

The Professional Portfolio: A Professional Development Tool for the Internship

**Lansing Area Elementary Team (LAET) (K-8)
Michigan State University
TE 501 and TE 502**



What is a Professional Portfolio?

A professional portfolio is a collection of carefully selected artifacts that represent your progress and accomplishments in learning to teach. It is a professional learning tool that you can use to reflect on your growth as a teacher over time, clarify your philosophy and teaching goals, connect those ideas to your emerging practice, and communicate your accomplishments to prospective employers. It is a place to *demonstrate that your teaching practices lead to meaningful student learning*.

Feedback from prior interns indicates that although not all employers review portfolios, many give prospective applicants an opportunity to refer to them during interviews. More importantly, many interns from previous years have reported that the experience of preparing a portfolio and the effort involved in articulating and representing their talents, abilities, expertise and accomplishments was an invaluable tool in preparing them for job interviews. They felt more confident and prepared to talk about their philosophy, goals and experience after engaging in the portfolio development process. Moreover, many states are encouraging beginning and experienced teachers to develop professional portfolios to promote ongoing professional learning. Your portfolio can become a valuable tool to foster your ongoing learning throughout your career.

Portfolio Processes

The creation of a professional portfolio is a *professional development process* through which teachers document their progress and accomplishments in learning to teach for themselves, for their colleagues, and for prospective employers. Interns engage in several processes that assist them in acquiring and making sense of new knowledge and skills and reflecting on their ongoing work in the classroom:¹

- **Reading:** gathering evidence of new knowledge and information from texts, articles, teaching resources
- **Writing:** formal and informal writing that demonstrates thoughtfulness and integration of new knowledge
- **Thinking:** making new meaning, connecting ideas, taking stock, constructing new perspectives

While the above processes may take place individually, it is also important for teachers to interact with colleagues to express their ideas, get feedback and learn from each other. Therefore, interns and their colleagues, in TE 501 and TE 502 seminars, in their TE 801-4 courses, and in the professional communities within their schools, also engage in:

- **Interacting:** sharing ideas, discussing and defending, actively constructing artifacts during group inquiry

¹ The categories for the portfolio process as represented in this document and the accompanying figure are adapted from Wilcox, B. & Tomei, L. (1999). *Professional Portfolios for Teachers: A Guide for Learners, Experts, and Scholars*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

- **Demonstrating:** presenting, critiquing, publishing, enhancing traditional lessons, applying thinking and learning

Although the portfolio process necessarily cuts across all aspects of the internship experience, the portfolio assignment itself is officially connected to the TE 501 and TE 502 seminars, where the field instructors provide support and guidance and clarify requirements.

Support During TE 501 & 502 Seminars

Although the portfolio necessarily cuts across all aspects of your internship experience, the tasks of engaging in portfolio processes and actually creating the physical portfolio itself are officially connected to the TE 501/2 seminars. Your field instructor will provide support and guidance, and clarify assignments. As outlined in the Mentoring Guide in the *Guided to the Elementary and Middle School Internship*, your CTs are also asked to become involved in supporting your portfolio processes as you engage in the seven phases of the internship (see Section 3: Mentoring Guide).

Drafting, Editing and Publishing the Portfolio

Identifying, Sharing, and Selecting Potential Portfolio Artifacts: As you engage in reading, writing, thinking, interacting and demonstrating activities to enhance your professional learning in the teacher preparation program, you will also gather and reflect upon various **artifacts** that will become potential portfolio items. In a sense, you are working on a "rough draft" of your portfolio across your internship year, that you might think of as having two types of activities:

- **Collecting:** A major part of developing a teaching practice involves acquiring new knowledge and skills. Artifacts that may represent your gathering of new knowledge and skills may include items such as:

- book notes
- journal articles
- annotated bibliographies
- curriculum overviews
- lesson plans
- assessment tools
- videotapes
- textbook summaries
- trade books
- historical timelines
- content standards
- charts and graphs
- posters
- world wide websites

- **Working:** By themselves, teaching resources do not demonstrate a teacher's professional knowledge and skill. Attempts to create, test and hone your new knowledge and skill help document how you are making connections, reflecting on and assessing your teaching practice, and finding ways to learn with and from your colleagues. Artifacts that represent these aspects of your professional learning may include:

- reactions to readings
- problem-solving strategies
- self-evaluation of teaching
- unit plans and reflections on teaching
- videotapes of teaching
- critiques of use of websites or electronic software in the classroom
- concept maps
- philosophy statement drafts
- feedback from colleagues on your teaching
- reflections on student learning
- sample assessments
- group projects

Interacting and Demonstrating: Collecting and working with artifacts become especially helpful when you take advantage of opportunities to share your ideas with colleagues. Then you are able to articulate your thinking, reflect on your teaching decisions and actions, and learn from your ongoing practice. Your TE 501 and TE 502 seminars, as well as your TE 801-4 courses, are places where you will have opportunities to discuss many of the artifacts you may consider including in your portfolio. In addition, be sure to take advantage of your interactions with teacher colleagues in your school as you draft your portfolio.

Your CT is in a key position to help you identify and reflect on potential items that provide evidence of the heart of your work: engaging in standards-based teaching and meaningful student learning. Since your CT will be present and actively involved in collaborative unit teaching, s/he can be especially helpful in advising you regarding what might count as evidence of effective teaching and meaningful learning (e.g., use of a particular assessment tool; samples of student work that represent their learning; observation notes from a classroom discussion). These same discussions have the potential to help the two of you reflect on whether and how the goals for unit teaching were met. Your CT can help you identify ahead of time what to collect, and to organize yourself to collect information in feasible ways.

Final Drafting, Editing and Publishing of Your Portfolio: Across your internship year, you will have collected far more artifacts than you will be able to include in a portfolio that "showcases" your strengths and professional accomplishments. You will need to select those items that *best represent* and *most effectively communicate* your professional learning to an audience who is not familiar with the day-to-day details of your experience. The selection process, therefore, includes: (a) choosing items as well as providing commentary (as needed) that help the audience make sense of how each artifact represents your learning and accomplishments; and (b) making decisions about how to categorize, organize and present your information. CTs can be "interested readers" who provide valuable input in this final stage.

➤ ***Showcasing:*** Artifacts with commentary that represent your progress and accomplishments in learning to teach are included in the "final draft" of your professional portfolio. Generally, these are artifacts that have been shared, critiqued and revised so that you can feel confident that they meet professional standards to which you will be held. There are several different types of artifacts that are needed to represent your expertise and talent as a learner and professional. The following items are examples of artifacts you may choose to include in your portfolio:

Background Information	Presentations and Best Papers	Teaching Artifacts and Reflections (with commentary)	Professional Documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resume ▪ www Homepage ▪ Background information on teaching context ▪ Background information on teacher preparation program ▪ Involvement in professional organizations ▪ Community service record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Philosophy Statement related to teaching for understanding and learning community development ▪ Personal Statement describing reasons and motivations for choosing the teaching profession ▪ Goals Statement regarding immediate and future goals as an educator ▪ Analysis of curriculum, teaching and/or student learning ▪ Outlines for formal presentations ▪ Case studies of student learning ▪ Representations of your use of technology (e.g., computer generated teaching materials) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview of unit goals and instructional plan that represent teaching for understanding and learning community development ▪ List of resources used ▪ Sample lesson plans ▪ Assessment tools ▪ Evaluation of student learning ▪ Evidence of meeting individual students' needs ▪ Photographs of class projects or displays, discussions, bulletin boards ▪ Sample student work ▪ Reflective commentary, self-evaluation ▪ Feedback from colleagues on teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transcripts ▪ Letters of Recommendation ▪ Letters of Appreciation ▪ Awards, certificates

Organizing the Portfolio to Look Professional

While the above suggestions are listed in categories, only you can decide on the best way to organize and present your artifacts to an outside audience. You should design your own presentation that:

- ⇒ shows that *you have met each Teacher Preparation Program Standard*
- ⇒ focuses on *how your teaching has led to meaningful student learning*
- ⇒ is creative and original
- ⇒ displays organizational skills
- ⇒ provides a table of contents and/or overall organizer
- ⇒ divides your materials into sections that are clearly labeled and easily understood
- ⇒ communicates your key attributes, talents and values

- ⇒ uses tools to enhance attractiveness (lettering, photographs, captions, charts, color, spacing/arrangement, borders, computer graphics, graphic organizers, variety of materials)
- ⇒ shows careful editing and proofreading

Timeline for Portfolio Development

September - December: During this time period, you will engage in reading, writing, thinking, interacting and demonstrating that will contribute to your "collecting" and "working" with potential artifacts for your portfolio.

The portfolio processes begin in the fall months and continue on through the spring semester. Since this involves collecting examples of classroom interactions, which you will share with others (audio tapes, videotapes, still photographs), examples of students' work, or information from short interviews with students, you will need to obtain formal parent/guardian permission to do so in accordance with your school and district policy. A sample cover letter, "Consent for Documentation of Classroom Events and Student Work During the Internship" is included in Appendix C of the *Guide to the Elementary Internship*. The same letter is also available as a Word and RTF document on your Intern CD. You may use this example and adapt it to fit your situation, or write your own in consultation with your CT and building/district policy.

During TE 501 seminar, you will share and discuss potential artifacts in order to reflect on your professional learning and initiate ways to organize your materials. These discussions will include exploration of the following:

- What "big ideas" will help you organize your portfolio? What are key factors in high quality teaching (e.g., honoring diversity, building learning community) that are powerful organizers for your teaching? How do these big ideas represent your philosophy?
- How do various artifacts demonstrate your thinking as a teacher?
- How do various artifacts demonstrate that students were engaged in *meaningful learning*?
- For each artifact, ask, "Why is this item important to me? What does it represent about me or my practice? What does the reader learn about my students' *learning*? How does each artifact represent my teaching philosophy?" Record your thoughts and answers to these questions on post-it notes to keep track of your thinking.
- As a collection, how do the artifacts represent your growth and development as a professional, and your ability to foster meaningful student learning?

January – March: This time period is an opportunity for you to create, test and hone your knowledge as you work with artifacts that represent your professional learning. You will talk in your TE 502 seminar about ways to document your lead teaching and you will share artifacts that represent what you are learning as the documentation process proceeds. Your interactions with your colleagues will be a critical part of your final selection process as you work toward creating your "showcase" portfolio. You will also need to pay attention to the development of the following:

- ✓ By mid-February, you should have a solid working draft of your resume (some people like to develop both a "short" and a "long" version of their resume)
- ✓ If you choose, you may also use the available space on the web to create your own home page

April: In your TE 501 seminar, you will have opportunities to present drafts of your "showcase" portfolio to your colleagues as you get ready to make final revisions and share it with prospective

employers. As part of this process, you will work on developing responses to typical interview questions that prospective employers may ask.

Intern Convocation: It has been a tradition among Lansing Area Elementary Team interns to share their completed portfolios at the end-of-year Convocation to celebrate the completion of the internship. This is an opportunity to share with colleagues, family and friends the many accomplishments and rich professional learning that has taken place across the program.