traditional portfolios, but technology allows for the capture and storage of information in the form of text, graphics, audio, and video. Electronic or digital portfolios enable preservice teachers to produce a multimedia portrayal of their skills and accomplishments and move beyond the limitations of the traditional portfolio.

With electronic media, preservice teachers easily expand the scope of their portfolios to authentically demonstrate their skills and accomplishments. In addition to the ability to present multiple and varied artifacts, preservice teachers can connect those materials in meaningful ways not possible with a pen and paper method. Artifacts can include "live" examples of their work including audio and video files. The electronic portfolios, easily transported and duplicated, demonstrate the preservice teacher's technology skills - skills valued by districts hiring new teachers.

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THE PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO TEMPLATE

Although the preservice teachers will be allowed to adjust the structure of their portfolio to best meet their needs, a template will be provided that incorporates all the components necessary for teacher preparation program assessment as well as career purposes. Preservice teachers will structure their portfolios using the categories depicted in Figure 1 below.

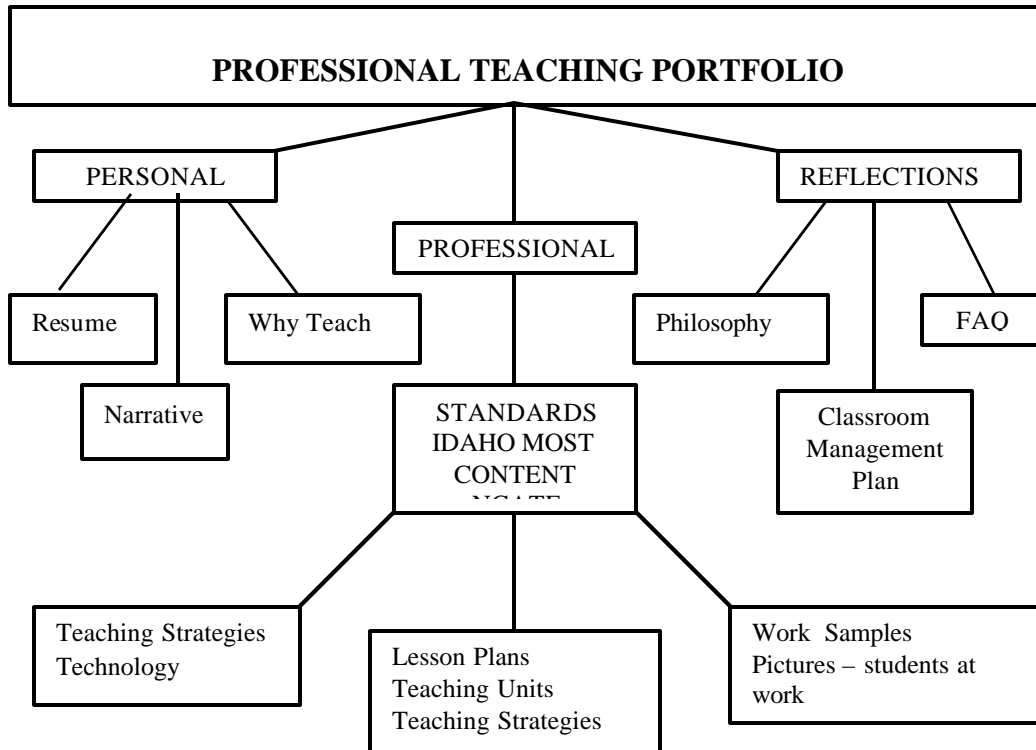


Figure 1 – Professional Portfolio Template

This basic template provides all the information needed to assess preservice teachers' growth and performance in their teacher education program as well as the information school district administrators require to make hiring decisions. The following primary focus areas of the portfolio provide the structure for the preservice teachers to arrange their work:

Personal - includes the preservice teacher's resume and a statement about why he/she wants to be a teacher. Also included is a narrative (written or audio) about the student which will provide the information often asked by hiring personnel, "Tell me a little about yourself...your hobbies, etc." If the student feels comfortable about supplying a picture or video clip, this is certainly the area in which to insert one.

Professional - for many educators, this area provides the "meat" of the portfolio. Here preservice teachers provide evidence that they have met and/or exceeded expected standards as well as their chance to highlight their K-12 students' work. With the use of electronic media, they are able to provide a wide array of artifacts including lesson plans, teaching units, and technology-supported lessons.

Reflections - our goal is for our preservice teachers to be reflective practitioners and they are encouraged to develop reflective practices throughout their teacher preparation program. This area of the portfolio allows preservice teachers to present their philosophy of education (school districts typically include this as a part of their applications). Additionally, a Frequently Asked Questions section is included in which they can respond to questions commonly asked by school district administrators when they consider hiring new teachers. Another area included in the Reflections section is the preservice teacher's Classroom Management Plan.

Although the three focus areas - Personal, Professional and Reflections - are not exclusive, they provide a structure for preservice teachers to arrange their work; by using electronic media, they can link materials that are appropriate in multiple areas. For example, preservice teachers would include their reflection logs in the Reflections Area, but will hyperlink those reflections that indicate attainment of the Idaho Most standards and/or other national standards. A reviewer of the portfolio could click on the hyperlink in a standards screen and be able to read a preservice teacher's reflection pertinent to the attainment of that standard. Similarly, the school district administrator could click on the MOST standard dealing with the development of a positive learning environment and directly access preservice teacher's classroom management plan.

CONCLUSION

The electronic Professional Teaching Portfolio provides an effective instrument for assessing the progress and growth of preservice teachers. With the guidance of university faculty, these beginning teachers are able to measure their attainment of state, national and content teaching standards. Just as importantly, through the electronic portfolio, they are able to "showcase" their accomplishments to future employers and be well prepared for the job interview.

REFERENCES

Paulson, L.F., Paulson, P.R., & Meyer, C. (1991) What makes a portfolio a portfolio? *Educational Leadership*, 48(5), 32-35.