Electronic Portfolio Assessment in Teacher Education

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The School of Education at Northern State University is using the electronic portfolio as an assessment tool and as a means of integrating technology throughout teacher education. The electronic portfolio offers a unique opportunity to build preservice teachers’ proficiency with technology as well as showcase their expertise in teaching.

This institutional session will focus on the process used to develop electronic portfolios and the method used to implement electronic portfolio assessment in teacher education. In addition, participants will have the opportunity to view student-created electronic portfolios guaranteed to knock their socks off!

Why electronic portfolios? Electronic portfolios emphasize process as well as product and are multi-sensory in nature. They provide the perfect format for facilitating the integration of technology throughout the teacher education program. Let’s investigate three reasons why portfolios have become so popular in the field of education.

First, today’s educators have embraced constructivism -- the belief that teaching is an active and learner-centered process. This philosophy recognizes that students build their own understanding of the world by using what they already know to interpret new ideas and experiences. Constructivists emphasize not only what students know, but what they do.

Secondly, the growing interest among colleges of education in performance assessment makes a transcript of grades and a score on the National Teachers’ Exam (NTE) seem inadequate indicators of competence. A wise person once said: “There is a lot of difference between naming the tools and building the house.”

And thirdly, there is stiff competition for teaching jobs in most areas of the country. It is imperative that prospective teachers be able to demonstrate their teaching competence in concrete ways -- to university faculty, to prospective employers, to policy makers at the state and national levels, to parents, the media, and the general public.

After piloting the use of electronic portfolios with 12 teacher education students during the 1998-1999 academic year, the School of Education at Northern State University began implementing electronic portfolio components into teacher education methods courses. The elementary education program was targeted during Year 1, the secondary education programs were targeted during Year 2, and this year the focus is on K-12 programs in art education, health and physical education, music education, and special education. The model used for electronic portfolio integration solicits proposals from faculty members planning to add electronic portfolio components to their methods classes. To date, twenty-one methods instructors have received summer stipends to plan and integrate electronic portfolio components into their courses.

Teacher education faculty members are currently creating a rubric that will be piloted during the electronic portfolio showcase in December. Two education faculty members will review each student’s electronic portfolio using the newly-created rubric to guide the assessment process. Students’ portfolios must demonstrate mastery of the ISTE National Technology Standards (NETS) and performance indicators for teachers. In addition, students must address each of the five components of the knowledge base for teacher education at Northern State University: Knowledge of Self as an Individual, Knowledge of Content, Knowledge of the Learner, Knowledge of Pedagogy, and Knowledge of Self as a Teacher and Member of a Learning Community.

The implementation of electronic portfolios in teacher education programs at Northern State University has not been without challenges; however, teacher education faculty believe, as did Dewey (1904), that “The purpose of education is to allow each individual to come into full possession of his [or her] personal power.” In this regard, electronic portfolios rule!