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Linking Mentoring and Electronic Portfolios for Utah Educators

Charles R. Graham
Kathleen Webb
Carol Lee Hawkins
David Harlan

Abstract
Starting January 2003 Utah districts are required to provide each entry level teacher with a trained mentor (EYE, 2003). Additionally, each entry level teacher will be required to create a standards-based teaching portfolio to submit to the district as part of the Level 2 licensure process. This paper provides practical information about standards-based electronic teaching portfolios and how the portfolios can be used as a vehicle for mentoring novice teachers.

Introduction
The goal of improved teacher quality is one shared by many different stakeholders including the Utah State Office of Education (USOE), Utah school districts, and institutions of higher education with Teacher Education programs. Table 1 shows the confluence of forces driving these three stakeholders' efforts to improve teacher quality.

At the state and district levels recent legislation such as "No Child Left Behind" (http://www.usoe.org/curr/nclb/) and the Entry Years Enhancement Rule (EYE, 2003) are prompting a renewed look at efforts to help novice teachers become experts. At the university level, changes in NCATE accreditation criteria (NCATE, 2001) are prompting a focus on providing concrete evidence of student learning beyond the achievement of good grades in required courses. Increasingly, standards-based electronic portfolios are being considered as a vehicle for helping teachers to document evidence of their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. At the university level, electronic portfolios are being used to facilitate learning and reflection among preservice teachers as well as to provide required evidence of learning for NCATE accreditation. A cornerstone of the EYE legislation in Utah - effective January 1, 2003 - is that Level 1 teachers submit a working portfolio to their district during their second year of teaching. Also, Level 2 teachers interested in getting their National Board certification (one path to a Level 3 license) are required to develop a professional portfolio. Figure 1 shows four strands of evaluation, one of which is portfolios, which are critical for teacher progress at each stage of a teacher’s professional development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Impacting Forces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USOE</td>
<td>Licensing Teachers</td>
<td>National (USDOE, 2002) and state legislative mandates (EYE, 2003) dealing with teacher quality that have an impact on teacher licensing policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts</td>
<td>Instruction and Professional Development</td>
<td>State mandates (EYE, 2003) to raise student achievement and provide high quality professional development - especially for new teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>Training Preservice Teachers</td>
<td>NCATE accreditation requirements (NCATE, 2002) documenting evidence of preservice teacher learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1  Forces impacting stakeholders interested in improved teacher quality.
A second strand visible in Figure 1 critical to the success of teachers is quality mentoring. At the university level, preservice teachers are mentored by professors in their courses and clinical faculty and in-service teachers during their practicum and student teaching experiences. With passage of Rule 277-522, new hires now must receive mentoring by expert teachers through induction programs and throughout their first three years of teaching. The mentor will have completed the district’s mentor training program including continuing professional development. This paper will provide background information on electronic portfolios and make a case for using electronic portfolios in the mentoring process.

Background on Electronic Portfolios

Before describing a vision for the use of standards-based electronic portfolios as a vehicle for quality mentoring, this section of the paper will attempt to establish some common definitions and background regarding electronic teaching portfolios. Specifically, we will (1) present a definition for a standards-based teaching portfolio, (2) describe the difference between a working and a presentation portfolio, and (3) highlight some critical differences between paper and electronic portfolios.

Basic Definition

Campbell and colleagues (2000) have defined a portfolio as “a purposeful collection of student work that demonstrates effort, progress, and achievement over time.” So, at the most basic level, portfolios contain artifacts (teacher and their students’ work) organized in a way to demonstrate teacher performance. Some common examples of teaching artifacts are:

- Lesson plans
- Student creations
- Multimedia presentations
- Video clips of teaching moments
- Reflections, etc.

A standards-based teaching portfolio would therefore contain artifacts organized to demonstrate...
evidence of performance related to a particular set of teaching standards as depicted in Figure 2. Utah, along with the thirty-seven other states in the U.S., has adopted the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Model Standards Beginning Teacher Licensing and Development (INTASC, 1992) as the basic set of standards teachers are to be evaluated against.

Figure 2 Basic depiction of a standards-based teaching portfolio

Working vs. Presentation Portfolio

There are many potential purposes for developing a standards-based teaching portfolio. Portfolios are typically created for a specific purpose, such as presenting evidence of skills when applying for a job or authentically assessing the level of a teacher's performance. In this paper we acknowledge that there are two general types of teaching
portfolios: the presentation portfolio and the working portfolio (Hill, 2002). Figure 3 depicts and describes the relationship between the two types of portfolios.

**Online Archive**

Utah is proposing an online archive accessible via the web where teachers store their artifacts and reflections. The archive provides database-functions for managing files. The archive is private and “owned” by the teacher, where the teacher can provide public access to selected artifacts with either customized systems or generic tools capable of making hyperlinks. The primary feature of this approach is the focus on the ‘working portfolio’ rather than the presentation portfolio.

**Presentation portfolio**

Barrett (2001) defines a presentation portfolio as “a public or semi-public demonstration of one’s highest level of achievement through representative artifacts and reflection.” The commonly held mental model of a portfolio is the presentation portfolio. The presentation portfolio is typically created for a specific audience and for a specific purpose. While it can be used for multiple purposes, it rarely is used beyond the context that it was created for. Table 2 contains a few examples of presentation portfolios along with the specific purpose and audience of the portfolio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course</td>
<td>To demonstrate that the learning objectives of the course have been met.</td>
<td>The Course Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>To demonstrate that the objectives of the program have been met.</td>
<td>Program Head or Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job</td>
<td>To demonstrate one’s competence in the field.</td>
<td>Potential Employers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Working portfolio**

A second type of portfolio is the working portfolio (http://electronicportfolios.com/portfolios/aahe2000.html). A working portfolio can be defined as “a collection of artifacts and reflections that may be viewed in private, semi-private or public in order to demonstrate individual growth over time and space as guided by standards and learning objectives” (Danielson, 1997). The working portfolio has also sometimes been referred to as an “archival” portfolio. It differs from the presentation portfolio in the fact that the primary audience for the working portfolio is the learner herself.

As the name implies, the working portfolio is always a “work in progress.” It is never “complete” or “finished.” Rather, the working portfolio is continually evolving and growing with the teacher. As the teacher progresses in her skills and experience, she adds artifacts and reflections to the working portfolio making it dynamic and evolving piece demonstrating growth over time. As owner of the working portfolio, the teacher should be able to keep artifacts and reflections completely private or make certain parts of the portfolio public to the world or to an individual or small peer group.

Figure 4 shows an example of the structure of a working portfolio used by pre-service students at Brigham Young University. Across the top are listed the ten INTASC principles (INTASC, 1992). In the left-hand column are links to the artifacts. The purple vertical bar has links to reflections related to each of the artifacts. The purple horizontal bar has links to reflection documents with dated comments on the teacher’s evolving understanding of the principle.

**Paper vs. Electronic Portfolio**

Traditionally teaching portfolios have been paper-based. Much like a scrapbook, paper-based portfolios typically consist of a binder with pages where artifacts are displayed and described. In recent years, changes in the availability of computers and the Internet have made electronic portfolios not only feasible but in many cases preferable to the traditional paper portfolios. While there is admittedly something nice about having a physical paper copy of a portfolio, there are also many debilitating limitations. Three major
INTASC Principles

Links to reflections and goals related to specific standards

Links to reflections related to specific artifacts

Links to artifacts in the Online Archive

Figure 4 Example working portfolio in a generic spreadsheet structure used by BYU students

X indicates that a specific artifact is evidence for a specific standard

limitations of the paper portfolios are:

- Ability to easily update
- Ability to share with others
- Space requirements

First, traditional paper portfolios are not easily modified and updated. These portfolios are typically presentation portfolios and not working portfolios. Changing the portfolio means reorganizing and/or adding pages, reprinting artifacts and tables of contents, adding sections that were there before. In fine, so much energy goes into making a paper portfolio look “just right” that once they are created they are typically never updated. If the paper portfolio is created for one audience or one purpose it may require creating a whole new portfolio for another audience or purpose.

Second, paper portfolios are limited in their ability to be shared with others. Because of the time required to create a paper portfolio, typically only
one copy is made. This means that it can only be shared with one person at a time. So if a teacher loans the portfolio to a colleague, others cannot look at it during that time. Additionally, depending on how the paper portfolio is constructed, it may be difficult to share certain pieces of the portfolio and maintain other pieces of the portfolio private for different audiences.

Third, the physical space required for individuals and/or institutions to maintain copies of paper portfolios over time can be enormous. Electronic portfolios, on the other hand, can be easily stored, duplicated, and transferred using electronic media such as CD-Roms, Zip disks, and hard drives.

Linking the mentoring process with portfolios

Many districts in the state of Utah are grappling with how they will meet the EYE Rule requirements for their new teachers. Districts such as Nebo have discovered that there is a natural linkage between the mentoring and portfolio requirements outlined in the rule. On the one hand there is an understanding that successful mentoring programs require some structure which allows mentor and novice teacher to engage in dialog, goal setting, and reflection that will lead to improved practice. Without some level of structure it is easy for a mentoring relationship to become superficial and unproductive in helping a novice teacher to significantly improve practice. On the other hand, there is the requirement that teachers become reflective practitioners by collecting and reflect on evidence of their teaching competencies in a portfolio centered around the INTASC standards. The ideal case as depicted in Figure 5 would integrate the novice teacher’s development of a standards-based portfolio with guidance from a qualified mentor.

While the integrating of portfolio development and mentoring may seem obvious, it is likely to present a challenge to many districts because the majority of mentors (unless they are NBPTS certified) have not created their own standards-based portfolios.
Additionally, there may be some anxiety among mentors regarding the technology skills required to build an electronic portfolio. However, experience with portfolios in the preservice program at BYU over the past year has shown that much of initial anxiety felt by students was unfounded and quickly forgotten as students realized how simple the technological aspects of the portfolio development were. More important to the success of the portfolio process is the quality of reflection that occurs as the novice teacher considers his/her knowledge, performance, and dispositions and selects evidence that will help to document growth over time in the ten broad areas outlined in the INTASC principles. A key to success will be training mentors that can help novice teachers to reflect honestly on the quality of their teaching, set goals to improve practice, and select evidence for the portfolio that accurately documents progress and achievement over time.

Conclusion

The Entry Years Enhancement Rule (EYE, 2003) now requires Level 1 teachers in Utah to submit a portfolio to their districts as a condition for receiving their Level 2 licensure. Additionally the rule ensures that districts will provide each Level 1 teacher with a qualified mentor. This paper provides some basic background regarding standards-based portfolios and makes the case that districts integrate their mentoring programs with their entry teachers' portfolio development process.

References


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