**Producing Quality Assessment in Digital Portfolios**

The digital portfolio embraces the challenge of making learning visible and mirrors quality assessment where the learning and student choice, voice and ownership are central and core. How does one capture quality assessment evidence and produce an ongoing digital portfolio for every student? The point is not to regulate but to re-orientate what we know about quality assessment practice and to systematically uncover and capture what is essential in communicating student learning. It is no longer about *standardization* of reporting but about the *personalization* of the learning journey. Where are students now? Where are they going? And how are they going to get there?

**Digital Portfolio: Fit for Purpose**

A central purpose of all assessment is to understand where learners are in their learning at the time of assessment with the objective of improving their learning. <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/assessment>. The digital portfolio is an ideal “fit” for this purpose. At its best it is [formative](http://edglossary.org/formative-assessment/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), relevant and accessible. The crafting of the digital portfolio provides meaningful, collaborative learning and feedback and invites active involvement and engagement for both student and parent. (Karen Fadum, 2015. FRAME <https://mrsfadum.wordpress.com/2015/10/26/where-is-the-learning-guidelines-for-using-digital-portfolios-to-communicate-student-learning/>)

**Guiding Principles for What Teachers and Students Include**

Throughout the learning process, teachers and students intentionally focus on gathering evidence of learning that demonstrates student growth and helps to guide both instruction and learning moving forward. “What is captured and shared should show students’ learning over time, changes and growth in their ability to communicate, think and build their capacities of self as a learner.” <http://abvendramin.com/2015/07/09/digital-portfolios-moving-beyond-the-glorified-scrapbook/>

In collecting evidence the teacher role is careful observer, listener, and designer. Quality documentation reflects the design of teaching/learning tasks which are well constructed, process-centered and open-ended inviting students to think, question, reflect and assess their own learning. Together teachers and students engage in setting criteria and uploading exemplars which allow for ongoing, timely, descriptive feedback for students and parents. The carefully shared decisions about WHAT to make visible not only helps students assess their growth but also helps them understand how to improve and move forward toward their learning intentions and goals.

Three important guiding principles should be considered when selecting documentation, artifacts and evidence (<http://kellivogstad.com/2015/08/31/digital-portfolios-making-the-learning-visible/>). It is important that what is made visible links with quality assessment practices and demonstrates student growth and learning. Vogstad recommends: (1) **Documentation** which shows growth over time through revisited curriculum tasks or experiences, demonstrates concrete change in abilities, skills, behaviours, attitudes, and understanding; (2) **Artifacts** which invite student reflection and analysis of student learning incorporating the thinking operations of observing, comparing, contrasting, analyzing, hypothesizing, imagining, and making conclusions; and (3) **Evidence** that demonstrates student behaviour and growth in the three competency areas: thinking, communicating ideas, and personal/social development, reflects meaningful and relevant learning across all curriculum areas and provides opportunities for students to show their learning in a variety of ways.

There are four practical ways for teachers to categorize and organize documentation (see Vogstad above). **Two of the Same** – Student completes two of the same tasks which are documented over a period of time. For example, an impromptu write completed in October, and one completed in January; the two similar artifacts invite observations and comparisons, demonstrating student’s growth and learning. **Showing the Knowing –** Demonstrations/process-based sharing: student presents or “walks” through an activity, task, or process, explaining thinking, strategies, connections, decision making, problem solving skills, and understandings. **Celebrating the Learning** – Documented student artifacts show skill and ability reflecting criteria of success. May include performance standard descriptors or task generated criteria; comments are made based on observed evidence that meets criteria. **Communicating the How and Whys** – The fourth component documented by the teacher provides parents accessing the documentation a lens through which they can understand and support their children’s learning. Descriptions and explanations about the curriculum activities are documented which inform, instruct, and communicate the big ideas, learning intentions, purpose, and goals behind the artifact.

**Dissonance and Hard Work**

The exploration of communicating student learning using the digital portfolio is not without its challenges and has created some uncomfortable feelings of dissonance. At this stage there are probably more questions than answers and yet, educators are attracted to the opportunity to develop better and more meaningful ways to motivate students and communicate with parents using the digital platform.

The “hard work” is to continue the search for learning which is visual, fresh and aligned to elements of quality assessment. This forces teachers to think deeply about the design of activities and the ways they document assess and share what they see. In this way teachers are key to transforming the learning. As teachers and students become more comfortable with using digital portfolios, students learn to search for their own evidence of their learning, upload artifacts and provide their own reflections on their growth–signally the opportunity for them to have choice, voice and ownership and to produce their own brand of creativity.

**The Search for Delight**

The personalized learning journey depicted by visible artifacts and essential documentation produces quality moments which quite frankly register delight. On the part of the student, parent and teacher there has been powerful recognition of the influence of the well-crafted digital assessment. The evidence is formative, relevant, accessible, meaningful, and engages students in live, authentic action. And, the personalized learning journey has only begun.

***Research Note ~***

***Elements of Quality Assessment Pertaining to Digital Portfolios.***

It is no longer about *standardization* of reporting but about the *personalization* of the learning journey. Where are students now? Where are they going? And how are they going to get there?

* Effective feedback is timely, ongoing, specific, descriptive and engaging.
* Communicating student learning to students and parents is for the most part formative and demonstrates student growth and learning.
* The student role is an active one. Students assess and celebrate their own learning and understand steps toward improvement. Student choice, voice and ownership are central and core.
* Assessment has a profound impact on motivation and well-being of student.
* “What is captured and shared should show students’ learning over time, changes and growth in their ability to communicate, think and build their capacities of self as a learner.”
* Results of assessment are used to monitor and adjust teaching and learning.