

DVD Portfolios as a Strategic Career Move

Scott L. Phillips
Assistant Professor of Music
Transylvania University
300 North Broadway
Lexington, KY 40515
(859) 233-8254
sphillips@transy.edu

While completing my doctorate in music education, part of my workload as a graduate assistant included observing student teachers. One of the requirements of the Education College was for each student teacher to create a digital portfolio of his or her work. The students were to author web pages containing examples of their work in the classroom, their teaching philosophy, a short bio, and a resume. Unfortunately, very few of the students had the skill or experience to author web pages. While there was a “Portfolio Boot Camp” that each of the students was to attend, in which they were given a crash course on using *Dreamweaver*, the limited experience combined with the student teachers’ limited schedules allowed very few of the students to ever get past an index page, much less to the point of having a viable product that any future employer could look at.

I wondered if there was a better way to create a digital record of student work that could be easily accessed by future employers? This paper will attempt to answer this question and propose a new option for the digital student teaching portfolio that overcomes many of the challenges inherent in Internet portfolios.

Why Portfolios?

Over the past two decades, there has been an increased interest in measurement and assessment throughout the educational establishment. Authors and instructors have focused attention on the measuring of achievement through various assessments, including performance-based assessments, observational techniques, peer appraisal and self-evaluation. One of the outgrowths of this interest has been the portfolio. A portfolio of student work was traditionally a compilation of various assignments, evaluations and artifacts that represented the work of that student. For university students completing a student teaching experience, the portfolio became a valuable tool to show future employers more about themselves and their experience than they could easily communicate in a standard resume. By the mid 1990s, most universities with teacher education programs were requiring their students to produce a student teaching portfolio.

I remember the first time I saw a student teaching portfolio. I was teaching choral and general music at Horizon Middle School in Kissimmee, Florida. As a member of the faculty, I had been asked to sit on a hiring committee that considered future teachers for employment in the coming school year. A candidate came to the committee with the usual cover letter, resume, and references. After the initial introduction, the candidate lifted a large three-ring binder onto the table and said that this was his student teaching portfolio. The binder contained hundreds of pages documenting everything the candidate had ever done related to teaching. There were lesson plans, examples of student work, copies of quizzes and exams given, etc. I remember that the

committee passed around the notebook and each member thumbed through a couple of the pages, but most of us didn't know what to make of the book. While it demonstrated that the candidate had spent considerable time compiling the various documents for the portfolio, the paper documents didn't answer the only question that was on all of our minds, "Can you really teach?"

Gone Digital

As technology has progressed, there has been a natural desire to digitize the student teaching portfolio. A digital portfolio generally consists of an Internet site or web page where documents and files are posted. The digital portfolio can present all the information contained in a paper portfolio, but it offers one major advantage: the potential to include video clips of the teacher in the classroom. If a picture is worth a thousand words, than being able to show a future principal or school administrator how you teach in the classroom is priceless. A future teacher's biggest and best selling point is their ability to teach and interact in the classroom, and digital portfolios allow future employers to observe this.

However, digital portfolios posted on the Internet have some serious limitations. First and foremost is the issue I observed as a graduate assistant: most students do not have the skill to create their own web pages. Although the software applications for web authoring continue to become more user-friendly with less-steep learning curves, I feel that this is still the major limiting factor for most student teachers. Once they compile the documents, artifacts and video clips for their portfolios, they are not able to put them on the Internet. Additionally, most universities only allow a small amount of web space for students to post their web pages. Even if students are able to create the pages, they rarely have enough space allotted to them to be able to include video clips of any significant length.

Because of these limitations, some university education programs have subscribed to services that enable students to create and post portfolios on the Internet. Some of these services provide templates that are easier for students to use, however the university pays the costs only until the student graduates. After graduation students often have to pay monthly subscription rates to keep their web portfolios active.

Computer learning systems have been used by some to post web portfolios. These include Blackboard, WebCT and TWIST, among others. These systems are used by many university professors and students already, and posting information and files is quite easily accomplished on these platforms. However, access to the programs is usually limited to the university community that purchases them, and a student teacher's future employers are not able to secure passwords and user IDs to login and view the student's portfolio.

A Solution

This past fall, I began working with my student teachers to create digital portfolios on DVD. I ordered a DVD burner for my office computer, and after having learned about Vegas video editing software at last year's ASCUE conference, I purchased the Vegas + DVD software bundle. My students and I quickly learned to use the software and by the end of the semester, we were using my office computer to create professional-looking DVDs.

Digital student teaching portfolios have many advantages over web-based portfolios. First, the DVD is compact and portable. It can be easily carried to any interview or mailed to a prospective employer. Second, the DVD can hold an enormous amount of data. With a capacity of 4.6 GB, and a potential of four hours of video, there is plenty of room for video clips, audio files, resumes, pictures, etc. Third, anyone with a DVD player can access the portfolio. Most schools have at least one DVD player, and many new computers do as well. Even if a school is woefully behind the times, nearly everyone has a DVD player in their home. Last, the DVD architect software is easy to learn and to use. Student can simply select from preset themes, drop video files into menus, and create submenus and bookmarks (see Figures 1-3). Students with more computer experience or interest can explore numerous plug-ins, create their own themes, and add audio and animated video thumbnails.

Way of the Future?

For several years, education professors, career placement centers and technology specialists have worked together as they attempt to digitize the student teacher portfolio. However, it has been difficult to find a viable medium through which these portfolios can easily and efficiently be created, organized, and presented to future employers. The DVD portfolio created with DVD architect offers a solution that is easy to distribute, easy to create, inexpensive to duplicate, and capable of storing and presenting a great deal of information. Additionally, DVD players, copiers, and burners will likely continue to be more readily available and less expensive, making this format an even more logical choice. Student teachers who present their future employers with DVD portfolios will have a strong advantage in the job search. Not only will they demonstrate their technological skills, but they will also allow their future employers to see their outstanding teaching – the most important message they can deliver.

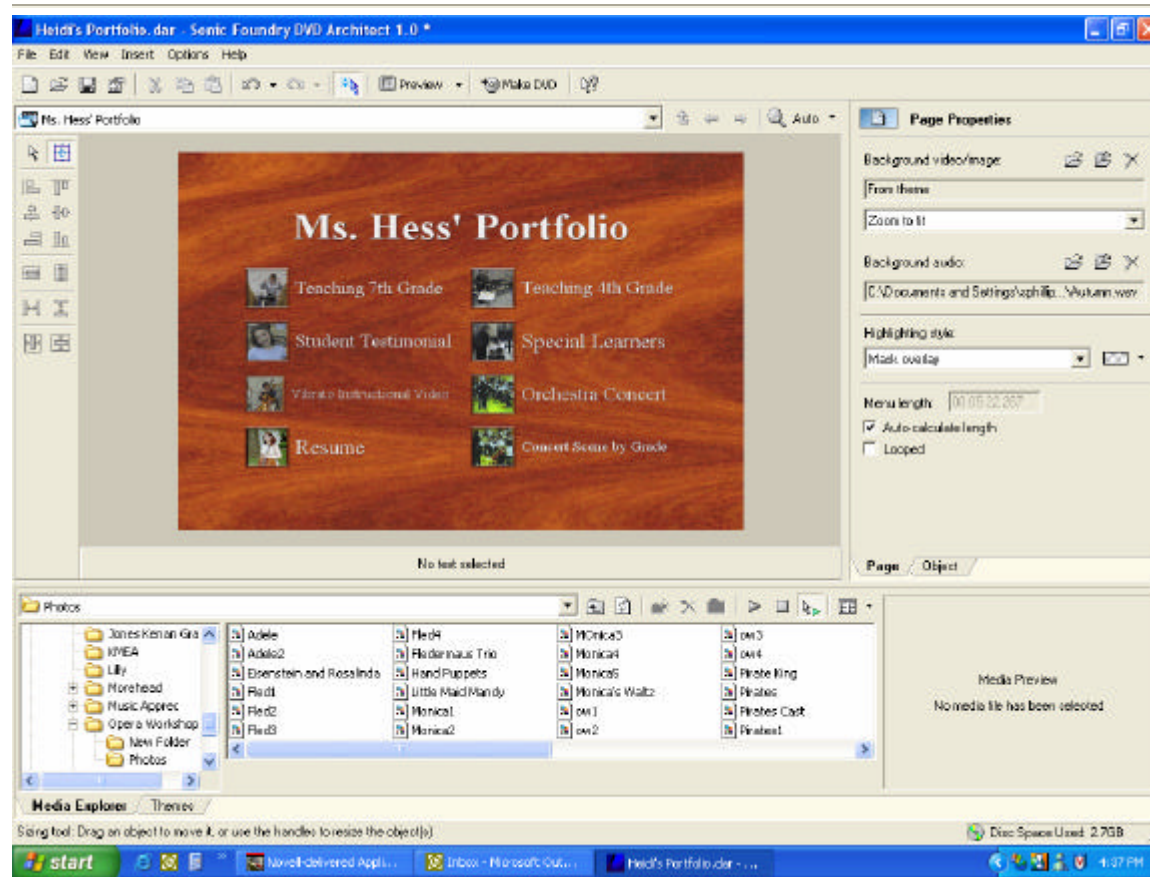


Figure 1. Theme Selection Menu in DVD Architect



Figure 2. Main Menu Page of a Student Teaching Portfolio, as Previewed in DVD Architect

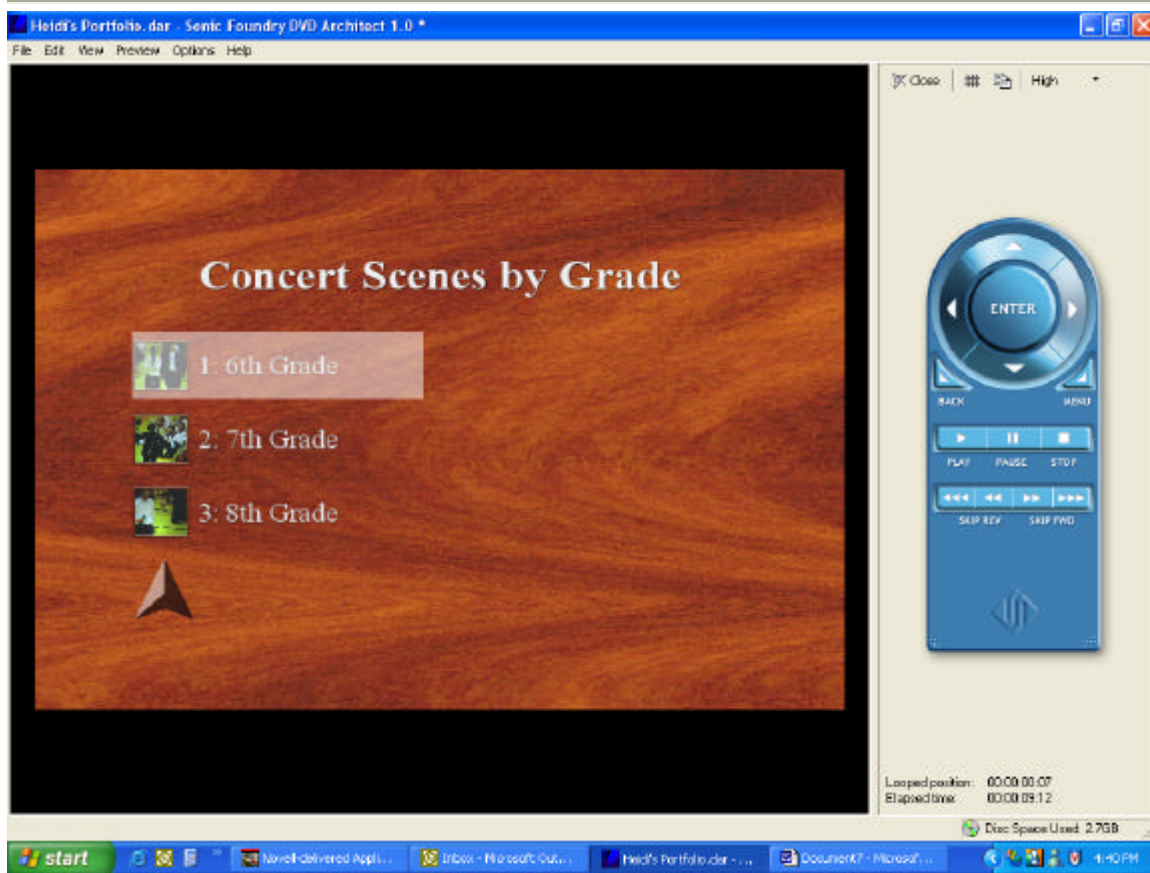


Figure 3. Scene Selection Menu Created in DVD Architect