Chapter 14

Reflecting on Portfolio Development:
How Does the Portfolio Facilitate a Preservice Teacher’s Growth?

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted portfolio assessment as a means of deepening pre-service teachers’ understanding of teaching and learning. The ultimate goal of using the portfolio was to bring the program in line with the mission of the institute, the criteria of the NCATE and INTASC, and the standards of the Ohio State License. This study discusses the challenge of implementing a year-long portfolio assessment procedure, as well as investigating how the exit portfolio assessment plays a role in facilitating pre-service teachers’ professional growth in terms of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Results indicate that preservice teachers considered the capstone portfolio as a tool for reflection, which helped them improve critical thinking skills, self-assessment, and advancement. Also, the portfolio process helped teacher candidates develop a professional identity and promote teaching. Overall, there was growth and improvement in knowledge, skills, and dispositions toward teaching, the role of a teacher and learner, and using the web-based portfolio process.

INTRODUCTION

A portfolio is “the collection, selection, and organization of a preservice teacher’s work over time that shows evidence of self-reflection and learning” (Wade & Yarbrough, 1996, p. 65). The artifacts should be chosen and arranged with specific thought and purpose (MacDonald, Liu, Lowell, Tsai, & Lohr, 2004). Portfolios are considered a powerful tool in developing a student’s learning, a means to evaluate a student’s growth and achievement, and a tool for reflective thinking (Stansberry & Kymes, 2007). Many portfolio users proclaim that a portfolio provides a more holistic
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assessment than traditional assessments (Cook-Benjamin, 2001). Portfolios also look at the many aspects that contribute to teachers’ performance and achievement (Reis & Villaume, 2002). The goal of using portfolios for this preservice teacher program stems from the idea that assessment of growth should not be distilled to one test or measure, but allow for the opportunity to show all aspects of growth and maturation over time. Part of this maturation should involve learning to reflect on the process of teaching.

Compiling a portfolio fosters “wide-awake, careful, and thoughtful habits of thinking” (Dewey, 1933, p. 78). It promotes self-consciousness, self-knowledge, understanding of choices or issues being explored, and reflectivity. When prospective teachers use portfolios, they must think about their own choices carefully, monitor their progress, take charge of their learning through self-evaluation, and encourage ownership and self-esteem (Kish, Cole, & Sheehan-Holt, 1997). When academic and professional competencies are aligned, the preservice teachers develop the skills to reflect and evaluate their performance, as well as create a tool to market themselves for employment (Tosh, Light, Fleming, & Haywood, 2005).

The use of the portfolio to evaluate teacher performance provides teachers with a strong professional development experience and meaningful self-evaluation (Rotberg, Futrell, & Lieberman, 1998). Cook-Benjamin (2001) reported that students see the growth they accomplished and areas that still need improvement, which provide them with time to reflect on their learning. This reflection can take the form of discussions with peers or answers to assigned course requirements. Clarifying their thoughts can be a key to helping preservice teachers develop their professional voice.

Writing becomes a critical element, because preservice teachers must write rationale papers for artifacts and summative reflection papers. Preservice teachers become empowered because they must take ownership of the portfolio writing, so that their voice will be heard. Moreover, writing reflection papers and sharing portfolio artifacts with others allow opportunities for preservice teachers’ growth. The portfolio can also promote dialogue and maintain communication (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993). In summary, the authors’ perspective on portfolio assessment emphasizes “constructivist student learning, articulated expectations of performance, reflection as self-evaluation, and growth over time” (Skawinski & Thibodeau, 2002, p. 82). While a program cannot hope to change all deep seated beliefs, the goal of the teacher educators should be to challenge preservice teachers in a way that makes them explore why they are disposed to teach in a certain manner, and to help them define what knowledge and skills they need to do an acceptable job of facilitating the education of their students.

Many state and university faculties selected the portfolio as a means of assessment for their courses, programs, and/or college (Meeus, Questier, & Derks, 2006; Quatroche, Duarte, & Huffman-Joley, 2002; Reis & Villaume, 2002). Several studies reported issues to be considered before implementing portfolio assessment, such as how to assess portfolio contents (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993), will the portfolio measure, replace or supplement other assessment methods (Nelson, 1995), who will view the portfolio, who will decide the contents of the portfolio, and how the portfolio will be stored (Cramer, 1993)? This research focused on the development of a web-based portfolio in a teacher preparation program. The main research question is, “Does the web-based portfolio assessment facilitate and measure preservice teachers’ professional growth in terms of knowledge, skills, and dispositions?”

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Regardless of the assessment system, teacher educators should be able to evaluate the preservice teachers’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions rela-