

The Professional Development Portfolio

Towards the professional development of student teachers

Deborah Chetcuti

“The Professional Development Portfolio is a collection of information about a student teacher’s (or teacher’s) practice”



DEBORAH CHETCUTI has a B.Ed (Hons.) (1989), an M.Ed in Curriculum & Instruction at McGill University, Montreal (1992), as well as a Ph.D in Education from the Nottingham Trent University. She is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Malta.

Introduction

The idea of introducing portfolios for student teachers arose out of the “Tomorrow’s Teachers’ Project” in 1997. Part of this project involved trying to find alternative ways of assessment for student teachers and one of the proposals suggested the development of student teacher portfolios. A short description of what portfolios were was included in an *Assessment Guidebook* published by the Faculty of Education in 1998. It was also decided during a Faculty Staff Seminar to pilot portfolios among second year B.Ed. (Hons.) students. This pilot project was in fact carried out between October 1998 and April 1999. During this period all second year students were asked to develop a portfolio. The students were then interviewed and asked to share their views about the relevance and usefulness of the portfolio. The students were in fact very positive about the experience and Faculty Board approved the introduction of student teacher portfolios within the Faculty of Education.

In October 1999 the Dean appointed a committee which started to work on the introduction of the student teacher portfolios. The committee was made up of members of the Faculty of Education and the Education Division and proved to be a successful collaborative project. The committee set about identifying what the student teacher portfolio which they renamed “The Professional Development Portfolio” should include and preparing a guidebook for student teachers on how to prepare and develop the portfolio. This guidebook will be launched in January 2001.

What is the Professional Development Portfolio?

The Professional Development Portfolio is a collection of information about a student teacher’s (or teacher’s) practice. It can include a variety of information such as lesson plans, student assignments, teachers’ written descriptions of their instruction and formal evaluations by supervisors (Wolf, 1996). However, the portfolio is also more than simply

a collection of artifacts. What distinguishes it from a mere scrap book or album of events is the thought and reflection that goes into the development of a portfolio. It is the means by which student teachers can show their successes and the process of thought and reflection which influenced their growth and development as a professional teacher. As described by Campbell, Cignetti, Melenzyer, Nettles and Wyman (1997) a portfolio is an organised, goal-driven documentation of a student teacher’s professional growth and achieved competence in the complex act called teaching. Although it is a collection of documents, a portfolio is tangible evidence of the wide range of knowledge, dispositions and skills that the student teacher possesses as a growing professional.

What are the aims of the portfolio?

The main aims of the portfolio are to enable student teachers to:

- provide an authentic collection of evidence to illustrate academic performance throughout the course;
- reflect about their own professional development;
- critically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and to set realistic targets for future development;
- hold purposeful discussions about their development needs and achievements with tutors, colleagues and critical friends;
- create a link between the theoretical and practical aspects of the course;
- draw on their experience in keeping a portfolio in order to think of ways of integrating this as part of their own assessment strategies;
- give them greater ownership over their own learning and assessment;
- prepare a presentation document which can be presented to present and future employers.

The portfolio can capture the complexities of professional practice in ways that no other approach can. Not only is it an effective way of assessing teaching quality but it also provides

student teachers with opportunities for self reflection and collegial interactions based on documented episodes of their own teaching (Wolf, 1996). As stated by a student teacher "...Even though it is time consuming it made me reflect on my initial experiences as a teacher. Moreover it gives an indication to Heads on my commitment as a teacher. It is something to be treasured after graduating...". It can also in the words of another student "...be helpful when we have to face interviewers...".

What does the portfolio include?

The professional development portfolio which has been developed by the Faculty of Education is divided into a number of sections. In each section student teachers are expected to include evidence or documents to show that they have acquired certain key skills throughout the course. The portfolio is organised in such a way that students are encouraged to include examples of their work accompanied by pieces of reflective writings which indicate why they have chosen to include particular examples and what they have learnt in the process. While student teacher may choose to include anything which they feel has contributed to their professional growth in the portfolio, the suggested contents of the portfolio are as follows:

The portfolio is organised in such a way that students are encouraged to include examples of their work accompanied by pieces of reflective writings

University of Malta
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO



Professional Knowledge:

- Introducing oneself as a teacher, philosophy and goals.
- Final transcript of results.
- An example of a submitted written task together with the evaluation sheet.
- Evidence of participation in seminars, local conferences, in service courses.
- Abstract of dissertation.

The Teaching and Learning process:

- Tutors' reports of all teaching practices.
- A pack which should include a scheme of work (for a particular subject and year level); a lesson plan developed from the scheme of work presented; the individualised lesson plan for students with learning difficulties (only where applicable); any resources such as handouts used during the lesson; the self evaluation of the lesson. You can for example include a lesson which was observed by a tutor, in such a case the tutor's report can be included as part of the pack.
- Feedback from co-operating teachers and Heads of School.
- Feedback from students and parents.
- Samples of student work.

Management Skills:

- Photographs of the class during specific activities (for example during group work).
- Photographs of resources used.
- Floor plans of classrooms, laboratories, space used for teaching and learning.
- A written description of how a class was organised to carry out a particular activity (for example role play) and a reflective evaluation of the effectiveness of the management skills.
- An anecdotal record of how you dealt with one or two specific discipline problems.
- Excerpts from tutors reports regarding management skills.

Information and Communications Technology:

- A short description of the various forms of media used in instruction with a reflective evaluation on the advantages and disadvantages of each resource.
- Examples of how information technology was incorporated in the classroom (for example a list of Internet Resources and the use of email to communicate with colleagues).
- Examples of any learning aids produced such as handouts, flashcards, games, computer programs.

Monitoring Student Learning:

- An assessment plan for a particular topic or subject to show how multiple forms of assessment have been used.



One of the main reasons why the Professional Development Portfolio is considered to be so important for student teachers is because it helps to encourage reflective practice and professional development.

- An example of an assessment given and an example of the feedback given to students.
- An example of progressive feedback given to students (to show feedback given and how this was followed through).
- An example of an assessment record sheet.
- A student or class profile.

Other Professional Qualities and Community Involvement:

- Evidence of involvement in school activities and extracurricular activities.
- Letters of reference indicating involvement in community activities.
- Letters indicating involvement in organising activities in and out of school.

Professional Development:

- Final reflections on growth and development throughout the course.
- Final reflection on the development of the portfolio.
- Professional development plan.

All these artifacts are intended to show the skills which each student teacher is expected to have acquired at the end of their course.

The portfolio is a commitment to professional development



Why is the Professional Development Portfolio so important?

One of the main reasons why the Professional Development Portfolio is considered to be so important for student teachers is because it helps to encourage reflective practice and professional development. The idea is not simply to help students present themselves in a positive way but also to make a difference to the way in which our teachers are educated. It is important to remember that the objective is not to create outstanding portfolios, but rather to cultivate outstanding teaching and learning (Wolf, 1996, p. 37).

Another important reason for the introduction of the portfolio is that it can also

be used as a presentation document during job interviews. In today's competitive world, it is useful to be able to sit in an interview and produce a portfolio which shows all the work which has contributed to professional growth and development. As stated by Campbell et al (1997) "teaching jobs are highly competitive and therefore creative ways of presenting yourself are essential" (p. 2).

How can the Professional Development Portfolio be used in schools?

As has been seen the Professional Development Portfolio is very important for the professional development and growth of student teachers, but how can it be used by teachers and Heads of School? The portfolio can in fact be very useful in to introduce student teachers to co-operating teachers and Heads of School.

During teaching practice a number of student teachers are always to be found in schools and usually they come to the school completely anonymous without any references and without any evidence of their strengths and potential. The portfolio can be presented to the Head of School and to the co-operating teacher or mentor and act as a window into the experiences of the student teachers. It can give Heads of School and co-operating teachers an idea of the academic abilities of the students, of their performance on previous teaching practices, on their preparation and commitment to learning and of any other talents or commitments to the community. This gives face and personality to each student teacher and creates a link between the work which has been done at University and the practical teaching. It also gives Heads of School and co-operating teachers the opportunity to include their own feedback and suggestions to the student teacher.

The portfolio is a commitment to professional development which makes the practice of teaching a collaborative venture between novice and expert teachers, between theory and practice.

It is an ongoing journey of reflective practice which enables us to cultivate better teaching and better learning.

References

- Campbell, D.M., Cignetti, P.B., Melenzyer, B.J., Nettles, D. H., Wyman, R.M. (1997). *How to develop a professional portfolio: A manual for teachers*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Wolf, K. (1996). Developing an effective teaching portfolio. In *Educational Leadership*, March 1996, p. 34-37.