Professional Portfolios for the Correctional Officers

Geoffrey Cowan

Geoffrey Cowan is Senior Correctional Officer with the NSW Department of Corrective Services, Parramatta Court Escort Security Unit

Abstract

The use of Professional Portfolios in professions is increasing and their use by Correctional Officers should not be disregarded. These documents provide the holder with a definitive history of their achievements, track record, failures, and professional development. The writer believes that with increased use of such documents in the field of nursing and allied medical sciences, such a transfer of the theory of portfolios could be made to the corrections industry. Such a document can demonstrate not only the ability of the staff member for promotion and development opportunities, but also additionally, the writer believes that it can be translated to the development of RPL and RCC for awards under the AQTF.

The Learning Portfolio and the Presentation Portfolio for Correctional Officers

This article will address two specific types of professional portfolio, namely the Presentation Portfolio and the Learning Portfolio. A discussion of the concepts of the portfolio will be followed by a comparative analysis of the two main types.

Concept and Purpose of the Professional Portfolio

To discuss aspects of the professional portfolio, it would be prudent to undertake an explanation of the purpose of the professional portfolio. Campbell et al (2007 P 3-4) defines a portfolio as:

“an organized, goal-driven documentation of ... professional growth and achieved competence ...”

Retallick (2000 p 12) defines the professional portfolio as:

“structured collection of teacher and student work created across a diverse contexts of time, framed by reflection and enriched through collaboration ... aim for advance(ment) of teacher and student learning”

Campbell et al (2007) does define the professional portfolio in the context of teaching but the professional portfolio does not limit itself to that context. Retallick tends to expand the definition that the portfolio is develop over time and several contexts, thus demonstrating the use of the same portfolio over several roles including employment, volunteer work and study. The Professional Portfolio as defined does allow for the collection of information that sows a staff member's growth in a given profession or number of professions. In Australia, such a portfolio does provide an opportunity for students undertaking vocational & educational training for gaining Recognition of Prior Learning/Recognition of Current Competency (RPL/RCC) for awards under the Australian Qualification Training Framework. But this use is underpinned by the ultimate purpose of the professional portfolio.

The RPL/RCC process does require the collection of information in the form of documents, awards, reports, tasks completed and any evidence that purports to demonstrate competence for the granting of awards under the AQTF. The Professional Portfolio is a process that allows for the collection of all information that relates an overall competence within a profession. Thus this explanation demonstrates the larger scale of the professional portfolio.
At this point, the reader will be offered a short discussion on the concept of “profession” and thus underpinning the concept of the professional portfolio. Sredl et al (1987 P49) outlined a number of criteria for the professional in the Human Resource Development “profession”. This set of criteria is relevant to this discussion as the HRD profession is directly related to the teaching profession. Sredl et al sees professionals as identifiable by their stages of development. This criteria is related to both the previously stated definition from Campbell et al (2007) and other definitions that will be provided further on in this essay. Specifically, Sredl cites the following criteria:

- High level of training & development (most Correctional officers hold VET qualifications and many are gaining university awards)
- Specialised Knowledge (most correctional officers do possess a degree of specialist skills in addition to the other staff employed within the correctional industry)
- Self organisation and membership of professional organisations
- Acceptance of Code of Ethics or Code of Conduct

These four criteria can be applied to all professions. This criterion now underpins one aspect of Professional Portfolio, being that of professional development and the acquisition of knowledge within that profession.

Campbell et al (2007) definition, as previously stated was inclined towards the teaching profession, but professional portfolios can be used for any profession. Oerman (2002) outlined a process for the development of a nursing portfolio but defined the portfolio in a greater depth to include “experiences and career path” (P 73). Oerman’s focus in regards to this definition is specific towards the nursing profession, but assimilation the criteria stated by Sredl et al and Oerman, the reader can gain an appreciation that the professional portfolio can be utilised in all professions. It is also stated by Sredl et al (1987 P 52) that no two professionals apply their professions in the same way: hence it could be assumed that no two professional portfolios are the same. Luescher (2002) supports this by stating the use of professional portfolios in the architecture profession

The Professional Portfolio can be used for any profession, but what is its purpose? The purpose of the Professional portfolio is simply a “showcase” (Oermann 2002 P 73) of all work, accomplishments and background that can be utilised in a number ways. Luescher (2002) sees the professional portfolio as a “marketing” tool for the professional. This showcase or marketing tool is an essentials component of the professional in terms of his/her skills, competence and track record within the profession. Thus, like a resume, the portfolio demonstrates competence as opposed to the resume just stating competence.

The portfolio has the purpose of demonstrating competence, a tool that is used for the aim of gaining promotion within the profession, career mobility or more strategically, addressing a reflection of the professional’s skills. This reflection is seen as strength for the professional in deducing the professional strength and weaknesses, identifying gaps in competence, thus allowing the professional to develop plans to close these gaps (Luecher 2002 p 353).

A stronger practical application for the Professional Portfolio is the development of the RPL Portfolio. As previously stated, both these portfolios are different yet are very similar in the achievement of goals such as the accreditation of the student for AQTF awards, which ironically, can gain promotion and assist with career mobility (NCVER paper Op 287 2007). Recent advice to the National Quality Training Council also stated that the development of portfolios for RPL
should be included in the further development of the Training Packages for the Assessment & Workplace Training packages. This statement could predict that portfolio development will become a major feature of the National Training Package and thus ensure that all learners will need to develop a portfolio in some form. Within the Corrections industry, a number of qualifications are now available which would see many of the competencies gained through the RPL/RCC process.

Hence it can be seen that the professional portfolio is a document that all professionals should not only adopt for the purposes of further development in relation to the AQTF, but also on a greater scale for the collection of data in regards to their employment, achievements and to identify their “gaps” in professional skills & competence.

The Roles of Correctional Officers

In today’s correctional industry, Correctional Officers tend to come from wider backgrounds than 30 years ago. Traditionally an Officer came from a military or other law enforcement related background. But now, they are recruited from a wide base of demographics and education levels. The Primary Training Course is the “equalizer” in bring together all skills held by the Trainee Correctional Officer and bringing those skills to a set national level as defined in the Certificate III Correctional Practice, an AQTF qualification. But after the award of this qualification, little further is undertaken by the trainee and subsequently all increments and promotions are undertaken with little regard for performance management other than review of sick leave and general performance. This can provide a “gap” in relation to promotion boards of a set level or standard of how the Officer has performed, generally leaving this to references from Senior Officers and supervisors and performance at an interview, coupled with an Application defined around set criteria.

I propose that this process can be improved with the use of the professional portfolio by Officers. Such a document can indicate the development of the officer from the context of trainee to the performance of the officer in supervisory positions, with reference to training & developmental activities, membership of committees, innovation and other activities and overall performance. This is the context that I wish to present the concept of the professional portfolio.

Types of Professional Portfolios

This article has already stated one type of possible type of professional portfolio, being the RPL Package for the gaining of qualifications under the AQTF. But this is not the portfolio that is being discussed in the context of this paper. Essentially, a number of broad examples of portfolios are available for use by professionals. Each of these portfolios fit a specific purpose and role, which will be the main thrust of this paper and the consideration for use by correctional officers.

Of interest is the need for the creation of portfolios in several forms. The use of paper portfolios is still evident in regards to formal presentations and interviews, but increasing use of e-portfolios, or electronic portfolios with interactive video and scanned documents and photos of competencies are being used. The use of e-portfolios in such professions as photography and architecture would appear to be a normal approach (Luescher 2002 p 359). With the description of e-portfolios in mind, the reader will now be provided with a summary of the basic types of portfolios.

The three main types of professional portfolios include (according to Campbell et al 2007 & Denzine 2001):
• The **working portfolio**

This portfolio is the main portfolio as it holds all artefacts or data of the professional achievements. As the professional gains further experience in various roles and employment, the portfolio would be expanded to include all major projects, units of competency, reflection material and data stored on computer mass storage devices. This would include reports, assessments, training certificates & transcripts etc,

• The **Presentation Portfolio**

This type of portfolio is used for specific purposes such as interviews and show casing specific skills that have been summarised. This would include commendations, training certificates of major courses etc

• The **Learning Portfolio**

(or “Student Portfolio” & “Teaching Portfolio”)

This portfolio demonstrates the professional or students progression. This would include all aspects of workplace assignments & assessments, assignments, essays, general training notes etc

These three examples demonstrate the various types of portfolios but also superficially show that the roles and purposes are different. This will lead to the discussion in relation to the difference between the: Learning and Presentation Portfolios. Retallick (2000 p 12) cites further similar types of portfolios that are used internationally for various purposes:

• The Learning Portfolio – promoting professional reflection over the learning & development process

• The Assessment Portfolio – demonstrating effectiveness in regards to professional effectiveness

• Employment Portfolio – provides interview panels with information regarding suitability for employment

Retallick’s perspective tends to demonstrate the approach taken by authors in the literature review that portfolios, as useful as they are, tend to be in three types, one for reflection, one for assessment and one for the promotion. This defines the portfolio as a useful tool in the professional development of the corrections professional.

**The Learning Portfolio vs the Presentation Portfolio**

As previously stated, there are differences between the Learning Portfolio and the Presentation Portfolio. Denzine (2001 p 497) defines the differences between Learning portfolio and presentation portfolio being the purpose and content. Combining the definitions provided, the following summary is provided:

The Learning Portfolio can be defined as:

> A collection of data or artefacts over a period of time that demonstrates reflection, gaps and competence, with a timeline showing skills gained and competence achieved

The Presentation Portfolio can be defined as:

> A summary of specific artefacts for a specific purpose such as promotion, career mobility or accreditation

From these two definitions, it would seem appropriate that the two types of portfolios would be tools that all professionals should use and develop. Firstly, the Learning Portfolio is a tool that all professionals should adopt in the course of their career. Such a document would hold relevant artefacts as stated by Seldin (1993)
All artefacts that relate to the professional’s personal participation such as workplace projects, courses taught, evaluations undertaken.

Assessments and references from supervisors, managers, peers demonstrating performance. Included in this are performance management reports, course reports.

The contribution to the profession. This would include articles written, both peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed, book reviews, research published.

Self evaluation and assessments of the work undertaken.

Course results of professional development courses undertaken, both university, AQTF related and short courses.

Other related activities such as volunteer work and training, personal achievements and hobbies, all references gathered over time.

E-portfolio articles such as presentations, web site related matters, photographs and images in regards to professional development.

The purpose of all these artefacts for the professional to gain an appreciation of their development from the commencement of their initial training to current day situation. The portfolio should be organised in a manner that collates all the information into relevant areas specific for the professional. As previously stated, all portfolios are different, just the purpose of the portfolio requires a definite context. In this regard, the learning portfolio would constant all artefacts, collected and collated in a manner to allow for retrieval. Thus the Learning Portfolio would be the basis of formation of all other portfolios, including the presentation portfolio.

Babin et al (2002 38) supports this list of contents but tends to expand to include learning & teaching philosophies (for teachers) and specific responsibilities. Babin tends to sway towards teaching professions, but the list provided can be utilised for all professions. This is the strength of the Learning Portfolio; it requires all artefacts to be assessed for placement. The theme for the correctional officer is: nothing is disregarded, nothing is thrown out, and copies are kept of everything and kept secure in a collated manner.

Brown et al (2003) supports the premise that portfolios, particularly learning portfolios, can increase their effectiveness and that of the organisation. Brown et al’s research demonstrated that portfolio “construction” allowed for not only self-reflection between the learner and the school, but can allow for self-reflection between the learner and his/her career in general. In particular, learning portfolio development allowed for the development of critical thinking skills. Brown et al (2003) cited as result of her research that employers appreciated employees with reasoning and thinking skills. Brown’s et al approach to this research has highlighted firstly a major resultant effect of learning portfolios, that they assist develop employees with critical thinking skills and these skills subsequently produce better organisations within a global economy (Brown et al 2003 p 1). Overall, three major findings of Brown’s research indicated that students that developed a learning portfolio produced a greater appreciation of there skills and competencies: secondly, together with critical thinking skills, other skills such as communication, reflection and organisation skills were also developed: thirdly, students had a greater understanding of there role including the use of mentors, work experiences and value of teamwork (Brown 2003 p 5) These findings indicate that the development of a learning portfolio to be effective tool for all professions.
The other portfolio of interest in this discussion is the Presentation Portfolio. As previously stated, the Learning Portfolio is a critical tool in the professional development of the professional. But the submission of the learning portfolio for the purposes of RPL/RCC accreditation, promotion or seeking other employment opportunities is not viable due to the nature of the learning portfolio. A presentation portfolio is simply that, for the purposes of presentation. In this regard, the format of the presentation portfolio is more relevant and aligned with the need. In other words, if the student is seeking RPL Accreditation from a Registered Training Organisation in a training package, and a portfolio of achievements needs to be submitted, that format will need to be aligned with the competencies were RPL is being requested. Whereas, a portfolio for the purposes of interview would be aligned with the role that the student is seeking. Moseley (2005 p 58) states that more administrators in US Schools are seeking Presentation Portfolios in interviews and teacher accreditation to evaluate levels of proficiency in skills. Mosely also supports the writers previous statement in relation to the format of portfolio, by stating that research “primarily focused on the ‘information’ provided in the portfolio. Little research according to Mosely has been conducted on the actual ability of the portfolio as a tool, in particular the presentation portfolio.

Mosley (2004) cited Wolf (1991 p 130) that the portfolio is more than a container of data, it “embodies an attitude that assessment is dynamic” and that “performance is based on multiple sources of evidence collected over time in authentic settings”. This indicates the difference between the learning portfolio and the presentation portfolio in a succinct way. The learning portfolio does embody these taints of “multiple sources” but the Presentation Portfolio does demonstrate the attitudes. This can be taken one step further by Mosely (2004) when she cites Windsor et al 1955) that the presentation portfolio is a “fusion of processes and product” made from “reflection, selection, rationalisation and evaluation”

This paper will now draw together the information that has been put forward and provide a summary analysis of the difference between the Learning Portfolio and the Presentation Portfolio.
## Comparative Analysis of the Portfolio

The summary table will draw together the main differences for the reader:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>The Learning Portfolio</th>
<th>The Presentation Portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>A collection of data or artefacts over a period of time that demonstrates reflection, gaps and competence, with a timeline showing skills gained and competence achieved</td>
<td>A summary of specific artefacts for a specific purpose such as promotion, career mobility or accreditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role</strong></td>
<td>Provide on going collection of evidence of a professional development, achievements, reflection</td>
<td>A summary designed for promotion, accreditation or other specific purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Components</strong></td>
<td>Has all information in a collected and collated manner demonstrating organisation and growth through the profession. Would include all documents, reports, assessments, development opportunities, goals and reflective material</td>
<td>Have similar contents to the Learning Portfolio but more summarised and specific for the purposes of interview. Components may also be defined by the purpose of the Portfolio, such as a RPL application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Designed For</strong></td>
<td>The Student – The Professional - the Teacher etc</td>
<td>Promotion Panel – Accreditation Board – Interview Panel, RPL Assessor – Performance Management Review – Evaluation Assessment – Membership of Professional Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General role</strong></td>
<td>Acts as a &quot;CV&quot; or Resume of the students track record together with the Working Portfolio</td>
<td>Acts as the showcase for the student of his/her achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development</strong></td>
<td>Should be developed as a normal part of professional development in conjunction with the Working Portfolio, from which the Learning Portfolio is developed from</td>
<td>Can only be developed as a result of the creation of a learning portfolio, gaps in this portfolio would be closed from the Working Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When Portfolio development is commenced</strong></td>
<td>From the beginning of initial training in conjunction with the Working Portfolio</td>
<td>When required for promotion, career mobility, accreditation, RPL Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When Portfolio development ceases</strong></td>
<td>Will proceed throughout career until retirement</td>
<td>When careers or professions change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Base Format</strong></td>
<td>Initially the format will be basic including initial information such as academic results and initial performance reviews, assessments and underpinning information such as volunteer work and possible previous professional history. As the professional grows within the profession, the portfolio will grow and a new level of collation will develop around the standards of the profession or via a format developed by the professional. That format will then include post-graduate training, awards, achievements, supervisory &amp; management experience, competencies.</td>
<td>This format will be developed around the requirements of the actual purpose of the portfolio. For example, if the portfolio is required for promotion, the collation will be centred on the position. An RPL portfolio will be centred on the standards set by the training package. Normally this portfolio would be adapted as required, but time effort would be needed for the specific purpose. This portfolio can only be effectively developed from a planned and collated Learning Portfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From this table of differences, the reader will be able to deduce the following:

- A difference between the Learning Portfolio and the Presentation Portfolio exists.
- That the Presentation Portfolio, being the “show case” of the student for major occurrences in professional life and the Learning Portfolio is a on-going “work in progress”. Both of these portfolios also depend on the artefacts that are placed in the Working Portfolio, which acts as a foundation for both types of Portfolios.

This difference indicates that the professional should have a learning portfolio from the beginning of his/her career, ideally at the commencement of initial training. This portfolio is in addition to the working portfolio which should have been commenced perhaps during High School education. This learning portfolio will remain a “work in progress” expanding to include all achievements, plans, developments, awards both academic and merit based. Included in this portfolio is the requirement to identify gaps in professional development and what steps were taken to close these identified gaps. As the learning portfolio is developed, it will no doubt be changed in regards to collation of the information. Other changes will be the type of information collected as the professional grows within the career. Such information as awards, performance management review, book reviews, academic papers, research and new programs developed would then start to demonstrate a new level of competence within the profession.

In summary, the learning portfolio is an essential tool for the development of a professional career. It demonstrates all the achievements and competency of the professional and allows the development of further essential skills such as critical thinking. The critical think and reflection will then allow for the identification of gaps and possible “road maps” for the closing of those gaps. When the professional is then seeking further advancement in the profession, which included further recognition of skills, professional membership or career mobility, then the presentation Portfolio is grown from the Learning Portfolio. The premise being that the Presentation Portfolio is dependent on the Learning Portfolio.

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Geoffrey Cowan is a Senior Correctional Officer of 14 years standing, currently stationed at the Parramatta Justice Precinct, NSW Corrective Services. He has been employed in various areas of the DCS including Long Bay Correctional Complex, Corrections Intelligence Group, State Investigative & Security Groups and Court Escort & Security Unit. He holds undergraduate degrees in Training & Human Resource Development and Masters degrees in Criminology and Education. He was awarded a Commissioners Excellence award in 2007 for his academic achievements.