STUDENT PORTFOLIOS

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Introduction

Several years ago a colleague and I piloted student portfolios at the eighth grade level. At that time the only portfolio I was familiar with was the job search portfolio required of me before I graduated from college. Although I used my professional portfolio to help get hired at my first teaching job, few educators at that time kept a professional portfolio. Since we began using portfolios with eighth grade students, my colleagues and the many students have made great strides, and I have seen this alternative assessment truly take off with students.

The purposes of the portfolios are for students to be able to set, and hopefully meet, goals, to show growth, and to assess their own work, or what is commonly referred to as collect, select, and reflect. Students in my language arts and reading class complete an assessment portfolio over the course of one school year by utilizing a working portfolio during both class and intervention time, and they are created using a large bound book of construction paper.

Year after year, I am amazed at how students take ownership of their portfolios, and I find them helpful in examining a child’s academic growth as well as using them for student led conferences.

Because I am a strong proponent of student portfolios, I want to make this form of assessment better, and I want to expand portfolios into the seventh grade so that portfolio assessment becomes school wide. The final demonstration of my research on student portfolios is a teacher handbook for portfolio use which includes the types of portfolios, the benefits of portfolios, how to get started, and the majority of this handbook contains reproducible pages for
teacher use in the classroom. This handbook is easy to follow and teacher friendly for even the teacher with no portfolio knowledge. Although the handbook is geared toward the middle school level, it could easily be modified for younger grade levels. Not only will I use this handbook, but hopefully my colleagues may also use it.

Portfolio Definitions

For many years photographers, artists, actors, writers, and models have been using portfolios to display and present their work, their talents, and their accomplishments. This real life showcase idea behind a portfolio is also an important function of a classroom portfolio, but ask any educator for the definition of a portfolio, and you will most likely hear several different definitions (Jasmine, 1992). *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition,* defines “portfolio” as “a hinged cover or flexible case for carrying loose papers, pictures, or pamphlets”, but in the field of education portfolios do much more than just carry loose papers. In 1993, the National Education Association defined portfolios as a record of learning that focuses on the student’s work and her/his reflection on that work (Danielson, 1997). A simple definition of portfolios is a collection of student work used to show student learning and measure academic progress over time. Although many definitions of portfolios exist in the field of education, most educators experienced with the use of portfolios would probably agree that the purpose of a portfolio is to engage students in their learning, to help students learn the skills of self-evaluation and reflection, and to document student learning through the collection of student work (Kimeldorf, 1994; LaBoskey, 2000).
A portfolio is more than just a container full of stuff; it is a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by both the teacher and the student to monitor growth of the student’s knowledge and skills (Vavrus, 1990). Some writers, commenting on the range of meanings associated with the word portfolio, have concluded that the concept is devoid of useful meaning. Others, however, recognize that the multiple definitions simply emphasize the many differences in purpose (Danielson, 1997). Even though many differences exist in the emphasis of the portfolio, most definitions share certain characteristics. First, portfolios consist of a collection of student work. Second, the collections are purposeful rather than random. As stated by Arter (1990, p.1), a portfolio is more than a folder of work; a portfolio should be a sample of student work assembled for a particular purpose. Third, portfolios allow students the opportunity to reflect on their work.

What is a Portfolio?

Even though the underlying goal of student portfolios may be the same, there are many different types of portfolios. Although the types of portfolios may be different, they tend to overlap in purpose. Educators can become confused by the many types of portfolios, their different uses, the practical issues that surround portfolios such as storage, and ownership. It is crucial for educators to decide what their portfolio goals are and who the intended audience is before they can decide what types of portfolios would work best for their students (Danielson, 1997).

Types of Portfolios

There are many different types of portfolios used by teachers, and a teacher may decide to use one kind or several kinds. Portfolios can be divided into three main categories: working
portfolios, display portfolios, and assessment portfolios. A working or collection portfolio is a project in the works that contains a purposeful collection of work in progress and work that is complete. The working portfolio can serve as a step to a more permanent assessment like a display portfolio. Although the teacher may guide the student, the student is the primary audience of this type of portfolio which allows the student to become more reflective and self-directed. In addition, working portfolios can be a useful tool for parents to check their child’s progress (Danielson, 1997; Jasmine, 1992).

For many the most rewarding and common type of portfolio is the display or showcase portfolio which illustrates the student’s best work. A display portfolio may be maintained from year to year to reveal growth or progress over a period of time. Because the student generally selects his or her best work for this portfolio, the audience is the student and whomever else they choose to show the portfolio (Danielson, 1997).

Last, the assessment portfolio is used to show what a student has learned through reflective comments focusing on their mastery of curriculum or standard objectives. This type of portfolio can be used to demonstrate mastery in several or one curriculum area or even one unit or the entire year. With this type of portfolio there may be many audiences such as the classroom teacher, the parents, and the student depending on the purpose (Danielson, 1997; Jasmine, 1992).

Containers and Storage

Even after recognizing the potential and value of portfolios, teachers find the prospect of hundreds of folders, binders, or boxes overwhelming. Some are even reluctant to integrate portfolios because they are convinced they will be too overwhelmed with keeping track of
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students’ work. Regardless of what is used for the portfolio, teachers need to be sure that what they choose is manageable (Danielson, 1997).

A portfolio could be anything from an artist’s case, a three ring binder, a scrapbook, a drawstring bag, a pizza box, a cereal box, a shoe box, or a folder. A good starting point in the portfolio process is a folder, manila, hanging, or expanding, for each student which could be easily stored in boxes, crates, or a filing cabinet. If a teacher has more than one class, each filing cabinet drawer can be reserved for each class, or boxes or crates could be stacked on top of each other to save space. Folders accessible to students allow them to keep their own papers filed, and folders can also be decorated by the student which helps students to develop a sense of pride and ownership in their work (Danielson, 1997; Kimeldorf, 1994).

What the teacher decides to use for the display or assessment portfolios and how the teacher decides to store the portfolios depends on the amount of available storage room. Boxes, shelves, or cabinets can hold this type of portfolio. The three ring binder is a good receptacle for portfolio materials because it is durable and may be equipped with dividers or pockets to help with organization. It is also easy for a student to add or take out samples from a three ring binder, and binders can be purchased with clear pockets on the cover so that students can easily display their own cover (Danielson, 1997).

If the portfolios are to be maintained by the school from one school year to the next, teachers must also consider summer storage. Whatever the teacher chooses to use, it should be easy and efficient for both the student and the teacher. Overall, the portfolio should hold what they need to hold, and they should be easily accessible to both students and teachers (Danielson, 1997; Jasmine, 1992).
Electronic Portfolios

Some educators choose to use electronic portfolios or to combine the use of an electronic portfolio with a paper portfolio; however, choosing to develop electronic portfolios would depend on available technology and teacher knowledge. Specifically, an electronic portfolio could include word documents, slide presentations, web sites, audio, text, graphics, and video and would be easy to update and maintain not to mention take up very little storage room (Heath, 2002). Some commercial publishers now sell programs to store student work electronically which allows large quantities of paper to be stored in a very small space (Danielson, 1997).

Today many college admissions officers state that it is much better to look at a CD-ROM student portfolio than a standardized test score because it reveals more about the individual (Clayton, 1997).

Instead of collection, selection, and reflection, the process of completing an electronic portfolio would be collection, selection, reflection, and projection. Electronic portfolios can still maintain the general goals of a paper portfolio. In fact, digital images can enhance the learning process in many ways. Putting pictures in documents, for example, lets students use their own pictures in learning, thus enhancing the students’ interest and making learning more fun. Multimedia portfolios allow teachers to provide a record of students and their work and providing a visual and valuable record of their work. Electronic portfolios can also be shared online giving the opportunity for distant learning. Overall, electronic portfolios can serve many of the same functions as their paper counterparts given that the educator has the technology and know how to use them effectively (Heath, 2002; Gustin, 1996; Penta, 2002).
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What Are The Benefits of Portfolios?

In classrooms where portfolios have been used, portfolios have been credited with improving the learning environment in ways that strong proponents never expected. Portfolios can improve instruction, assessment, professional development, and parent teacher communication just to name a few. Students become engaged in their own learning through the process of collection, selection, and reflection while assuming responsibility for their own learning (Danielson, 1997).

Student centered

Many teachers who use portfolios in their classrooms report a higher level of student motivation and engagement in their work. Portfolio based education can and should focus the child’s, teacher’s, and parent’s attention on the process of learning by stimulating questioning, discussing, guessing, proposing, analyzing, evaluating, and reflecting. These ideas support a child centered approach to learning. Through regular portfolio observations and one on one portfolio interviews, teachers can discover more about the individual child and what motivates students more choices about their education and assessment, students become the creators of their own learning. Many students in a traditional classroom have the attitude that they should complete the assignment just to get it finished and turn it in, but in a portfolio centered classroom, students are constantly evaluating their own work and the classroom culture is forever changed. The portfolio is centered on the individual and illustrates far more about the child, their knowledge, and their growth than a grade on a traditional grade card (Danielson, 1997; Shores, 1998).
Assessment

Portfolio assessment allows teachers to observe student learning in a variety of settings and over a period of time. Traditionally, classroom assessment has been done to students with teachers creating the tests, administering them, and evaluating them while the students play a passive role in the process. Portfolios, on the other hand, change that traditional process (Walther-Thomas, 2001; Danielson, 1997). Portfolios provide a larger view of a student’s achievements by revealing the unfolding of skills and the growth over time, something a pencil and paper test can’t do (Dalheim, 1994). What can be confusing about assessment is how and when it should occur, but it is pretty much what the teacher who uses it wants it to be. Its usefulness and credibility depend greatly on the expertise of the teacher who uses it in their classroom (Jasmine, 1992).

The main differences among the approaches to portfolios concern their use in assessment. Portfolios can be used as a tool for learning and motivation so that students determine what should go in the portfolio, why it should go in, what story the contents tell, and how they should be organized. In a portfolio classroom, assessment plays a much different role than in a traditional test taking classroom. Specifically, more of the student work is evaluated through self-assessment rather than teacher assessment. In fact, when students select finished work for their portfolio, they not only evaluate it, but they often strengthen it through revision. Furthermore, when students initially complete the work they often engage in preliminary evaluation and revision to ensure that the work is as good as possible to be placed in the portfolio. By encouraging students to engage in self evaluation, teachers empower students to
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take control of their own learning, and students learn that they are ultimately responsible for their own learning (Danielson, 1997; Glazer, 1994).

Portfolios are also a way for teachers to assess students by documenting what they know and what they are able to do. Portfolios can also enhance a teacher’s awareness of the student as an individual. Although portfolios can play a useful role in supplementing existing grading systems, both common sense and recent research suggests that portfolios are so varied, they cannot be used as the only means of evaluating students (Kimeldorf, 1994).

Unlike portfolio assessment, traditional testing is not particularly revealing about what students actually know and can do. In fact, standardized testing provides a snapshot in time of the levels of learning attained by students and often only at certain grade levels. On the other hand, portfolios illustrate a student’s individual skills, knowledge, and growth over time. When portfolios are passed from one teacher to another, those teachers can truly observe the student’s growth from year to year. Overall, when used for the assessment of student learning, a portfolio is a tool that greatly benefits student learning by giving them a more active role in the process which helps students develop skills such as self-reflection and self-evaluation which are important in many walks of life (Danielson, 1997).

Professional development

Portfolios support ongoing professional development because educators can discover through student portfolios whether what they are teaching is effective, if the students are mastering the objectives. Teachers can ask themselves, Was this activity effective with all of the children? Why did some children not respond to the activity? Why is this child preoccupied with a particular activity, and how should I respond? Furthermore, when reviewing student
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portfolios, teachers may become aware of aspects of the curriculum that the students did not comprehend as well as the teacher had thought; therefore, they can use this information in planning for instruction for that particular class or student. Teachers may discover that much of the work their students are being asked to complete may not be suitable for the portfolio because they do not document students’ understanding of important outcomes. The contents of the student portfolio must be designed by the teacher to meet these skills and knowledge. Portfolios are a way for teachers to make themselves aware of areas of the curriculum that need to be strengthened (Danielson, 1997; Shores, 1998).

Parent communication

Portfolios are one way for teachers and students to improve parent communication. Teachers and parents have discovered that the best spokesperson for sharing a portfolio is the child. In sharing their portfolio with a parent, students are given the opportunity to share information about them and their progress that parents may otherwise never see. Students become used to meaningful conversations with their parents about the details of work they are completing for school. This process can be completed through parent teacher conferences, portfolio nights, or sending the portfolio home with the child to be returned the next day to the classroom. These approaches also give an opportunity for parents to make comments about their child’s portfolio and their growth (Danielson, 1997; MacDonald, 1997; Santa, 1995).

Few approaches to parent teacher conferences are as effective as including a student portfolio as the center of a student led conference. Who knows more about what the student completed than the student? Traditional conferences generally exclude the student, but a student led portfolio conference allows the student to be the facilitator of the conference. When student
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led conferences are combined with portfolio use, students assume more responsibility for their learning. A student led conference is more meaningful and informational to a parent than a grade on a traditional grade card. In order to truly understand the contents of a portfolio, it is necessary for its creator to explain it and by doing so students gain a greater feeling of commitment and ownership to the portfolio and its process. If you can explain something to someone else, you can really understand it so by explaining their portfolio to a parent, their learning is enhanced. In addition, a student led conference or a special portfolio night puts the student in the spotlight which not only boosts the child’s self-esteem but also sends home the message that what the student is learning and what they have to say about what they are learning is important (Danielson, 1997; Conderman, 2000; Jasmine, 1992).

Another advantage of student led conferences is that the teacher has more time for all of the parents because although teachers are present during the conference to contribute when needed, the student leads their parent through their portfolio, not the teacher. This is also an advantage to the parents because they have more than the allotted fifteen minutes to be rushed in and out to see evidence of their child’s progress. In addition, this type of student led conference also allows the student an opportunity to reflect about the discussion with their parent the day after the conference. It is also possible that educators will see a rise in the number of conferences because the child and the parents both feel more connected (Collinson, 1995; Santa, 1995).

Some educators also believe that using the portfolio of a special needs student with Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s) is highly effective. Goals listed on the IEP can be
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integrated into their portfolio and evaluated during the IEP meetings. The focus on high quality work, self-reflection, self-evaluations, and pride in accomplishments are just as valuable to special education students. When using portfolios, parents, teachers, and special education students will all have an opportunity to clearly see the child’s progress (Danielson, 1997).

How to Get Started

It is important to remember before implementing portfolios into the classroom that the portfolio process is not etched in stone, and it is perfectly okay to try different approaches before finding the one that works best and is productive for both the students and the teachers (Jasmine, 1992). In some classrooms all instruction is centered on the portfolios, but in other classrooms portfolios are merely manila folders holding student papers. Teachers who will most likely use portfolios successfully in their classroom are people who are willing to turn more control over to the students, are willing to take risks, are flexible, value and emphasize thinking skills, see themselves as coaches, mentors, or facilitators rather than dispensers of information, and believe that students should take an active role in their own learning (Kimeldorf, 1994; Hall, 2000).

Portfolio examples

There is not just one way to implement portfolios into a classroom; a lot depends on matching a teacher’s goals to their practice. In addition, assessment is tied to teaching strategies, and if assessment changes then so will the instruction (Dalheim, 1994).

Before introducing portfolios to students, teachers should assemble their own portfolio to appreciate the challenge and know firsthand the pleasure and complexity of creating their own portfolio. Students will also be more accepting of the idea of creating a portfolio and hopefully
more likely to follow the teacher through the process once they have seen that the teacher has made the effort to create their own. The teacher portfolio could be career centered, or it could be centered on an accomplishment or interest outside of the classroom including a collection of photographs, newspaper clippings, certificates, or awards. It is also beneficial to show a portfolio that a student has already completed (Kimeldorf, 1994; Farr, 1997).

Teachers also need to give the students background information about what they are completing and why they are completing it. It is also important for educators to explain to the students how their progress will be evaluated and that they will no longer be evaluated by comparing their work to other students but rather they will be evaluated by comparing their new work with their old work. Students need to understand the purpose of a portfolio before they create their own portfolio so that it is authentic to them (Jasmine, 1992).

Depending on the support from colleagues and administrators, it may also be beneficial to explain the portfolio process to them. Offer to share your information and knowledge, and invite them to look at the student portfolios (Jasmine, 1992).

Portfolio policies

Next, teachers should decide on a portfolio policy for their classroom. They should consider the following questions:

- How any disciplines will be included in the portfolio?
- What is the purpose of the portfolio?
- What type(s) of portfolio will students complete?
- How will the portfolio be organized?
- When will students complete their portfolio?
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- Who is the audience of the portfolio?
- Who decides what should be collected for the portfolio?
- How will the portfolio be aligned with the state standards?
- How much of a student’s work will be included in the portfolio?
- Will students include portfolio entries from their lives outside of school?
- Do the portfolio entries include both rough and final drafts?
- Who should have access to the portfolios and when?
- When and how will the portfolios be evaluated?
- How will students reflect and evaluate their work?
- Where will the portfolios be stored?
- What will be done with the portfolio at the end of the process?

(Danielson, 1997; Panitz, 1996; Jasmine, 1992)

Implementation

It is important for teachers to try not to be too focused on the contents of the portfolio but rather the child’s thoughts and his or her reasons for selecting their entries. That selection process reflects the interests of the child and the inspiration and influence of the teacher (Herbert, 1998).

When setting goals for implementing portfolios, teachers should remember to start slowly, be sure that the requirements are realistic for all, and not to assess everything. There is no reason to implement the change all at once so probably the best advice for teachers is to start small. For example, beginning with a small group of students may be a good idea the first year
(Panitz, 1996; Danielson, 1996). There are also many places in the portfolio process to stop; the collection may be as far as a teacher may care to go the first year or semester. The second year or semester may be a better time to take portfolios to the next step by having students collect and select, and then the third step would be to have students collect, select, and reflect. At the end of that process, teachers should then evaluate what was completed and make adjustments for the next year (Jasmine, 1992).

Implementing portfolios into a classroom is not as hard as one may think because most teachers have already started without even realizing it. Most teachers already have a system for saving papers and important student artifacts which is the foundation for that most basic of all portfolios, the collection or working portfolio (Jasmine, 1992).

Many teachers also feel that it is easier to begin the portfolio process with one curriculum area and add others as both teachers and students feel more comfortable with the process over time. Language arts is generally an easier place to begin because the writing process is made to order for the portfolio, but the teacher should chose the area they are most comfortable teaching (Jasmine, 1992)

Parent education

It is important for teachers to be sure that parents fully understand the portfolio process. This can be accomplished through newsletters, parent orientation, open house, the school or district website, school visitations, conferences, or special portfolio nights. Through these communication strategies, parents need to be informed of the goals and the value of a portfolio and become used to the idea that much of their child’s work now stays at school. Furthermore, they also need to become knowledgeable of how portfolios are used with the curriculum and how
they fit into assessment. It is also important to emphasize that portfolios do not replace more standardized measures but rather help to show more about the child’s progress. Teachers should be sure that parents are updated about their child’s portfolio progress through conferences and special portfolio nights, and they should be sure the parents know about these dates ahead of time so that they can plan accordingly (Herbert, 1998; Jasmine, 1992; Walther-Thomas, 2001).

Contents

The contents of the portfolio first and foremost should be decided based upon the audience for which it is intended and the purpose for which it will be used. The collection or working portfolio should contain a wide variety of samples of many kinds of work because it is meant to be viewed by the student and the teacher and will be used to select samples for the display or showcase portfolio. Ideas include examples of the writing process, writing samples, rubrics, inventories or checklists, journal entries, tests, pictures, responses to reading, book reports, and homework samples (Jasmine, 1992; Danielson, 1997).

The display or showcase portfolio will contain examples from the collection or working portfolio of the student’s best work and samples of work that illustrate growth over time. Also included in this type of portfolio should be the student’s reflections and possibly artifacts that support the child’s self-esteem such as newspaper clippings and photographs, team or club photographs, awards, playbills, letters of recognition, or certificates. It is intended to be seen by people the students wants to share their progress with and the teacher wants to inform such as parents (Jasmine, 1992; Danielson, 1997).

Similar to the display portfolio, the assessment portfolio will also contain copies of work that illustrate growth and progress over time from the collection or working portfolio, but in
addition to that, documentation necessary for assessment will also be included such as self-reflections, self-evaluations, anecdotal records, interest inventories, teacher made tests, and standardized or state test scores. It will be used by the teacher and the student and shared with the parents (Jasmine, 1992; Danielson, 1997)

Selection

Both the teacher and the student should share in selecting the work to be included in the portfolio. There are several ways this could be completed. For example, the teacher could guide the students by requiring a certain number of samples to be included in the portfolio and by expressing a preference for certain pieces; however, many believers of portfolios think it is best to allow the student to include pieces of work that he or she feels are best or most important so that the student feels the portfolio genuinely belongs to them. The recognition of the student’s ownership of both the papers and the learning process is important to the success of this approach (Jasmine, 1992).

Students can also include samples or artifacts associated with their personal interests or accomplishments with out of school activities such as sports, music, art, drama, extra-curricular activities, community service, or clubs. Research indicates that including examples of things that are important to a student’s life makes a better connection between school and the real world (Jasmine, 1992).

A basic format for a display or assessment portfolio is a cover or title page first followed by a table of contents, an introduction, the actual documents with reflections, and a goal setting chart (Danielson, 1997).
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Documentation

To help show growth over time, it is important to document each item to be included in the portfolio with a title, when it was completed, and why it was completed. This documentation should apply to every sample placed in the working folder, including photographs. It is important that each draft of the same assignment is dated so that the process is clear. Students are more delighted to complete this task when using a date stamp. Dating each sample of student work will make the eventual selection process easier and more meaningful for evaluation purposes for the student. Organizing a student filing system where everyone has access to them so that students can file the papers will also help to save the teacher and the students’ time (Jasmine, 1992; Juniewicz, 2003; Danielson, 1997).

Modeling

In order for teachers to receive the expectations they require of students, it is crucial to model aspects of the portfolio process for the students. Selection, student-led conferencing, and self-reflecting should all be modeled for the students before they complete the task. This can be accomplished through role play (Danielson, 1997; Santa, 1995).

Reflection

Reflections are also important to the development of authentic portfolio assessment. The ability of a student to evaluate his or her own work by taking a thoughtful look at it over a period of time is beneficial to the learning process. With guidance and practice students can be successful at self-reflection. In fact, some of their best writing is often completed during the process of self-reflection (Jasmine, 1992).
Students are asked to reflect on their work when they choose it for their showcase or display portfolio and their assessment portfolio as well. Students are expected to evaluate their samples and reflect on the progress they have made. Each document should have some type of reflection attached to it. If a single piece of work is chosen for the portfolio along with earlier drafts, only a single reflection is needed. The reflection indicates why the student selected the piece of work, what it shows about them, what they liked about it, and what they would do differently if they had the chance to do so. Many teachers discover that students become more insightful with this process through experience, but that it is the most important step in the entire portfolio process (Danielson, 1997).

Through self-reflections, students also have the opportunity to evaluate their goals. This can include short or long term goals, whether the student has met the goals, how they met the goals, or how they plan to meet the goals. Similarly, students may also reflect on things they are getting better at or things they still need to work on (Danielson, 1997).

This process can be completed through answering a teacher made form or it could be a quick write that is really a reflective essay. Although these are self-reflections, they can be completed as a whole class activity while students have their portfolios in front of them to look through for ideas (Jasmine, 1992).

Parents and teachers can also include evaluations about the student’s portfolio. This can be completed through comments on teacher made questionnaires, forms, or they could be spontaneous comments on sticky notes. Teachers can prepare reaction sheets in advance and provide them during student led conferences or special portfolio nights. Prompts for those evaluating the portfolio could include answers about what they liked the best, what
improvements they see, and what goals or expectations they have for the child’s portfolio. The reflections can be centered on the entire portfolio or individual pieces (Danielson, 1997).

Evaluation

Self-evaluation is an integral part of the selection process. As the student selects samples for their portfolio, he or she should be asked to reflect on their work and their progress. These written reflections, in a form or in short responses, should then be included with the chosen samples in the portfolio. It can also be useful to have students reflect on their progress over part of the school year like at semester time. Students should focus on the question, are they mastering the goals they set for themselves (Jasmine, 1992)?

There are no simple answers to questions about evaluating portfolios, but evaluation procedures will vary according to the philosophy and policies of the school and the school district regarding grading. Furthermore, grading policies may differ according to the grade level because what is appropriate for first graders may not be appropriate for high school students. Each teacher will have to decide for themselves, and for their students, what evaluation policy fits with their portfolio goals. Some believe that portfolios, not even an assessment portfolio should ever be graded while others believe that the assessment portfolio is the only kind of portfolio that should be assigned a grade. However, if the teacher decides to assign a grade to an assessment portfolio, evaluation standards should be clearly defined so that students are aware of how they will be evaluated prior to the evaluation process so that they can strive to meet the expectations. Rubrics are one way to assess student portfolios. For example, a teacher could evaluate a student’s portfolio using a rubric based upon certain criteria shared with the students.
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ahead of time. Such criteria could include student goal setting, growth, achievement, completeness, and self-reflections (Kimeldorf, 1994; Danielson, 1997).

One theory behind portfolios is that examining a student’s work over a given period of time provides a holistic assessment that demonstrates whether a student is progressing toward and achieving educational goals, and this can be integrated into an existing system using rubrics (Panitz, 1996).

Summary

After completing research on the topic of student portfolios, I have come to several conclusions. First, I have made the realization that the process I currently use to assess and evaluate student portfolios may not be the best possible way. Specifically, I now believe that I do not give the students enough choice in the selection and assessment of their portfolio. I will reevaluate this procedure before the beginning of the next school year. Also, I am surprised at the lack of research to be found on teachers who actually use portfolios in their classroom. Furthermore, I am now more aware of the different types and approaches to portfolios in the field of education. I also now realize that with any major change in a teacher’s classroom, they should first research the topic thoroughly to be sure that it is worthwhile. It is important not to jump on the latest bandwagon, and although I believe that portfolios are valuable, careful exploration should be required before one decides to jump in.

On the other hand, I now feel more confident in my belief that portfolios are worthwhile. This research will also give me the support I may need to try to implement portfolios school wide and convince parents and administrators that portfolios are an effective way of assessing student progress.
I also believe that this process has also helped me to organize my thoughts to be able to create a teacher workbooks centered on the topic of student portfolios. My hope is that this workbook bridges the gap between the theorists of portfolios and the realities of teaching. It is also my hope that this workbook will help educators clarify their purpose in using portfolios and provide some practical guidance to get started.
Reference List


Biography

Beth Morse has been teaching language arts and reading at London Middle School in London, Ohio for ten years. A graduate of The Ohio State University, Beth earned a degree in elementary education with an area of concentration in English. In 2004 she will complete her master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Ashland University. During the last ten years of teaching she has been involved with Power of the Pen, student council, the school newspaper, mentoring, department chairperson and coached both middle school track and cheerleading. As an educator, Beth has an interest in teacher collaboration, interdisciplinary units at the middle school level, and of course, student portfolios. With experience teaching accelerated, inclusive, and at risk classes, she has found that portfolios are successful with all types of students. She has integrated student portfolios in the classroom for the last seven years with eighth grade students and hopes to constantly work at improving and expanding the program. Currently, she lives in Marysville, Ohio with her husband, Andy, and three sons, Luke, Owen, and Max.