Chapter 6

21st Century Teaching and Learning through E-Portfolios: Potentials and Challenges in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon the experience of institutionalizing ProcessFolio in a teacher education unit, the author outlines the processes of design, implementation and institutionalization; strategic changes in program, curriculum and assessment; and uses of data and technology to leverage change and increase efficiencies in policymaking, teaching practice, and organizational operations. Through discussions of coherent program-wide and career-wide ePortfolio systems, the author invites teachers and learners to re-examine the potential of ePortfolios in realizing collective goals of quality enhancement and to re-envision ePortfolios as a framework for reciprocal transformation of the teaching profession and professionals in the 21st Century.

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GREATER EXPECTATIONS AND THE PROMISES OF EPORTFOLIO IN AN ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The promise of synergistic integration of teaching, learning, assessment and accountability associated with electronic portfolios have led to renewed interest and increased adoption in teacher preparation and education programs in the United States (Elliott, 2003; Huang, 2006). In the context of teaching and learning, eportfolios enable a learner-centered, standards-based, and outcomes-oriented approach for generating, assessing and documenting learning and achievement, in and over time. Rather than being short-term and episodic, a program-wide eportfolio is sustained throughout the teacher education cycle, focusing on cyclical and reciprocal processes that connect theory with practice. In the context of assessment and accreditation, the implementation of a program-wide eportfolio requires defined accountability processes and outcomes at individual, collective and material levels and, hence, facilitates the creation of a “culture of evidence.” The demand for systemic commitment to educational excellence through the provision of rigorous processes that generate, assess and use data for quality assurance and enhancement has been a dominant trend in the American teacher education reform agenda. This trend is evident in national accreditation processes and requirements set forth by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Murray, 2005; Wise, 2005).

In the broader context of 21st century education needs and aspirations, coherent career-wide eportfolios, spanning from teacher preparation programs for pre-service teachers to teacher education programs for practicing teachers, potentially transcend traditional barriers faced by the teaching profession. At the individual level, eportfolios democratize learning through deeply personalized engagement and empower practitioners to become both adaptive experts and knowledge creators. If we consider the “process” of creating an eportfolio (often characterized as create, collect, select, reflect and project) as “the proof” of individualized teaching and learning, the eportfolio “product” can be seen as an individualized acknowledgment of competencies and celebration of achievements for the duration of a teacher’s career. At the collective level, eportfolios help the establishment of communities of creators, extend interactions beyond classrooms to communities of practice, and expand teacher research beyond core subjects to include 21st century themes and skills. The continuous support for teachers’ professional development, as operationalized through career-wide and standards-based eportfolio development and assessment, helps instill mutual accountability and facilitates reciprocal transformation between the professionals and the profession in realizing collective goals of quality enhancement.

EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM (EAS): PROFILE OF A TEACHER EDUCATION UNIT

The Department of Education at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) offers teacher preparation programs for initial licensures and teacher education programs for practicing teachers. These programs are approved by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), accredited by the NCATE, and nationally recognized by the Specialized Professional Associations (SPAs). Central to the accreditation and quality improvement processes are the development, implementation and sustenance of the Education Accountability System (EAS).

The institutionalization of the EAS is the result of strategic visions and actions aiming to enhance teaching, learning and collaboration within the P-20 continuum and is reflective of the changing dynamics in policymaking, teaching practice, and organizational operations. The discussion of the