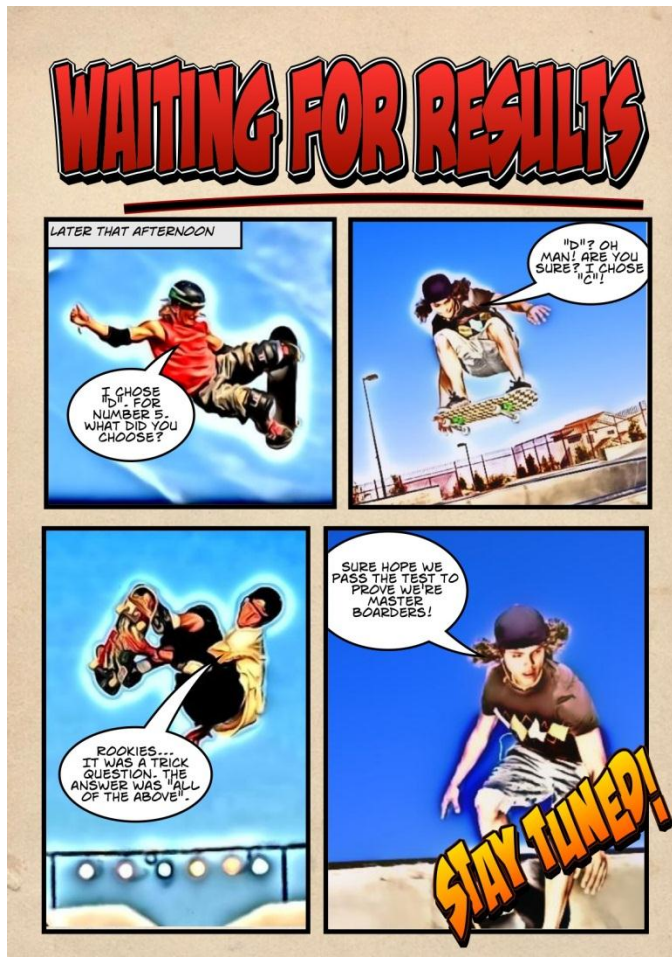# Skateboarders & Monkey Bar Swingers
Support for ePortfolios

By Don Adams

As a qualified teacher I sometimes conduct examinations for organizations outside of mainstream education. I have supervised tests for the Association of Skateboarders and helped members of Monkey Bars Council complete their performance evaluations. I enjoyed working with the skateboarders. Most believed they had done well on the multiple choice, fill-in-the blanks test, and went off to purchase their first skateboard: ready to ride as soon as they were qualified. The monkey bar swingers were more problematic. Most didn't want to get off the monkey bars to complete the evaluation despite its friendly "compare your performance to a growing flower" format. Not one earned the "3" required to demonstrate mastery on the monkey bars.

Too much of a tall tale? Not really. Five times a year, I report on my students. I observe them. I collect and collate data from: checklists, work samples, and tests. I compare it to an approved rubric and arrive at a number to describe each student's performance. A wholly inadequate number: a number that ignores growth, minimizes self-evaluation, and tarnishes the laurel wreath of mastery.

Skateboarders and kindergarteners understand this. Determining mastery on the skateboard and monkey bars using a multiple choice test or a "compare yourself to a flower" checklist would prompt a sneer from kindergarteners and an unprintable comment from skateboarders. Why? Because they understand that mastery is not reflected in a number. Personal development and continual growth are key factors in mastery. It is an active process that must be demonstrated and assessed in a real way.

Skateboarders and monkey bar swingers take control of this process and start it with, "Hey…watch me…look at this!" They anticipate their performance will be judged "masterful" by everyone who is watching and will be followed by cheers and high-fives.

Is it possible that mastery is too difficult to document? After all, in answering the question "What is mastery?", George Leonard stated that "It resists definition yet can be instantly recognized."[1] Most people do recognize mastery. Watch a skateboarder defy the laws of physics and gravity, and you'll find yourself muttering, "Masterfully done, what an expert!" Even kindergarteners know that mastery is the moment when something that couldn't be done can suddenly be done with ease and style. It is the moment they cross the monkey bars successfully.

Have we become so fixed on using scales and tests to define and measure mastery, that we no longer look for it? How can we report on something we don't observe?

So I returned to the experts and asked them how to better document growth and mastery. The Kindergarteners suggested taking a picture or making a movie to send to their parents. The skateboarders pointed to their blogs, tweets, Facebook pages, and WIKI's. A few mentioned ePortfolios.

And they must be on to something. "Skateboard blog" garnered 22,100,00 hits on Google; and "ePortfolio" got 43,000,000.

So just what is an ePortfolio?

A quick review of a few Google responses suggests that ePortfolios vary according to their purpose, use, and design. But

> "In general, an ePortfolio is a purposeful collection of information and digital artifacts that demonstrates development or evidences learning outcomes, skills or competencies. The process of producing an ePortfolio (writing, typing, recording etc.) usually requires the synthesis of ideas, reflection on achievements, self-awareness and forward planning"[2]

Or put more simply,

> "E-portfolios are personally designed online showcases of your work."[3]

Or even more simply,

> "Hey…watch me…look at this!"

Do ePortfolios make sense? Sure they do. Will they help me authentically document growth and mastery in my students? Absolutely. Do I know how to prepare an ePortfolio? No. Do I know how to help my students prepare an ePortfolio? No. But thankfully, I have enrolled in the

Master of Educational Technology program and will have the chance to learn. Failing that, I can always return to the playground or skateboard park.

References

1. LEONARD, G. (1992). *Mastery: The keys to success and long-term fulfillment* (p. 3). New York: Plume - A Division of Penguin Books

2. COTTERILL S. J. (2007). *What is an ePortfolio? ePortfolios.* Maastricht University

3. University of British Columbia. (2012) Retrieved October 7, 2012, http://wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Eportfolio_Basics/Elearning