# The journey from pre-service teacher to practicing teacher: A national snapshot of portfolios of evidence in Australian initial teacher education

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## Abstract

It is now over two and a half years since the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) report, Action now: Classroom ready teachers (TEMAG, 2014) specified that pre-service teachers should develop a 'portfolio of evidence' during their initial teacher education program to demonstrate 'classroom readiness' before their graduation. Since its release, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers have been progressively realigning course design, curriculum, assessment and professional experience programs in order to encompass the key recommendations that have filtered from the TEMAG report into national teacher course accreditation requirements.

The study reported in this paper was funded by Federal Government's Department of Education as part of an investigation into priority research areas relating to ITE Professional Experience. The funding was made available through the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) and the National Academic Directors of Professional Experience's (NADPE) national steering committee has managed a set of research projects addressing the priority areas. The *Pre-service teachers' portfolios of evidence: A national snapshot of the collection and assessment of evidence of practice within Australian ITE* project targeted all 48 Initial Teacher Education providers in Australia. It recruited the Academic Director of Professional Experience (ADPE) (or equivalent) in each institution to ask individual staff members working on implementing portfolios to complete an online survey.

The survey addressed a range of aspects relating to portfolio implementation in teacher education. It was designed to report on the characteristics of portfolio use and the progression of portfolio enactment in each context. The data collected provided an insight into the use of portfolios in initial teacher education from the perspective of a range of staff involved in the process. The study found that implementation of portfolios of evidence is predominantly undertaken by academic lecturing staff and is usually led by those responsible for course coordination. Portfolio work customarily occurs at a program/course level in pockets of innovation and, when successful, portfolio activity enables professional requirements (including the Australian Professional Teacher Standards), units of study and professional experience placements to be connected across a course of study in a meaningful and systematic way.

This snapshot confirms that a collection of 'champions' are driving responsive change for the implementation of portfolios of evidence in initial teacher education. While full portfolio integration is not yet widespread, there is clear evidence that the portfolio has the potential to serve as a device to evidence classroom readiness in ITE.

**Keywords**: *Initial Teacher Education, Professional Experience, Portfolios of Practice*

## Introduction

Australian ITE providers are under significant pressure to respond quickly to new and evolving accreditation requirements. Simultaneously, the financial constraints placed on ITE providers require them to make judicious decisions about resourcing learning management platforms and teaching and learning resources that make tangible benefits to student learning (Kertesz, 2016). Aligning pedagogical arrangements with these drivers for change provide opportunities for innovative and exceptional practice which ultimately contribute to student learning. The effectiveness of portfolios of evidence is therefore inextricably linked to the digital environment in which these are produced, the resources made available to support and develop them, and, responses and innovation by teacher educators to extend beyond how these resources are conceived (Fox, Muccio, White, & Tian, 2015). Gaining a national snapshot of the ways in which these decisions are being made by ITE providers and the outcomes associated with these decisions have implications for the sector as a whole (Ndoye, Ritzhaupt, & Parker, 2012) and individual ITE providers looking to respond to these challenges.

The project described in this paper surveyed stakeholders from all ITE providers in Australia. The survey addressed aspects such as strategies for implementation, patterns of use, roll-out and the consequences of embedding a portfolio into teacher education programs. The findings from this study have helped to clarify how and why we engage with portfolios in initial teacher education.

## Background

The need for portfolios (Light, Chen, & Ittelson, 2012) has been articulated in the TEMAG review (2014). The Government Response (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, 2015) led to changes in accreditation requirements, meaning that ITE providers must incorporate portfolios into ITE programs. Mandating the 'portfolio of evidence' is an attempt to capture how graduates are able to verify their development against the Graduate Teacher Standards (Australian Professional Standards for Teachers [APST]) while also emphasising the quality and outcomes associated with ITE programs.

Within the context of rapid change within Australian ITE, implementation of portfolios has evolved beyond capturing evidence of impact and practice to simultaneously highlight pedagogical arrangements that are re-organising ITE programs. This includes informing how learning managements systems align with ITE providers' internal needs while also making this evidence available for other purposes and audiences (Masters, 2016). The dependence on technological infrastructure is important to note and institutions that offer initial teacher

education have a clear responsibility to provide systems that are robust and fit for purpose.

Changes to national accreditation requirements have emphasised Professional Experience as a central component of ITE, and the need to capture the development and practice of pre-service teachers in valid and consistent ways, to demonstrate evidence of their achievement against the Graduate Teacher Standards of the APST. The requirement to produce evidence of practice and make this evidence available to audiences beyond the institution has highlighted the need for ITE providers to collect and assess pre-service teacher's achievement in innovative ways. The implementation of portfolios of evidence of their practice within ITE has been a response to these drivers for change. This implementation has also been responsible for re-imagining ITE pedagogy and curriculum.

## The Study

The Federal Government's Department of Education, Canberra, identified five priority areas for research for ITE Professional Experience, in response to the TEMAG review (2014). Subsequently, funding for this research was made available through the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) and the National Academic Directors of Professional Experience (NADPE) national steering committee was approached to investigate the priorities areas. This study addressed the area of portfolio use in alignment with professional experience and is titled *Pre-service teachers' portfolios of evidence: A national snapshot of the collection and assessment of evidence of practice within Australian initial teacher education*. The findings of a nationwide survey are reported in this paper.

The aim of this project was to capture a national snapshot of the ways in which ITE providers are using pre-service teachers' portfolios of evidence to collect and assess their evidence of practice, and assess program impact at the point of graduation and entry into the teaching profession. This study explored the following research questions:

1. How are pre-service teachers' portfolios of evidence of their practice being collected and assessed within ITE?

2. How are portfolios supporting Pre-Service Teachers to demonstrate evidence of meeting the Graduate Teacher Standards?

3. Where is innovation occurring through the use of portfolios?

4. How are portfolios influencing pedagogical delivery of ITE provision?

5. How are institutions re-aligning resources, personnel and infrastructure to support implementation?

6. What challenges are ITE providers encountering through implementation and how are they responding to them (including issues related to data ownership, management, storage and confidentiality)?

It is recognised that the design, development, implementation and evaluation of pre-service teachers' portfolios of evidence within ITE programs is undertaken by diverse teams of academic and professional staff within all ITE providers. Consequently, participant selection for this project involved a targeted initial approach to the Academic Directors of Professional Experience (ADPE) from all ITE

providers in Australia. The ADPE has knowledge of where portfolio work is occurring within their site and the staff involved. The ADPE were therefore asked to distribute the survey invitation to any interested staff within their faculty/school but also to target specific staff associated with this work. Disseminating the survey at faculty/school level through the ADPE was paramount to capturing how and where this work occurs and why.

The survey was developed in the online survey tool, Survey Monkey, and consisted of 40 questions, including a variety of formats such as multiple choice, drop down, ranking, matrix and short answer. Some questions were *adaptive*, where subsequent questions were revealed according to the responder's answer selection. The questions in the survey were designed to be as concise and clear as possible in order to mitigate questionnaire fatigue. The estimated time for completion was 15-20 minutes.

The content of the survey was developed to address each of the key components in the research questions. A goal of the survey was to capture where portfolio of evidence development occurs in ITE programs and the range of staff involved. It also addressed implementation aspects such as the drivers for inclusion, types of activity, roll-out, challenges and opportunities. Participants were also asked to identify influences and impact of portfolio work. The survey also asked about resourcing and funding provided to facilitate portfolio implementation.

## Findings

Several key insights relating to the nature and extent of portfolio implementation emerged from the survey data. Perhaps the most significant of these was that the responsibility for portfolio implementation is predominately undertaken by academic staff, many of whom are also responsible for course/program coordination. These staff are 'champions' who drive implementation activity, inform decision making and lead teams to carry out this work. They also are heavily involved in the design and development of portfolio tasks, they participate in teaching and learning using portfolios and they inform how portfolios of evidence connect to new accreditation requirements and graduate entry into the profession.

While there were instances where portfolio activity was left up to students or confined to unit/subject level activity, the majority of respondents identified that their goal was to move to towards full course integration. Those leading this transition identified that there was a need for a shared vision where portfolios are implemented in a systematic way to evidence learning across academic contexts and professional experience. The key drivers for change were reported as the current accreditation requirements and particularly the need for a portfolio of evidence that connects ITE with the APST, for example;

> *We haven't take a coordinated and systematic approach [previously] but with the new accreditation and implementation of revised and new courses we are changing this. We will have a rollout in new courses where the portfolio of evidence will be embedded.*

Resourcing and support required for implementation extends beyond financial costs or the purchasing of digital infrastructure. Participants emphasised the need for a shared understanding across the school or faculty and professional learning for all staff beyond the current implementation teams. Resourcing was therefore

identified as a means of supporting pedagogical priorities and outcomes associated with implementation.

Although participants acknowledged that there was much work to be done, the majority (70%) of those who completed the full survey considered that implementation in their context so far, had been successful. It may be possible though, that some ITE providers may have decided not to complete the survey because little success or progress had been achieved at their institution. It should also be noted that almost half of participations had exited the survey through adaptive questioning before this question because they reported that they knew little about portfolio implementation.

## Future Directions

The participation in this survey was low (n=67 participants from 21 institutions) and so further data is required to provide a representational picture of Australia's 48 ITE providers. It is therefore recommended that a further data collection round is conducted to generate a larger participation cohort across more ITE providers. This further research may help to further understand how some ITE teams are able to overcome competing challenges of resourcing, staffing and technological constraints in order to conceptualise and then enact successful portfolio integration in their ITE programs.

The information from this work will contribute to ACDE's and the wider sector's understanding of the role of portfolios in ITE. The ongoing investigation will inform this understanding by:

- Documenting a snapshot of current practice around the use of PSTs' portfolios of evidence of their practice in meeting the Graduate Teacher Standards in Australia;

- Capturing attitudes to the use of portfolios in ITE;

- Highlighting the innovation and the drivers for change in ITE pedagogy, curriculum and assessment using portfolios;

- Recording examples of challenges, barriers and risks associated with implementing portfolios;

- Identifying the infrastructure needs associated with portfolios;

- Building capacity within NADPE and Australian ITE through dissemination of knowledge and innovative practice.

## Conclusion

The Federal Government has clearly identified that ITE providers are responsible for ensuring that pre-service teachers are 'classroom ready' by the time they finish their ITE course. Further, it is also apparent that the onus is on ITE providers to ensure that each student has a portfolio of evidence that substantiates this readiness. As ITE providers grapple with the challenges thrown out by these mandates, a national snapshot of the current state of play is likely to be beneficial for all those trying using portfolios in effective and meaningful ways.

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## Biography

### Jennifer Masters

Jennifer Masters is an academic and a researcher who specialises in the use of digital technologies in education. She has an eLearning focused position in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania and is based in Launceston. Her research interests include creative and the applied use of computers, informal learning and social constructivism, mobile learning and notions of ethical digital citizenship. She has used ePortfolios in teacher education for many years as a device to represent the learning journey.

### Chad Morrison

Chad Morrison is the Academic Director of Professional Experience in the Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania. His research interests include the preparation of pre-service teachers (with a specific interest in Professional Experience programs) and early career teachers and teaching. These research fields incorporate a range of interrelated topics including the development, wellbeing and identity work of teachers, their teaching contexts, and, the structural, cultural and political factors that shape this work and the outcomes associated with it. The participation, wellbeing and engagement of students is fundamentally tied issues relating to their teachers, and these represent another overlapping teaching/research concentration

### Megan Quentin-Baxter

Megan Quentin-Baxter is the Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching in the School of Education at UTAS. Megan led a team in a Jisc-funded EPICS project that embedded a bespoke eportfolio for all students at a previous institution, and researched transfer of portfolio content across schools, colleges and universities, leading to the development of the Leap2A specification for eportfolio portability and interoperability. She also chaired the "ePortfolios, identity and personalised learning in healthcare education" conference (2007) where new authorisation and access tools for sharing learning environments across education partnerships (Shibboleth) were showcased.