

Guest Editors' Introduction: Teaching Portfolios and Teacher Education

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The inception of this issue actually occurred in the spring of 1995, when a small group of teacher educators in California met as a Special Interest Group (SIG) within the California Council on the Education of Teachers (CCET) to discuss the use of teaching portfolios. The group struggled with some of these basic questions:

Why use portfolios?
How should portfolios be structured?
Can or should portfolios be used to assess
the teacher's performance?

Since that initial meeting, there has been a growing interest in and burgeoning use of portfolios in teacher education. Portfolios have been used at every phase of teacher development—as students begin to

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master subject matter in the early stages of preparation, as they move into the professional preparation component, in student teaching and in internships, in the initial years of practice or induction period, and in pursuing career-long professional growth and development.

Teacher preparation programs have been using portfolios in a variety of ways. Portfolio use extends beyond institutions of higher education as well. Districts may use portfolios to make decisions about who to hire. Portfolios are being used in some states as a way to make decisions about who should be licensed to teach. Portfolios have also been used to assess and recognize outstanding teaching.

In a new arena, it takes a relatively short amount of time to become a veteran. And so, early members the CCET Portfolio SIG have seen the group grow quickly and the conversation deepen. We no longer debate whether portfolios are useful and we have gone beyond the point of discussing what they look like. We have developed an almost missionary zeal for the process and product of the portfolio. Yet for all this progress, many questions remain. In fact, the basic questions are still the same, but our understanding of the complexities of those questions has deepened.

In preparing for this special edition of *Teacher Education Quarterly*, we asked Sheryl O'Sullivan, the current chair of the CCET Portfolio SIG, to revisit some of the original questions with the now vastly expanded and much more experienced group of portfolio users. We thank her and the rest of the group for leading us through a very productive discussion.

As we revisited the question about the value of portfolio use at the Spring 1997 SIG meeting, we discovered that that our answers are more varied and focus more on long-term benefits to teacher development than ever before. We use portfolios because they give emphasis to student reflection and self-directed growth. We use portfolios because they help students build the habits of mind necessary for good teaching. Portfolios encourage collaborative dialogue and enriched discussions of teaching. They allow us to document growth over time and allow students to integrate the diversity of their teacher preparation experiences.

Our authors all speak to the question of use. Kenneth Wolf and Mary Dietz give the broad overview, describing the strengths and limitations of the learning portfolio, the assessment portfolio, and the employment portfolio. Rebecca S. Anderson and Lisa DeMeulle share research on the use of portfolios across twenty-four teacher education programs. The synthesis of the personal and professional is the focus of the article by Grace E. Grant and Tracy A. Huebner, who describe how portfolios use motivates teachers to become researchers of their own practice. Jon Snyder, Ann Lippincott, and Doug Bower write about the tensions surrounding multiple uses of portfolios. In an article by Bonnie S. Sunstein and Joseph P. Potts, we examine portfolios as a tool to extend teacher literacy and breathe life into the curriculum. In two articles, the first by David Georgi and Judith Crowe and the second by Marilyn McKinney, we look at the construction and use of electronic

portfolios. In two more articles, Bernice A. Stone and Nona Lyons each present us with evidence to illustrate reflective uses of portfolios. The issue concludes as we co-guest editors consider mentoring conversations that occur around portfolio use.

Some unintended results of portfolio use are becoming increasingly evident. A telling remark appears in the Anderson and DeMeulle article:

...we found that portfolios are impacting teacher educators and teacher education programs. Teacher educators report becoming learner centered, clearer about professional standards, and reflecting more on their practice. In terms of programs, portfolios are promoting dialogue with colleagues and assisting in clarification of program outcomes.

Grant and Huebner recognize that the portfolio users they followed have developed habits of mind and have become researchers of their own practice. These authors note:

They are teachers who assume, without question, that inquiry is a part of their professional work as teachers.

Our SIG also revisited questions about portfolio structure and SIG members have come to recognize that there are many ways to structure portfolios and many forms of evidence or artifacts that are appropriate. Some structure portfolios around individual student questions or personal experience (Grant and Huebner; Sunstein and Potts; Lyons) other around program standards or broader professional standards (Stone; Bartell, Kaye, and Morin). We have all become much more comfortable with the ambiguity of multiple purposes and uses, finding ourselves in agreement with Wolf and Dietz, who state that "portfolio purpose is instrumental in shaping the form, content, and process of the portfolio."

The issues related to portfolios as assessment are still hotly debated. We recognize the uses of portfolios as both formative and summative assessment tools. All recognize the authentic nature of the portfolio as representation of teaching and most would argue that the portfolio cannot be the only source of evidence about a teacher's performance. Some would use portfolios for self assessment only; others use them to help make a decision about a candidate's fitness for graduation from a program, for receiving a teaching credential, for employment in a teaching position, or for recognition for a special award.

Our authors generally take a stance on assessment and write from that perspective. The presentations range from portfolio as self reflection and discovery (Grant and Huebner; Sunstein and Potts; McKinney) to assessment for clearly defined, summative purposes (Bartell, Kaye, and Morin; Georgi and Crowe). Wolf and Dietz consider different portfolios for different assessment purposes and Synder deals with the tensions inherent in assessment purposes.

In order to extend the dialogue, we posed the following questions to the authors submitting articles for consideration for this issue of the journal:

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What are the multiple purposes and uses of portfolios in teacher education?

How should portfolios be organized, presented, managed, and evaluated?

How can portfolios be used to stimulate dialogue and discussion?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the portfolio approach to assessing teaching?

How are professionals prepared to make use of portfolio information?

What do portfolios contribute to the understanding and improvement of teaching practice?

What are the implications of portfolios for teacher education and development?

What is the place of portfolios in teacher preparation, induction, and professional development?

The articles in this issue collectively address many of these important questions and raise yet other important ones for consideration. Our authors report initial research and reflections on the use of portfolios, and share some lessons learned through practice. It is clear that portfolios have become more than a passing fad and are beginning to occupy a significant and solid place in teacher education and professional development.