Chapter 6
The Use of ePortfolios in Teacher Education Programs to Support Reflective Practitioners in a Digital World

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ABSTRACT

The use of ePortfolios to document and assess preservice teacher learning continues to be a prevalent method for encouraging student reflection. This chapter outlines the definition and prevailing uses of ePortfolios and describes the variety of ways that ePortfolios are implemented in teacher education programs. The authors describe the issues that faculty and preservice teachers face when implementing ePortfolios, particularly when writing for different audiences, such as accreditation agencies and to meet program requirements. The importance of technology knowledge and skills for successful creation of ePortfolios is outlined. Through the presentation of two cases, this chapter focuses on the development of ePortfolio implementation projects. The chapter concludes with suggestions for faculty to support preservice teachers as they implement ePortfolios in their teacher education programs.

INTRODUCTION

The electronic portfolio, known as the ePortfolio, has increased in use for students at colleges and universities across the United States. According to the 2012 ECAR study of undergraduates’ use of instructional technology, the percentage of students using ePortfolios increased from 7% in 2010 to 52% in 2012 with about the same percentage of use in 2013 (Brown & Chen, 2014). Interestingly, in the 2014 ECAR study, the percentage of undergraduates reporting the use of ePortfolios dropped to 25% (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014). In spite of this decline, educators must be prepared to utilize ePortfolios.

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as part of the assessment program. As educators, we need to know what ePortfolios are before we can use them effectively in our education programs. According to Jenson and Treuer (2014):

... educators do not agree on a common definition of it [ePortfolio] because its nature and uses vary widely. Some see it as a gigantic electronic file cabinet. Some regard it as a tool for authentic assessment; for others, it is a digital, multimedia resumé. Certain teachers might define the e-portfolio as a course management tool or a learning platform, while still others view it primarily as a space for creating a virtual identity. (p. 51)

In this chapter, we will define what an ePortfolio is, share a variety of ways that ePortfolios are implemented and the issues that faculty and students face when implementing them in teacher education programs. As Strudler and Wetzel (2011) explain, ePortfolios have been used “…to support teacher candidates’ reflection and learning, enhance their job searches, and provide data for program assessment and accreditation” (p. 161). This chapter will focus on the use of ePortfolios as related to reflection and learning. Yancey (2009) explains that reflection is a skill that students need to learn to do effectively and one they can develop through scaffolding and feedback from faculty. The ability to reflect leads to continual learning, which is the ultimate goal of lifelong learners.

BACKGROUND

Throughout the literature on ePortfolios, there is consistency in the definition of what ePortfolios are. At the basic level, ePortfolios are evidence collected in an electronic format assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Internet (Meyer & Latham, 2008; Miller & Morgaine, 2009). They are a way to house artifacts that provide evidence of achievement. Additionally, they allow students the opportunity to reflect on their learning, leading to enhanced levels of metacognition. Jenson and Treuer (2014) created the following definition of ePortfolios through research conducted at their university: “The e-portfolio is a tool for documenting and managing one’s own learning over a lifetime in ways that foster deep and continuous learning” (p. 55). In a longitudinal study of preservice teachers that followed them as they entered their first year of teaching, Boulton (2014) described the ePortfolio as a “…space to build authentic, multi-modal evidence of professional identity where tacit, authentic knowledge can be exemplified, critical reflection can be developed and linked to assessment and developing evidence can be shared with others” (p. 377).

Prevalence of ePortfolios

Many teacher preparation programs in the United States have implemented ePortfolio systems to assess preservice teachers (Meyer & Latham, 2008). A significant increase between 2010 and 2012 is evident (Brown & Chen, 2014), with a decline reported in 2014 (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014). Successful implementation of ePortfolios requires support and commitment from university administration, faculty, and compliance stakeholders. The significant effort required on the part of all participants in ePortfolios implementation may be negatively impacting their recent use in teacher education programs. Professors, in particular, may feel like one of the medical educators quoted by Jenson and Treuer (2014) who privately
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