

talking the walk

introducing

ENTERPRISING PASSPORTS

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Enterprising Passports

Talking the walk

In many ways Enterprising Passports fly in the face of more conventional approaches to recording and reporting on enterprise skills, yet they are **complementary**.

The Enterprising Passport is built on the proposition that *if a student has enterprise, he should be able to describe his enterprise...and in an enterprising manner*. In short the Enterprising Passport is an enterprising account of one's enterprise. Students use it to 'market' themselves as 'enterprising' to whom they choose and how they want. As such each passport is **idiosyncratic** and colourful, personalised yet professional. The student is the author of the document/object, which remains **their 'property'**. The school offers help but it does not verify the content. The process is as important as the product. And the quality of the passport itself is evidence of enterprise. Parents and employers respond well to the passports. (Young people have the right to self-representation).

To best understand the concept first take a look at the example by following the link www.enterprisingeducation.com. The passport is a reconstruction based on an actual passport – personal details and some related matters have been omitted. Some other aspects have been changed to make the example more illustrative of the concept.

In a sense the Enterprising Passport is a marketing tool, by which the owner persuades others that they are enterprising.

The enterprise passport has its origin in the 'third passport'. In his ground breaking report Colin Ball identified three passports that young people need to move from school to work and make other transitions. The first passport related to 'academic' knowledge, the second concerned technical skills for a specific vocation and the third passport concerned applying to two other passports in a critical and creative manner. The third passport very much concerns enterprise, especially attitude. Although complementary the third passport has become highly prized by employers. In this context the Enterprising Passport is a manifestation of the third passport.

The passport is not a portfolio as such. It may draw on the contents of a portfolio and share some features. However the Enterprising Passport attempts to be an active agent. Notwithstanding exceptions, 'enterprise' passports have become formal instruments whereby students match evidence to set criteria using a **standardised format**. Hence the preference for the term 'enterprising'.

With the enterprising Passport the student (the owner) tries to present himself as a **distinctive individual**. It is this individuality that is so often missing in formal reporting, yet it is one of the key factors that employers, for example, look for when making judgements. More on this later.

Purposes

A student can use his passport in a number of ways.

- Some further education may accept the passport to support an entrance application. Similarly they may be offered as part of a 'credit claim' for advanced stranding.
- A student may offer the passport as evidence in a more formal assessment arrangement at school or elsewhere in a similar fashion as a portfolio might.
- A student may use it to gain support a commercial venture.
- Most commonly a passport is used to gain employment. Some passports initiatives have been labelled Employment Passports. The remaining commentary will relate to the employment context.

Quite clearly employers value enterprising skills - they want to know about individual applicant's initiative, resourcefulness, flexibility and so on. And they feel that standardised reporting does not adequately cover these area – even if it is graded. With resumes young people are coached to 'play it safe', to the point where the document is colourless, homogeneous and an impersonal replica. Hence in the absence of positive 'personal' information, they rely on **negative indications** such as the candidate's address and appearance. This is where the Enterprising passport can be so valuable. The employer wants to know about the individual, 'the person', because employing the 'wrong person' can be cost dearly, and even be fatal for a small business. Those who know the dynamics of the labour market know that next to trust and reliability, employers value the most initiative. In fact some passports initiatives have involved young people asking groups of employers which characteristics they most value – and then the building their passports around the responses. (This is a powerful experience...more on it later)

Power of process

There are few things sadder for a caring teacher than to watch a student sit through an employment interview unable to describe skills, which the teacher knows they possess. They may as well not possess skills.

The process of creating an enterprising Passport is valuable for four reasons

- It is evidence of being enterprising itself
- Learners appreciate the value of enterprise to others, especially to employers
- Learners learn so much in general
- Learners learn to 'talk the walk' describe their enterprise

It is not easy describing one's own enterprising capabilities. When challenged to write a brief description of their own enterprising capabilities and achievements, **many teachers admit the task is beyond them.**

How does one succinctly and convincingly describe one's initiative or problem solving skills? Yet this is the information employers want and increasingly quiz learners about. How difficult then is for young people?

Where enterprise passports have complemented resumes in youth employment programs, they have been very successful in helping the youths get jobs. This is not necessarily due to employers seeing the passports, but rather they learn students are able to **describe and substantiate** their own enterprising capabilities....and they learn this through the process of developing these documents.

The process of developing passports not only provides young people with the 'critical vocabulary' but also helps them to identify concrete examples to illustrate their claims.

In fact some young job seekers are so confident and ready to tackle the questions on personal and social skills they forget to show their passports. And this is the point: the passports are a valuable asset in themselves, but the real value is being able to more fully describe your attributes with confidence.

Although it is questionable some people would argue that 'unless you can talk the walk, you can't do the walk, ie unless you articulate your enterprise, you are not enterprising in the full sense of the word.

Content

While there is no recipe for passports, some common ingredients include

- personal statements about career and life goals
- descriptions of enterprising events or processes
- descriptions of enterprising behaviour
- testimonies from third parties
- samples of work from projects, eg letters, plans, minutes from meetings
- photographs of products, events, etc
- personal assessments of strengths, weaknesses and achievements
- peer comments on the author
- teacher comments on the author
- a development plan to further develop enterprise capabilities
- descriptions of life experiences

Typically a passport can be broken into several components ie personal information, including family, enterprise projects, work, community participation and life-experience.

Presentation

Some passports are more personal, others more formal, some are methodical others loosely structured, some are plain, others arty - and some are low-tech, others high-tech. Integrating the internet (especially facebook, MySpace and YouTube) create new possibilities.

Because the passport is marketing the enterprising individual, passports should not be the same. They need to be distinctive even idiosyncratic. This is partially achieved by the individual student 'authoring' their own passport.

Bulky passports will be self-defeating, in that employers and others will not read them...and if they do, the essential messages can be lost in all the clutter. Employers want to see the 'narrative'. A passport is starting to get too big if it goes over ten pages.

A snappy attractive passport will encourage employers to seek further information if they need, eg resume, portfolios, school reports and the all important interview. *In many ways the passport is about getting the foot in the door and then talking the walk.*

The challenge of making individual passports exciting, engaging and special often captures the imagination of students and teachers alike.

Issues

Issues for further discussion include those below

- Initially teachers can have some reservations about not being able to 'vet' matters and dealing with **genuine learner ownership**. However, they quickly become positive on seeing the benefits. Many also understand that young people have the right to self-representation, as adults do. However if learners want help, there must be some conditions, such as the school must not be negatively portrayed. Don't take conditions too far.
- **Authenticity of authorship** can be a concern. Where learners have received help, including from one another, encourage them to clearly state this. As with adults learners should be able to 'outsource' some help, especially with technical matters eg use of software.
- **Verification** can be a concern. As a rule, stay out of this area, insisting that all passports carry a disclaimer about verification upfront.
- The level of assistance depends on a number of circumstances including abilities and resources. One initiative uses detailed facilitator and participant guides to enhance flexibility.

While the Enterprising Passport is about individuality and personality, it is complementary to more conventional approaches. The Enterprising Passport is about self-representation and empowerment.

The bottom-line is the Enterprising Passport is about the 'human factor'!

**Towards An 'Enterprising' Culture (Colin Ball OECD Education Monograph, Paris 1989)*