

Assessment Portfolio

Think for a moment. If you are interviewing for a position in advertising, what would the employer want to see evidence of you knowing and being able to do? What would that evidence look like? If you are bidding on the contract to refinish hardwood floors, what would the homeowner need to see evidence of you knowing and being able to do? What would that evidence look like? If you want the program faculty to know that you are ready to enter into the clinical teaching experience, what evidence do they need to support your application to enter into the capstone experience, i.e. Internship II or Graduate Internship?

Assessment portfolios as a concept have become part of the teaching preparation education vernacular. But what are they? What are they designed to do? A portfolio is simply a repository for stuff. The concept of the assessment portfolio originated in occupations where creativity is essential. If a portfolio is simply a repository for stuff, then what stuff would illustrate one's talent as a teacher? What evidence would support the assertion you can design a lesson for the students that you must teach? Is filling in a lesson plan template the evidence? What if the question being asked is whether you can teach. This question can only be answered one way. Did the students learn? How do you know if the students learned what you were trying to teach?

Because teaching is such a highly complex combination of specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions, demonstrating competency as an educator requires careful thought and consideration to the evidence that goes into the assessment portfolio (Martin-Kneip, 1999). It is important to understand that the body of work collected and assembled into a portfolio is not merely a collection of lesson plans, reflection logs, or previously written papers. It is also important to understand that reflection is an essential component of any portfolio. Critical reflection leads to self knowledge. It gives careful attention to experiences and looks at how experiences blend with knowledge to bring about behavioral change. Becoming reflective means that one moves beyond simply doing and begins to pay attention to how the "doing" resulted in change. The "change" may be in knowledge, in skills, in attitudes, or in values.

A portfolio has no magic, no power, and no purpose other than what you put into the repository through careful consideration of the artifacts that are included. The portfolio should be viewed first and foremost as a communication tool. It tells the reader what you want them to know. The secret to a successful portfolio is the obvious link of the evidence to the assertion. It is this link that individualizes the portfolio. It speaks to who you are, just like the IEP should speak to the individual child.

Evidence falls into three main categories, authentic evidence or documentation, explanations and reflections, and validation entries. **Authentic evidence or documentation** are things you actually did (lesson plans, teacher-made materials, photos of bulletin boards, examples of technology used or examples of differentiated instruction). These may be captured on paper or through photographs. **Explanations and reflections** are the narrative that provides context for and clarification of the authentic evidence in the artifact. **Validation entries** such as observations are the third-party view of the event or product. This would come from your college supervisor, an instructor, or the school-based supervisor.

Since the portfolio is a communication tool it should have a point of reference. Otherwise, you may include evidence that is irrelevant and fail to provide the reader with the most important information. The point of reference for the teacher preparation programs in Special Education are the knowledge and skill sets identified by the Council for Exceptional Children. These knowledge and skill sets have been put into four program outcomes, a) Planning and Preparation, b) The Classroom Environment, c) Instruction, and d) Professionalism. Your portfolio should include evidence aligned with these four outcomes.