



Early years curriculum materials

Making and using digital folios



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Making and using folios

During the trial of the Prep Year, the QSA worked with a number of teachers to explore how information and communication technologies (ICTs) could be best used to support teachers as they implemented the monitoring and assessing process described in the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG)*.

This case study looks at how one teacher developed a digital folio (or “e-folio”) to support monitoring and assessing. The case study also focuses on how a teacher at another school used the digital folio.

The case study is presented in a question-and-answer format, and it investigates the teachers’ thinking and feelings about coming to terms with the monitoring and assessment approach. The narrative provides insight into how to develop and use a digital folio.

A commentary is provided in some places to highlight particular issues or to draw attention to particular points.

Copies of the folio (in PowerPoint and Word) are also on the *Early years curriculum materials: Teacher’s CD-ROM*.

| Anne-Maree's narrative | Question and commentary | Belinda's narrative |
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| <p>Before I started as the prep teacher at St Saviour's Primary School in Toowoomba, I had worked at the school for 12 years as a preschool teacher.</p> | <p>What was the context in which you were working?</p> | <p>I started teaching at Inala State School where I worked as a Year 1 and Year 2 teacher for three years before I started teaching in the prep class. Inala has a diverse community and, for many children, English is a second language. The predominant language in my prep class is Vietnamese.</p> |
| <p>Initially I didn't see folios as "assessment". Rather, I saw them as a way of recording what the children were doing and where they were at.</p> <p>When I started using the <i>Preschool Curriculum Guidelines (PCG)</i>, I began to make some links between what the children had been doing and what they had been learning in relation to the curriculum.</p> <p>This learning was recorded under the headings of "Foundation Learning Areas" (FLAs) and "Multiple Intelligences".</p> | <p>What did you see were the purposes of monitoring and assessing learning before you started teaching in the Prep Year?</p> <p>The <i>EYCG</i> says the purposes of monitoring and assessing learning are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plan for future learning • build a picture of a child's learning and development • give direction to conversations with the child, parents or carers, specialist teachers, the child's next teacher and other professional colleagues • record point-in-time judgments using the early learning record and report on these. | <p>My school had an assessment guide, the purpose of which was to help my planning, to inform parents during interviews and to track children through their transition to the next year level.</p> |

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| <p>I used a folio to record children's learning. This served three main purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helped me communicate with parents. • It educated parents about learning through play. • It documented learning through play. <p>Initially, photographs were taken of children at play, sent for processing, and pasted with a commentary. There was no real discussion of the learning which had taken place.</p> <p>With the introduction of the PCG, I used digital technology to develop an electronic form for recording children's learning through play. The documentation included a digital photo, a description of the play, an analysis of the learning under the FLA headings, and a space for parents' comments. I printed these, placed them in display folders, and sent them home to parents.</p> <p>I also documented classroom events and</p> | <p>What was the approach you used to support monitoring and assessing, or to talk about children's learning prior to prep?</p> <p>The <i>EYCG</i> identifies a new approach to monitoring and assessing learning for use in the Preparatory Year.</p> <p>What were the features of this approach?</p> <p>The approach to monitoring and assessing uses three components that help teachers talk about children's learning. These components are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a folio • the learning statements from the curriculum • the early learning record (ELR). | <p>As I was a beginning teacher I felt that I was not yet at a point where I could develop my own practices in response to the school's assessment guide.</p> <p>Lots of content was also prescribed for assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • summary records at the end of each term • writing samples (from focused learning tasks, negotiated activities, class reflection) • running records (from literacy centre and reading groups) • outcome reporting (using school form, and collecting work samples) • end-of-semester reporting (using school form) • oral-language reports (from our oral-language program and oral-language screening) • the continua. <p>I used a portfolio containing family information, running records, writing samples, end-of-term outcome reports, and end-of-semester reporting,</p> |
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| discussed learnings within the FLAs. . | | oral-language screening and the continua. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • digital photos of children at play • samples of children’s learning • language samples • anecdotal records • written observation | <p>How did you go about gathering information for these purposes? The <i>EYCG</i> describes a number of ways in which teachers can gather evidence of children’s learning.</p> <p>They emphasise that teachers need to monitor and assess by gathering information and evidence over time so that they can build an overall picture of children’s learning.</p> <p>Strategies for gathering information include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observing children as they learn • talking with children about their learning • helping children identify what they have learnt • gathering the things children produce during their learning • commenting on children’s learning in relation to the curriculum • having formal and informal discussions with parents, carers and professional colleagues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • running records • writing samples • end-of-term outcome reports, and end-of-semester reporting • oral-language screening • observation against the continua |
| <p>Originally, when I heard prep was coming in, I was concerned that it was going to be standardised and formal, with a direct instruction model that was going to push down the Years 1 to 3 curriculum.</p> <p>After reading the <i>EYCG</i>, I saw the</p> | <p>What were your initial reactions to the assessment framework identified in the <i>EYCG</i>?</p> <p>The assessment framework will help teachers talk about children’s learning.</p> | <p>It came back to what my priorities were to start with. I had assessment as a priority but I didn’t understand how it would work in my teaching practice. So I asked myself these questions:</p> <p>What should a prep folio look like?</p> |

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assessment approach as a way of focusing the documentation I was already doing for my preschool folios.

The early learning record (ELR) was a way of summarising all the information that had been gathered.

I found that by monitoring and assessing I was focusing my teaching because I knew exactly what the focus of the learning should be. I could help children link this to their own interests, ideas and theories.

The learning statements helped me to know what to look for in children's learning. This impacted on my planning, teaching and assessment.

It all became a cycle that was interrelated.

I really tried to immerse myself in the curriculum materials. I photocopied them and hung them around the room, and kept the phase descriptors close at hand.

Once I knew the learning statements, my observations became more focused. I found that as I interacted with children I was beginning to analyse their learning at the same time. I didn't plan this; it just started to happen as I became more familiar with the learning statements.

The folio provides a language for commenting on the learning children have done as they participate in the program.

The learning statements provide a language for commenting on the learning in relation to the curriculum.

The ELR provides a language for talking about the distance travelled in children's learning.



As a Year 1 teacher my portfolios had been prescriptive. My prep folios had no boundaries. This caused me to go a little crazy collecting everything! I had CDs full of photos and files full of Post-it® Notes and work samples.

Who is the prep folio for?

Is the folio for the parents, the Year 1 teacher or to inform my planning. These folios can look very different but I wanted one to cover all audiences.

How does the ELR link to the portfolio?

Initially this was in the too-hard basket. I focused on developing the program, and I kept putting off the folio, saying I would get to it soon. I found myself starting to make it much bigger than it really was. I had to start thinking about things realistically so I could manage the work and the thinking in the time I had available.

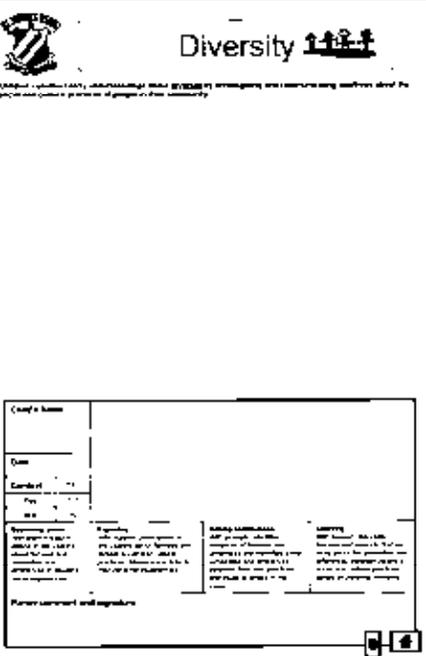
What and when do you report to the parents using the portfolio?

This was a school-based decision and was left up to me. Initially I did not use the folio for the parents. I used the documentation I made of projects to report to parents as a whole group.

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| <p>For me, the key was to know the early learning areas and the learning statements really well. The support material was also really helpful. The phase descriptors helped me to make judgments for the ELR and for my planning. They gave me examples of a child's phase of learning.</p> <p>The phase descriptors also helped with my planning because they gave examples of the types of things I could expect to see children doing as they began to operate in the next phase.</p> |  | <p>This whole-group reporting was used because for many parents English was a second language, and time with an interpreter was limited. When individual interviews are requested an interpreter is made available.</p> <p>How do I manage my time to do this?</p> <p>Initially very badly and in a state of panic because I was not focusing on the job at hand. I was making it harder than it needed to be. I kept putting the ELR in the too-hard basket.</p> <p>I soon realised that if you never make the time you would never find the time.</p> <p>Throughout this time my monitoring of children was assisting my planning but I was not making the link to their learning by thinking about the phases in the ELR. I really had to answer the above questions before I could begin to make informed decisions in developing a workable portfolio.</p> |
| <p>Gathering evidence</p> <p>I used the same practices for gathering evidence; that is, I gathered digital pictures and samples of children's learning.</p> <p>I also started to document group projects and learnings, and hung these up around the room.</p> | <p>What things did you change in your monitoring and assessing practices?</p> | <p>Gathering evidence</p> <p>I started documenting with my digital camera. I took photographs of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • items children produced during their learning • children interacting • samples of writing |

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| <p>I started to link information (from this group documentation) about individual children to the ELR.</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• objects children made• activities or projects children were involved in. <p>I documented observations of children's learning in the form of written notes that included oral-language samples.</p> |
| <p>I became more focused in my gathering of evidence. Whereas before, the "cuteness factor" may have influenced what was photographed, later it was documented because of the learning it demonstrated.</p> <p>Knowing the learning statements helped me to know what to look for, and the descriptors helped me to make judgments about a child's phase of learning.</p> | <p>Did you notice any difference in the evidence you were gathering?</p>  | <p>The folio helped me focus on learning statements, which I noticed required the children not just to do things but often to be able to talk about things.</p> <p>I had many children in my group for whom English was not their first language, and I found that I needed to look beyond oral language to gather evidence of these children's learning.</p> <p>This forced me to focus on what children knew in their first language. I did this in partnership with a bi-lingual teacher aide, who helped me to interpret behaviours and samples of learning. I became conscious of observing children's non-oral transactions in play.</p> <p>I also started to take more notice of the ways children documented their own ideas, such as in their paintings, writing and in the books they made.</p> <p>I had to be mindful that many of the</p> |

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| | | <p>children who knew English as a second language already demonstrated many literacy practices in their home language. I started to see this as a foundation for the acquisition of literacy in English, not as a deficit.</p> |
| <p>Originally, I inserted digital photos (of children and evidence of their learning) into an electronic form.</p> <p>The form included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • photos • narratives • a grid of the early learning areas, • the contexts of learning • a space for parents' comments. <p>I typed information into the form and printed the page. I then placed the page into a child's display folder (the folio).</p> <p>I photographed learning stories (posters from group projects) with the digital camera, printed them out and placed them in the children's folios as well.</p> <p>This helped to show people looking at the folio the types of contexts in which the evidence of learning was gathered.</p> | <p>How did you organise the evidence of learning that you gathered?</p>  | <p>Initially I stored digital photos on CD and recorded observations on Post-it[®] Notes. I kept samples of learning and other comments in folders in a filing cabinet.</p> <p>Now each child has a digital folder and in that folder there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the photographed evidence of learning • photos of the children learning. <p>The things, which I formerly kept in a folder in a filing cabinet I now photograph with my digital camera and keep in a file on the computer.</p> <p>I use a PowerPoint presentation that incorporates the ELR to interpret this information. .</p> |

Originally I would use an observation of a child, and would interpret it across a number of learning statements.

I referred to the descriptors as examples of what to look for, and how to phrase my comments.

The level of support the child needed was an important key to understanding and making judgments about a child's phase of learning.

At first I recorded my judgments by writing the date and name of an observation onto an ELR under the headings of the "Learning Statement" and Phase of Learning.

After a period of trial and error, the ELR developed into a single page, with date references to the evidence. The ELR was at the front of the folio, with the evidence following.

How do you interpret evidence?

The image shows two examples of Evidence Learning Records (ELRs) from St Saviour's Primary Prep Year Learning Portfolio. The top one is titled "Gross Motor" and the bottom one is titled "Representing ideas". Both include a list of learning statements on the left, a grid for recording observations, and a section for evidence photos and notes on the right.

Initially I was taking photos with no real link to the curriculum. The link would come when I later analysed the photo. This caused me to have too many photos to analyse.

Later, as the learning statements and phases in the curriculum became more familiar, I would make more informed choices when taking photos. You really need to get your head around the learning statements, the rubrics and the phase descriptors before you can make judgments about the children's learning.

For me the only way the curriculum made sense was to see it in action. So I had to put the curriculum in action before I could understand assessment. The more you use the curriculum documents, the easier this the process becomes.

The next part of the case study asks specific questions of each teacher. It explores some of the decisions and motivations behind developing the digital folio. It also discusses how using the digital folio began to affect one teacher's practice.

When did you first think about using digital folios?

It soon became evident that there was a need to make links between the evidence of learning and the ELR. Also, as the paper folios went home regularly, and there were no back-ups of information, I was concerned about folios becoming lost.

I was already using a digital folder for storing children's photos, but this wasn't telling me about the children's learning. What I really wanted was a way of linking the evidence I had about learning to the curriculum and the ELR.



What changed when you started to use the digital folio?

Initially, my digital portfolios were Word documents. I found Word to be clunky and rigid. I also did not have a digital link to the ELR, but instead kept a paper version.

PowerPoint was a much more fluid program. The way the folio was set up in PowerPoint I was able to literally see the links between my photographs, learning statements and the phases in the ELR.

When I was doing paper folios I was less familiar with the curriculum, but this format has forced me to better engage with it. I am constantly looking for learning I can capture in photographs and then transferring that knowledge into the curriculum.

I found I have come to know the children better and understand their learning more.

What does the folio physically look like?

I now use PowerPoint for my folios, but when I first started making digital folios I tried many different versions. These used different layouts, displayed different information, and even used different software. Sometimes I would try something and realise that I was better off with the folio the way I had it in the first place.

After I trialled many versions, I developed a final folio style.

On my computer I make a folder for each child. Inside each child's folder I make:

- another folder in which I store the relevant photos or any other digital files relevant to that child
- a PowerPoint file with a slide for each of the 15 learning statements (one per slide), as well as a slide with the ELR on it.

I take photos and make observations of the children regularly and store them in each child's folder.

The PowerPoint presentation is where I recorded my analysis of the information in



You started using this digital folio after it was developed. How has it helped you?

I have started to think differently about the way I observe. I now use my digital camera like a photocopier, I don't just photograph the children but instead I look at the things they do, make, write and draw. I am now gathering evidence of children's learning instantly and efficiently.

This way I keep continuity in the classroom. Observing is quick and easy, children get to keep the things they make and I get a good picture of it.

I can keep as evidence things I couldn't keep before, constructing with blocks or boxes, and interactions. I don't know how to capture the sound yet but I'll get there.

I can organise evidence about processes in a way I couldn't before. I can link a design that a child drew to an actual object or construction that they made. For example, a child made name tags and used them for a transition activity. Using the camera I was able to capture the whole

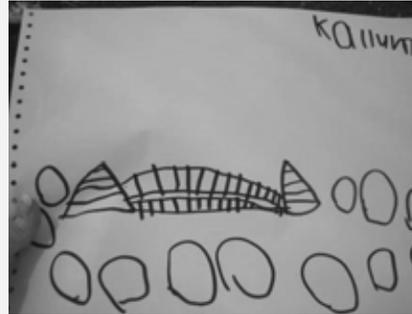
the folder.

To do this I:

1. import selected photos, related to the learning statement, onto the relevant slide
2. make commentary on the slide about the evidence of learning (the photos I imported)
3. identify relevant contexts in which I had observed the learning
4. make a judgement about a phase of learning when a variety of evidence is collated and mark this in the ELR by adding a date and highlighting a cell.

In each child's PowerPoint folio there is also a home page from where I can link to the analysis folio, the photos, the ELR and documentation of the program.

The ELR provides a "one page overview" of learning and distance travelled. It links directly (via hyperlinks) to each Learning Statement, so that evidence of learning can be viewed.



sequence of events and build a picture story of what took place. It was showing more of the learning than just collecting the cards, and she was able to use her cards again; they were not in a folder in a filing cabinet.

I now store samples of children's learning and observations in an organised and informative way. Because of this I can use observations to inform my planning. I can also revisit evidence or observations to build up a picture of the children and fill gaps in my program.

I find the folios more accessible in the computer and because of this I use them more than I did before. There is no more fishing between a million pieces of paper. I just click a link on a page.

In future I can really see it cutting down on the time I spend. I can collect everything in the digital folio and link it through to the ELR.

I also have just one document that I can use to interpret and analyse both the children's learning and my teaching.

Not only have I found the digital

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| | | <p>portfolio useful for interpreting the children's learning, but it also shows me areas of the curriculum I may not be covering.</p> |
| <p>How do you share information with parents? I print out the learning statements and give them to parents in display folios. The parents take them home and as I add pages I send them home so the parents can comment. I find that this enhances the partnerships with parents. Children also have access to the folios, and frequently look at them and look over all that they've learnt.</p> <p>At the end of each semester I print a copy of the ELR and add that to the paper folio. There is no need to formally report to parents, as they are constantly informed about the learning process through the folios.</p> | | |
| <p>How much time does all this take? During the development phase it took an enormous amount of time, but now I feel that this process is almost at a manageable level.</p> <p>With electronic pages already set up, I can now insert a photo, add a description and make some analysis fairly quickly.</p> <p>I still struggle with the time it takes to</p> |  | <p>Does using the digital folio save you time?</p> <p>Yes it does save me time. It enables me to make a direct link to phases and the ELR. It allows me to do this at a click of a button when I visit a child's folio.</p> <p>Because it is so accessible to me I update the ELR regularly. Previously I</p> |

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| <p>download photos and sort them into each child's folder. I find that this is best done on a regularly to keep the process manageable.</p> <p>It is important to be selective in the choice of photos, choosing photos that best represent the learning that has taken place.</p> <p>My principal allowed me to bank my non-contact time into whole days, and I used this time to add photos, write commentary to learning statement slides, and make links to the ELR.</p> | | <p>would have been flicking through folders of work at the end of term and making judgments and then recording those judgments on paper.</p> <p>In future I can really see it cutting down on my time. I can collect everything in the digital folio and link it through to the early learning record.</p> |
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Thanks to Anne-Maree d'Abadie from St Saviour's Primary School in Toowoomba, and to Belinda Lattimore from Inala State School.