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# P rofessional Portfolios

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## A Collection of Articles

*Although portfolios can be time-consuming to construct and cumbersome to review, they also can capture the complexities of professional practice in ways that no other approach can.—Kenneth Wolf*

Please begin boarding the tour bus. Only one small suitcase per person is allowed. We will now embark on our annual ‘Magical Mystery Staff Development Tour.’ We’ll be visiting four sites throughout the year, and our seven-hour tour packages require that you get off the bus at 8:30 and re-board again at 3:30 each day.”

“This year’s tour includes the following packages: Stop 1 in February—Strategic Planning; Stop 2 in April—Integrated Curricula; Stop 3 in July—Problem-Based Learning; and Stop 4 in September—Performance Assessment.”

Sound familiar? In many staff development programs, just as on many European bus tours, everyone, regardless of their needs, prior knowledge, interests, or motivation, experiences the same thing. The programs are developed to comply with school goals, to meet state mandates, or to accommodate speaker availability. Too often teachers who do not have input into the decision-making process for what constitutes these staff

development programs feel that the information they get is irrelevant to their own classes. Thus, they sometimes are unresponsive to the ideas presented in these one-day workshops. Others may welcome learning new ideas but feel that one “quick shot” of a topic du jour is not sufficient to understand the key concept or to implement ideas successfully. Comments like, “Our entire staff has been trained in co-operative learning. We were ‘inserviced’ *one day* last March” are common. Rarely is a follow-up session scheduled or are attempts made to find out how many participants are actually applying what they have learned; rarely are participants provided with time to share what they are doing with peers. Moreover, these so-called “parachute drops” of staff development do not foster long-term transfer.

Structured bus tours, however, aren’t always bad. Anyone who visits Europe for the first time (like most beginning teachers) usually appreciates the fact that there is a knowledgeable guide (staff developer) who speaks all the languages (educational), who knows what places (hot topics) to visit, and who makes all the necessary arrangements (time, date, site, books). The tour provides security and routine since everything is new and since many aren’t really sure where they want to go anyway. Some prefer to leave their travel plans to someone else because they’re busy just trying to maintain their own classrooms (or, in the case of beginning teachers, just trying to establish teaching routines). Some have no idea where to go unless someone reviews the travel options with them.

The security of the “bus tour,” however, turns to boredom after a few years, and veteran travellers begin to search for ways “to get off the bus.” They yearn for the freedom of exploring on their own by strapping on a backpack and planning their own itinerary. Now that they’ve sampled the European tour, and have been exposed to all the options, they know which countries they want to return to, which ones they would rather avoid, and, most importantly, how long they want to spend in each country.

The analogy of the structure of the tour bus versus the freedom of the backpack journey describes the major difference between traditional staff development and a more focused and personalised staff development provided by a professional de-

velopment portfolio. Traditional staff development, in many cases, calls for someone else to plan the itinerary; therefore, someone else has ownership of the journey. With a professional portfolio, on the other hand, the learners have ownership of their own travel plans. They determine their own needs and then utilise self-initiation, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation to reach their professional goals.

To continue the analogy of a journey, the travellers can use their backpack (or portfolio) to collect mementos or artifacts of the trip. They can also keep a travel log or journal to document their thoughts throughout the journey and take pictures and videos of memorable places, key events, or important people to include in the final album of the trip. Along the way, they can share their experiences with their peers and mentors, who provide meaningful and ongoing dialogue throughout the journey.

A professional portfolio, therefore, is very similar to an individualised backpack tour of Europe. The travellers make the decisions about what goals they would like to reach that year. For example, one teacher may want to experiment with using Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences in designing lessons and assessments. Another teacher may want to research how other educators are using portfolios in the classroom. Still another teacher may want to try using problem-based learning with science students.

Once educators have determined their goals and purposes for the year, they plan their itinerary by researching what has already been done in the field *before* beginning to explore new ideas on their own. Along the journey they collect products, documents, processes, and reflect on their findings. They continually discuss these findings with peers and mentors as they share the mementos of their journey and anticipate their ETA (estimated time of arrival) for meeting their goal.

With the metaphor of the backpack journey in mind, the articles in this collection have been divided into three sections, each of which describes a different type of portfolio educators can develop to document their professional growth and development throughout their journey.

In section one, "Preservice Journey: The Academic Plan," tertiary teachers discuss the various programs they have established to incorporate portfolios into their undergraduate or