

## Portfolio Documentation in Context

BY RANDY WONG

Music-in-Education Portfolios, like assessment tools of any sort, cannot exist in a vacuum. There must be a community of like-minded individuals who can appreciate the work of the MIE student or MIE professional. Without a supportive environment of peers, mentors, and teachers, the reasons behind portfolio documentation and assessment would be lost on our students. Howard Gardner draws notice to the problem that educators generally face when veering away from traditional forms of assessment:

The major obstacle I see to assessment-in-context is not availability of resources but rather lack of will. There is in the country today an enormous desire to make education uniform, to treat all students in the same way, and to apply the same kinds of one-dimensional metrics to all.

Gardner proposes that in order for alternative forms of assessment (i.e. the portfolio) to exist at all,

It would be necessary for a wider gamut of individuals to “pitch in”; for college faculty to examine the [portfolios] that are submitted; for community members to offer mentorships, apprenticeships, or “special pods”; for parents to find out what their children are doing in school and to work with them on their projects.<sup>1</sup>

At New England Conservatory, I have created a specific role for our guided interns—the *MIE Documentation Specialist*. Documentation Specialists are MIE Research Center guided interns who are empowered with the rich task of documenting class activities with the purpose of sharing that work with the MIE community-at-large, such that colleagues from other MIENC sites can more easily learn about what we do here. In order to maintain well-rounded and objective perspectives, Documentation Specialists are encouraged to collect a multitude of artifacts from the class seminar or internship that they are assigned to; these artifacts have included peer interviews, video recordings of activities, transcripts of class sessions, and even anthologies of peer notes and journal entries. Documentation Specialists are encouraged to work in teams of two or more, if possible, so that the act of documentation doesn’t become a burden, particularly if the students conducting the work are also members of the class they are documenting. This is not to say that students in MIE classes don’t also collect their own documentation; the role of the Documentation Specialist is not to act as a ‘court reporter’ *per se*, but rather as someone who can help share specific learning instances with an outside audience. And in order to facilitate the sharing of the work that they observe, MIE Documentation Specialists assist in the creation of class portfolios, and also make weekly posts to the MIE NewsBlog ([www.mieatnec.org/blog](http://www.mieatnec.org/blog)), which itself serves as a ‘live’ portfolio of current MIE work.

Furthermore, we have also created the role of the *MIE Portfolio Archivist-Analyst*. Guided interns who choose this persona undertake the responsibility of acquainting themselves with our MIE Portfolio Library (which includes individual student, class, and cumulative Concentration portfolios from the inception of the MIE program in the late 1990s) and the portfolio process. Portfolio Archivist-Analysts are also familiarized with similar portfolio work done in other Research Center and National Consortium projects; for example, that of the LLSN School Portfolio System, that will be reported on in the fourth issue of this *Journal*. Portfolio Archivist-Analysts work hand-in-hand with Documentation Specialists to ensure that the appropriate types of documentation are being collected, and both roles help to inform their class peers, guided internship mentors, and teaching faculty of particular issues, concerns, or successes that the portfolio program may need to address.

At the end of the semester, Documentation Specialists and Portfolio Archivist-Analysts meet to assemble class portfolios that

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will serve as an additional record of a particular course. Portfolio Archivist-Analysts collect incoming student class and internship portfolios and digitize them in accordance with the MIE Digital Portfolio System. Once students’ portfolios are digitized, MIE faculty members electronically annotate them with reflections, questions, feedback, and scores. And when students receive their hard-copy portfolios back, they also receive a copy of the digital, annotated version. At the same time, students can opt-in to our MIE Portfolio Showcase Program, which serves as the repository for student work that we can use for publication on our website or in this *Journal*. Likewise, those portfolios are made available for other Conservatory students who are interested in learning from their peers’ work. Thus, all students who participate in the MIE Concentration program (and by default, the MIE portfolio process) become active members of the “wider gamut of individuals” Gardner suggests is necessary for a system like this to function. Additionally, Gardner’s own views on the regularity of reflection can help us to better understand how and why the MIE portfolio

process is important to those who are active in it:

By asking students to keep and review process-folios regularly, we hope to involve them in constant reflection on their activities and to allow them the opportunity to monitor and to learn from their own growth and even their own setbacks. Ultimately, we hope that these process-folios can become rewards in themselves as well as a tangible record of an artistic apprenticeship.<sup>2</sup>

With the creation of an ecosystem (affectionately referred to as the “M-i-Ecosystem”) the centerpiece of which is the student/guided intern and his/her portfolio, we are hoping that students may start to recognize that the partnership of teaching and learning is a lifelong endeavor, and that the skills that they hone while creating their portfolios are applicable whether or not they eventually choose to become teaching artists, researchers, or professional musicians. ¶

<sup>1</sup> Gardner, H. (1991). Assessment in context: The alternative to standardized testing. In B. R. Gifford and M. C. O’Connor (Eds.), *Changing assessments: Alternative views of aptitude, achievement, and instruction* (pp. 77-119). Weston, MA: Kluwer.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



Monica Soto-Gil, a vocalist who was the recipient of an Albert Schweitzer Foundation Fellowship, poses with preschool students she taught music to at the Hattie B. Cooper Community Center in Roxbury, MA.