Scenario from the Midwest: Moving from Process to Professional Portfolio in Teacher Education

The education community in Minnesota has embraced the use of lifelong efolios (from k-12 education, to post-secondary, to workforce training) in a major initiative championed by the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system in partnership with Avenet (http://efoliomn.com/). Because Now, every citizen in Minnesota (over 4.5 million!) has free access to the efolio. Soon, students will come to college already well versed in using efolios to meet the Minnesota Graduation Standards. Continuing with state-wide practices of standards-based curricular efforts, the Department of Professional Education at Bemidji State adopted the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice for Teachers as its conceptual framework. The ten standards (sidebar) are based on the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards. As students enter the program, they refine their efolio, keeping quality items from their liberal education courses and adding new items and evidence from their teacher education program. During the student teaching semester, a capstone course (ED 4800) helps students identify weaknesses and strengths in their preparation. Professors assign specific tasks during student teaching that are directly translated into evidence of competency under each of the ten standards. Students use this process portfolio to prepare for the Praxis II tests of content area knowledge and pedagogy. Using the efolio throughout their educational experience and beyond ensures evidence of a continuous connection to lifelong learning for the professional teacher.

This scenario and the accompanying efolio (currently located at http://student1.efolioproject.com) was created as a demonstration of how a student in Bemidji State’s teacher education program would modify a process portfolio for use as a professional portfolio. Screen shots are included as a means of efficiently documenting this process rather than maintaining several sample sites.

In addition, the efolio sample displays a wide variety of possible items to include in a portfolio of this type. Because the software has tremendous flexibility, novice users can create an efolio by simply following the suggestions found within the efolio help features while more advanced users may code directly in html and include Java, Flash, various movie and sound files, downloadable files, and so on.

Keep in mind as you read the following scenario that EVERY Minnesotan has access to this free portfolio application.

SCENARIO: GRADUATING SENIOR
Susan Johnson (not her real name) is a senior in the Bemidji State Teacher Education program. She has successfully completed her student teaching semester and easily passed Praxis II. Susan is on her way to becoming a productive and involved teacher. Working with her advisor, Susan is ready to turn her process portfolio into a professional showcase of her new skills, competencies, and creative ideas.

Step 1 requires a long hard look at all of the items available in the process portfolio. Susan has collected a variety of papers, reflections, lesson plans, graphic images, movie clips of her teaching experiences, and has authored several impressive interactive teaching tools. Each of these is categorized under the ten Standards of Effective Practice as required by the education department. But such organization would be difficult for potential employers to handle. Busy principals do not want to dig through too many items to find relevant information on candidates. Susan needs to create a view of her portfolio that is quick and easy to understand and yet provides the opportunity to link more deeply with items that may be of great interest to hiring committees.
Next, Susan takes a look at her portfolio with a critical eye for visual impact.

Visually, the efolio is OK, but seems too tied to the campus. She makes a note to explore other designs.

She opens the link for the ten Standards of Effective Practice, since the majority of her work is found there. Ten different links organized by ten different standards detailing competencies was fine for the process side of the portfolio but hardly makes a good impression as a professional showcase. Susan’s first edit is to begin hiding some of the unnecessary items in her portfolio. She does not delete them yet, but will consider off-loading unused items to a CDROM archive or may decide to purchase additional server space at the special alumni price.
Step 2 is a reorganization of available items. She can cut down on the number of active buttons and still allow all of the relevant information to be viewed. For example, Susan simply makes links to different sections of her CV in a one-page view. Susan is thinking like her prospective employer: clicking on too many buttons may become too time-consuming for search committee members. It seems reasonable to provide simple scrolling pages with all of the small sections of the CV visible, in a similar format to the familiar paper copy of the CV. But, because the efolio is an electronic medium, Susan also wishes to provide a rich environment that allows the viewer to explore in his or her own way. Thus Susan has provided for a variety of user preferences, much in the way she has learned to design instruction for a variety of learner needs.
The final step is to decide which items are of most interest to prospective employers. This is a hard one, and Susan knows she can customize her efolio to fit any job application. She wants to tailor views for jobs that focus on her technology skills, views that focus on her life experiences in the military, and views that highlight her preparation in communication arts and literature.

CREATING VIEWS

As Susan worked on her portfolio, it occurred to her that, while she is proud to have been educated at Bemidji State, her portfolio should no longer be about presenting herself as a top student at a university. She had to re-think presenting the evidence of her skills and abilities (which items to choose) as well as how that presentation should be handled. Should the fact that she attended a particular university be prominent or should the accomplishments of Susan Johnson as a whole person with a degree become the focus?
With the help of her former professors, Susan began a series of new designs for her professional portfolio. Her pages (below), became more refined and clean, thanks to templates available in the efolio.

Susan has added a few video clips, some images, and a graphic of the children’s book she is publishing next year. She included some basic, typical resume information on education levels, activities, and so on, but used the power of a web-based medium to hot link to the additional information a prospective employer might want to have available.

Susan’s design choices include: limiting page lengths to one full computer screen for easy viewing (a few exceptions), using short text explanations with hot links to items such as her Roteract/Rotary honors (see below), and choosing a clean, professional looking template for her presentation.
Now Susan is ready to make a few more minor visual changes. Her final efolio has been streamlined for easy reading by prospective employers. She has kept many items from the general view and can easily provide a more in-depth view of her work should the situation arise. Susan’s cover letter in the application process will indicate how to access the efolio and that additional information is available upon request.
Final efolio homepage for Susan E. Johnson.

The author wishes to thank Erin Johnson for her wonderful contributions to this sample efolio.

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