Mastery ePortfolio Defense

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The following practice, teacher candidate students’ defense of a mastery presentation-style ePortfolio (MPeP), constitutes part of a programmatic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (TLA) ePortfolio in Early Childhood Education.

Social pedagogy has been defined as a “design approach for teaching and learning that engages students with what we might call an “authentic audience” (other than the teacher), where the representation of knowledge for an audience is absolutely central to the construction of knowledge in a course” (Bass & Elmendorf, 2012).

At the end of the senior year, teacher candidate students (TCs) in the Early Childhood Education capstone present and defend their mastery presentation-style ePortfolio (MPeP) to an authentic audience as one of the culminating experiences in their program. The MPeP captures the students’ documentation of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards. Although the TCs prepare all six NAEYC standards in their MPeP, for their defense they present one standard that is randomly chosen.

The oral defense allows TCs to demonstrate the student learning outcome of communication to an authentic audience comprised of peers, faculty other than the instructor, and guests. Each MPeP defense consists of two parts: 1) an overview which includes an interpretation of the NAEYC standard comprising sample artifacts that address the standard and demonstrate the TCs’ skills /competencies in this area; and 2) a question/answer session where each TCs responds to audience questions related to the TCs’ understanding of the standard, their selection process for the artifacts, and a discussion of their personal portfolio development process.
The portfolio development process consists of a self analysis of the TCs’ mastery of the competencies within the standard, a description of the featured artifacts, an analysis of how the artifacts demonstrate the competency, and what TCs have learned from the artifact creation (reflection). The MPeP defense provides a high stakes setting that replicates a job interview process. Since the MPeP is presentation-based, it can also be easily shared with others to establish credibility with colleagues, parents and other stakeholders.

Author

The practice was developed by Lynn Worden, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Coordinator in the Department of Human Development & Family Studies, with feedback from faculty colleagues and Teacher Candidate Students.

Submitted by ePortfolio Leadership Team

Description of Practice

MPeP Defense Context

Senior teacher candidate students in the Early Childhood Education capstone defend their MPeP to an authentic audience at the University of Delaware Laboratory Preschool. The TCs are placed into small groups with a faculty evaluator and guests in each group. Guests usually include program faculty external to the capstone course, faculty from other departments, university administrators, ePortfolio support staff (e.g., members of the C2L UD team), and colleagues from the local community college.

The faculty evaluators receive copies of the MPeP Defense rubric for each student. The TCs’ ability to “defend” their portfolio is critiqued in 6 areas: (1) Preparation, (2) Overview of standard, (3) Content knowledge and analysis, (4) Evidence of understanding of key concepts and their application, (5) Reflective practice, and (6) Quality of presentation.

Teacher candidate students, in groups, take turns presenting the faculty-selected standard and related ePortfolio work. After the presentation, the faculty evaluator, guests, and peers pose questions. The ePortfolio defense starts with a celebratory light meal that the students share in before the presentations and sometimes special presentations of research projects by honors students are included in the program.

This professional and collegial atmosphere underscores the importance and authenticity of the MPeP defense and creates a strong sense of community. The format enables TCs to share their academic work along with their thinking about the work in relation to set criteria, and also provides their peers with a deeper understanding of their own work.
Finally, the program faculty are provided an opportunity to synthesize the quality of the academic program experiences for their students. The faculty members’ discussions and reflections about the students’ presentations are then used to further discussions of curricular improvement. In addition, these “closing the loop” discussions are documented so that improvement strategies can be monitored and accreditation documentation also occurs.

**Reflections**

The TCs’ MPeP reflections are aimed at two levels: (1) student self-analysis of professional growth and development in relation to each standard; and (2) reflection on how artifacts represent a student’s achievement of the standard.

**Level 1:** The MPePs are designed to demonstrate the students’ understanding and application of all the competencies obtained throughout their academic program. Through artifact preparation TCs reflect on their growth and development as teachers throughout the program. Also, TCs document their growth from previous student teaching placement experiences to now. When they revisit their teaching philosophy statement they note changes and modifications over time connected to these multiple experiences.

**Level 2:** Besides TCs’ personal analysis of the standard, they are also asked reflective questions about the artifact(s) they selected to demonstrate their competency of the standard. They do so by submitting an artifact description, analysis, and reflection. In their artifact description, they demonstrate relevance and understanding by providing pertinent information that helps the audience understand what they have learned from the assignment. The analysis allows them to show how the artifact supports their understanding of the standard. The reflective section helps them assess the artifact’s impact on the children they teach, families, other teachers, the community and themselves.

As this practice is repeated for each artifact, an “iterative cycle” of engagement with each standard takes place. Students’ knowing that they have to complete a defense of their MPeP, strongly engages them in this process and encourages deeper knowledge and understanding of each standard. The TCs have an investment in the content they include in their ePortfolio.

**Impact and Evidence**

Below are some excerpts from Prof. Lynn Worden’s exit interview.

“Graduates of the program told the professor that the defense helped prepare them for job interviews. They stated that the questions they were asked during job panel style interviews were similar to defense questions. This prior practice in the defense setting provided teacher candidates with authentic interview preparation that they would not have received in a career center mock-interview.”

“Graduates also shared a link to the portfolio with prospective employers, possibly giving them an advantage over other teacher candidates who may not have a similar resource to share.”

Audio excerpt of exit interview:

Practice Identifiers

**Location** The MPeP defense takes place toward the end of the HDFS480: Student Teaching Seminar. This course is a discussion-oriented and problem-centered seminar with emphasis on the role and contributions of the Early Childhood Education professional. Students are also student teaching. Student Teaching is a full-time extended student teaching experience in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade schools. Students are under the guidance and supervision of a cooperating teacher in the classroom and a University of Delaware supervisor.

**Scale** The creation of the MPeP takes place primarily during the semester students take the Student Teaching Seminar course. Some parts of the ePortfolio are addressed earlier in the program (i.e. writing of Philosophy of Education) which are then refined during the seminar when students are creating a finished version of the MPeP.

**High Impact Practice** The Student Teaching Seminar is a capstone experience.

**Helping students advance their learning**

Mastery ePortfolio Defense, December 16, 2013
Format used for the 2013 defense was similar to a poster session where students presented their MPePs simultaneously to judges.

**Reflection as a form of Integrative Learning:**

- Make connections within a course
- Make connections across courses and semesters
- Make connections among academic experiences, co-curricular & lived experiences

**Reflection as Systematic and Disciplined form of Inquiry:**

- A structured and scaffolded process
- The Reflective Cycle
- Connecting their learning to Gen Ed or programmatic competencies

**Reflection as Social Pedagogy:**

- Sharing their ePortfolio w/ and getting comments from faculty
- Sharing & engaging in integrative ePortfolio commentary w/ other students
- Sharing their eP & getting comments from external groups

**Reflection as a Process of Personal Change:**

- Articulating their educational and career goals
- Considering their evolving personal relationship to learning and education
- Planning/preparing for transfer or advanced education
- Preparing ePortfolio to showcase to potential employers

**Professional Development**

The ePortfolio team (i.e., technological and pedagogical expertise) met with the faculty member throughout the preparation and implementation phases providing feedback and support. Team members visited the faculty's class, provided training and guidance on the use of the ePortfolio platform to the students, and was always available for consultation. The ePortfolio team assisted the faculty member in creating an introductory video to describe the purpose and structure of the ePortfolio to the students. This video was posted on the entry page to the TLA programmatic ePortfolio site.

Video of Prof. Lynn Worden discussing ePortfolio project for Early Childhood Education

**Outcomes Assessment**
The MPeP captures the students' documentation of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards. Although the TCs prepare all six NAEYC standards in their MPeP, for their defense they present one standard that is randomly chosen. The oral defense allows TCs to demonstrate the student learning outcome of communication to an authentic audience comprised of peers, faculty other than the instructor, and guests. Faculty members discussions and reflections about the students’ presentations are used to further discussions of curricular improvement. These discussions are documented so that improvement strategies can be monitored and accreditation documentation occurs.

Technology

The transition from previous paper portfolios to electronic portfolios warranted additional, yet unexpected, support for both students and faculty. The faculty member noticed that students comfortable with the ePortfolio technology emerged as natural mentors to their peers thus creating a learning community; this practice has been repeating with each cohort.

“We learned that our students needed more support to use technology, which was surprising. Conversely, there have been students who have stood out in their ability to use the ePortfolio technology, but who had not demonstrated outstanding academic abilities in other areas. They served as mentors for their peers, particularly when they were using the Sakai platform. I think some of the students feel much more competent in what they can create using various applications.”

Scaling Up

Because the number of students in the program continues to increase, completing all the students’ MPeP defenses in a timely manner has become challenging and has raised questions regarding alternatives to the current defense structure. The faculty member is now having the students present their MPePs simultaneously following a format similar to a poster session. Teacher candidates share their MPeP on a laptop and the faculty/guests/and peers walk around and score the presentations using the MPeP defense evaluation sheet. Ideally, this format would accommodate for a small group size, feedback and discussion between students, guests, peers, and faculty evaluator. The assignment expectations and parameters remain the same while introducing the students to the professional format of a poster session, a new venue for the students.

Attachments and Supporting Documents

Course handouts:

- Portfolio_Defense_Assignment_III
- PortfolioEvaluationRubric
- MasteryPortfolioDefenseEvaluation
- ArtifactDetails-InstructionsforNAEYCStandards

Samples from a student’s MPeP:

Level 1: NAEYC Standard5 Personal Analysis Student Sample

Level 2: NAEYC Standard4 Artifact Details Student Sample


Conclusion
This culminating experience for teacher candidate students in the Early Childhood Education capstone provides an opportunity for students to publicly present and defend their mastery presentation-style ePortfolio (MPeP) to an authentic audience. So often students are asked to create academic work which they may not always be able to connect to their learning or see its value. Since the MPeP is presentation-based, it is easily shared with others to establish credibility with colleagues, parents and other stakeholders. The MPeP defense provides a high stakes setting that replicates a job interview process. This is so relevant to these senior students ready to apply for teaching positions. The setting provides a professional and collegial atmosphere which underscores the importance and authenticity of the MPeP defense along with creating a strong sense of community.