

Portfolio: A Professional Development and Learning Tool for Teachers

By

¹Babar Khan and ²Salima Begum

¹Deputy Project Coordinator and ²Professional Development Teacher
Aga Khan University-Professional Development Centre North,
Gilgit-Pakistan

Abstract

Professional development of teachers is considered a source to enhance teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. To meet this purpose teacher education institutions use a variety of ways for teachers' development programs. Mostly these ways and strategies are used in short and long programs where teachers are provided opportunities to learn knowledge and skills outside classroom and schools. The purpose of these courses is to enhance the teachers' capacity and improve students' learning outcomes. However, most of these learning and strategies are limited to the training centers and teachers face challenges while implementing the learning in their respective schools. Teachers generally consider the professional development centers and training centers as the only source of professional learning. They ignore the importance of workplace learning and experiential learning (Kolb, 1981) which is possible through reflection on their own practices. This study focused on the role of portfolios for professional learning of the course participants in a module of master programme in a private university. The study was conducted using the qualitative mode of research and was carried out at private sector university of Pakistan with six course participants from different contexts and three faculty members. Interviews and portfolios of six course participants were the major source of data. As a result of qualitative data analysis, the study has generated some findings related to the role of portfolios as a professional development/learning tool for teachers. One of the significant roles was documentation of teachers' learning over a period of time, which is generally not documented by the teachers. The process leads the teachers to continuous reflection on their beliefs and practices. This continuous reflection provides opportunities for teachers to learn from their own experiences and construct their knowledge and understanding.

Keywords: *Portfolio, Professional Development, Learning*

1. Introduction

Ongoing professional learning is very important for teachers, because it maintains and improves their performance of current practices and it helps them cope with changes. Changes are occurring all the time and there is a need for teachers to increase their capacity to provide better learning opportunities for the students. Therefore, ongoing professional learning updates teachers' knowledge and skills (Schools Learning Network, n.d.). Teachers can play a significant role in the implementation of school reforms and they are essential to any meaningful reform, and they are in a position to influence the students (DeFour and Eaker 1998).

As West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998) say, "One of the most important aspects of managing professional learning is the choice of appropriate techniques to facilitate and support learning" (p.65). Learning can be improved by different techniques, for example reflection, action research, autobiography, coaching, courses and conferences and portfolios. This research is concerned with the teacher learning portfolio. The portfolio is a very strong source of learning because it enables teachers to record and reflect on their learning as evidence. (Retallick & Groundwater-Smith 1999). The portfolio is a form of reflection but it is a systematic and organized way of reflection. Portfolio development is not a sudden activity, it is a regular and continuous process and it prompts teachers to reflect on their practices (Seldin 1991 & Winsor 1998). Portfolio creates opportunities for teachers to learn from their own practices.

Statement of the Problem

In our education system the concept of pre-service training is not properly taken into account in Pakistan. To enhance teachers' professional competence, professional development courses have a high importance in Pakistan. To fulfill this requirement some of the government and private institutions have taken initiatives for teachers' professional development but in these professional development programs a few teachers have the opportunity to attend these courses. However, experience has shown that the learning of the teachers who are engaged in in-service teaching programs is fragmented because they are not given opportunities to reflect on their personal experiences. In the training centers educators are trying to give new things to the teachers without making links or discussing daily life issues of the teachers. Teachers do not record their learning experiences and reflect on them because there is no mechanism for the teacher to reflect on what they have learnt from these courses and what new experiences they have had as a result of these courses. Teachers are not used to maintain the record of the activities, which they have gone through in the course for reflection to enhance further learning. So in this way there is no impact of these courses on these teachers. They do not change their practices and do not apply the learning in their respective schools. As Bell and Day (1991) say, "Professional development through attending courses became a panacea for improving the quality of school and education of children. In spite of this there was little evaluation of the impact of the course on the work of teachers in school" (p. 7). The study tried to respond the research question "How and to what extent did the portfolios influence the Course Participants' learning in the in a Master Programme at a private sector university in Pakistan?"

Research Design

The study was in the qualitative paradigm using a case study approach. The reason for the qualitative paradigm was that it enabled me to investigate the process of learning through portfolios in a natural setting, where the data collection process was carried out in an uncontrolled environment to explore participants' experiences (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Marshall and Rossman 1995). Researcher was not only getting data from the participants, but also explaining and interpreting them to clarify for the reader how researchers was making sense of that data (Krathwohl 1991). The qualitative method enabled me to explore the complexities that are beyond the scope of more 'controlled' approaches and also provide a chance to look at the case from the inside and study the research as a process rather than as a significance of the result (Gillham 2000).

The study that researcher had conducted was a case study because as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) said, " Case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interaction of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance" (p.182). Researcher studied the perspective of the course participants' portfolio as a learning tool, and as an assessment tool from the perspective of the faculty. This study was taken from the real experience that the course participants had of developing a portfolio and it explored it as a learning tool (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000). Case study explore the significant feature of the case and study the aspect of the case in a greater depth (Bassey 1999;Bell 1999).

Yin (1994) explains, "Case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena... the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life event" (p. 3).

The study was conducted at a private sector university in. Researcher selected nine participants; six students of master program and three faculty members as sample. The nature of sample is very complex and there is not rule for sample size in qualitative study (Patton, 1990; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000)

Variety of methods was used in the study to get more valid information to meet the purpose of my study, such as the semi-structured interview and documents analysis.

Semi-structured Interview

Researcher interviewed six course participants and three faculty members once each and the nature of the interview was semi structured because of its flexible nature (Hitchcock and Hughes1989; Robson 1998) As Denscombe (1998) says:

With semi-structured interview the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered, and perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on issues raised by the researcher. (p.113)

Document Analysis

Researcher analyzed the research participants' portfolios, which they had already developed. The document analysis provided me with an opportunity to see the strengths and weaknesses of this portfolio and provided me an opportunity to triangulate the interview (Hitchcock and Hughes1995).

3. Findings and Discussion

The study focused on portfolio as learning tool for teachers in their professional development and learning. The study found that it is critical for teachers to understand the concept of portfolio and the purposes it serves. The findings also reveals there is greater role portfolio in recording learning through reflection and collecting evidences of learning. This section discusses and explains the concept of portfolio, its purpose, and learning through portfolio based on data.

Understanding and definition of A Portfolio

There are several definitions of portfolio given by different authors. Some of these definitions mentioned in literature are summarized hereunder.

According to Retallick and Groundwater-Smith (1999) in the portfolio teachers provide their learning evidence, which demonstrates their progress and attainment of knowledge from their experiences, whereas Shulman (1998) believes that portfolio is a structure document where teachers record their learning as well as the students' work samples. These documents are developed through reflective writing, thoughtfulness and serious conversations (Lyons 1999). "A portfolio is a container of documents that provide evidence of someone's knowledge, skills and/or disposition" (Bird 1990, Barton & Collins 1993; Teacher Portfolios, p.1, Document). Supporting the ideas researcher participant Mirza says:

It is a good way of collecting or recording your learning. There is a phrase; "Jangal main more nacha kis nay daykha"(who has seen the peacock dancing in the Jungle). This is your portfolio; it tells somebody that you did something. It is a kind of reflection on learning and good record of your reflection. It is a kind of evidence of your learning that what I can see.... (Interview, February 4, 2004).

Researcher found a similar kind of definition in the portfolio, which Mirza developed in the teacher-learning module where he states, "Portfolio is also rudiment record of my progress on the bases of these experiences I will be able to decide my future strategies for professional development". So a portfolio is a source where a teacher can judge his/ her own performance and how much he/she has done or learnt. On the basis of that judgment and identification he/she can plan to learn more through an in depth reflection or through other ways and courses. It is evident from the definitions that professional development/learning of teachers is not a linear process. It is going back and forth to identify one's strengths and weaknesses and find out ways to overcome the weaknesses to make learning more visible and comprehensive for self, as well as for the students.

One of the faculties also expressed his views in the same way, and said, "So it is a tool to record the learning. It is not a recipe, it is teachers' creativity. Portfolio is evidence of learning and quality of work" (Interview, February 17, 2004). Shah explains his portfolio:

Portfolio in which you record your knowledge, your pedagogical knowledge, after a period of time you can assess your growth as a professional, you can check your previous knowledge and understanding with new and it is something which help you to compare with past with present. (Interview, February 25, 2004)

A similar definition is stated in his portfolio, which is as follows:

This portfolio will be a unique and valuable collection of my professional activities during certain period of time. It will demonstrate and evaluate my understanding, my achievements and successes and display my professional growth in the field of teaching. Reflecting on my past and present practices and help me learn from my mistake through reflection, which will lead me to self-improvement in my future performance.

Hence portfolio not only provides evidence of knowledge and skills, but also represents someone's beliefs and values of teaching and learning through critical reflection.

"A teaching portfolio is a collection of physical evidence that helps documents a teacher's performance and professional accomplishments" (Teaching Portfolio Guideline Document, 2000) because in the portfolios teachers set their professional goals. Through reflection they evaluate their performance.

Hall (1997) explained a portfolio as, " A professional portfolio is a collection of material, made by a professional [teacher], that records and reflects on, key events and processes in that professional's [teacher's] career" (p. 171).

According to Shulman, Wolf and Dietz (1998), " A teaching portfolio is defined as a structured collection of evidence of teacher's work across the diverse context and over time and framed by deliberation and reflective writing" (Xu, 2003). Therefore, portfolio development is not a short event but it is long process through continuous reflection by including different learning activities.

A professional portfolio is a collection of documents that represent one's understanding of teaching and learning as it unfolds over a period of time, from entrance to teacher education through the development of a teacher's career. A portfolio is a way to document not only what a teacher and her students do but how she think and makes decision as a teacher. (What is the professional portfolio: document)

It is not only a recording of the learning but it also brings together three very important aspects of the teaching profession: knowledge, skills, and achievement and weaknesses. Through reflections a teacher can evaluate his/her teaching in the class, reveal what knowledge has been delivered and how it has been delivered, what were the successes and what kind of improvement is needed. So through systematic

reflections the learning of teachers becomes visible. In this process teachers learn from their mistakes “the important thing is that we learn from our mistakes” (Beard & Wilson, 2002, p. 25).

Supporting these definition and understandings of a portfolio another research participant, Linda Mercy says:

Portfolio is a way of documenting all that learning that comes. When you document it and keep it on the record then it is visible, the learning becomes more explicit. It was a kind of collective device, which put all the teacher’s work together, gives teacher’s perspective and breadth and depth of learning at a particular point. (Interview, February 24, 2004)

This definition also comes out from her portfolio where she writes:

The development of my portfolio involve documentation of an accumulated collection of process artefacts, reflections, achievement, self evaluation and analysis of learning experiences as evidence of my learning.... Since portfolios are excellent way of demonstrating learning and professional growth constructed over a period of time, it was a strategy for assessing my learning on top of the reasons. To meet this requirement I had to put one in place.... It was a good way of celebrating my achievements and opportunity to have hands on experience.

Portfolio identifies the gap between learning and practice. The teacher can draw a career map, develop a philosophy and reflect to fill the gap between learning and teaching. It is clear from all the above definitions stated by the research participants that a portfolio is a good and effective way of recording and documenting someone’s understandings, learning, reflections, achievements, and interest. This recording and documentation help the developer to evaluate his/her learning and professional growth over a period of time. It provides an opportunity to compare one’s previous learning and existing learning with where he/she was and after going through certain activities or courses and exposures where he/she is now. So a portfolio gauges his/her growth and learning in terms of understanding about a particular event, topic or issue with the passage of time. As one faculty said:

Portfolio is a kind of evidence showing that you have something and you report in that manner. So from my point of view basically learning from learning kind of thing that is you learn about your learning and from your learning. (Interview, February 23, 2004)

Purpose of a portfolio

The significant role that portfolios can play in the professional learning and development of teachers is making them a reflective practitioners and critical thinkers. The portfolio is a source that gives information about the teaching philosophy, teaching and learning plans, and methods, and also the teachers’ learning outcomes. It also interprets methods, plans and philosophy in the form of reflections that help the teachers in further planning of lessons and developmental activities. Developing a portfolio is not only the completion or collection of evidences in a course or in one particular event, but also teachers look at the learning as a result of that event by reflecting on that event which leads towards their continuous development and learning. It helps in developing deeper understanding of the daily practice of teachers (Retallick & Groundwater-Smith, 1999), and they reflect on their practices and improve their strategies and plans. Professional learning portfolios give a frame of reference for ongoing learning and reflection. They also help teachers to maintain an action plan and incorporate the growth of the learning (Retallick, 2002). A portfolio is a systematic and organized form of reflection, because it can develop three aspects of learning. For example, the process of developing a portfolio can assist the individual to move from concrete experiences to abstract conceptualization of learning. In the abstract conceptualization, the individuals make sense of their practices and develop ideas and theories on the basis of practical work, for example, in the Teacher Learning Module the participants were involved in the process of developing a portfolio where they got concrete experience, and on the basis of those experiences they developed an understanding about the importance of the portfolio for the professional development of teachers. It can help individuals through active experiments, and the reflective practice

makes teaching according to the required standard of the time (Kolb 1984; Retallick 2002). By developing a teaching portfolio teachers can highlight the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching through reflection, and this reflective process make the teachers think how they might overcome their weaknesses and improve their practices. Reflection is a major component of the portfolio because reflections help teachers to learn from their own experience, who they are as teachers and how much they know about their profession. Developing a portfolio provides an occasion to reflect on the teaching goals, teacher-student relationships, teaching strategies and looking for alternatives to improve the assessment practice. All these factors contribute to the professional learning of a teacher (Center for Effective Teacher and Learning: n.d.).

The Department of Education in New South Wales, Australia has conducted research on learning portfolios in schools and it has been introduced to support school based learning and professional development of teachers. The findings of the study show that the schools recognized that it is important to give enough time to teachers to reflect on the process, product and procedures. It was also found that professional learning occurred where teachers were engaged in professional learning through reflection and developing portfolios (Groundwater-Smith 2002).

Teachers keep a reflective journal in my context, though at a very superficial level, because such practices are not developed and understood by the teachers for their continuous learning as portfolios are quite a new concept in Pakistan. The major difference between a portfolio and a reflective journal is that a portfolio contains artifacts and activities with reflections (Wolf 1996), and also the purpose, beliefs and philosophy, and the professional goals. Portfolios also contain evidence of the experience or learning which make the practice of the teachers effective. Mostly portfolios contain the good pieces of the teachers' work, but the reflective journal does not have all these things as it contains only the reflections. Wolf (1996) further says, "Too often, good teaching vanishes without a trace because we have no structure or tradition for preserving the best of what a teacher does" (p. 37).

In many schools in Australia and other Western countries, the portfolio has been introduced as the primary source of evaluating, improving and rewarding the teaching profession in terms of learning. The portfolio is an effective strategy for the professional development of prospective teachers, because it tells the story of their growth and reflects on the growth and progress (Teaching Portfolio Guideline, 2000). Using the portfolio can help teachers to improve their professional learning because it is not only the documentation of evidence but it gives an opportunity to reflect and enquire into the experience of the teachers and they can construct their knowledge and skills by using self designed questions. The process of questioning of the teachers' own practices contributes to their learning. Developing a portfolio enhances the skill of time management, resource management, and management of processes because it is a continuous process and ignoring one thing could affect the whole process (Coquard 1999). "Portfolio process can prompt teachers to reflect on themselves and their practice on regular and continuous basis" (Winsor 1998). Edgerton, Hutchings and Quinlian (1991) describe a portfolio as follows:

- Portfolios provide documented evidence of teaching that is connected to the specifics and contexts of what is being taught.
- They go beyond exclusive reliance on student [teachers] ratings because they include a range of evidence from a variety of sources.
- In the process of selecting and organizing their portfolio material, faculty [teachers] think hard about their teaching, a practice, which is likely to lead improvement in practice.
- Portfolios are a step toward a more public, professional view of teaching. They reflect teaching as a scholarly activity. (The center for teaching effectiveness: document p. 2)

Portfolios help teachers to explore their own developed theories of teaching and learning, relating to their practical and formal theories. This process encourages teachers to look at teaching in a broader sense rather than an atomized approach and it considers teaching as a complex, high order,

intellectually engaging and practically satisfying professional activity (McLean & Bullard, 2000). The nature of the portfolio represents the constructivist theory because teachers learn knowledge and skills based on their own experience, which can be critically analyzed in a portfolio. Critical analysis of events and practices can support teachers to balance the theory and practice from the teachers' and students' perspectives (McLaughlin & Vogt 1998; Shulman 1988 quoted by, Tucker, Stronge, Gareis, & Beers 2003) which is missing in most of the training centers, they just talk about the theory without bringing in the real practices of the teachers. But researcher found these practices of bringing together theory and practice in the master programme at the private university that portfolio is very useful tool for professional development and learning.

Portfolios provide an opportunity to the teachers to think deeply and critically, which can generate some questions for clarification. This practice was used by the course participants in the Teaching Learning module. For example, while going through the website the course participants needed some clarification about some concepts which were complex or challenged their understanding and beliefs. These concepts were deliberated upon in the tutorial sessions and also discussed with other colleagues beyond the classroom. To answer these questions the teachers engaged themselves in professional conversations that developed and contributed to their professional learning (Groundwater-Smith 2002), these kinds of processes lead to ongoing teacher learning. This kind of deep thinking and critical analysis is missing in the school of my context. Teachers consider teaching to be a linear process; creativity and diversity in teaching is not valued. Teachers are not used to questioning their practices and their knowledge they acquire from their colleagues and the courses they attended. Wolf (1996) says that portfolios have been used for students' assessment for many years, but recently the attention has turned to teaching portfolios. The reason for this attention was the nature of the portfolio, which can capture the complexities of professional practices, which other approaches may not. Portfolios are not only considered as tools of self-assessment but they also cater to the opportunities for the teachers to reflect and have group interaction on the bases of their own documents of teaching.

The study conducted in the New South Wales Department of Education and Training mentioned that schools started to think about curriculum and pedagogy, which challenged teachers' previous practices. By using portfolio teachers have learnt about the teaching (Groundwater-Smith, 2002).

A portfolio, being a colorful collection of a teacher's work, shows the interest, strengths, efforts, and goals of the teacher to see how he/ she thinks, feels, works and changes over a period time. So researchers monitor the teacher's growth continuously and guide the teacher to improve his knowledge and skills (Hill, Kamber, & Norwick, 1998 as quoted in Brady, 2002). The main focus of the portfolio is that in this process the developer asks questions such as: who am I? Where do I have to go? Why should I go, and where do I need to go? The development process of the portfolio answers these questions over a period of time (Paulson & Paulson, 1994 quoted by Brady, 2002). One of the Australian studies says that the use of the portfolio increases the involvement of the students [teachers] in the teaching and learning process. It was also found that the use of the portfolio diminishes the emphasis on the product or outcome. It fosters the process as well the product but the emphasis is more on the process (Brady, 2002).

Another purpose of the portfolio is personal decision making. In the process of the construction of a portfolio the teacher has to take a decision about the content of the portfolio, which represent the performance of the teacher (Cole, 2000). Hall (1997) mentioned that there was an increasing interest in keeping professional development portfolios due to several reasons, for example, to credit prior experiential learning it was recognized that professional development depends on the synthesis of practice and theory and reflection has great value in synthesis. Teachers were involved in the professional development activities by themselves because it was highly recognized in the field of education. That is why it was introduced in a module at private university, because this institute recognizes, values and promotes activities, which have been found to be effective in teachers' development and learning. The purpose of these activities was to meet the needs of the teachers in different areas. Hall (1997) further

said, "Professional development portfolio is a collection of material, made by a professional that records and reflects on key events and processes in professional's career" (p.171). The emphasis on reflection with evidence of learning distinguishes between a professional diary and a professional development portfolio, where teachers reflect on their experience and other teaching related experiences. Being a major component of the portfolio, reflection improves the reflectivity in teachers and this practice improves the learning of the students. By using portfolios teachers think proactively and become organized and structured in their work. By reflecting on their past teachers can develop professional confidence and they can develop their managerial skills. One of the benefits of keeping portfolios is that they create a supportive environment for teachers and make them maintain records of their learning. While recording and reflecting on the learning, teachers identify issues and share with other colleagues and seek alternatives to address these issues. Developing a portfolio makes the teacher and institution realistic and informed about the affairs, and strengthens the relation between the teachers and the institutions. Portfolio development convinces the teachers to be responsible for their learning, which adds to their professional learning as well as the performance of the institution. As Hall (1997) says, "Teachers who feel good about themselves will feel good about their employers" (p.173). I would say the development of the teachers is the development of the institutions.

Hall (1997) further said, "The importance of reflection is both a key to professional learning and as a source of evidence that learning has taken place" (p.174). In the reflective approach teachers become more analytical and teachers' problem solving skills could be improved. Teachers focus less on the transfer of knowledge and strategies. A portfolio also creates favorable conditions for teachers to examine their beliefs, knowledge, and experiences overtime that guide them to identify their need for professional development and learning. The portfolio has four main components: the statement of the teachers' philosophy, goal statement, samples of the students' and the teachers' work and a concluding reflective statement (ERIC, 1995).

The purpose of a portfolio varies from situation to situation. There could be more than one purpose of developing a portfolio, for example, a portfolio for assessment, for promotion and learning. As Linda Mercy said:

It is very genuine way to assess, to appraise a teacher... portfolio could be a good instrument to appraise a teacher because it accounts and record all kind of learning. Another could be that a portfolio could be a record or to develop the teacher knowledge.... the knowledge is there, they have it but not pronounced. It is silent but if they put it down and document it then this knowledge is accessible to even those people who do not have the idea. (Interview, February 24, 2004)

As Mirza says:

In teacher learning module what I have seen what was the purpose of the [portfolio] and definitely I was asking myself why are we doing this portfolio and then what I have learnt from the literature that it is a new approach towards teacher like teacher learn from workplace, every aspects and every moment is learning which we do not record, you are learning that you learn. It is also good for assessment. (Interview, February 4, 2004)

Mirza mentioned the purpose of developing a portfolio in his portfolio, which indicates two purposes, one is assessment and another is recording the learning. He writes:

The main purpose of this module is to help tutor assess my learning that I have achieved from our teaching learning module, which we have been discussing for the last six-week. In this module we came across the ranges of model and strategies to facilitate teachers' professional develop and the themes helped me to conceptualize and articulate my role as a teacher educator. I selected the three themes to include in my portfolio, which facilitated my learning,

Portfolio: A Professional Development and Learning Tool for Teachers

- It will demonstrate my learning from the plot website, how did it help me to decipher the teaching perspective by the materials presented in the pedagogy in action.
- Next this portfolio will expose my learning experiences by going through the processes of planning and implementing the workshop. My reflection on the workshop will depict the true story of my learning from planning to implementation.
- Further a reflection on the visit of PDC will show how it broadens my vision about teachers development programme in the context of Pakistan. Another reason was to reflect on my professional goal; from it I will be able to see my beliefs regarding teaching/learning and education as whole. My achievement is my motivation and encouragement to continue working hard and sustain learning. Therefore this portfolio will clearly depict those achievements that resulted through endeavors and it will be the foundation of my learning documents through the programme, from this I will be able to assess my learning. It will also give me guidance which area needs to be improved.

According to Retallick's and Groundwater-Smith's study (1996), which Woodward (2000) refers to, they believe there are "Possibilities of using teacher professional development portfolio as evidence of achievement and for the purpose of recognition of prior learning" (p.334). This was one of the purposes of the teacher learning module. In this module the course participants recorded their achievements and learning in three different activities. The faculty recognized their work and learning through portfolio development as an assessment tool. Roy's point of view about the purpose of a portfolio is as follows:

The purpose of portfolio for me I think when you collect, document some of what you have learnt, some of what you have understood better.... the other way is like how far I have developed because the process of portfolio for me was not at once. I collected some material at the initial step then I re-looked at them, on the second step I was kind of developing again... I was comparing that how far I developed. I would say it is a transition from one stage to another where growth and professional development is evident. (Interview, February 7, 2004)

Roy's stated purpose was also found in her portfolio, which was evidence of her understanding. She mentions:

The purpose of designing this portfolio is three folds. Firstly my portfolio is to accumulate data to illustrate my learning and celebrate my achievement in the teacher-learning module as a course participant and my future role of teacher educator. Secondly to reflect on my learning that will demonstrate my beliefs about teacher learning and show the connection between these beliefs with my attained knowledge. Thirdly to meet the assessment criteria that will act as a benchmark for my future learning.

The other four research participants also mentioned the same purpose that it was for assessment and recording the learning of the module. This purpose was depicted in his portfolio as follows:

The most important use of portfolio development are assessment, and evaluation of teacher's learning or promotion purposes to support learning and teaching and for professional development. The main purpose of the portfolio is to promote the important skills such as reflection, self-evaluation and critical analysis. Therefore this portfolio would not only give me an in depth insight about teaching and learning process but in future I would be able to develop further improved portfolio. It would create a critical, analytical and reflective mind and would provide an insight about professional development.

Another faculty says:

In think the rationale to enable the CPs to look at their professional development. To enable you [CPs] to develop professionally. So the processes were kind of looking at what are the CPs doing in this particular module, what are we offering them and what kind of opportunities are we giving them. (Interview February 23,2004)

A third faculty has the following view:

Purpose was to develop future teacher educators ... who would enhance teacher learning in their context ... the purpose was not only to develop knowledge, attitude and skills required to become an effective teacher educator but also suggest ways to sustain and maintain your own learning ... then we felt portfolio could be one way to sustain your own learning, to enhance your own learning. (Interview, February 27, 2004)

The stated purposes of the faculty were also depicted in the guidebook, which they developed as guidelines for the course participants that says:

The issue of purpose is very important in the construction of portfolio. Quite simply, if the purpose is not clear then it is difficult for you to find the appropriate motivation to put the work into the exercise. It is important here that we focus on what is your purpose actually is;

- To assemble a career record
- To reflect on the past
- To formalize key experiences
- To celebrate achievements
- To meet assessment requirement in the course. (Retallick, 2003, p. 4)

By analyzing all the stated purposes of the six course participants and three faculty researcher found that there were two main purposes of introducing and using a portfolio in the module. One was to provide an opportunity for the course participants to record their learning and achievement and another was assessment. Even the purpose of assessment was looking at the learning. So I would say that assessment always revolves around the learning and gives an opportunity to seek strategies and ways to improve and sustain the learning. So in this module the purpose was to make learning more effective and sustained.

Learning Through Portfolios

As West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998) say, "Professional learning is fundamentally about enhancing the capacity of the individual to do her or his job" (p.72). Looking at the idea of the authors where they are talking about the enhancement of the capacity, that is possible for teachers through reflection. For continuous reflection portfolio development is an effective tool. Reflection is a key to professional learning, which develops and flourishes the potential of the teacher, but it is difficult to describe in terms of practices (West-Burnham & O'Sullivan, 1998). They further say, "Reflection is the process of giving meaning to, and so understanding, experience. The means by which understanding is achieved will include analysis, categorizing, prioritizing, conceptualizing, and, crucially interpreting" (p.80). In the developing process of portfolios teachers question their practices, identify their weak areas and seek alternatives to improve their practices. So it is a kind of coach for the teachers where they have to work for self-improvement and in this way they could enhance their capacity. West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998) further say, "Coaching is a helping process designed to translate understanding into actual practice. It is very much about perception, negotiation, understanding and then identifying strategies implementing them and reviewing change" (p.72). Teachers can enhance their capacities through other means also, however, mostly these means are confined to the training centers or are difficult to contextualize, but the portfolio is a strategy, which can be used in training centers as well as in the schools. According to West-Burnham and O'Sullivan (1998),

Portfolio: A Professional Development and Learning Tool for Teachers

Reflection implies an image being returned and that holds the clue to the process. Although reflection is a personal and subjective process, to work it needs objectification. The process of reflection requires a stimulus in the form of a consolidated and internalized experience, an appropriate questioning process and a means of comparing that experience against other sources. (p.81)

One of the purposes of introducing portfolios was to provide opportunities for the course participants to record their learning for further reflection; what they learnt and how they learnt. As Azad says:

It was not easy to judge how much I have learnt in a particular module, however on the basis of my experience when I recall, so there are something which are coming in mind, that is the work which I did mostly in portfolio, they are coming in my mind. I also did other things but portfolio was also there. For portfolio we have to work hard, we did some reflection there. Therefore that is continuously coming in my mind. I think that is my major learning. (Interview, February 5, 2004).

In the process of reflection a learner has to question his/ her description, which he/she made, and try to identify the reasons and also search for alternatives. Being a systematic record of reflection, a portfolio provides opportunities for teachers to continuously question their practices and theories

Azad says in his reflection:

The most important learning I got from constructivist is ...in which the writer has very beautifully compares the old traditional way of teaching (in which child mind is considered to be empty vessel, which is filled by instruction of teacher) and constructivist learning approach.... where child construct his/her learning through the connection of present and prior learning.

Linda Mercy also learnt about constructivism in this process, and she says:

When I was writing, there were some areas I had found challenging like constructivism. I took time to interact colleague and asked what is constructivism. I failed to understand the concept. It means I was doing my own learning. I was constructing my own learning. I was constructing my own learning not in the class but putting extra efforts to go and learning from somebody else because in the book I could not understand and from that interaction my mind opened and then I wrote about it. I mean the meaning of constructivism I have is not to do with the book, the meaning I have to do is with the interaction I got that is the way I constructed the meaning and I wrote down and now I have a fair concept. So the portfolio enhanced my learning. I had definitely the urge, the motivation of seeing how much learning I am making. (Interview, February 24, 2004)

Fullan (1993) says (as cited in West-Burnham and O'Sullivan, 998), " The very first place to begin the change process is within ourselves ...therefore, teachers should look for their first lesson from individual who do a better job of learning even under adverse circumstances" (p.44). So the portfolio is a tool which deals with the teachers' inner feelings and motivates them to do better work as compared to the previous. The authors say, "The 'meaning of change' and the change process are directly related to personal understanding, individual perception and the capacity to change behavior rooted in a fundamental shift in a person's conceptual map" (p.44). I agree with the author that the portfolio develops the teachers' understanding about the profession and helps to identify the basic issues. When teachers start thinking about issues they also try to find solutions, and in this way they develop professionally. Wenzlaff (2000) says, "Teacher characteristics, attitudes, concepts of self, and intellectual and interpersonal disposition in large measure determined both the formal and informal curriculum of the classroom" (p.564). To improve the performance of the school, teachers should be developed but one should look into the concept of development that is whether the teachers' development is just sending them to attend the course or is it

more than that? I think teacher development is a process where teachers implement the learning from the courses they attend and make these learning a part of their daily practice. This can be possible through continuous reflection and continuous reflection is possible through portfolio development. Wenslaff (2000) says, "One method of engaging pre-service [in-service] teacher in reflection is through the process of developing teaching portfolio" (567). The author further says, "The reflective process of portfolio development is not a task that can happens expeditiously or without thought; rather it requires student [teachers] to search themselves to explore their thoughts feeling about teaching and what it means to be a teacher"(p.568). So portfolio development is a process of exploring themselves by teachers. Richert (1990) as cited in Wenslaff (2000) believes that:

Since Dewey, teacher educators have been concerned with how to prepare reflective teachers how have the capability and orientation to make informed and intelligent and good decision about what to do when to do it, and why should be done. (p.57)

Portfolio is a source of reflection on the teaching and learning beliefs of the teachers. This process does not only involve reflection, but it also involves problem solving and decision-making. Reflection, in the process of developing portfolios, makes the teachers realize about their beliefs and also makes them aware about the disposition of teaching.

The major purpose of conducting and attending courses is to improve and enhance the learning of the teacher. To meet this purpose there are many ways and strategies such as workshops, seminars, short and long courses. The ultimate goal is professional development and learning of the teachers to raise the quality of the teaching and learning process. The concept of a portfolio was one of those strategies, which was introduced in a module of the master course at Private Sector University.

While developing their portfolio the participants were constructing their own knowledge, learning and understanding. As one faculty said: "It was constructivist learning in the sense that CPs have to demonstrate their learning and provide evidence of it. Portfolio shows evidence of creativity and in depth learning" (Interview, February 17, 2004). Another faculty said: "You can learn something from not only external resources but learning is something coming from your own experience because you have so many experiences". (Interview, February 27, 2004)

It is clear from the statements of the research participants and from their portfolios that the experience of developing portfolios was a constructivist approach to learning. In this process the course participants were constructing their own knowledge and understanding on the basis of their experiences. This was experiential learning where the course participants were exposed to theoretical aspects as well as to practical aspects of teacher learning activities. As Beard and Wilson (2002) say, " We can define experiential learning as the insight gained through conscious or unconscious internalization of our own or observed interaction, which build upon our past experiences and knowledge" (p. 16).

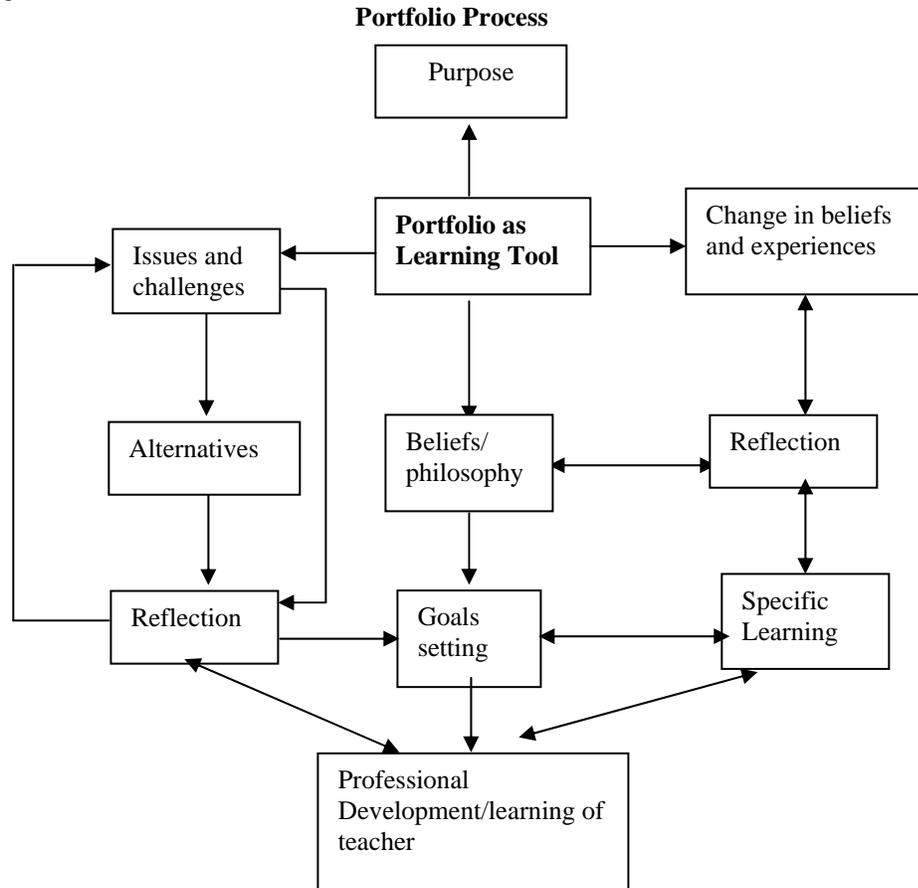
4. Conclusion

The portfolio is considered a good way to gauge the professional growth where a developer can report his/ her progress and can find out his/her weaknesses and seeks alternatives to overcome those weaknesses.

The major components in the portfolio were reflection. In this process there were eight components: contents, purpose of portfolio, professional goals, career map of course participants, teaching beliefs and values, professional achievements and learning, evidence of learning, and reflection on learning. It was evident from their portfolios and interviews that the process was helpful for their professional learning, learning from their experience through reflection. The course participants' learning was visible from their reflections on the different activities, which they had experienced in the Teacher Learning module.

Through portfolios, teachers reflect on their practices and learning continuously, systematically, and consciously. Portfolio is not only a source of reflection on the current learning or experience but also a tool for reflection of the teachers' professional beliefs and goals. In the portfolio development process, teachers look at their professional and academic careers as a learning process. It shows what they learnt at different levels and how it helped them to make their teaching and learning process comprehensive. It also makes their teaching philosophy visible and comprehensive whilst other ways of professional development do not provide opportunities to think about one's philosophy, beliefs, and values of teaching. A portfolio provides opportunities to look at these elements, and this was mentioned by most of the research participants.

From the analysis of the data it was clear that the process of developing a portfolio begins with the teachers' purpose of having a portfolio and leads to their professional development/learning, which is presented in figure 4:



In Figure the beliefs and experiences are interlinked because experiences are based on beliefs and beliefs are built on experiences, which I found in the portfolios and interviews of the research participant. When teachers experience new strategies their experiences and beliefs change.

This reflective process led the developers to professional development and learning by looking at different solutions to the challenges and problems. This learning process does not stop; developers (course participants) can reflect on their learning and improve continuously. While reflecting on their changed experiences and beliefs the course participants found strengths and weaknesses of their teaching

and tried to find out strategies to address their weakness. In this way learning occurred to overcome the weaknesses.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor **Dr. John Retalick and Attia Hussain**, who supervised the study and provided quality input, advice and guidance in the process my research. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the **Aga Khan University -Institute for Educational Development** for giving me the opportunity of being able to participate in the M.Ed. programme. and for the generous the scholarship. My special thanks go to my wife, Salima Begum for encouragement in developing this paper for publication. My heart felt gratitude for my **parents** who enabled me to acquire education.

References

- Bassey. M. (1999). *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Beard, C. and Wilson, J.P. (2002). *The power of experiential learning: A handbook for trainers and educators*. UK: Kogan Page.
- Bell, L., and Day, C. (1991). *Managing the professional development of teachers: Developing teachers and teaching*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bell, J. (1999). *Doing your research project: A guide for first time researchers in education and social sciences* (3rd ed.). New Delhi: Viva Books.
- Brady, L. (2002). Defining the portfolio in an Australian context. *Educational Practice and Theory*, 24, 53- 61.
- Center for Effective Teaching and Learning (n.d). *Introduction to teaching portfolio*. Retrieved June 6, 2003, from <http://www.utep.edu/cetal/portfoli/intro.htm>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge Falmer.
- Coquard, N. (1999). *Teacher professional portfolio and the integration of technology*. Retrieved January 2, 2004, from http://www.qesnrecit.qc.ca/portfolio/eng/te_article/html
- Cole, D.J. (2000). *Portfolio across the curriculum and beyond*. California: Corwin Press.
- DeFour, R. and Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Alexandria: ASCD.
- Denscombe, M. (1998). *The good research guide for small –scale social research projects*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- ERIC DIGEST. (1995). *Reconceptualizing professional teacher development*. Retrieved December 15, 2003, from <http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigest/ed383695.html>
- Gall, M. D., Borg, W. R., & Gall, J. P. (1996). *Educational research: An introduction* (6th ed.). USA: Longman.
- Gillham, B. (2000). *Case study research methods*. London: Continuum.
- Groundwater-Smith, S. (2002). *Work matter: The professional learning portfolio?* Retrieved January 3, 2004, from http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/edu.leadership/prof_read/portfolio/smith.php
- Hall, D. (1997). Professional development portfolio. In L. Kydd, M. Crawford & C. Riches (Eds.), *Professional development for educational management* (pp.169-175). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Portfolio: A Professional Development and Learning Tool for Teachers

- Hitchcock, G., & Hughes, D. (1989). *Research and the teacher: A qualitative introduction to school based research*. London: Routledge.
- Krathwohl, D.R. (1991). *Methods of educational and social science research: An integrated approach*. New York: Longman.
- Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Englewood Cliff.
- Lyon, N. (1999). How portfolios can shape emerging practice. *Educational leadership*, 56, 63-65
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research*, (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publishers.
- McLean, M., and Bullard, J. (2000). Becoming a university teacher: Evidence from teaching portfolios (how academics learn to teach). *Teacher Development*, 4(1), 79-101.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Retallick, J. (2002). *Professional ethic and teacher practice*. Retrieved January 3, 2004, from http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/edu_leadership/prof_read/portfolio/retallick.
- Retallick, J., & Groundwater-Smith, S. (1999). Teachers' workplace learning and the learning portfolio. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 27(1), 47-59.
- Retallick, J. (2003). *Guideline for developing portfolio*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Robson, C. (1998). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner- researchers*. USA: Blackwell.
- Schools' Learning Network. (n.d). *Continuing professional development: Setting up a portfolio of evidence*. Retrieved November 16, 2003, from <http://schools.northyorks.gov.uk/training/portfolio/portfolioindex.html>
- Seldin, P. (1991). *The teaching portfolio: A practical guide to improved performance and promotion/tenure decisions* (2nd ed.). Bolton: Abker Publishing Company.
- Tay-Koay, S. L. (1999). Teacher development: Understanding the struggles of classroom teachers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education & Development* 2, 15-28.
- Teaching portfolio guidelines (2000). Retrieved August 20, 2003, from <http://grove/ufl/edu/~rolandc/courses/portfolio/html>
- The center for teaching effectiveness. (n.d). *Preparing a teaching portfolio*. Retrieved November, 01, 2003, from <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/teachportfolio.html>
- Tucker, P.D., Stronge. J. H., Gareis. C. R., & Beers. C S. (2003). The efficacy of portfolio for teacher evaluation and professional development: Do they make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39, 572-602.
- Wenzlaff, T.L. (2000). Dispositions and portfolio development: Is there a connection. *Education*, 118, 564-572.
- West-Burnham, J., & O'Sullivan, F. (1998). *Leadership and professional development in schools: How to promote techniques for effective professional learning*. London: Pearson Education.
- Winsor, P.J. (1998). *A guide to developing professional portfolio in the faculty of education*. Retrieved January 3, 2004, from http://www.edu.uleth.ca/fe/pdf/porfolio_guide.pdf
- Wolf, K. (1996). Developing an effective teaching portfolio. *Educational leadership*, 53, 34-37

- Xu, J. (2003). Promoting school-centered professional development through teaching portfolio. *Journal of Teacher Education*. 54, 347-361
- Yin, R.K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd Ed.). London: Sage.