Costs and Benefits of Electronic Portfolios in Teacher Education: Student Voices

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Background for our Study

❑ Both on Sabbatical

❑ Wanted to:

    ❑ Visit mature sites/travel

    ❑ Contribute to emerging knowledge base

    ❑ Gain new understandings that would inform practice at our respective universities

❑ Today's Report - Part of a Larger Study

Background: Review of Literature

❏ Value of Reflection

   ❏ Lyons (1998) discovered that nearly all of the interns and 1st and 2nd year teachers found the process of constructing a teaching portfolio "an important and significant reflective learning experience" (p. 255).

❏ Content of ePortfolio

   ❏ "Portfolios of the best kind include not only the documentation of teaching, but the documentation of student learning. In the ultimate nirvana, the very best teaching portfolios will consist predominantly of student portfolios." Shulman, p. 36

Review of Literature

- Time and Effort
    - "Portfolios done seriously take a long time. They are hard to do. Teaching is a job that occupies every waking and some nonwaking moments of a good teacher. Given such demands, the question is: Is that much work worth it? And, if it is, is there any chance of reorganizing the life of teachers so they can do this hard work without killing themselves?"Shulman p. 35
- Importance of Student Voices
    - As Fullan (2001) reminds us about educational change, "Meaning must be accomplished at every level of the system, but if it not done at the level of the student--all is lost" (p. 163).

Research Questions

❏ What do teacher education students see as the benefits of electronic portfolios?

❏ What do teacher education students see as the costs of electronic portfolios?

❏ From a student perspective are the benefits worth the costs?

Research Methods

❏ Identify "mature" users through:

    ❏ Review of literature

    ❏ Call on listservs

    ❏ Polling experts

❏ 26 Questionnaires sent out

❏ 13 phone interviews conducted

❏ 6 sites selected for longevity of use program-wide

Research Methods

- Informants
  - 80 Interviews, 124 Informants
  - 35 Students, 13 Recent Graduates
- Length of Interviews
  - I5 - 90 Minutes, Average - 45 Minutes
- Student Voices
  - Beginning
  - Mid-point
  - End (student teaching)
  - Recent Graduates

Results: Benefits

❑ **What do teacher education students see as the primary benefits or advantages of the use of electronic portfolios?**

  ❑ An opportunity to reflect,

  ❑ Better access to and organization of professional documents,

  ❑ Increased technology skills,

  ❑ Better understanding of teaching standards, and

  ❑ Usefulness for employment.

Benefits

❏ An opportunity to reflect

  ❏ One of the main things that they would have us do in a reflection was look at what we did well and if we would do that again. And also things that we could work on to improve: I could have done this a lot better, so next time I will do this. (Iowa Student)

  ❏ There were three questions we had to answer: how does the artifact meet the standard? What did we learn from making this artifact? And how is this artifact connected to learning theories or development of children? (IUP Student)

Value of Reflection

- ❏ I think they reflect it to death. I said that to lots of people. It is valuable, but it's just over-kill. (JHU Graduate)
- ❏ Um, I liked the reflecting on my teaching more than I did on reflecting on how the artifact went in to the principle. (JHU Graduate)
- ❏ I mean, I kind of liked that part of the reflection [personal reflections on student teaching] because you were sharpening your game, you know. And that's worthwhile absolutely, but I just felt like it was forced a lot. (JHU Graduate)

Better access to and organization of professional documents

❏ I like having all my work in the EP. [Otherwise] All the paperwork is under my bed or wherever; with this I know it's right on there always nice & neat. Any computer you go to you can access it, in the library or at home. (CLU Student)

❏ I think it's really useful for me personally because it's one source you can go into and you have all the syllabi for all your classes. If you know what you need to do for that week you can bring up all the syllabi and each assignment has a rubric or an outline stating what it required for the assignment so you can just go in and look at everything without bringing out all your folders and paper and go through everything. (CLU Student)

Increased technology skills

❏ I think it seems like EKU really is pushing technology. They really want students to get involved in technology. I think probably part of the reason they do it is just to get people involved in working with the technology and preparing them for things they might need to do as a teacher in the classroom. (EKU Student)

Standards

❑ Demonstrated the relationship among the artifacts included and the standards they supported

❑ Measured growth toward becoming a teacher

❑ Good preparation for future classroom

Employment

❏ EP as tool for preparing for interview

❏ EP as a hiring portfolio for employers

❏ Most employers did not look at recent graduates EPs

❏ Most students wished that administrators would examine them as part of hiring process

Results: Costs

What do teacher education students see as the costs or pitfalls in using electronic portfolios?

- ❏ Technology issues
  - ❏ Access & Reliability
- ❏ Program issues
  - ❏ Changes in procedures
  - ❏ Inconsistent Implementation
  - ❏ Timing
- ❏ Student time and effort
- ❏ Lack of value

Technology Issues

- ❏ Access
  - ❏ Lab access generally good except at *crunch time*
  - ❏ Scanning student work
  - ❏ High speed access needed for downloading large files
  - ❏ Hard to access from remote school sites
  - ❏ Access to specialized software
- ❏ Reliability
  - ❏ Generally very good (with one exception)….

Program Issues

- ❏ Changes in procedures
  - ❏ *It seemed they just threw it in; it was real quick; it wasn't real organized. And I realize that has to do with, it's kind of feeling your way through the program, and as they did it they kind of realized "oops, we've got to go back and change this." And I think our class was pretty much guinea pigs.* (Recent grad)
  - ❏ *Well those students, they've seen the rules change three times, and they're not happy about that. You interview some of them that have been around here for a while, they will tell you that it would be really nice if we could get it right…so the next time that they're asked to go through one of these checkpoints, they won't have to scrap everything that's in the portfolio because apparently we're asking them for an entirely different set of stuff. (Administrator)*

Program Issues

❏ Inconsistent implementation

   ❏ Lack of agreement on program implementation--people not on "same page"

      ❏ *If you go to the teacher, you suffer from some of the problems we talked about--they don't know technologically what it is they're supposed to do; they refer you back to the syllabus. You go down to the e-portfolio office, they don't know what it is that your teacher is asking you to have done for sure. The only people who really know are us. (Student teacher)*

Program Issues

❏ Inconsistent implementation from class to class-- over time.

    ❏ *I had a couple of instructors that helped. But I felt like that we should have had to do a little bit of this in each class. More people should have used it in their instruction--made us put certain things in our portfolios or something to keep us going. I just don't feel like the instructors did what was needed…We had no reinforcement.*

Program Issues

❏ Timing during end of semester or checkpoints in program

    ❏ Within semester, much comes down at the end…

    ❏ At end of student teaching:

        ❏ *And e-portfolio was the last thing we had to do before graduation…We were all here in the computer lab, uploading stuff. Oh, God that was miserable! [laughter] I mean, talk about wrong place, wrong time to be doing that!...I don't even want to think about it. (Recent grad)*

Time and Effort

- EPs take lots of time depending on:
    - Requirements beyond class assignments
    - Standards for assessment of EPs; Re-dos…
    - Scanning and uploading student work samples
        - *I really scrambled near the end to try to get everything in and scan it in here. And I'd be in here until it was closed, and coming in all the time. But I think that realistically, that's the nature of the beast. I felt like I was floundering, but I looked around and I wasn't the only one. (Recent grad)*
        - *I felt like it just would suck up way more time than I really wanted to devote to scanning things. You know, I'd much rather spend that time planning my lessons or reflecting on my lessons. (Grad)*

Time and Effort

❏ *I'd say it's half and half, some of them just do it because they have to do it and they don't really ask many questions. But other people are frustrated because they feel like it's a waste of time. Like my class now, it's pre-student teaching, so we're doing unit plans, and so they feel like...on top of having to do a unit plan, you've got to prepare stuff to upload it. (Student)*

Lack of Value

❏ *I think that most of us think that it is a lot of time put in to something that doesn't seem to have much merit-I don't really want to say merit...hmm can't find the word. Meaning? ...I was just talking to someone and he said that it was supposed to be so that we could look back on our university experience and see how we've grown as a professional. But right now that wasn't how it was ever explained to me. And so we see it as being a waste of time doing it. I can say that honestly. Some people feel like they're just throwing things in here and they don't know if they're doing it correctly, and whether or not it will ever mean something to them in the future. So I don't know if we're approaching it with the wrong attitude, or if we just haven't been correctly told what it's actually supposed to be. (Student)*

From a student perspective are the benefits worth the costs?

❏ Clarity of purpose

❏ Program review and accreditation purposes

❏ How much does it help the student personally?

❏ How much does it help the student become a better prepared teacher?

  ❏ It depends on the nature of the personal experience