

# Digital Portfolios in Student Assessment

**By David Hall**

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I had a remarkable experience that I want to share. In our school division there is a group of about twenty teachers who represent a variety of levels of experience, grade levels and subject areas and who took time to share their stories about how they used digital means to construct student portfolios. A variety of truly amazing approaches were shared, such as:

- The use of wikis by several Middle and High school teachers to not only communicate with students more frequently than their hour together every day, but also to allow students to post video examples of their performances in Reading and Dance. Since the wikis are open, the performances can be viewed and commented upon by classmates, friends and parents. Each entry is linked with the student learning outcome that is being addressed and in some cases with the criteria on which the student requests feedback.
- In a Grade Two class, several teachers are using blogs to involve students by allowing them to reflect orally on the learning outcomes for the day. It didn't take too long for the teacher to show students how to upload audio files onto the blog spaces and these are often accessed by parents who are interested in following their child's progress. In one case, a teacher reported that one of the parents provided feedback to every single child in the class on their reflections.
- In addition to the obvious benefits of collecting evidence of student learning, an added benefit to the use of Career Cruising (<http://www.careercruising.com/>) software was reported by another teacher. She told the story of one young student who had some cognitive disabilities and whose career portfolio included information submitted by teachers, parents and even support workers in the school. It was heart-warming to hear of how the student was able to use this portfolio to help secure employment since it told a complete story of the student's abilities and his support network to the potential employer.
- Students in a French Immersion class prepare for their student-led conferences by role playing the parts of the parent and teacher as a classmate "delivers" the walk through of the portfolio. When it comes time to discuss the parts in which students are reporting on some of the ways that they aren't quite meeting the outcomes, students who play the parent and teacher roles use an analytic rubric developed by the school division to ask questions about how personal and social skills may be having an impact on learning. It seems that the "behaviour discussion" is sometimes an inevitable part of student-led conferences, whether we wish them to be or not, so this teacher has used the criteria in a common rubric to frame the discussion around growth rather than blame or excuse-making.

- Commonly used presentation tools such as Powerpoint are widely available and can link to students' audio, video and picture files as well as to their web-based social media. One teacher saves conference time by having the student and parents view the Powerpoint portfolio prior to the face-to-face contact. It's also a great organizational tool because a template of pre-built slides can be distributed to students so that they can input their own data, reflections and goals.

Digital portfolios are wonderfully suited to accommodating students with the types of social media that they use daily. Some platforms are more suited to particular learning outcomes—say, the use of audio files to capture oral reading—but they all seem to serve to motivate students to share their work to a broader audience. That audience allows multiple levels of feedback from a variety of observers and can be easily tweaked so that it relates to the student learning outcomes that are the target of each lesson.

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