

# Dust Off the Portfolios

## How to Create a Dynamic Showcase of Your Preservice Teachers' Skills

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*Applying an old idea in a new context creates a valuable capstone experience for physical education teacher education students.*

**B**efore graduating, college students studying art traditionally host a senior art show displaying the works included in their portfolio. Why not borrow this tradition of a senior art show and apply it to physical education? Currently, most institutions of higher education ask their physical education teacher education (PETE) candidates to prepare portfolios, hard copy or electronic, as a graduation requirement. This article will explain how physical education departments can shake the dust off these portfolios and create a dynamic “showcase” of PETE candidates’ work, thus transitioning seniors from preservice to professional educators.

### **Scenes from a Showcase**

The climate in the room is electrifying, comparable to the start of a play before the curtain rises. The stage is set with chairs in the center of the room facing a portable screen and with displays on the perimeter proudly representing the senior PETE candidates’ growth towards professionalism. Behind the scene, the computer and projector are set to start without a glitch. The performers of this production, the PETE candidates, who normally dress in the regulation college sweats and tee shirts, are unrecognizable in their professional dress. Attendees enter the room and are warmly welcomed and escorted by a PETE candidate to view the displays. Enthusiasm is exhibited along with professional conversation as the candidate explains the displays. After the attendees view the exhibits, the candidate guides them to the buffet table at the back of the room, where they are graciously encouraged to fill their plate and obtain a seat in the center “theater” to eat their meal. When the room is filled, the curtain rises and the showcase begins. Candidates are introduced, an outline of the presentation is given, and each pair of candidates delivers their presentation. During the delivery of each presentation, the candidates encourage the attendees to ask questions or clarify ideas and become engaged participants. As the production comes to the end, the curtain is lowered. Attendees are delighted with the performance and are fully impressed by the vast display of knowledge they have observed. A sense of accomplishment fills the candidates. Bravo! Bravo! Candidates take a bow and now feel ready for the final act, student teaching.

## Why Have a Showcase?

In the past, university professors and school personnel interviewing PETE candidates were the only individuals who viewed the candidates' portfolio or body of work. To add purpose in developing meaningful and quality work by the candidates throughout the PETE program, more opportunities are needed for others to view the candidate's work. A showcase is an excellent way to accomplish this. During their last semester on campus before student teaching, PETE candidates' works are dynamically formatted through displays and presentations in a showcase.

Additionally, the showcase acts as a capstone experience in which the PETE candidates can gain confidence in moving from candidacy to professional status. Some of the showcase benefits for candidates include (1) providing experience in giving a presentation to a professional group, (2) validating their work in all PETE courses, (3) increasing the quality of their effort in the PETE program, and (4) motivating them to keep and organize their assignments with the professional quality needed for public display.

The showcase operates on the same premise, a demonstration of mastery, that underlies the requirements for a doctoral degree. As Wiggins and McTighe (1998) explain,

The doctoral candidate not only must write a thorough dissertation, but also defends it in an oral exam. That is, the written thesis alone is not considered sufficient evidence of mastery. The candidate is confronted with challenges, counterarguments, and requests for commentary and critiques on other points of view. (pp. 85-86)

## Components of the Showcase

There are two major components of the showcase, displays and presentations. The visual displays are clearly labeled with signs and are set up around the perimeter of the room. Attendees may view the displays at their leisure before or after the presentations, or they may be accompanied by a PETE candidate who can explain the displays. Suggested displays of PETE candidates' works include the following:

- Videos of each candidate's teachings in the public schools shown on televisions or laptops in a digitally edited movie format.
- Photographic displays of candidates teaching in the schools. These are mounted on foam board and labeled with the candidate's name, what he or she is teaching, and the location of the teaching.
- Each candidate's written lesson plans in a binder organized by grade levels and units.
- Authentic assessments such as skill tests, fitness testing, and written tests, conducted by the candidates and placed in binders.
- Authentic evaluations and electronic grading that candidates conducted on school children, with the children's last names excluded.
- Field experience documentation in each candidate's binder.



Photos courtesy of the authors

Two preservice teachers give a presentation that showcases their work.

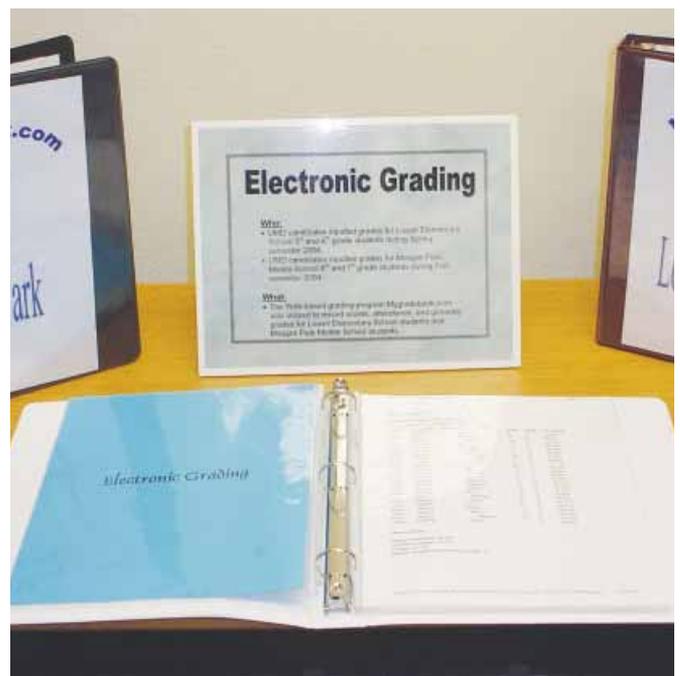
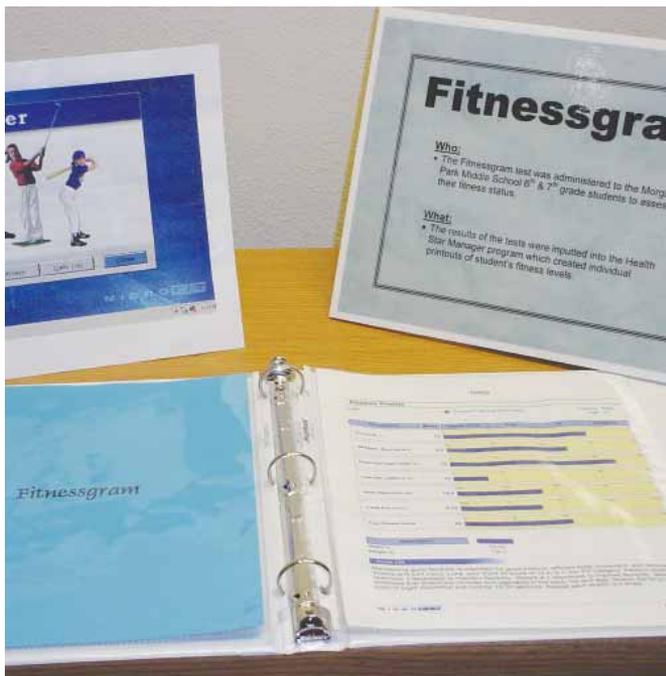
In order to promote a collaborative rather than competitive environment, all candidates' documents are grouped together in each of the above areas, rather than giving each candidate a table for display of individual works.

The second component of the showcase involves a formal presentation by the PETE candidates. All presentations are given in pairs in order to ease the stress level of the candidates and to accommodate time limits. All presentations are supported by well-organized and polished PowerPoint slides. To start the presentation process, a theme is decided upon by the candidates and the professor, with each pair of candidates presenting an element of the theme. The presentations are created, developed, and organized by the PETE candidates, with approval from their professor. One presentation theme of the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD), for example, was *The Process of Turning Candidates into Teachers*. This theme consisted of three elements: one pair presented on the *Process to Improve Teaching*, another presented on the *Assessment Process*, and yet another presented on the *Electronic Portfolio Process*. Candidates are expected to present at a professional level, and they need to incorporate their actual work into the presentation. Depending on the number of candidates, presentations need to be long enough—perhaps 15 to 20 minutes—to show the candidate's mastery of the material. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) describe how such mastery may be judged:

To judge an understanding of how someone makes sense of something, we typically need the person to explain it to us. The quality of an explanation depends in part upon its clarity and in part upon the quality of the evidence and the reasoning. (p. 80)

## Mechanics of Creating a Showcase

The showcase should be a component of a senior-level PETE course. The designated course should be one that all PETE candidates are required to take immediately before beginning student teaching. The showcase is presented during finals week. A one-and-a-half to two-hour block of time is needed



Showcase displays, at tables on either side of the room, might include (clockwise from upper left) assessment materials, video clips showing the preservice teacher in action, examples of electronic grading, and documentation of the use of Fitnessgram.

for the showcase presentations, so the scheduled final time provides an adequate time allotment. In addition, professionals such as deans, department heads, professors, public school principals, and teachers are more available to attend during finals week.

A large room is needed to host the showcase. Tables should be set up around the perimeter of the room to accommodate the displays. The center of the room should be set up in theater seating for the audience to watch presentations. The room must contain a quality projector and screen to display PowerPoint presentations.

Six weeks are needed for PETE candidates to organize the

showcase. Allow part of class time during the last six weeks of the semester to create, develop, and organize the showcase. After the showcase is developed, every PETE candidate should be assigned a job and given its due date, which may be updated every class meeting. Most work for the showcase is done outside of class, thus class time is used to organize the work, to verify work completion, and to assign additional tasks. The week before the showcase, professors should allow candidates enough time to practice their presentations and finalize their displays in class.

To promote attendance, invitations to the showcase need to be sent out in the following suggested order: An email

Table 1. Student Comments About the Showcase

The following comments come from several 2005 graduates of the University of Minnesota Duluth.

#### The Structure

- “The structure of the showcase allowed me to make a professional presentation to public school teachers, professors, the dean of the college of education, and peers.”—Mike
- “The showcase provided a platform for us to come together as a group and forced us to work together because it was a reflection of everyone’s work.”—Jeanne

#### The Experience

- “After the showcase was over, I felt like I had accomplished something, that I had turned the corner from being a student to being a professional....I got to explain the displays to the physical education department head. Someone of that stature showing interest in me was outstanding and gave me the feeling of being professional.”—Steve
- “As I looked around the room after completing the showcase, I felt great pride in the work that I had accomplished as a student. It was an amazing feeling for me.”—Mike

#### Overall Benefits

- “I feel that I really benefited a lot from the showcase because we were able to show all of the accomplishments that we made throughout the years. I came out of it with a great deal of knowledge that I can use in the future when I teach.”—Annie
- “My college graduation ceremony was great, but the PETE showcase was the true celebration of what I had learned during my college experience.”—Jeanne
- “This experience provided a good lead-up in presenting myself for a physical education position in a school district. It helped me in my job interview for the elementary physical education position that I currently hold.”—Mike

announcement should be sent out eight weeks before the showcase to inform attendees to reserve the date and time; hard copy invitations should be sent out and posters should be hung six weeks before the showcase; email reminders should be sent out one week before the showcase. Send invitations to deans, department heads, professors in both physical education and education, public school principals and teachers who worked with PETE candidates, parents of PETE candidates, and all PETE majors. All junior PETE majors should be required to attend so they are better prepared to create their own showcase next year. The authors of this article recommend against having people RSVP, as it sometimes hinders them from attending.

The showcase should be conducted at lunch time so attendees are more available. To further entice attendance, a free buffet luncheon should be provided for attendees to eat as they listen to the presentations. Food is a necessity at a showcase, as it is guaranteed to increase attendance.

#### Overall Benefits of the Showcase

The showcase is a memorable and worthwhile way for PETE candidates to end their college experience. The candidates work as a team to develop, organize, and produce the showcase and the showcase becomes a true reflection of the candidates’ abilities. The showcase allows PETE candidates to gain a greater depth of understanding and knowledge in their subject area, and it allows them to see their work professionally displayed, which is extremely fulfilling. The

presentation also gives the candidates a professional venue to demonstrate their abilities, to be asked questions by professionals, and to expertly defend their statements. Table 1 presents several students’ comments on the experience and its benefits.

An unexpected benefit of the 2004 showcase at UMD was the response from the students’ parents. Nearly every parent attended, many traveling great distances to do so. They were filled with pride at the accomplishments of their children and were very vocal in supporting the teacher education program at the university. The showcase is one of the best public relations events a physical education department can embrace.

Overall, a showcase builds confidence in a student’s ability as a professional. The candidates come away from the experience feeling accomplished and ready for the next step in their career: student teaching and professional interviews.

#### Reference

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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