

ePortfolios In the Fine Arts Classroom: Mapping Out Your Students' Creativity

by Carl Dickerson

If the Pandemic taught us anything, it's that we as educators must shift our teaching to utilize technology as tools to help our students develop the skills needed in the real world, the digital world. But how can we use technology in a fine arts classroom? ePortfolios! ePortfolios have the possibility to open doors for your students to have a successful future, give them the confidence to share their learning with others, and ignite their creativity and imagination. At a time where most colleges and universities are embracing and requiring these digital portfolios, now is the time to help students expand their learning horizons and be prepared for the future. With the need for change in the educational system from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning, an ePortfolio can be a meaningful tool for teachers to assess what students have learned, where they are at in their learning path, and what knowledge and skills they still may need to access (Wickersham-Fish, 2006).

So, What is an ePortfolio?

An ePortfolio is a digital collection of work displayed that can include artwork, photos, video, writing, or anything else that a student would like to share that demonstrates their learning. Artifacts for their ePortfolios can be their finished projects after a unit, a compilation of work from throughout a semester, or special assignments from the teacher. It should be purposeful, reflective, and most important, showcases learning and growth over time. Think of it as an online portfolio of all the best work a student gathers together, that they choose to share, that represents them and their creativity and skills. What better way to show off your students' artwork than to have a digital archive of their work.

Why ePortfolios?

Competition in the workforce is huge. A career in the arts has very limited opportunities and the demands for qualified individuals is a high stake, cutthroat game. Students need a platform to exhibit their abilities that can be easily shared and evaluated and ePortfolios do just that. ePortfolios transform the student to the role of learner and their learning becomes student focused, driving them to seek knowledge and refine their skills through exploration and reflection (Bennett et al., 2021). The self-regulated learning that ePortfolios allow, demands that students are active participants in the entire learning process, and that they plan and monitor their learning, which enhances their questioning and expression (Segaran et al., 2021).

How to Get Started!

You don't need to be a website designer to build a good ePortfolio. In fact, all you need is some basic knowledge of Google applications such as Docs and Slides. If you know how to create a slide in Google, or have used their word processing app, then you too can build your own ePortfolio. Google offers a free web application called Google Sites that allows you to create your own ePortfolio in a matter of minutes, easy enough that a kid can do it. To get started, if you already have a Google account, log in, then visit: [sites.Google.com](https://sites.google.com).

Mapping It Out

So, you are in Google Sites, now what? Google provides several templates to help you in the creation of your ePortfolio that you can manipulate and transform into one that represents you best, one template is even titled "student portfolio". There you can decide what pictures you'd like to share for the header, the colors you want to use and the information you want to share, including an "About Me" section. Don't fret, Google knows the importance of privacy and provides the ability to set your students' ePortfolios to private so they are only shared by those that need

to see it, including teachers, parents, and their peers. You can even create a class page where you link all of your student ePortfolios on one page to allow for easy access. Utilizing Google's many features into the ePortfolio is simple.

Google Docs: This simple word processing app can be used by students to write scripts, essays, stories and more.

Google Slides: A presentation tool where students can share a slide presentation on their site that may document their steps in developing an artwork, or to present their research on various forms of theatre genres.

YouTube: Another Google app that allows students to share videos created that can showcase their acting skills, musical abilities, or directing skills.

These are just some of the applications that Google provides that students can use to create their artifacts and link them on their ePortfolio sites.

What to Include, What to Leave Out

There really isn't a set guideline to what a student should include in their ePortfolio. Utilizing ePortfolios in a fine arts classroom, students can take photos of their artwork, share links to their writing assignments, create videos that provide insight into their artistic process, the sky's the limit. An important thing to remind students is that they should be purposeful in choosing what they want to share. This collection of work should represent the best of themselves and their creativity. That means they need to decide which artifacts would best display their abilities and skills, as well as provide examples of growth. Ownership and voice are the predominant features of ePortfolios that engage and empower students and develop them into lifelong learners (Thibodeaux et al., 2019). Imagine going onto a student's ePortfolio and seeing their examples of self portraits from the beginning of the year and the end, maybe a video of the student performing a piece of music from one year to the next, or a link to a script they wrote for their final exam in theatre. Then, think about how what you are teaching your students now can help them to continue utilizing their ePortfolios after they leave your classroom. These students will have the opportunity to track their own learning of their artistic skills, accomplishments and learning through the rest of their educational journey and have something that can be shared on college applications or even when seeking a job. They will be ready with an extensive digital portfolio that displays their capabilities.

My Students Created Their ePortfolios, What Next?

Train your students to present their ePortfolios to others. Have a family ePortfolio night where students can sit with their families and present their ePortfolios, show them what they've been working on, the growth they've made and goals and accomplishments.

Sharing your new class ePortfolios with other teachers in your school can give them the push they need to integrate them into their own classrooms. Students can develop ePortfolios with various sections for the classes they are taking and to include the work they are doing in each.

Have your students give constructive feedback to their fellow classmates to make their ePortfolios stand out. Or give them the opportunity to collaborate with each other on projects that can be documented on their sites.

Use ePortfolios as an assessment of student learning. What better way to check for student understanding than reviewing their recorded process and demonstrating the skills they learned throughout.

Make the leap to integrating ePortfolios into the fine arts classroom now to give your students the skills to track their learning journey and lead them on the path to being ready for that always developing digital real world.

References

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