

# Teaching Portfolios: A Strategy to Improve Learning and Teaching for Pre-Service Teachers in Agricultural Education

## *Poster Abstract*

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### **Introduction**

Teaching portfolios have been used in the Agricultural Education Program at Oregon State University to help pre-service teachers reflect on their knowledge about teaching and learning and improve their ability to convey this knowledge. The portfolio is an indication of the quality of work completed by the pre-service teacher. Various components of the portfolio reflect the pre-service teacher's knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, curriculum, students, and schools. The content of the portfolio includes revised papers and projects completed as a part of the pre-service teacher's coursework. It also includes worksamples, videotapes of teaching, a video summary, and materials documenting additional professional activities in agricultural education. Hurst, Wilson, and Cramer (1998) defined portfolios as reflective summaries of self-reflected artifacts, representations of teaching credentials and competencies, holistic views of teachers, and documentation for strengthening interview.

### **Components of the Teaching Portfolio**

#### Material of Oneself

- The individual's resume'
- A philosophical statement of teaching and Agricultural Education Programs, reflecting the individual's view of the teacher's role and how the individual's activities will fit with that philosophy

#### Material from Others

- Student course evaluation data, statements/evaluations from mentors, administrators, supervisors, etc. who have observed the individual in teaching situations
- Documentation of teaching development activities, such as attendance at conferences or workshops
- Honors or other recognition such as teaching recognition or nomination for such an award

#### Products of Teaching

- Examples of lesson plans and unit plans (worksamples), indicating ability to develop and teach curriculum
- Videotape of a lesson and/or best teaching practices, demonstrating the individual's abilities as a teacher

### Other Items

- Reflection statements for each area of development in the portfolio, such as teaching, philosophy, classroom management, student teaching experience, and the portfolio itself
- Pictures, newspaper clippings and evidence of successful teaching that add individuality and a personal touch to the portfolio

### **Positive Outcomes of Teaching Portfolios**

The Agricultural Education Program at OSU has observed distinct benefits from having students complete teaching portfolios. Pre-service teachers benefited by reflecting upon their teaching experience as they compiled their own effective teaching strategies. The end product also served as a valuable instrument to prepare for job interviews and the interview process. Students that developed electronic portfolios were able to demonstrate their ability to use and integrate technology to a potential administrator.

Throughout the portfolio development process, students were reflecting and synthesizing their accomplishments and experiences during teacher preparation courses and student teaching. Students came away from this process with a clear understanding of their effectiveness and need for further refinements in the classroom. The development of philosophy statements, further defined their understanding of what makes them effective in the classroom. Students actually practiced their philosophical beliefs while student teaching and further defined their philosophy and goals of becoming effective teachers. The reflective piece in this development process is what delineates the difference between a meaningful document and a set of meaningless papers and video clips. The importance of communicating clear philosophical beliefs and following those beliefs with documented evidence makes a truly significant difference in the quality of the portfolio.

Follow-up interviews with school administrators have indicated that the portfolio was an important element to assist the hiring team in effectively evaluating the prospective teacher. Principals and teachers alike, have admitted that portfolios are becoming an effective interviewing tool. Students were able to show the work they have produced and their growth throughout the teacher preparation program and through their student teaching experience. In some cases, the portfolios have made the difference between landing the job.

### **Summary**

Just as an artist uses a portfolio to illustrate their talents, a teacher portfolio is designed to demonstrate the teacher's talents and goals (Doolittle, 1994). The student teacher may present the portfolio to the interview team as a hard-copied document in a three ring binder, and/or as an electronic form, floppy disc, compact disc (CD) or WEB page that can be viewed before, during or after the interview process.

Pre-service teachers' experience with building portfolios resulted in a meaningful end product, which allowed self-reflection, a user-friendly product, and improved knowledge base in technology. The question educators will be asking themselves isn't if they should utilize portfolios, but how they can best utilize them to improve teaching and learning and to best market themselves as professional teachers.

## References

Doolittle, P. (1994). Teacher portfolio assessment. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 385 608).

Hurst, B., Wilson, C., Cramer, G. (1998). Professional teaching portfolios: Tools for reflection, growth, and advancement. Phi Delta Kappan 578-582.