Artist Digital Portfolio

The Artist's Portfolio and its Integration into the Digital Portfolio

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Abstract

Artists were the first to create and use the portfolio as a form of authentic assessment to determine the growth of an artist and to evaluate the quality of work. This idea of the portfolio has been adapted by other areas of education and with the advent of the technological boon in recent years a new "Digital Portfolio" has been created to assess all aspects of a student's education. Many schools now see the digital portfolio as a way to go beyond the standardized test to determine the true extent of knowledge or abilities that have been mastered by a student. The new digital offspring of the portfolio has a vast capability of storage and offers more tools for a greater evaluation than has ever been seen. Present day artistic community needs to reassess their views on the 'E- Portfolio' and the potential it offers Authentic Assessment.

The Artists Portfolio and its Integration into the Digital Portfolio

Artists were the first to create a portfolio system that was meant to evaluate the skills and knowledge that has been obtained through a student's education. This has now been developed into other areas of education with a digital base, but the artist community, for the most part, has not embraced this new way of evaluation. The artistic portfolio is a time honored method of assessment of students' abilities and growth as an artist. In the twenty first century teachers and schools from all areas have turned to the digital teaching portfolio as a way to evaluate all students in any content area by reviewing their development. Art education is now in the position to create a new digital artistic portfolio for teaching, which will combine the traditional with the contemporary. Next generation artist portfolios will have more than just the artists best works but all works. Teachers will have the ability to truly see the creative progress made by the student and so will everyone else who desires to know.

With the advancement of technology into nearly every aspect of everyday life it is not surprising that the education system would adapt in ever increasing ways such as, Power Point and Microsoft Word. Lynch and Purnawarman (2004) stated as much when they wrote "The electronic version of the portfolio in which all artifacts are digitized is coming into more common use, and is quickly becoming the standard for this type of evaluation strategy in teaching education" (p. 50). Nearly everyone knows about web pages and is familiar with using them, which has led to the desire to use digital portfolios or "E-Folios" because of how similar they are to web pages. Students are able to add work quickly to their own portfolios, and teachers are able to asses them with greater ease. Parents, administration, and teachers can all view the information within these programs as a way of determining a greater level of growth and

comprehension that was difficult to achieve in previous generations. All of these improvements in the education system are leading to a better scholastic environment, yet the art world in many ways does not have the desire to incorporate that which it created into its educational process due to its desire to continue in traditions. The art world must adopt the new E-Portfolio as a way to stay current and to meet the demands of artists everywhere.

Through the course of this research paper a history of the portfolio and how it is used will be detailed in both the art world and the educational world. There will be a clear reasoning on why educators are using the portfolio in both fields and why the artistic community is still using the traditional method with very little interest in the modern methodology of the digital portfolio. Advantages and disadvantages will be shared, as will the beliefs of some researchers in the educational system. Authors Cole and Ryan (1998) point out that "Educators must incorporate both traditional and authentic assessment procedures to accurately interpret professional growth" (p. 4). The argument will be made that the art world needs to improve their educational review methods, but the fact is that much of the art world to embrace the future of digital assessment. There are still countless schools in all areas of academia that are also behind the times and the need for a portfolio should be seen as the best solution for evaluation.

The Basic Portfolio

Most people when asked to think about an art portfolio think of a large black case filled with art work within its pages. Webster's online dictionary (2010) defines a portfolio as "(1). A case for carrying papers or drawings or maps; usually leather". For the purpose of this paper the primary idea of a portfolio is the one as defined by Yancey (2001) who wrote:

Created by the three principal activities of collection, selection and reflection, student portfolios can be succinctly defined as collections of work selected from a larger archive of work, upon which the student has reflected. Portfolios can be created in many different contexts serve various purposes, and speak to multiple audiences (p. 16).

This definition meets both a classical idea of a portfolio and it meets the demand of a digital portfolio, but the E-Portfolio is capable of so much more.

When a student in an art class has a portfolio review there are a few variations but for the most part a student presents either the latest pieces or a collection of works over a period of time. The aim of the review is to look over the work and find out what were the good examples and which ones were lacking. Instructors use the time to challenge the student in many different ways so that they can evaluate important areas of knowledge and ability that should have been mastered. Art is such a subjective field that in some ways one's ability needs to be graded not with standard test scores, but rather on a complete look at the effort that has been put into their academic labor.

Greenberg (2004) sums up the artist portfolio when stating the advantage an art student has over any other student in fields that do not use portfolios when stating:

The artist's portfolio is ongoing. Work carries over from class to class, year to year. Work can be stored away for future reference or can be kept close by for continued reflection. Ideas from a previous course or independent work can take on unexpected significance in a future context. From time to time, stepping back and looking over a body of work for a show or presentation can reveal new connections and directions that may not have been apparent before (paragraph 3).

Artists have made this practice a time tested pivotal part of the art education curriculum that has been adopted by all areas of the visual arts as a standard for assessment.

Other areas of education see this as (somewhat) a new thinking form for evaluation without the use of the tests which is popular because of the more relaxed environment which gives greater ability to look deeper into the student's understanding of the subject. Cole and Ryan (1998) argued that the portfolio could do much more for the student's ability to demonstrate their knowledge of a subject. They wrote "learning represents much more than merely retaining given knowledge and mastering a set of discrete skills, and values identified by the system as essential. Learners should be asked to apply skills, integrate knowledge and demonstrate values and attitudes" (p. 7). A strong reason to use Authentic Assessment over tests alone is that a student knows more than they think they do, and they know more than what a test can show.

Standardized tests or tests in general will not be replaced by the portfolio, and there will be a need for tests in the foreseeable future. Some tests are the best way to evaluate a student's ability especially in areas like math but, in other areas the standardized test can be more of a hindrance then a benefit. A combination of the two can be especially helpful in many subjects as together they can "paint" a full picture of the students ability and understanding of a subject. A counter argument can be made that there will always be those who need a hard test score in their hands that says exactly how well a student did. Portfolios are sometimes considered to be too abstract and lack this very structure that makes a test so valuable with its clear cut questions and answers. To that end, it is wise to view the two methods as two parts of the same whole.

Digital Portfolio

Looking around at the average life of most students in schools it is hard to find someone who does not use a form of technology, nor has access to it in their schools. New technology in devices, like the 'I-Phone,' now has more computing power than any computer a few decades ago did. Students do not even realize how integrated they are with new technology even when they do not want to acknowledge it as a way to learn. In the world of the 'E-Student' the amount of information that can literally take seconds to be accessed is an amazing thing and also offers greater opportunity for the assessment. One, two gigabyte thumb drive is more than enough to hold an entire repertory of student papers, tests, video, and any pictures the teacher or student deems worthy. A DVD can hold an entire school years worth of work and scores so that it is now easy for educators, students, and parents to view the artifacts at any time. Web sites and data storage are offering a new frontier of instructional evaluation that is entirely unique to the world of education, and will open up countless avenues for educators to take. Parddiek & McMullen (2005) agreed when they described, "E-Portfolios allow for easy access of selected performance assessment in a visual format" (p. 4). By nature the visual aspect of web pages and E- Folio makes them simpler when looking for specific information or images that have been documented.

The ability to store and recall data instantly has other virtues for the teacher when one considers the increasing demand from all sides to prove their worth to parents and administrators alike. Thanks in part to the internet, teachers can create E-Portfolios that are accessible by the teacher, student, parent, and administrator from anywhere at any time as long as they have an internet connection and password. Depending on the level of complexity of an E- Portfolio students can request feedback from whoever is reviewing their work (Hall, Kiggins, and Weimer, 2005). There is an impressive ability to communicate with selected people at an increasingly fast

pace that has never been known to education and which allow for transmissions over both great distances and even the years. Greenberg (2004) noted that "Ideally, showcase E-Portfolios should go beyond simply sharing work that has been completed. The E-Portfolio should provide a stimulating context for reflecting on a body of work in order to make new connections" (p. 14). The heart of the educational experience is to create discussions that will lead to a greater understanding of a subject and this applies to the E-Portfolio as well.

All of the benefits of E-Portfolios relate back to the importance of an authentic assessment which has taken on greater importance in last century. Wiggins (1990) deemed that "assessment is authentic when we directly examine student performance on worthy intellectual tasks" (p. 2). The authors Cole and Ryan (1998) granted this when they wrote about it in their report to the Association of Teacher Education, in which they stated:

> There are several reasons why portfolios accurately attend to authentic assessment. Portfolios contain actual artifacts. Because the portfolio can contain many entries, both formal and nontraditional entries can be incorporated. Thus a full range of cognitive and affect skills can be evaluated (p. 9).

Educators who believe in the "scaffolding" method of teaching in which they build on past knowledge will find the E-Portfolio to be a great tool in their class room.

While it is true that children and even adults can change greatly over a few months the E-Folio lets an instructor look back on previous works or grade levels to see how well a student has done. The value of the portfolio depends to some extent on the quality of the documentation developed over time. If a teacher does not believe in the technology or chooses not to participate for whatever reason, then there will be clear deficiencies that future educators will be unaware of or have no access too. Granted it may not be too hard to look over general notes and grades, but

if a student needs some special attention or has a proclivity towards a certain subject, it would be of great help to be able to look at some firsthand samples. Similar to an artist portfolio that would let the teacher look over the best work and be able to direct the learner towards a better result, the E-Folio can do this but it would also let the teacher see what things really need help in.

In years past the physical size of a artist portfolio can vary, but even the generic look of a piece of art mounted on a black board or paper in a case, (usually a black leather one) is so standard that it almost does not need to be explained to the observer. On the other hand E-Portfolios are so new that there is still only a generic idea of what they should look like and there are very few standardized requirements for any of them. Teachers tend to use the same types of media formats like the PDF (Portable Document Format) or Microsoft Words 'word document' format because they are so uniformly used and nearly anyone else would be able to look at the material. There may never be a truly uniform portfolio, but it is becoming more and more acceptable that things in the portfolio should be arranged and formatted so as to make it simpler for everyone involved. To this point, it is simply a matter of making the E-Folio user friendly and intuitive that even a beginning student or educator would be able to manipulate it with relative ease. E-Portfolios need to be more than simple to use or understand and more than just their appearance; they need to incorporate all three into one package (Goldsby, 2001). As with so many web pages or video games on the market today, there simply needs to be a good combination of form and function to facilitate the learning process. The E-Portfolios must keep these two things in mind at all times so as to create an environment of interest in the class room.

It is safe to say that the average educator believes that they are already putting in long days, and the added component of creating an E-Folio will only make their day longer and use up time that they simply do not have. To be fair this argument is very true and it seems like there never is

enough time to do all of the things that need to be done, and not just in the academic world. Still there is the issue that the demand for both product and a lack of time is a factor in the spread of the E-portfolio in both K-12 and college levels. Batson (2006) conferred this idea when writing, "E-Portfolios have arrived. Sort of. Oddly, universities have hyped E-Portfolios during the past year, while vendors are racing to catch up, instead of the other way around" (Paragraph 28). Most marketable products are created by the manufacture and then adopted by the industry, but with a proven method of evaluation it is hardly a surprise that the demand would be so high in the educational field.

By using a creative format, it is now possible to let the student become the master of a great deal more of their education by allowing them to create entire sections, or the very look of their portfolio. Strudler and Wetzle (2005) believe that "[in] general, such learning portfolios are based on a constructivist philosophy. Students may be expected to take responsibility for selecting artifacts, making connections to standards, and interpreting their own learning" (p. 412). Over the years many schools have come to promote the idea that the more you can relate a subject to the real world the better a student will do in the subject. Students who can take ownership of their own education and development in general tend to want to do better and achieve higher grades. Letting a student have a greater control of documentation, like the E-Portfolio, allows them better chance that they will feel empowered to learn and develop new skills. All of these abilities and developments relate to assertiveness which in turn helps teachers see a wider range of learning on behalf of the student.

It may not be surprising that authentic assessment would want to look at a greater amount of factors when grading the individual on their abilities, and the E-Folio adds perfectly to this belief. Wiggins (1990) stated as much when writing:

> Authentic assessments attend to whether the student can craft polished, thorough and justifiable answers, performances or products. Conventional tests typically only ask the student to select or write correct responses irrespective of reasons, (there is rarely an adequate opportunity to plan, revise and ask substantiate responses on typical tests, even when there are open-ended questions) as a result (p. 2).

Educators strive to find ways of creating interests in the subject matter with new and interesting lesson plans that have end results that motivate the students to continue learning. Students want to have fun and not take a test, which only adds to the problems of evaluation. The E-Portfolio has been created to offer a new way of documentation and creativity to the educational process.

The Artist's Electronic Portfolio Imagined

The traditional artist portfolio is typically intended to hold the best works, pieces from a series, or material from a specific subject, but only the art work and nothing else. With new technology at hand it is now time for the educational art world and the art world as a whole to change and adapt to new methods and documentation. Existence of technology does not translate to getting rid of original works of art or the physical black portfolio cases, but it does add another tool to be used by the artistic community. When a sculptor or painter creates a work of art they normally do not carry around this piece with them but instead they take photographs of the work and add it to the portfolio. In some cases (usually at the college level) the original works of art are brought in for a portfolio review or for art shows that require the original work to be assessed. Now the artist has the ability to not only make photographic representations of the work, but the artifact can now be posted on a website and shared with whoever wishes to look. In

the world of art galleries this has become a boon for those who want to attract a wider range of customers.

New forms of art like graphic art, digital art, video games and video art have opened up the portfolio to be a new physical being that is no longer contained by a physical case. Boughton (2004) stated that the "[r]apid development of digital technology has enabled portfolios to assume far more complex forms than the conventional humble collection of artifacts. The benefits of traditional portfolios can be significantly enhanced in digital form" (p. 268). Artists need to look at the traditional art portfolio and decide if the advantage of an 'Art Electronic Portfolio' is great enough to adopt into the art worlds identity.

A portfolio review should be a meeting between the student(s) and the teacher or a group that is gathered together to evaluate the artworks. In reality this ideal situation cannot always happen due to countless things but with the advent of online classrooms distance is no longer an obstacle. The Electronic Portfolio also adds the dimension of being able to offer more than just the art work but it can offer test scores, assignments, and other information that might be needed to fully flesh out the students education. Many students in the K–12 grades may never go onto pursuing a higher level of art education and so it is harder to assess them on the final projects alone. An 'Artist E-Folio' can contain class room participation on video files or the attendance in the classroom as a way of demonstrating the effort that was put in. Many parents do not see the arts as a worthwhile endeavor in today's culture and so pay little attention to it. A digital portfolio can give many the ability to see for themselves the advancement of knowledge in the classroom, and gives a teacher greater opportunity to illustrate their teaching. E- Portfolio thinking is document or 'work – centric' in that the discussions and interactions are as critical to the learning process as is the final art work (Greenberg, 2004).

It may seem that the E- Portfolio is a good idea and that there are very few arguments against it in a class room or in administrative circles. Some of the biggest reasons to not adopt the new   Art E-Folio are the argument of tradition and the amount of time the Art   E-Folio takes to incorporate into a class room. Art is a subject area that is full of contradictions in how it sees itself. On the one hand it is the realm of creativity and pushing new boundaries or arguing for change in the world. On the other hand, art is very much steeped in its rich history which predates written history and goes to the very essence of mankind. Every higher education art program requires some level of art history in its curriculum as a way to express its historical importance. Today the newest forms of art like, the graphic arts or digital arts are still considered by some circles are not art at all and are frowned upon. It should not be surprising that the beloved portfolio is also considered to be an artifact that should stay the way it is even though it can now evolve into so much more. Boughton (2004) has said:

> The Portfolio, once the sole province of art education, has now been embraced widely throughout the educational community. Portfolio assessment has its origins in the visual arts and, interestingly, has been recognized as a useful solution to the short comings of paper-and-pencil testing in other subject areas but is largely ignored by both the state high stakes assessment programs and by teachers of the visual arts in the United States" (p 268).

Artists have always prided themselves as being at the forefront, breaking boundaries, new styles of imagery, and yet an Art E-Portfolio is still shunned by the community.

Perhaps it is the thought of losing the physical case that scares the art educational system and for that matter the art community as a whole; the advantage of the E-Portfolio is that in many versions it is not tied down to even a physical space and can be accessed anywhere with the aid of a computer and the internet. Another flaw to the E-Folio is the fact that it requires more time

than the traditional portfolio, especially on the teachers end. Normally a portfolio is created by the student and presented to the teacher at the end of a course but the digital portfolio will require both to be involved. From the beginning, teachers will have to put in time to learn how to create this new form assessment and they will be the ones required to teach the student how to use it and set it up as well. In the course of a year the teacher will be the one to upload test scores and grades from assignments as well as any other material that may be important to the evaluative process in the future. Perhaps it is better than that only the best work be included in the Art E- Portfolio, so as to keep it simple and to the point and this is fair to argue. Time is an important commodity that no one wants to give up or waste and so it is imperative to keep in mind that the ultimate goal of the Art E-Portfolio is to create a better classroom and a well rounded student.

The best way to imagine a successful E-Portfolio is to think of it as an excellent web page that talks about an individual and all things that make this person a success. There will be an opening page with the students name and general information that is important to gleam at a glance. Links will be clearly listed to other sections of the site, such as attendance, test scores and presentations. Personal opinions will be listed so that other educators or parents may see and, depending on the intent, this site will have all material at a click of the mouse. Authentic Assessment requires that more information on hand to be used and considered is the ultimate goal of a teacher and a developed student.

Conclusion

Portfolios have taken on a niche in the education system when they were primarily used by artist. By using Authentic Assessment as a new way to truly measure a student's education it

seemed only natural that a time tested tool would be needed to show the level and depth of awareness. Subjects took this model, developed it, added to it and modernized it into the E-Portfolio that exists today which has taken on greater and greater context every year. Ironically, it has been shown that the creators of the portfolio show little interest in bringing the new digital offspring into its realm of educational tools for evaluation. The 'Digital Age' that exists today nearly demands that all subject areas incorporate technology into their every existence. Students need to be a part of the new era and thus need to be assessed on all aspects within the Art E-Portfolio (Goldsby, 2001). Many traditional methods have been modernized in the name of efficiency and improvement which is seen as both a positive and a negative in nearly all fields not just the education system.

Accountability is the catch phrase of education in the last decade and it is the challenge from society that teachers prove themselves with greater accuracy. Is it any surprise that so many educators are turning to the E-Folio as a way to demonstrate their prowess in the class room? The Electronic portfolio is not just a way to prove to parents and administrators their skills but the portfolio is a tool that can be used by all fields to secure jobs or advance a career (Myers, 2009). An aptitude for artistic talent is important if someone wants to become an artist but they must also know the history, fundamental basics, theory and countless other skills to become a great artist. To be able to demonstrate skills and knowledge with a single leather case full of the best works of art may not be possible or give a complete story when it comes to appraising an ability. The Artists Digital Portfolio offers the chance to add to ones best work by displaying more academic history than one book dossier can contain within its few pages. As technology improves it is conceivable that an artist's entire knowledge could become part of a single

portfolio. The 'Artists Digital Portfolio' could be abused but there are so many benefits that need to be weighed for authentic assessment outweigh the negative.

The Digital Portfolio still comes in a multitude of options and combinations which gives teachers a nearly endless style to choose from and will meet the educational goals of the class. Professional Art Portfolios will continue to be of a certain requirement and appearance but it is not a hindrance to adopt the Art E-Portfolio as a way to supplement the artist repertoire. Teachers need this tool to not only show what the student can do but to show what they have learned and accomplished within their charge. Artists need the Art Digital Portfolio because of the demand to see more and more of their work, regardless of any limitations that existed and of new technological demands. The art world is constantly changing and it is time for the presentation and assessment changed as well.

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