TEACHING PORTFOLIOS

Presenting Your Professional Best



Patricia L. Rieman Northern Illinois University

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From the Author

Dear Reader:

I wish I had known back in 1982 when I was interviewing for my first teaching job all that I know now!

On my first interview for a special education position in a small town near Tulsa, Oklahoma, I dressed in "my best," which, unfortunately, was a spaghetti strap sundress with a matching jacket. No portfolio in hand, no hose, for that matter, and to top it off, I was SO SICK! I had a horrid, painful ear infection and was on strong medication. Evidently, I was too sick to even consider the rational approach of rescheduling the interview--I am chagrined to admit that I even used the words, "I'm on drugs right now..." Needless to say, I did not get the job!

Seventeen years later, here I am: a 16 year veteran educator with a Master's in Behavior Disorders, working full-time on my Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at Northern Illinois University and teaching two sections of courses to future educators. I always was a late bloomer...

You will undoubtedly do better than I on those first interviews—not only would it be difficult to have a worse first interview, but the fact that you are reading this booklet and planning ahead by creating a professional portfolio already shows your initiative and know-how. You are using resources to give your best effort to this exciting phase of your career. Be prepared with your portfolio in hand, be wise, be enthusiastic, be eager to learn, show your love for your subject and your students, and show your willingness to work with your team to do what's best for the students.

Best wishes, and welcome to the field!

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Rieman Northern Illinois University

> Dedicated to my husband-the-teacher, and to all those future teachers in CIRE 100 and 340, 1999 --thanks for the artifacts and the inspiration!

Preface

Why This Handbook?

Teacher education programs across the nation are encouraging their education majors to begin early the process of documenting their experiences with schools and children. Portfolios are excellent tools for maintaining records, showing growth, and displaying experiences related to the field of education. Students may be assessed with portfolios in their courses, some states are moving toward portfolio documentation requirements for certification, and many administrators appreciate having portfolios to examine when considering candidates for teaching positions.

In an effort to meet the growing need for guidance in how to create portfolios that best portray the abilities of students and new teachers, I offer you my interpretation of current trends and theories in portfolio development. I've researched current documents, texts, and Web sites, and have met with a diverse group of students, principals, and parents to provide a current, balanced view on what artifacts are most valuable in portfolios.

The Handbook's Approach and Organization

Teaching Portfolios: Presenting Your Professional Best is designed to complement any pre-service educational course. Specifically written for pre-service teachers, each chapter begins with either student-generated artifacts or insights from an administrator about what's important in an interview, and then goes on to suggest artifacts for inclusion in a portfolio. Another component of this text is the inclusion of questions for reflection. It is periodically suggested throughout the text that the reader use the note pages at the end of each chapter to pause and write responses to the readings. Also note-worthy is the special care taken to address issues of diversity through sections on curricular modifications, standards, and pro-active classroom management.

Teaching Portfolios: Presenting Your Professional Best is divided into two parts. The first part, Your Portfolio and its Contents, presents what a portfolio is, why it is important, what it should include, how to construct it, and how to organize it based on state, national, or content-area standards. By focusing on the need to reflect, the second part, Presenting Your Professional Best, discusses areas for which the portfolio can be used to illustrate and highlight proficiency. It expands on "what should be in a portfolio" to include guidance on how to make each artifact the best example possible.

Special Features

Pedagogically, depth is added to the handbook through:

- From The Real World, a feature that offers words of wisdom (and interview suggestions) from experienced administrators
- Real artifact examples provided to guide students in their decisions regarding what to include in their portfolios

- Annotated Web sites and references
- Opportunities for reflection with special areas designated for note-taking

Key content that pre-service teachers will find invaluable includes:

- A Portfolio checklist providing guidance on what should be included in a portfolio
- How to organize a portfolio around any set of standards that uses the INTASC Standards as an example
- Information on Digital Portfolios
- An explanation of the importance of portfolios both in teacher and career development, and the interview process
- Why reflection is important
- How to illustrate your ability to meet individual needs through curricular modifications in your portfolio
- An Appendix listing state boards of education and professional organizations

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PART I YOUR PORTFOLIO AND ITS CONTENTS

From the Real World

B.J. Richardson is a middle school principal in a rural area of northern Illinois. He oversees 72 staff members and 580 sixth through eighth grade students. This is his second year as principal. With over 9 years of experience as an assistant principal and as a principal, B.J. has also served as District Testing Coordinator and Career Education Coordinator.

What makes me sit up and take notice?

- Enthusiasm, genuine care, and concern for student growth.
- Someone that can articulate a strong student centered mission.
- Someone that is polite, courteous, and on time for their appointment.
- Someone that can articulate their knowledge and ability to utilize Technology, State Standards, and an understanding of School Improvement Initiatives in their daily classroom instruction.
- Someone that consistently articulates a strong sense of self worth and team concept.
- Positive self image.
- Ability to ask questions that demonstrate a sincere interest in our school and in our district.
- Evidence of a sense of humor.

What sets off warning bells during an interview?

- Lack of any of the above.
- Poor communication skills.
- Appearance of saying what they think I want to hear.
- Trying to demonstrate, or "wing," knowledge or skills they do not possess.
- Untidy appearance.

Chapter 1 Teaching Portfolios: What are They, and Why Do You Need Them?

"Educators of teachers have two essential ethical and legal responsibilities. One is to support the development of the teachers with whom they work. The other is fundamentally one of accountability and plays itself out in policy arrangements between the state and teacher education institutions (e.g., credential and accreditation). These two responsibilities of any teacher education program contain an inherent tension: How to provide supportive opportunities for learning while simultaneously being accountable to the standards set forth by the licensing agencies?" (Snyder, Lippincott, & Bower, 1998)

You can see the dilemma: educators wish to extract the personal best from the students, yet they must always look over their shoulders to see who is watching and evaluating them, the teachers. Enter: portfolios. Portfolios offer authentic assessment to both the educators and the administrators evaluating those educators. Some education majors claim that teaching portfolios are not worth the time they would have to invest in them. They may either feel confident that their skills will speak for themselves, or they sometimes believe that their achievements are not worth highlighting, and that it would be self-centered to focus so much attention on themselves. Either way, these educators are wrong. Maintaining portfolios of your skills and achievements is beneficial to you and to your future employers.

Why Portfolios?

A portfolio is more than a collection of your best teaching efforts; rather, a portfolio is a demonstration of your growth and improvement as a teacher (Farris, 1999). In this chapter, we'll explore three main reasons to maintain teaching portfolios:

- portfolios benefit you personally
- portfolios give your prospective employers valuable information about you
- portfolios help you to develop and voice your personal philosophies and theories of education.

How Portfolios Benefit You

As you complete your course credits, hours of study, and years of experience in college and in your pre-service student teaching endeavors, you are accumulating an on-going, vast array of outstanding examples of your growth as an educator. You will have papers of which you are particularly proud, glowing narrative descriptions of your first time in front of a group of students and critical but encouraging evaluations from your supervisors. Most importantly, you will have documentation that you possess both the desire and the knowledge necessary to become a dedicated professional and a lifelong learner.

Another personal reason to maintain portfolios is to keep records of those wonderful projects, bulletin boards, learning centers, and thematic units you've created. As the years fly by, the memories of those unique creations will fade and you'll find yourself wishing you had kept copies of them to adapt for future students. You may be an experienced educator who wishes to teach in a different area and could finally use all those projects you learned about and created, but never got the chance to pursue when you were an undergraduate. Or you may be taking post-graduate classes and would like to refer to all those wonderful activities you implemented when you student taught.

Finally, teaching portfolios provide times for reflection. Reflection is the ability and disposition to think deeply and make decisions about which strategy is appropriate at any given time (Arends, 1998). We educators often get so swept up in the day-to-day (or minute-to-minute) hectic world of teaching that we forget to stop and think about how our lessons have turned out, or how we feel about the day's events. Maintaining a portfolio gives you the opportunity to develop the healthy habit of reflecting on the success (or lack thereof) of a lesson. Saving student work that shows how you wanted the lesson to turn out validates you and reminds you why it worked. On the other hand, saving student work that shows how the lesson failed miserably provides valuable input as well. You can learn from your mistakes and chuckle ruefully as you come across the unfortunate samples years later. Either way, you are taking the time to consider the effects of your efforts—isn't that what we always wish for our students to do?¹

How Portfolios Benefit Your Prospective Employers

Employers who are seeking new employees to join their staffs are in precarious positions. They must rely on subjective evaluations such as interviews, letters of recommendation from people who are strangers to them, and the word--possibly lip service--of those being interviewed. The opportunity to see, to have the time to read and reflect upon, a professional portfolio gives employers the chance to affirm or discredit their intuitions with hard facts. The professional portfolio eliminates doubt and reinforces the recommendations given by you and your personal references. While employers may not have the time or the opportunity to examine each and every portfolio that comes their way, they may have certain criteria in mind as they skim through the artifacts. Another way you can use the portfolio as you interview is to have it organized so neatly that you can immediately pull out a certain section as the topic arises in the interview. Consider color-coding artifacts or having a usable table of contents.

As you'll see in our personal notes from administrators, their position as the determiners of the fate of educators is not an enviable one. Employers must weed out the sincere from the false, the knowledgeable from the vague, and the actual best qualified from the best-worded applicants. Portfolios provide authentic assessment of an educator's skills, accomplishments, and teaching philosophy. Portfolios may include glowing letters of thanks from parents or students, awards from the school or community, and certificates of

¹ For more information on reflection, go to Chapter 2.

additional coursework achieved. These artifacts compiled with complimentary letters of reference and moving personal statements all give employers a fair representation of exactly whom they're considering.

How Portfolios Help You Express Your Philosophy

Whether you realize it or not, you have already developed a philosophy or two regarding the field of education. There are instinctive answers to age-old questions regarding the purpose of schools and the best ways to teach, and the knowledgeable teacher realizes the importance of those philosophies. When you are aware of your points of view, you may speak more eloquently to issues of curriculum, classroom management, parental involvement, and the rights of both teachers and students. However, bear in mind that as you gain experiences in both your profession and in life in general, your philosophies of education may change.

As you apply for and interview for jobs, you will find that employers often ask either in person or on the applications for your philosophies of teaching. How do you plan to make a difference? Why do you wish to be a teacher? Having an answer ready for these questions shows that you are making an intentional decision to become an educator. Recognizing that your beliefs may change demonstrates your willingness to grow and to be a life-long learner.²

Types of Portfolios

The term "portfolio" is one of the most commonly-used buzz words in the education profession today. Some of the people most likely to use portfolios are undergraduate education majors, student teachers, new teachers, tenured teachers, and higher education faculty.

- Professional portfolios are maintained by undergraduate college students to document skills and experiences.
- Student teachers update their portfolios to prepare them for those crucial first interviews.
- New teachers keep all their lesson plans, evaluations, and communication documents in portfolios to show their organization, growth, and readiness for tenure.
- Tenured teachers wishing to become nationally certified, "master teachers" will
 include artifacts of post-graduate work accomplished, diversity of students taught,
 peer evaluations, letters of recommendation by parents and students, and copies of
 outstanding lesson plans and samples of student work following those plans.
- Finally, university level educators will wish to document their achievements, such as dissertations, publications, awards, speaking engagements, evaluations, and advanced coursework as they pursue full professorships.

As you can see, portfolio maintenance is developmental and on-going—one may even consider it to be a major component of being a professional educator.

² For more information on philosophies of education, see Chapter 3.

The Professional Portfolio as a Concept

In their 1998 manual from the University of Maryland, *Developing a Professional Teaching Portfolio*, *A Guide for Educators* (1998) Constantino and DeLorenzo explore the development and use of portfolios. The importance of portfolios is outlined in the text with the below listed reasons. As you can see by these eight attributes, creating your own portfolio is clearly a worthwhile, necessary endeavor.

- Portfolios facilitate the development of reflective thinking.
- Portfolios present a holistic view of your achievements.
- Portfolios provide an ongoing record of your accomplishments.
- Portfolios place the responsibility on you to develop and plan for your goals.
- Portfolios correlate with national and state initiatives toward performancebased assessment.
- Portfolios may be used to document and validate teaching accomplishments.
- Portfolios may be used to assess preservice and inservice teacher performances.
- Portfolios enhance job searches and interview processes.

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- Snyder, J., Lippincott, A., & Bower, D. (1998). The inherent tensions in the multiple uses of portfolios in teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 25 (1), 45-60.

Website Suggestions:

For an excellent example of a teaching portfolio created by veteran educator Martin Kimeldorf, visit his website. In addition to sharing his actual portfolio with you, Kimeldorf also explains why he feels it is important to use portfolios.

http://amby.com/kimeldorf/sampler/html

The American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) provides this guide to "Campus Use of the Teaching Portfolio: Twenty-Five Profiles."

http://www.bradley.edu/otefd/Library/Teacher-Portfolios.html

The list below has links to Web pages on Teaching Portfolios. The URLs are shown in square brackets, but you do not need these URLs if you click on the links.

http://www.cll.wayne.edu/fls/Teachptf.htm

Notes	

From the Real World

--In Chapter One, B.J. Richardson shared with us his views on how to quickly interest or repel an interviewer. Now B.J. explains his interview process.

During interviews, I utilize the *Gallup Organizations Teacher Perceiver Interview*, for which I have received extensive and intensive training. The interview entails: 60 questions given to each candidate, which encompass these 12 teaching themes:

- Mission
- Empathy
- Rapport Drive
- Individualized Perception
- Listening
- Investment
- Input Drive
- Activation
- Innovation
- Gestalt
- Objectivity
- Focus

In addition to the 60 question Teacher Perceiver, I utilize questions that will key in on the individuals, their interests, and their understanding of Middle School students and Best Practices.

I also give each candidate one or both of the following questions, with a description of each:

- "If you could be any, which of these would you choose: Explorer, Pathfinder, Settler, or Stayat-Homer?"
- "You've always wanted to be in the circus. It's in town and you can be one of the following: Ring Master, Clown, Lion Tamer, or Juggler. Which do you choose, and why?"
- Finally, I always ask if they were the successful candidate, how long would it take them to make their decision.

Chapter 2 What Goes in a Teaching Portfolio?

Many renowned experts in the field of education have researched the uses of portfolios and made recommendations for design. In the fifth edition of *Teachers, Schools, & Society* (Sadker & Sadker, McGraw-Hill 2000) Phyllis Learner describes your portfolio as a tool that is:

- Purposeful
- Selective
- Diverse
- Ongoing
- Reflective
- Collaborative

Purposeful and Selective: This portfolio will show your intentional, thoughtful alertness to detail in the items included. Each section will have a specific purpose. Learner recommends basing your portfolio upon a set of national standards. Another possibility is to research the school districts you're applying to and make the portfolio specific to their priorities. For example, if they are currently advocating full inclusion in their classrooms, your portfolio will reflect your ability to team teach, to work with parents, to utilize support staff effectively, and to appropriately modify your curriculum and instruction.

Diverse and Ongoing: Remember that your professors and administrators are interested in more than a one-dimensional documentation of courses taken and clinicals you've experienced. Any experiences with children and with the community are relevant to your abilities and your willingness to go the extra mile for students and for your educational community. Keep your portfolio diverse by including items displaying your involvement with your church, university organizations, or community. Make the presentation engaging with a variety of mediums used: photos, news articles, letters of thanks, certificates of achievement, and other worthy entries.

Ongoing refers to the need to keep your portfolio current. Regardless of your level of experience, as an educator you will always be learning and growing. Your portfolio should display this growth. However, remember to be intentional: use the artifacts that best represent your abilities, interests, and commitment without causing your portfolio to seem cluttered or inefficient.

Reflective and collaborative: We've already addressed the importance of reflection in portfolios, and you will encounter the topic again in this text. *Collaborative* is a term with several positive meanings. One definition of being collaborative indicates that you are a team player, willing to work with your colleagues, fellow staff members, parents, community, and students to provide the best possible education to your students. Another definition of collaborative addresses the need to display the role others played in

your portfolio. You may have team-taught a lesson in class or completed a group project. Perhaps you and your professor maintained a dialogue journal during your clinical experiences. A third possibility for collaboration is asking others to provide feedback on your portfolio. It is important to determine whether your portfolio reflects your intended message to its audience.

The following outline provides a general guide to the categories and items suggested for inclusion in a teaching portfolio. It is important to bear in mind that your portfolio must reflect your personality more than your ability to follow a how-to portfolio "recipe."