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# Showcasing Your Professionalism with an e-Portfolio

by Jessica Alvarado

Hiring and promotion decisions in all fields are made based on an evaluation of a candidate's demonstration of competence. Early childhood education is no different; being hired for a teaching or administrative position or being promoted requires you to showcase your knowledge, skills, and competencies. Early childhood professionals must be able to provide evidence of talent, an understanding of foundational knowledge of theory, teaching and learning strategies, and so on. With that being said, there are many professionals who have yet to learn how to showcase this information in a manner that validates their knowledge and skills. Portfolios can be the medium for collecting and displaying this information. With the recent integration of technology into all aspects of our lives, e-portfolios are a great platform to explore.

## What is an e-Portfolio and Why Should We Use This Format?

An e-portfolio is an electronic portfolio, one that uses an online format. In 2002, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education mandated that technology be integrated across teacher education curricula and placed an increased emphasis on the use of technology in demonstrating achievement (Foley, 2008).

Following this, there was an increased use of technology in the early childhood classroom, as well as in demonstrating competence in professionals. Over time, there has been increased support for the use of technology and it has become a popular and respected way in which to showcase one's own knowledge and skills as an early childhood educator. Further, professionals have found an e-portfolio to be a way to 'stand out' with prospective employers; likewise, employers value e-portfolios as a valuable way to learn more about an applicant before the formal interview. An e-portfolio:

- offers the same elements as a traditional portfolio (typically housed in a three-ring binder), but with better

organization, more content, and a more creative and interactive format.

- is more easily maintained than the traditional portfolio, which is paper-based and much more intensive to assemble.
- can be shared more easily and with more than one person at a time.
- offers protection against loss of materials because it is transported electronically.
- is easier to update, with just a few clicks of the mouse.

For example, if a candidate is applying for a teaching position at a center that follows a Reggio-inspired approach, he can add a Reggio-focused section. Or if a current teaching assistant wants to use her e-portfolio to advance to a lead teacher role, she can include a copy of her most recent performance review, a self-reflection of her development as a teacher, photographs of her interactions with children, and sample lesson plans she has created. These additions can illustrate an educator's dedication to the processes of reflection and ongoing learning, and even highlight video and audio clips of the applicant in action.

## Components of an e-Portfolio

A standard e-portfolio includes:

- educational background and training.
- a philosophy of teaching and learning.
- theoretical foundations.
- a preferred approach to early childhood.



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- teaching strategies.
- child development principles that guide your practice.
- knowledge of child assessment, desired outcomes, and standards.
- photographs of you in your work with colleagues and children, in your classroom.
- teaching credentials: college and university transcripts, training certificates, permits.
- awards and other forms of professional recognition.
- special talents: bilingual in Spanish or American Sign Language.
- other artifacts that document areas of expertise.

The e-portfolio can be as colorful and vibrant as you wish; the idea is to showcase your unique personality, while demonstrating competence. It should feature:

- a welcoming homepage with tabs that are easy to navigate and easy to read and follow. Be sure to use colorful pictures or something that will engage viewers.
- a letter explaining its purpose and structure.
- a résumé with contact information.
- working links.
- creative demonstrations.
- evidence of how you meet minimum and preferred qualifications for the position.
- information about yourself as a person: your personal interests, activities you enjoy, or even organizations where you volunteer.

## Getting Started

E-portfolios can be built in different online spaces. Many professionals use free online platforms and web space, such as Weebly, Google Sites, or Folio Space. These are easy to use and have tutorials and prebuilt tabs where you can simply upload your information. These are the quickest ways to get started, but be aware that some platforms may have limited space and could change their fee structure with little or no notice to their users. With that in mind, you should consider if it might be worth using a space that charges a low fee and does not run the risk of disappearing or raising prices. Search the internet to see what options are available on different platforms and consider the best fit for your purposes — before you begin building your portfolio.

Once you decide which platform you want to use, view the tutorials available to learn about the main features and how

to get started. View sample portfolios on the platform to get inspiration for what you might like to do. It is a good idea to make note of what you like from other portfolios and use those as inspiration for creating your own unique e-portfolio.

Because an e-portfolio is housed in an online space, you should put basic online safeguards in place. An e-portfolio should be controlled only by the person to whom it belongs and should include a unique username and password to avoid the possibility of someone else gaining access. Anything you include in your portfolio should legally belong to you or be used with permission. Everything should be authentic and reflect an accurate and honest representation of you. Be sure to back up your work on an external space in the event that the e-portfolio is lost, changed, or removed for any reason. It is important to remember that anything posted online could get into the wrong hands. Consider removing any identifying information that you do not feel comfortable sharing (you can always remove addresses and put a note that you are willing to share these if requested to do so). It is wise to regularly review the e-portfolio to ensure that it has not been altered in any way, especially right before you send it to someone to view. Update your password regularly and test all links to ensure accessibility for future use.

E-portfolios should be maintained regularly and updated as appropriate. It is a good idea to update contact information, work experience, and any additional trainings, certificate, or education, as these are all important components. Regular feedback from family, friends, colleagues, and peers can help you make improvements, correct errors in accuracy and readability, and continuously improve your presentation. The unique link for your e-portfolio should be tested regularly and prior to sharing with any potential employers to ensure it is accessible and appears the way you want it to. Remember that it is a good idea to showcase your volunteer work and any new certifications or professional development sessions you attend; these are all ways to show your passion and competence.

## Tips for a Strong Structure

Listed are some practical tips to get you started with your e-portfolio. You can begin with these simple ideas and build upon them as you continue to grow as a professional.

- **Homepage:** Remember that the Homepage is the landing spot, the place where you will make your first impression on prospective employers or where a current supervisor will review your progress in reaching your professional

goals. On this page you should have a professional picture of yourself, an introduction, and a short biography.

- **Philosophy, Approach, and Theory:** On this tab you want to include a statement of your philosophy of teaching and learning and approach to early childhood education, as well as any particular theories you follow. This should be done in about 250 words and be free of grammatical errors and may include photographs of you inside or outside the classroom that showcase your beliefs in action. For example, if you align with the Reggio approach, you might show a photo of children in your classroom exploring materials in the atelier (art studio). Be sure you have permission to use any photos before posting them.
- **Education and Professional Qualifications:** On this tab you will highlight your formal education, including both degrees and certifications and professional development training you've completed. Include scanned copies of certificates, along with dates of completion along with your résumé. You may also want to include information on a degree in progress, CPR and first aid training you've completed, or any special internships or community volunteering you have been involved with. It is also a good idea to provide a short reflection of your learning and future goals.
- **Samples/Artifacts:** On this tab provide copies of any work you are proud of and/or that have special meaning to you. For example, you may want to include sample lesson plans you have created along with photographs of the activity set-up, you teaching the lesson, or the children's work that resulted. Be sure to provide a reflection and an explanation for each of the artifacts you include. If you have any photographs or if you write a blog, you may want to share those as well.
- **Contact Information:** Don't forget to include your contact information in case a prospective employer wants to request more information or to set up an interview. Be sure your email account has a professional address (free from slang or anything inappropriate) and that it is an account you monitor regularly. Also, your phone number should be one that you are responsible for. Don't forget to leave a professional, personalized outgoing message in case you are unable to take the call.

## Standing out from the Pack

- Demonstrations of how your teaching reflects NAEYC accreditation or Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) standards.

- Reflections on 'hot topics' in early childhood (for example, the use of technology in the children's classroom) or areas in which you are passionate (e.g. trauma-informed care).
- Innovative activities you have designed for children.
- Meaningful ways to connect with families.

Building an e-portfolio provides you with an opportunity to stand out as a job applicant and/or as a candidate for promotion. It offers people a preview of your knowledge and skills in a way that is much more tangible than an interview. It shows that you are serious about your career and, more importantly, how and why your work with children and families is important to you. It displays your dedication and love of teaching and learning; it is a showcase for your passion. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, an e-portfolio aligns with what the field of early childhood education expects from professionals by using technology to demonstrate competence.

The e-portfolio can be a powerful tool for landing a new job or advancing in one's career in the field of early childhood education, as well as showing yourself all you have accomplished. Have fun with your e-portfolio and build away!

## Additional Resources

For more information on e-portfolios, please check out the following websites.

"The Benefits of Developing a Professional Portfolio":  
[www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201001/PriestWeb0110.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201001/PriestWeb0110.pdf)

Folio Spaces (free eportfolio):  
[www.foliospaces.org/](http://www.foliospaces.org/)

"How to Prepare a Professional Portfolio for a Preschool Teacher":  
<http://work.chron.com/prepare-professional-portfolio-preschool-teacher-16033.html>

Weebly (e-portfolio builder):  
[www.weebly.com/](http://www.weebly.com/)

"Which e-portfolio tool is best for you?":  
[www.iste.org/explore/ArticleDetail?articleid=31](http://www.iste.org/explore/ArticleDetail?articleid=31)