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## Portfolio assessment in field study courses: A student-teacher's perspective

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### Abstract

This study examined student-teachers' perceptions with the use of portfolio assessment in their field study courses. A qualitative research design was employed. A questionnaire containing open-ended question was utilized in obtaining insights from the BSED-Mathematics student-teachers of UM Tagum College regarding the use of portfolio assessment in six field study courses. The participants were taken purposively. Responses from them were coded, sorted and clustered into emergent themes. The results showed that portfolio assessment is a valuable tool in showcasing student-teachers' creativity and reflective abilities. These activities improved student-teachers writing skills and creativity though time-consuming. There were three major themes emerged, namely: learning enhancer, a difficult task, and a collaborative activity. Student-teachers need specific and clear directions about what the instructor expects from the portfolio. Thus, there was a call for a more improved portfolio assessment development process.

**Keywords:** Education, Portfolio Assessment, Student-teachers, Qualitative, Davao del Norte, Philippines

### Introduction

In many ways, teacher education has been a leader in the use of portfolio assessment as part of academic programs. A variety of benefits of portfolios in teacher education have been identified and there are a number of uses to which portfolios are put in teacher education programs. Portfolios are viewed as a way of determining not just how much students know, but also how they are able to apply and use what they know. Lamson (2008) <sup>[6]</sup> described a portfolio as a systematic and purposeful collection of work samples that document student achievement or progress over a period of time.

Portfolio development is also a cyclical process of collecting, reviewing, reflecting, and learning from experiences (Zubizaretta, 2004) <sup>[12]</sup>. Therefore, for educational purposes, it is essential that portfolio does not become a mere scrapbook of artifacts and narratives, but should contain reflections on students' learning and experiences. In sum, several studies have reported that the process of building a portfolio increases reflective abilities, develop cognitive processes of critical reflection, self-learning and assessment (Klenowski, 2002) <sup>[7]</sup> because they provide a systematic, continuous way of planning, supporting and monitoring students' progress (Borko, *et al.* 1997) <sup>[11]</sup>.

On the other hand, several studies also showed some limitations of using portfolios in teacher education such as time element, storage, maintenance, and accessibility (Dutt-Doner & Gilman, 1998 <sup>[5]</sup>; Zidon (1996) <sup>[11]</sup>). Some studies reported that when students find difficulty developing a portfolio they resorted to finding support from peers. Burke *et al.* (1994) <sup>[2]</sup> surmised that collaboration and support are essential elements in this project, which is consistent with the findings of other studies. For instance, Orland (2005) <sup>[8]</sup> supported the notion of collaboration for portfolio users. He indicated that portfolios provided opportunities for student teachers to gather a variety of responses by communicating to peers and instructors either orally or through journals. Furthermore, the assessment criteria need to be clearly defined (Carliner, 2005) <sup>[3]</sup>.

In Canadian University, Chitpin & Simon (2009) <sup>[4]</sup> conducted a study on how a portfolio helps pre-service teachers examine their identity as learners.

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Despite the overwhelming nature of reflection, pre-service teachers in this study said that constructing a professional portfolio challenged them to cyclically reflect on taken-for-granted assumptions, articulate growth and gain perspectives.

Closely aligned to the constructivist view of learning by Jean Piaget as cited by Raagas (2006)<sup>[10]</sup>, Philippine schools expect teachers to employ active learning strategies while designing and implementing lessons which promote student's inquiry, engagement and reflection. Related to this, recent research efforts have demonstrated numerous benefits of using nontraditional assessment that provide a clearer picture of student learning which allow demonstration of knowledge (Wolf, 1996)<sup>[13]</sup>. Teachers are being asked to devise alternative methods of assessments for their classrooms. Hence, in University of Mindanao Tagum Campus particularly in six field study courses, portfolio assessment has been introduced with conviction that this will promote self-assessment, creativity and reflection as indicators of student's academic growth.

The results of this study would be beneficial to the University of Mindanao in general, and the Teachers College faculty and students in particular, who have been practicing portfolio assessment in field study courses. This could serve as baseline data for the revision and modification of the Field Study Manual thus, minimizing limitations of the portfolio assessment as a learning tool. Explicitly, this study answered a single question: "How do student-teachers regard portfolio assessment in field study courses?"

### Methodology

The key areas in the collection of data revolved around the specific research question mentioned above. A questionnaire containing open-ended question was used to obtain insights from ten (10) BSED-Mathematics student-teachers at UM Tagum College, Tagum City regarding the use of portfolio assessment in six field study courses. These participants were taken purposively. This study utilized qualitative approach in which responses from participants were coded, sorted and clustered into emergent themes. Additionally, to ascertain participants' perceptions on using portfolio assessment, the researcher spent time in informal conversation with them.

### Results and discussion

Qualitative information gleaned from a single open-ended survey question yielded four (3) distinct themes classified as *learning enhancer, a difficult task, a collaborative activity*. Over-all, eight out of ten student-teachers valued portfolio as an assessment tool which enhances learning. Accordingly, portfolio assessment boosts their writing skills and creativity. It gives student-teachers opportunity to demonstrate their rhetorical abilities in a variety of writing situations.

Creativity is developed since they were given opportunities to showcase their best works. This finding supports what Klenowski (2002)<sup>[7]</sup> concluded that the process of building a portfolio increases students' reflective abilities, develop cognitive processes of critical reflection, self-learning and assessment.

On the other hand, two of them did not appreciate the use of portfolio for some reasons, although they had compiled a portfolio in compliance with their requirements in field

study courses. They noted that the number of questions to answer as part of portfolio was a distinct disadvantage. They also expressed their concerns about the limited time involved in portfolio preparation. During an informal conversation, Jenny (not her real name) reiterated this sentiment, copied verbatimly:

"I find portfolio preparation as an extra duty, a burden and a forced responsibility especially if I am already piled up with so much projects and requirements. I find difficulty answering a number of journal entries and questions, very time-consuming and tiresome. I was a bit scared because directions and scoring guides were not clear. Though having said those, I still believe that portfolio assessment still plays a very significant role in showcasing students' efforts and accomplishments. However, without purpose a portfolio will be just a folder of student work. Therefore, teachers need to emphasize beforehand the relevance and purpose of creating such portfolio, cause it's only then that I may value and give more importance in preparing and constructing such output".

The participants also emphasized that working on the appearance of the portfolio made the process even more time-consuming. Student teachers were very concerned about how their artifacts would look and often talked about the need to type their artifacts. Additionally, they also revealed that finding time to develop the necessary technical skills was a challenge, and required more attention.

This finding conforms to what Zidon (1996)<sup>[11]</sup> reported that time was a limiting factor when constructing portfolios. Many of students did not start working on their portfolios on time because of their other responsibilities in school. A lack of time to prepare the portfolio was the major challenge student teachers faced as reported in the literature (Dutt-Doner & Gilman, 1998)<sup>[5]</sup>.

Moreover, there were 3 student-teachers cited difficulties with the portfolio preparation and sought solutions to those problems. One solution came in the form of support from their classmates. They revealed that their portfolio preparation process was collaborative, finding and receiving support from each other. This finding agrees with what Burke *et al.* (1994)<sup>[2]</sup> had to say about collaboration. They said that although schools usually focus on students working alone, the real world allows and encourages people to talk, ask questions, get help and receive feedback.

The student-teachers in the present study talked with each other. For instance, Debbie explained that the help and support she received from her classmate Joy was important to her success.

"She helped me because I was having problems with the portfolio, especially with the journal entries. I talked with her, asked her what she wrote. She described what she did and it helped me in writing my reflective statements."

Student-teachers in this study reported that support from peers was very important in their success in developing portfolios. Working with peers gave student teachers an opportunity to view ideas and experiences from different perspectives. Student teachers' verbal interaction with each other is not only stimulating, but also it acts as a principle catalyst for reflective development.

Finally, despite other concerns, the benefits of portfolio assessment clearly outweigh the negative aspects. Portfolio assessment helps students to enjoy their assignments, while assisting learners in developing cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities. Rather than a mere course grade or

percentage in an instructor's class book, portfolio assessment can be an enjoyable learning tool, one which students can reflect upon long after the course itself has finished.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Portfolio assessment is proven as a valuable tool in showcasing student teachers' creativity and reflective abilities while also providing them a chance to engage in meta-cognition. It is an excellent way to encourage students to reflect on their prior writing experiences and glean new insights.
2. Time has been an obstacle in the on-going preparation of the portfolio. Student-teachers even perceived that portfolio preparation was a tiresome and time-consuming process. Finding time to develop necessary technical skills was a challenge and required more attention.
3. Difficulties were cited with the portfolio preparation. Student-teachers sought support from classmates. They did not work alone, they collaborated with each other. They discussed with each other the ideas they had and offered advice to one another. Collaboration was an important practice during the portfolio preparation process.

### Recommendation

A more improved portfolio assessment development process is recommended. Teachers should give clear directions about what they expect from the portfolio. By filling this need, portfolio assessment will become a more valuable, integral part of the student-teachers' professional development, and the product will be one that is sustainable throughout their field study courses.

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