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Tracking Teacher Librarian Effectiveness Using Digital Portfolios

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Today school professionals are being evaluated on educational effectiveness. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), teacher effectiveness is the single most important school-based factor in student success (as cited in Varlas, 2009).

However, defining and evaluating teacher librarian effectiveness varies from state to state, district to district, and school to school. This article examines how the teaching role of school librarians can be effectively evaluated with the use of digital portfolios. Since the teaching role of librarians tends to be the primary focus in formal evaluations (rather than emphasis on the other four roles of school librarians: information specialist, program administrator, instructional partner, and leader (AASL, 2009), evaluation of these other roles is not addressed in this article.

Teacher librarians may be classified for evaluation purposes as classroom teachers, non-teaching professionals, professionals, or support staff. For school administrators to evaluate the total picture of teaching effectiveness of a teacher librarian, they need to evaluate instructional activities, artifacts, and quantitative and qualitative data over a period of time. There are two possible approaches for the teacher librarian when storing artifacts:

- a print binder, which will be difficult to keep updated, may not be a reasonable size, or may not accurately demonstrate technology skills or products
- a digital portfolio, which is easy to update, can be quickly accessed via electronic files and search boxes, is attractive and not overwhelming to the end user, and can showcase existing and emerging technologies

In today's environment, the most obvious choice for the teacher librarians is a digital portfolio. It can be used as a professional repository to store evaluative data collected from performance-based evaluations that demonstrate continuous professional improvement (Church, 2012). The use of portfolio-based teacher librarian appraisals has emerged as an intriguing option to make the time required for teacher evaluation more productive and the process more meaningful, comprehensive, and accurate (Attinello, Lare, & Waters, 2006). The digital portfolio can be used as an electronic filing system for compiling teaching activities, journals, artifacts, data, and reflections. Digital portfolios enable educators to share their work not only with the administrators evaluating them but also with parents, students, peers, and anyone else who might be interested in what takes place in schools every day (Nielsen, 2014).

SECURITY ISSUES WITH DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS

One concern with data collection and storage is privacy. The Family Educa-

tional Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. This is true for both print and digital portfolios where students' names and identifying labels must be removed. Additionally, it is important to ensure the security of files on a website by permitting only limited or password-protected access.

When selecting a web design product, the teacher librarian needs to consider what is readily available for use at the school district level. School districts may use a web company or have access to a proprietary learning management system (LMS), such as TeachPoint or PD360/Edivate. Although these systems are often primarily used by administrators for evaluation purposes, they also are designed so that teacher librarians can upload and organize their documents into an electronic filing system. Some of the LMSs have a portfolio component available with specific guidelines.

If this is not a possibility or if the LMS portfolio development is too overwhelming or confusing, it then becomes important to investigate and select a fee-based web design program that will be secure. However, security comes with either a monthly or a yearly fee. A secure web-design product provides the option of having password protection, access using a visitor's pass, and/or privacy settings.

For any fee-based digital portfolio design site, it is important to carefully read what will and will not be secure. When purchasing a fee-based design product, consider if there is a need to link documents within an intranet or to

link files from online storage sharing sites such as Google Docs.

DESIGN OF THE DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Once the digital portfolio is thoughtfully designed, it can be continuously updated and maintained. Navigation of a digital evaluation site is more important for the end user than the pictures or graphics. The portfolio can have the same look as a filing cabinet, with general file headings and subtopic file headings. Under these appropriate files, selected artifacts and data records can be posted. The file names should be specific, dated, and easily recognizable. Keep in mind the importance of including baseline data when creating files and subfiles. Establishing baseline data is important so that in future years the teacher librarian can make comparisons to demonstrate progress, improvement, and innovation (M. Bigagini, personal communication, February 18, 2016). In addition, a digital portfolio can be designed to showcase the teacher librarian's technology skills for teaching, using a variety of software programs and Web 2.0 tools.

COLLECTING, CURATING, ANALYZING AND PRESENTING ARTIFACTS

One organizational method for collecting, curating, analyzing, and presenting artifacts is the Danielson Framework for Teaching (Danielson Group, 2013). The framework defines 4 domains of teaching responsibility, with 22 components incorporating 76 elements (Danielson Group, 2013). *The School Librarian's Guide to Success in the PA Department of Education Educator Ef-*

WEB DESIGN PRODUCT EXAMPLES

Weebly Pro (www.weebly.com): Offers ease of the drag-and-drop website builder coupled with site search capability and password protection

Wix Premium Plans (www.wix.com): Provides different pricing levels of support to create private domains. Member login button added to a site allows visitors to log in to access members-only pages. The member login button can be set to require pre-approval.

LiveText (<https://www.livetext.com>): Charges a yearly fee and can be used to effectively organize, supplement with multimedia, and share with others. The sites are password protected, with an optional visitor pass.

Live Binders (www.livebinders.com): Combines documents, multimedia, and videos in an e-portfolio. Subscription versions are available to keep the binders private and only accessible to someone who has the access key to the binder.

Google Sites (<https://sites.google.com>): Offers a structured wiki and web page-creation tool as part of the Google Apps for Work productivity suite. There is a configurations option available to limit who can access the site by sharing. By default, only the people you specify can edit your Google site.



YA FICTION

LIVING WITH LOSS

Stork, Francisco X. **The Memory of Light**. Scholastic, 2015. 341p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9780545474320. Grades 8-12. After narrator Victoria Cruz tries to kill herself, she ends up in a hospital teen psych ward, to the dismay of her wealthy, controlling father. Vicky's been dealing with depression since her mother's death years earlier. With help from a good psychiatrist, Vicky starts seeing some light ahead during weeks with three teens in her therapy group, who come to matter to her. A poetic, moving story.

Anderson, John David. **Ms. Bixby's Last Day**. Harper, 2016. 320p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780062338174. Grades 4-7. When their teacher, Ms. Bixby, takes a medical leave, three of her sixth graders vow to pay her the perfect, perhaps last, visit. On the way, they collect what they need for their quest. But nothing goes smoothly. Each boy faces obstacles that call upon his special strengths to overcome. The journey, during which they share stories about Ms. Bixby, proves as meaningful as the visit itself. A tribute to great teachers and the lives they change.

Federle, Tim. **The Great American Whatever**. S&S, 2016. 288p. \$17.99. ISBN: 9781481404099. Grades 9-12. Narrator Quinn relied on his sister to direct the screenplays he wrote. The car accident that killed her also destroyed his ambitions and hopes. But thanks to good friends, Quinn goes to a party—and falls in love with Amir, a fellow writer. This romance explores grief and self-knowledge with great charm.

White, Kiersten. **And I Darken**. Delacorte, 2016. 496p. \$18.99. ISBN: 9780553522310. Grades 10 up. Although strong-willed Lada adores her ambitious father, Vlad Dracul of Wallachia, he arranges for her and her brother to be held hostage by his Ottoman overlords. In their court, which she hates, Lada hardens her heart against love and loss, bolsters her strength, and plots revenge, in contrast to her kind brother. War, romance, and political scheming fill this historic tour-de-force.

fectiveness System (Biagini, 2016), designed by the University of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania School Librarians Association (PSLA), provides specific examples of evidence; is aligned to the four Danielson domains (Danielson Group, 2013); and demonstrates effectiveness for teaching. The PSLA document describes teacher librarian behaviors and activities in each of four rating categories—distinguished, proficient, needs improvement, and failing (Biagini, 2016)—as they relate to the teaching responsibilities of the librarian.

Artifacts used for documentation of teaching effectiveness may include but are not limited to parts of relevant emails, observations, past evaluations, lesson plans, instructional activities, student work, grades and test data, committee work, surveys, and various multimedia applications. In a blog entry for *Knowledge Quest*, Smith (2016) presents an infographic of 30 artifact ideas for a portfolio. Similar to labeling folders in a traditional filing cabinet, each artifact needs to have a specific title, description, and purpose and needs to be uploaded to a specific file or subfile for easy access.

Depending on the yearly evaluation cycle and the administrative evaluation requirements in a school district, the teacher librarian may organize the digital portfolio with a focus on student learning objectives (SLOs). The use of SLOs as an evaluative process to measure educator effectiveness is based on documented student achievement of content standards (Biagini, 2016).

SLOs are assessed using specific performance measures for an identified student population, grade level, or class. These student performance measures can be tests, projects, presen-

tations, research, or other assignments but are generally curriculum related. Additionally, performance indicators define the expected level of achievement for each of the performance measures. The teacher librarian develops the SLOs, performance measures, and indicators in collaboration with the classroom teacher. Throughout the year, the teacher librarian collects data that pertains to the SLOs for the identified group of students. At the end of the school year, the teacher librarian examines and reflects on the data to determine if the SLO has been met by the students and at what level. The last step is for the teacher librarian to identify possible SLOs for the next evaluation cycle (M. Unruh, personal communication, February 23, 2016).

Some school districts may have a list of goals, experiences, outcome statements, or other standards that the teacher librarian may be asked to use as measures of effective teaching. The digital portfolios for evaluating teacher effectiveness may also be organized to demonstrate local outcome-based competencies.

VALUE OF REFLECTION

In addition to data and artifacts that demonstrate teacher effectiveness, the digital portfolio is also a vehicle for reflection. The teacher librarian's goal for doing reflection is self-assessment and professional growth (Heath, 2004). Through reflection, teacher effectiveness is personally evaluated in terms of what worked and what did not, what needs to be modified to ensure increased student learning, what data collection tools and analysis should be used or changed, what performance measures and what indicators need to

be identified in the future, and how the teacher librarian can better demonstrate the competencies required by standards, domains, or student learning outcomes.

SUMMARY

The digital portfolio can be easily designed, viewed by others with privacy safeguards in place, and updated. It serves as a repository for teacher librarian artifacts and data that document teacher effectiveness. The digital portfolio can be easily shared with administration for evaluation purposes, as well as with others who might be interested in what takes place in schools every day, as long as the confidential student information is either password protected or identifying names/grades are deleted. Also, the digital portfolio can be used as a self-reflection and self-assessment tool to document professional growth. Finally, the use of digital portfolios for evaluation methods can certainly be extended to demonstrate the other four roles of the teacher librarian outlined by the American Association of School Librarians.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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