

# *Assessment*

## *Portfolios in the Classroom*

### *What is a portfolio?*

- Think about Your closet
  - What does it tell about you?
  - What would you like it to tell about you?

Many professions use portfolios as a way to assess an individual's qualifications for a particular position. Artists, architects, musicians, photographer are a few of the many professionals that use portfolios—even teachers are often required to produce a portfolio when interviewing for a position.

Portfolios are a collection of artifacts—chosen by the student, student and teacher, or student, teacher, and others—to illustrate the student's growth and development over time. Portfolios can be for a grade level, class, or content area. Some teachers, for example, have students complete a portfolio for a specific unit; some use portfolios for a grade level to “pass on” to the next teacher as a way of communicating the student's abilities. Other teachers and schools use portfolios to assess curriculum. The key is that artifacts in the portfolio must be collected over time—not in a single class period.

### *Why use a Portfolio?*

1. Students Kindergarten through college appear to appreciate the opportunities portfolios give them to share their achievements, skills, and development.
2. Students take ownership of their learning.

3. Assessment becomes collaborative instead of competitive.
4. Parents are engaged in seeing first-hand what it is that students are achieving.
5. Teachers have a richer view of what students know and how they develop.
6. Teachers have a plethora of artifacts that illustrate an individual student's growth and development.
7. Teachers have available student-centered assessment opportunities.
8. Administrators have available a means to auditing individual classrooms and individual performances that represent what students are doing.

Portfolios can be used as a way to validate of other types of testing results or as a benchmark for student achievement. They are a rich source of information for the school, teacher, parents, and other shareholders.

### *What goes into a Portfolio?*

Artifacts can and should include a variety of student work: paintings, sketches, written documents, audio and videotapes, lists, products, traditional teacher created tests, or anything that demonstrates student development. Portfolios may be stored in any logical container. These may be boxes, folders, or binders. Many schools now store student portfolios on the Internet.

The important point is not what a portfolio looks like, but rather what types of artifacts might be included in the portfolio.

Many elementary teachers find that using storage boxes is a good way to house portfolios for their students. Others use accordion folders. Determine where in the classroom portfolios can be easily stored and accessible to students.

Portfolio Example (from ABC school)

During this semester at ABC school, you will work with your teacher and peers to develop a portfolio that will illustrate you as a learner. You may choose samples of your work that you think shows your development. You must, however, evaluate the pieces in your portfolio. The following outline will help guide you as you choose your portfolio pieces.

I. Writing samples

- ❖ What are some of your strengths as a writer? (younger students may be asked what piece they like the best and why)
- ❖ What are some of your weakness as a writer that you will work on next year? (younger students may be asked what piece they would like to "make better" next year and why)
- ❖ Option: Which piece represents your best writing and why?
- ❖ Option: How have computers influenced your writing?

II. English project samples

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

III. Social Studies project samples

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

IV. Science samples

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

V. Math samples

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

VI. Computer samples

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

VII. Your choice samples

- ❖
- ❖
- ❖

VIII. Guide

Portfolio Self-Evaluation Example (from ABC school)

Use the following guide to help determine why you have included artifacts in your portfolio. Each artifact should have this guide attached.

Why I chose this piece	What I learned	My future goals

When using portfolios with younger children, teachers or other adults may have the child orally explain why an artifact is important. Adults should transcribe the child's reasoning without editorializing.

### *When do I use a Portfolio?*

When to use a portfolio depends on the teacher's purpose for a particular portfolio. If the class is spending a large amount of instructional time on a unit, this might be a good time to decide on a portfolio to help students understand how their ideas and beliefs about the topic have changed or developed. If the purpose for the portfolio is to communicate student cognitive or social development, then the decision to begin a portfolio at the beginning of the year might be beneficial.

When to have students add, subtract, or evaluate items in their portfolio is dependent on their age level and the purpose for the portfolio. If, for example, a grade level portfolio is used, then having student evaluate and select items once every three weeks is typical. Unit specific or content area specific portfolios may need to be evaluated more frequently.

### *How do I assess a Portfolio?*

Portfolio assessment is different from other types of classroom assessment. The following chart compares portfolio assessment to testing (adapted from Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

Portfolio	Testing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Represents the range of knowledge students are engaged in.</li> <li>▪ Engages students in assessing their progress and accomplishments and establishing on-going goals.</li> <li>▪ Measures each student's achievement while allowing for individual differences between students.</li> <li>▪ Represents a collaborative approach to assessment.</li> <li>▪ Has a goal of student self-assessment.</li> <li>▪ Addresses improvement, effort, and achievement.</li> <li>▪ Links assessment and teaching to learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assesses students across a limited range of knowledge which may not match what students do.</li> <li>▪ Mechanically scored or scored by teachers who have little input.</li> <li>▪ Assesses all students on the same dimensions.</li> <li>▪ Assessment process is not collaborative.</li> <li>▪ Student assessment is not a goal.</li> <li>▪ Addresses achievement only.</li> <li>▪ Separates learning, testing, and teaching.</li> </ul>

Portfolios help us achieve a movement towards authentic assessment in our classrooms—grounded in the classroom and its activities and grounded in the recognition that we need to help students become decision makers.

Classroom Portfolios reflect what students know—in other words—we can and should use portfolios as an assessment tool.

The concern of teachers is often expressed thusly: If all students are choosing various pieces that represent them as learners, how can I equally assess students?

This is a valid concern. What kind of rubric or scoring guide could possibly include all the variables that might be included in individual portfolios? Using the following steps as a guide may help teachers who are beginning to use portfolios communicate assessment to their students, parents, and administrators.

- ❖ Decide what types of samples you want in the portfolio. These could be from a variety of content areas and could include a variety of formats.
- ❖ Decide how many samples you would like in the portfolio. Too many samples are difficult to evaluate. Too few samples do not indicate achievement.
- ❖ Decide if the student will have sole ownership of the samples. In other words, who chooses the samples? This could be the student, the student and teacher, the teacher, or the student and peers, or any combination.
- ❖ Decide how you will weigh self-evaluation in the assessment.
- ❖ Decide if you want a traditional grade or a written assessment of student abilities.

Usually, teachers who are attempting to show student development during 3<sup>rd</sup> grade will opt for a written evaluation of the student to be included in the portfolio for the next teacher or administrators.

If the portfolio is for a specific unit, for example, a unit on the Rainforest, then the teacher may decide that students must include a picture of five endangered species, a map of the Rainforest, a list of products that are exported from the Rainforest, and a short paper on the importance of saving the Rainforest through conservation. In this case, the portfolio could be evaluated by a rubric—weighing each item. Grammar, usage, neatness, and an oral presentation of the portfolio could also be included in the assessment. It is important to remember, however, that the student self-evaluation must also be included in such an evaluation.

Assessment of portfolios can be as diverse as the portfolios themselves. Teachers **MUST** communicate with students, parents, and others how the portfolio will be evaluated before the collection of artifacts begins.

In summary, portfolios as an assessment tool

- Help teachers communicate student's progress to parents and other interested shareholders.
- Help provide ongoing curriculum development that reflects students' needs and thus provides direction for instructional decisions.
- Involve students in the assessment process.
- Help teachers understand how students grow and develop as learners.