Administrator Use of the Portfolio in the Hiring Process

Dennis Ehlert, University of Central Missouri
Jerry Neal, University of Central Missouri
Mel David Krohn, Virginia State University

ABSTRACT

This study was a nation-wide survey of building-level school administrators who were asked to rate the value of portfolios and their contents in respect to employability of job applicants. The results indicated that only a very few typical portfolio artifacts were deemed essential or useful by administrators, that administrators seldom actually review the portfolio's total contents, and that electronic portfolios were not looked upon favorably by prospective employers. The authors note that portfolios may be on the decline as assessment instruments for teacher education graduates or for accreditation purposes.

INTRODUCTION

The use of portfolios as "authentic assessment instruments" has been a mainstay of higher education for the past several years. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has vigorously advocated for the use of the portfolio as one of the several data points for national recognition of teacher education programs in colleges and universities. State departments of instruction have also used portfolios as a measure of teacher competence and required their use as a certification requirement. However, there is growing sentiment for the removal of the portfolio as a legitimate method to gauge the effectiveness of teacher education programs or the competency of the graduates of those programs to teach children in the nation's classrooms. The problems associated with portfolios have long been recognized. While commenting on the versatility and extraordinary usefulness of portfolios, Wolf (1991) stated that unless educators are very cautious, portfolios will be inherently messy, difficult to construct, cumbersome to store, and vulnerable to misrepresentation by students. The problems identified by Wolf have come to be realized by many teacher educators, and teacher education programs, over the years. The original idea was that the portfolio would allow the pre-service teacher to become a more reflective practitioner and thus improve classroom performance (Dietz, 1995; Wade & Yarbrough, 1996).

The format of the teacher education portfolio has evolved from a sometimes-vast collection of hard copy documents filling a 4 or 5-inch binder to various types of electronic formats. Some "forward thinking" individuals articulated in the literature that the electronic portfolio will most assuredly overcome the bulkiness and the storage problem associated with hard copy portfolios, and assumed they would be more appealing to prospective employers who are more technology-oriented and, thus, amenable to pre-service teachers' dossiers in an alternative format. Reilly (2003) refuted this assumption and demonstrated clearly that local school districts' human resources personnel were simply not prepared to view electronic portfolios and had little interest in them.

Teacher educators should be interested in not only the process of the development of portfolios, but also in how these rather cumbersome projects are utilized by prospective employers. Schools of education are telling their students to take their portfolio to the job interview to demonstrate their potential for a teaching position (Wolf & Dietz, 1997). Anthony and Roe (1997) found that 5

percent of school districts require portfolios of prospective professional employees in the application process, but only about half of the school districts will ask for them or refer to them in the actual interview.

The purpose of the present study was straightforward: we wanted to know the extent to which school administrators, in particular, building principals, use portfolios in their hiring practices of prospective teachers. We were keenly interested in the extent to which these administrators rated the usefulness of a number of portfolio items that are more or less required by either the teacher preparation programs or state departments of education for certification. Our intention was to gather pertinent information so that those of us who are in the teacher education profession will be better informed as to the usefulness and applicability of the portfolio documents.

Method

A nationwide electronic survey was conducted of building-level school administrators at the elementary, middle, and high school level. The research questions of this study were:
1. What artifacts should be in a student's portfolio?
2. Do administrators use the portfolio as an employment device?
3. Should a portfolio be in hard copy format or an electronic format?

Subjects

Subjects for the study were 1500 principals of public schools in the United States. The subjects were selected from either school web sites or the State Public School Directory of each state. A random sampling procedure was not employed because of the format of state directories; several states' directories do not identify school administrators e-mail addresses. The researchers then had to go to school web pages to locate principals' e-mail addresses. The researchers made sure that the total sample was proportionally representative in terms of level (elementary, middle, junior high, senior high) of schools surveyed. A total of 250 surveys were returned. This was a rather small return rate (17%). No follow-up reminders were sent to the non-responders.

Results

This was a nationwide study to determine the ways in which school administrators' use portfolios during the hiring process and their opinions of portfolios in general. There were three major research questions: first, what items do administrators wish to see in a student's portfolio; second, do administrators use the portfolio in the hiring process; three, should the portfolio be in hard copy format or an electronic format? Only percentages are presented here, as the authors were not looking for statistical differences between respondent groups or survey items.

To determine the answer to our first query, (what artifacts/items should be included in a prospective teacher's portfolio), thirteen items were listed for the respondents selection. These items included: Philosophy of Teaching, Resume, Unit Plans, Academic Transcripts, Photographs of Work, Case Studies, Computer Work, Student Teaching Evaluations, Behavior Management Plan, Strength/Weakness Paper, Awards/Honors/Accomplishments, IEPs/Diagnostic Summary, and Videos of Teaching. Table 1 presents the findings for this survey item. The administrators' top two items that were considered to be "Very Important" for inclusion in a prospective teacher's portfolio were Transcripts (54 %) and Evaluations of Student Teaching Performance (52%). Artifacts the administrators considered to be "Unimportant" were Video Tapes (50%) and a tie between Videos of Teaching and Strength/Weakness Paper (44%).

Table 1
Administrator's Rating of Portfolio Artifacts Given in Percentages

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	Unimportant	Very Important	Important	Unimportant Very
Philosophy of Teaching	29	24	36	11
Academic Transcript	**54**	33	12	1
Comprehensive Resume	34	40	20	6
A sample Unit Plan	18	**49**	29	4
Photographs of Work	7	33	**50**	10
Samples of Computer work	15	26	41	18
A Behavior Management Plan	32	47	20	1
A Strength/Weakness Paper	11	35	**44**	10
Student Teaching Evaluations	**52**	39	6	3
Evidence of Awards/Honors	23	**49**	26	2
IEPs/Diagnostic summaries	39	41	18	2
Case Studies	15	43	31	11
Videos of Teaching	11	31	**44**	14

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In Table 2 we find that 50 percent of the administrators consider the portfolio to be "Unimportant" as a tool during the hiring process. Sixty-four percent of the administrators considered the actual viewing of videotapes to be "Unimportant".

Table 2
The Portfolio as an Employment Tool Percentages

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	Very Important	Important	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Portfolio as an Employment Tool	11	35	**50**	4
Viewing video Tapes	5	25	64	6

In Table 3 we find that the use of portfolios during the hiring process was at best "Some of the Time" 43 percent and only 14 percent use the portfolio "All the Time" during the interview. It would seem that the portfolio is not in big demand for an interview tool.

Table 3
 Use of a Student's Portfolio During the Interviewing Process
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	All The time	Some of the Time	Seldom	Never
Use a Portfolio during the interview	16	43	37	4
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In Table 4 we notice that 44 percent of the administrators determined the value and usefulness of portfolios was "About Right".

Table 4
Overall Usefulness of the Portfolio
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	Not Enough	Accurate	About right	Excessive
Usefulness of Portfolio	17	26	44	13
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In Table 5 we find that if a student should happen to bring a portfolio to an interview, 83 percent of the administrators would greatly prefer a "Hard Copy" as opposed to an "Electronic Format ".

Table 5
Administrator's Opinion of the Format of a Portfolio for an Interview
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	Hard Copy Format	Electronic Format
Format of a Portfolio	83	17
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<u>Discussion</u>

Portfolios have been on the educational scene for years to fulfill various purposes including showing student growth over time, nurturing students' ability to become a reflective practitioner, providing data points for accreditation and program approval, demonstrating individual accomplishments, and as a piece of hard evidence for prospective teachers to take to the job interview. However, a number of negative issues also emerge in the portfolio development process. What do portfolios cost students and faculty in terms of time and effort required in relation to the ultimate use of the collection of documents? The students do not like creating portfolios because of the enormous amount of time it takes to create and maintain the portfolio. In many instances, the majority of portfolio artifacts are completed during the student teaching phase of a student's career. Cooperating teachers who supervise student teachers and seek to establish a mentoring relationship with the novice frequently complain of the inordinate amounts of time student teachers spend on the portfolio which could be better spent in honing one's craft and establishing a pedagogical knowledge base. This creates problems because cooperating teachers complain that instead of focusing on student teaching, the student is focusing on completing the portfolios.

Schools of education have told the student teacher in the past that one of the major purposes for developing the portfolio is to take the portfolio to the job interview because the interviewer is expecting to review the portfolio and make employment decisions based on the quality of the collection of documents found in it. This survey indicates that this is not always the case. These results indicate that relatively few administrators will actually use the portfolio prior to or during the job interview.

The use of portfolios, which were once touted as being the acme of authentic assessment in teacher education programs, appears to be waning. Some state departments of education are also eliminating them as data points for accreditation purposes. The use of portfolios in the hiring process also appears to have stagnated and may even be on the decline. Even as schools of education move toward the use of electronic portfolios, portfolios in any format are not being readily accepted by administrators as indicators of employability of prospective teachers. The results of the present study indicate that perhaps portfolios may have outlived their usefulness in teacher education, and that other assessment devices and procedures may better capture the skills and talents of future education professionals. Additional study is recommended.

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