CHAPTER 1

Professional Learning, Portfolios, and Today's Technology

Many view the e-portfolio as the future of learning, a powerful aid for personal development.

Tosh (2003)

Professional learning for teachers has always been important, reflecting the pace of change in education and society. For many years, teachers have had opportunities for professional development in the form of conferences and courses. The focus often was on providing information about curriculum innovations and specific classroom methods and practices that met the immediate perceived needs of teachers. Recently, the focus has been on longer-term learning, such as individual growth in self-understanding, setting goals for professional development, planning learning activities and projects, and reflecting on outcomes. Day (1999) argues that for school reform to be effective, learning opportunities for teachers must model constructivism, taking into account the individual learning styles and career history of teachers and contextual factors such as school culture, support of colleagues and leaders, and the influence of governments. In the constructivist view, teachers are always potential learners, able to make meaning out of experience individually and collaboratively. Day's definition of professional development is helpful:

> It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with young children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives. (Day, 1999, p. 4)

School-based professional development therefore has become very important as teachers and their employers realize the value of learning situated in their everyday work setting. This demands that teachers work together to consider their learning within a purposeful framework, asking why they are pursuing an activity and, having learned something new, seeking to apply it to their work to benefit the community. By examining and reflecting on their work, teachers can learn more about their strengths and skills and about areas in which they can grow and learn. Such self-knowledge is an important tool that can be used to plan for further development. This type of professional learning has the dual purposes of improving or reforming schools while enhancing teacher skills, knowledge, and professionalism.

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the 21st century, valuing individual capabilities and talents is becoming more important than ever. Ways of organizing work are changing, making permanent employment less common and creating a sense of opportunity for some and great insecurity for others. Individuals are becoming increasingly responsible for managing their own career paths. According to Bridges (1997), the organization is no longer a structure built out of jobs but a field of work that needs to be done. Teachers are being asked to be self-sufficient and entrepreneurial and to engage in ongoing learning to keep up with change. The expectations of teachers' roles are changing for those preparing to be teachers, the institutions that train them, and the schools and communities that employ them.

Technology is also contributing to the changing expectations of teaching and learning. It has created wonderful opportunities for learning, and many teachers are working with students who are more familiar with technology than they are. With the recent information explosion, a teacher in the 21st century cannot possibly have all the information students clamor for. Many who have been teaching for more than 20 years are faced with the challenge of being learners at a time in their career when they hoped to be experts in their work.

As new skills and knowledge are needed for curriculum development and assessment, new methods of teaching and learning can be created as teachers and students use technology (Mercer & Fisher, 1998). Learning can be more fluid, for example, because they can be in contact after school hours, using online or cellphone technologies. However, the problem of data overload is real, and teachers are forced to make difficult choices about the use of technology, which can be used to support inquiry, link learners in many settings, and record and assess progress. Which of these should be emphasized? Trying out new things, gathering evidence, reflecting on activities, and making sense of the successes and failures are essential to the teacher's role of incorporating new technology to support learning. Exploring this method and the learning that results is important as teachers seek to develop useful resources for the future.

Teachers are knowledge workers: educated professionals with knowledge and expertise, dealing with the creation and communication of information. However, there is a digital

divide: Access to a range of media is still limited for many teachers and learners within the one school, one city, or one nation. There are other practical barriers to professional growth. Often teachers are so busy with everyday work that they have little time to reflect deeply about or articulate clearly what they know. To overcome these barriers, it is essential for teachers to collaborate and for teachers and students to work together on their learning. Some teachers value this opportunity, as in this case:

> That relationship between the teacher as the provider of the information, the student as the person who absorbs it or learns it, that's completely changed. Everyone is just a learner and engaging in some sort of exchange, which I find excellent. I think some of the most interesting things I have learned about using computers, given that I would describe myself as an early novice in the area, have been things that kids have shown me. (Hartnell-Young, 2003b, p. 171)

A new term has arisen to describe this never-ending experience: *lifelong learning*. Lifelong learners, suggests Hargreaves (2004), know what they know, what they have to learn, and what they can do for an employer. This self-knowledge comes from spending some time reflecting on one's beliefs, values, and achievements, situating oneself in society. Teachers who engage in reflective practice spend time considering what they value as teachers and how this influences their approach to teaching, learning, their career paths, and their aspirations. Reflective practice includes recording thoughts, goals, successes, and failures. This allows teachers to understand more about themselves as learners and to communicate this to others. Some teachers write regularly in journals, others document critical incidents and their responses, and others collect snippets of information that are important to them in some way, such as quotes, photographs, or letters from students. Some make time to reflect with others, as one student told us

> I think you have to really reflect on what you are doing and why you are doing it, to make it important, make it worthwhile for yourself and for the people that you are teaching. When you have made those connections and reflections for yourself, it becomes real. Someone discusses it with you, a colleague talks to you about it and

> you have a real sense of moving in the same direction. (Hartnell-Young, 2003b, p. 226)

It is important to spend some time focusing attention on oneself, for as Stephen Covey (1992, p. 58) expresses it, "Until we take how we see ourselves—and how we see others—into account, we will be unable to understand how others see and feel about themselves and their world." One way to do this is to create a portfolio.

PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIOS

Over the past two decades, as teachers have become more involved in planning, recording, and reflecting on their own learning, paper-based portfolios have been used as a means of keeping and presenting information about professional growth (Burke, 1996b; Wolf, 1994). However, paper-based portfolios have never achieved widespread adoption at higher levels of education (eport.consortium.org, 2003) because of significant cost and logistical barriers, and some believe that this type of portfolio is limited in that it typically captures only the final product rather than the interactions that lead up to the output.

With digital technologies, portfolios have become digital or electronic and are commonly known as ePortfolios (Greenberg, 2004). They are generally made up of a selection of artifacts in the form of digital files containing audio, visual, and textual material. The format of these ePortfolios ranges from highly structured and compartmentalized selections of artifacts to flowing narrative forms.

A portfolio can include statements of vision and values that describe and explain beliefs about education, indicate why various activities are included, and reflect on the outcomes of the activities and what was learned from them. The evidence can include curriculum materials or reports, photographs of students at work or the outcomes they produce, feedback from colleagues or employers, and even video clips of presentations.

WHAT EXACTLY IS AN EPORTFOLIO?

At present, there is much discussion about the need for clear definitions among those involved in large-scale portfolio

projects. Here are some current ideas that, taken together, cover most of the aspects we believe are important.

- A digital repository with a purpose (Cambridge, 2003)
- A collection of authentic and diverse evidence, drawn from a larger archive, that reflects what a person or organization has learned over time, on which the person or organization has reflected, designed for presentation to one or more audiences for a particular rhetorical purpose (Educause, 2004)
- Privately owned, with complete control by the owner over who has access to what and when (Europortfolio, 2006)
- A toolbox for the student and the knowledge worker (Home & Charlesworth, 2004)
- An information management system that uses electronic media and services (Haywood & Tosh, 2004)
- A Web-based method to save work and information about your educational career (www.eportfolio.org)
- Digital stories of deep learning (Barrett, 2004)
- An inventory of acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities (Chang Barker, 2003)

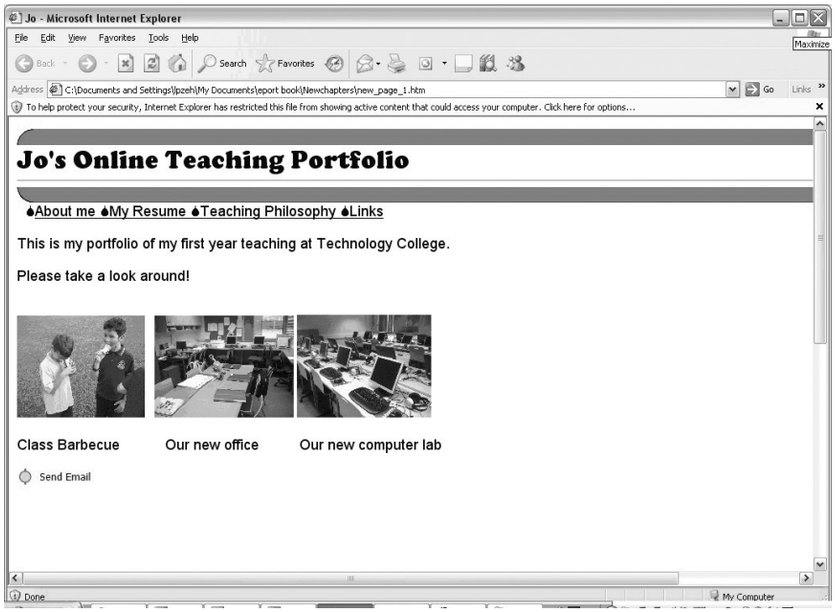
Love, McKean, and Gathercoal (2004) make a distinction between ePortfolios and Web folios, suggesting that the former are stored on transportable media (e.g., CD-ROM, thumb drives, or memory sticks) and not accessible from the Web, but in this book we use the term *ePortfolio* to mean the container of items as qualified here, in all digital forms of representation.

ePortfolios link the need for professional development with the need for greater skills and understanding of technology. These digital portfolios require thoughtful construction and not only provide teachers with a vehicle to shape their goals but also help them further their goals by experiencing the potential of technologies for learning.

If you open up an ePortfolio, it might look something like Figure 1.1. This is why some people think an ePortfolio is equivalent to a home page on the World Wide Web. But this is merely the entrance to the ePortfolio.

In a thoughtful ePortfolio, we expect to find a clearly reasoned case related to its particular purpose, accompanied by relevant evidence and reflection. Unlike Web pages that can be viewed by anyone, the ePortfolio is designed with a particular audience in mind and is addressed to that audience.

Figure 1.1 Sample ePortfolio Home Page



WHY CREATE ePORTFOLIOS?

Experienced teachers and administrators are finding that the benefits of developing a portfolio include the opportunity for professional renewal through mapping of new goals and planning for future growth. Many people discover that one of the most important and long-lasting outcomes of producing a portfolio is the self-esteem that comes from recording and reflecting on achievements and career successes and clarifying who they are as a professional and as a person.

Although there are many reasons to develop a portfolio, in this book we consider the developmental purposes as means for teachers to plan and reflect on their own growth. Many teachers and administrators are working in systems where personal accountability outside the classroom is becoming more controlled, and education administrators are using portfolios as containers of information for teacher assessment. For example, in New Zealand newly appointed principals are expected to complete a portfolio as evidence of their professional learning and progress related to their professional learning plan. Also, the portfolio is the basis for mentor and first-time principal discussions. First-time principals can also use their portfolio as valuable evidence of their annual performance agreement goals. The satisfactory completion of a portfolio is a requirement

for a first-time principal who wants to receive the National Certificate of Principal Induction (University of Auckland School Leadership Centre, 2006).

Although these are legitimate uses for portfolios, when teachers perceive that accountability is viewed as more important than their knowledge and expertise, they can become cynical, and their portfolios tend to be heavy with documentation but light on passion. When teachers feel valued and rewarded, and then accountable, they feel more positive about their work. Therefore, this book focuses on the learning and development opportunities available to teachers, individually and in groups, through portfolio creation.

Digital stories and ePortfolios are forms for reflecting on and presenting the multiple identities of individuals and the collective identities of cultural, social, and work groups. As one teacher wrote

> Identifying skills such as teamwork, listening with empathy and understanding, interacting within the community, and being persistent, requires us to value and acknowledge diverse aspects of students' lives and interests. Students are encouraged to draw upon wider experiences that may well be found outside the school context, to create a richer picture of who they are. (Kane, 2004, p. 14)

It's not difficult to replace *students* with *teachers* in the preceding quotation to see the possibilities for portfolios in helping us all identify who we are.

From an individual's point of view, the multiple purposes for which portfolios are used are summarized in Table 1.1.

These purposes cover 10 areas:

1. *Professional development planning.* Many teachers undertake self-assessment activities as they set professional development goals and conduct research related to their teaching. The portfolio enables them to define their professional development needs.
2. *Recording of continuing professional development.* The portfolio can be used to record the steps in the process of professional development and reflections that teachers engage in along the way. The recording of all professional development activities, with an indication of time spent and learning outcomes achieved, often is suggested or required by school and professional associations.

Table 1.1 Purposes for Portfolios

Formative (Developmental) Purposes	*Summative (Assessment) Purposes*	*Marketing Purposes*
Professional development planning	University admission	Job application
Recording of continuing professional development	Course requirements	Cold calling
Celebration of achievements: lifelong learning	Performance review and promotion	Organizational capability
	Professional certification and registration	

3. *Celebration of achievements: lifelong learning.* Many people, including teachers, find that keeping a record of highlights of their formal and informal learning and achievements in a portfolio, with captions and reflections, is a wonderful boost to their self-esteem. In the spirit of lifelong learning, all residents of Minnesota (United States) and Wales are given the chance to create and administer their individual Web-based portfolios.
4. *University or college admission.* For many years, students in the visual arts have been expected to present portfolios of design, photography, or artwork in addition to their entrance interviews. Several projects in the United Kingdom are developing systems by which high school graduates can provide portfolios in addition to their examination scores to provide evidence of their capabilities.
5. *Course requirements.* Many university courses, particularly those for preservice teachers, require a portfolio that provides evidence of coursework and contains accompanying reflections. California Lutheran University uses a portfolio structure in the K–12 classroom context with some of its preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and graduate students.
6. *Performance review and promotion.* In many schools and universities, the presentation of a portfolio that provides evidence of meeting the criteria or standards often is required of staff in a regular review meeting. It is also

often required when an application is submitted for promotion. The Teaching ePortfolio at the National University of Singapore is designed to assess lecturers' teaching practices. Some people use portfolios to stimulate conversation and feedback between peers rather than from supervisors.

7. *Professional certification and registration (professional standards).* Some human resource, management, education, and health-related professional organizations have devised portfolio frameworks for their members in which they must provide evidence of achievement for membership, for continuing registration, or to upgrade their membership. Beginning and seasoned teachers in Australia and the United States often present portfolios showing how they have met the teaching standards.
8. *Job application.* Often applicants for a position prepare a portfolio providing evidence of skills, competence, and personal development. They take this to an interview, or even sometimes send it with the application. A good portfolio can make writing a résumé simpler.
9. *Cold calling.* Portfolios demonstrating skills and achievements have been used in the visual arts as part of the introduction process between client and artist. Entrepreneurial educators can use portfolios in a similar fashion to display their abilities when cold calling, or meeting a prospective client for the first time. When Kath graduated from her teacher education course in Australia, she sent a very professional ePortfolio constructed in Microsoft PowerPoint to prospective employers in Australia and overseas and quickly landed a job.
10. *Organizational capability.* Organizations can make important use of ePortfolios. They can use them to view the skills of their staff, evaluate programs, and market the capability of the school or organization to parents and the community.

The importance of purpose is expressed by David Baume:

> Preparing a portfolio must always involve acts of judgment, periods of critical reflection, the processing of and learning from (mostly evidenced) experience. As a consequence, preparing a portfolio can be a moving

> experience—a long look into the mirror, with the image magnified and sharpened for greater clarity (sometimes welcome, sometimes not). But what form should the portfolio take? If the sole or primary intended function of the portfolio is, for example, for assessment, then the portfolio will take one form, usually the form of an evidenced claim that certain outcomes have been achieved, certain capabilities demonstrated. If the purpose is to plan for one's professional development, or to prepare and make a case for promotion, or to generate a growing journal of practice from which to learn, then a different form will be appropriate in each case. (Baume, personal communication, 2006)

Whatever the purpose, what is exciting and challenging is the ability to record, store, and present a portfolio in digital form. In order to do this, it is important to gather a wide range of evidence of work and accomplishments. Numerous commercial and open-source software tools enable this evidence to be stored systematically, but in the absence of these, anyone with a computer can organize digital files by categories in appropriately named folders. The skills needed to develop a digital portfolio are not complex, and the computer equipment in many schools and organizations is suitable, as can be seen in Chapter 2. You can see some excellent examples of digital portfolios from La Guardia Community College on the World Wide Web at http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/.

Although people can develop ePortfolios individually, experience indicates that greater learning occurs when groups of people work together. The Internet is beneficial in this way because it allows communication between widely dispersed portfolio developers, allowing them to ask questions, share ideas, and provide feedback. This book advocates that anyone—teachers, students, and those outside formal learning situations—can benefit from preparing a portfolio in conjunction with other learners.