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Implementation of writing portfolios in grade two

Abstract
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The purpose of this article is to provide background information about writing portfolios. Then, the implementation of portfolio assessment in a second grade writing program is presented through three students' collection activity.
Implementation of Writing Portfolios in Grade Two

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Abstract

The view of language as a process has influenced the use of qualitative assessment techniques that allow the description of children's progress, interests, and instructional needs. One qualitative technique among several is the portfolio. Specifically, in assessing children's writing, the students and the teacher can collaborate in selecting a collection of writing exhibits for their portfolios. Such collecting can occur over time giving evidence of emerging literacy.

The purpose of this article is to provide background information about writing portfolios. Then, the implementation of portfolio assessment in a second grade writing program is presented through three students' collection activity.
As an emphasis is placed on creating meaning through the writing process while engaged in the language functions, a change is necessitated in assessment. In order to describe involvement in the writing process, qualitative assessment techniques must be employed. Teachers have previously used methods such as standardized tests to monitor progress of students (Graves, 1994).

Qualitative assessment is still talked about more than it is used. School districts and individual schools are at various stages in development of alternative assessment, which will alter the way Americans think about evaluating schoolwork. Altogether, 40 states are planning some form of alternative assessment at the state level (Maeroff, 1991; Kane & Khattri, 1995; Frank, 1994).

After reviewing the professional literature that supports qualitative assessment of writing and writing portfolios as a qualitative technique, the implementation of portfolios as a means of describing second graders' progress and instructional needs in a writing program will be presented. The portfolio collections of three second graders will be shared.

Value of Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios, a qualitative assessment technique, can be defined as an ongoing collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and instructional needs. The collection includes student participation in the selection of its contents, the criteria for selection, the
criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). Although qualitative assessment is not new in education, educators are beginning to understand that it creates more accountability (Kane & Khattri, 1995).

Portfolios as an assessment technique allows children, teachers, and parents to examine their work and reflect on its quality (Valencia, 1990; Frank, 1994). Reflection is a metacognitive process, or thinking about language (Smith, 1994; Potter, 1996). Portfolios provide children opportunities to set goals, carry them out, assess their progress and instructional needs, and then set further goals (Manning & Manning, 1996). Thus, portfolios can assist children in becoming more involved in the writing process and in taking responsibility for their own learning goals (Potter, 1999; Manning & Manning, 1996; Farr, 1990). Frank (1994) relates that students in developing portfolios can own their work. They can develop independence, understand the writing process, set clearer goals and make decisions, and feel free to take risks. They can write better, write more, and enjoy it.

Portfolio assessment can be closely related to instruction. It allows for continuous assessment over time. The focus is on student growth. The evidence of learning is systematically collected in portfolios over extended
periods of time; therefore, it allows for assessment to be integrated with instruction (Valencia, 1998).

Implementation of Portfolio Assessment

Artists, educators, and stockbrokers are just a few professionals who collect samples of work to illustrate their achievements. On a personal level, family members and friends value scrapbooks, photo albums, and personal notes that demonstrate the framework of their personal lives. Students, too, can collect samples of their work to validate and demonstrate their achievements and to help them reflect on their own strengths and needs (Valencia, 1990). The writing portfolio was introduced to the students after several weeks of exploring the components of the writing process through different types of writings and taking an active role in the writers workshop. It was defined as a folder for each student’s writing exhibits. These exhibits would illustrate their writing activity. Portfolios come in many shapes and sizes, can be simple or complex but what they all have in common is a collection that shows interest, efforts, growth, and attitudes (Frank, 1994).

In gathering samples of children’s writings, two types of portfolios can be created: the working portfolio and the showcase portfolio. The working portfolio demonstrates the processes of writing and learning new language concepts. Students use this knowledge to carefully assess their writing
and examine the processes they use, thus providing them opportunities for self-evaluation and problem solving to improve future writing (Gronlund, 1998).

The portfolio samples provide a teacher with valuable information to determine the strategies needed to improve each child's capability as a writer. Different types of indicators of learning can assist teachers, students, parents, and administrators in building a complete picture of a student's development (Valencia, 1990). Students and teachers need to work together to decide what should be selected for a working portfolio. It should include many types of writing for many purposes over a period of time (Frank, 1994). Each child's collection will represent his/her interest, experiences, and involvement in the writing process throughout the school year (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

The contents of writing portfolios can be housed in different ways. No one kind of container is right for portfolios. The purpose and goals of the portfolio collection, the needs of the students, and the organization of the classroom can determine the size and shape of a portfolio. For storage purposes, it is convenient to have portfolios the same size and shape. Student ownership of the portfolios begins with the designing of the container's exterior and interior (Frank, 1994). The portfolios must be
easily accessible to the students and the teacher as they make assessment and instructional decisions together.

Throughout the year, each student and the teacher can collaboratively select several writing pieces to illustrate the students' accomplishments, instructional needs, and development as a writer. At the end of the year, pieces representing the student's growth and interest in writing can be selected from the working portfolio for the showcase folder that will be sent on to the next year's program (Gronlund, 1998). Other means of qualitative assessment can be included in the showcase portfolio, such as interest inventories, conference notes, parent and peer reflections, observation records, and checklists. The showcase portfolios also can be used for an open house, or a curriculum night (Frank, 1994; Batzle, 1992; Tierney et al., 1991).

Introduction of Portfolios to Students in Grade Two

As a second grade teacher, I believed that report cards, conferences, and standardized tests did not give me as well as the parents complete information on how each student was developing as a writer. As a result, I became a risk-taker and implemented writing portfolios in my second grade class as part of a qualitative assessment program.

During an open house for the parents at the beginning of the school year, the teacher described writing portfolio assessment. A letter explaining the
benefits of writing portfolios was also distributed. The parents were invited to visit their child's classroom to view the writing program.

I modeled the writing process to the second grade students through daily news, shared writing, and demonstrations of writing forms, such as stories, poems, reports, letters, and journal entries. At the beginning of the program, oral language experiences, for the most part, supported the students' writing activity. Literature experiences and discussions suggested topics for writing. Another source of topics for writing was the daily class news. The class members dictated important reflections on their school and out of school lives to me. I wrote summary sentences of their contributions on chart paper. Through this experience, writing conventions, such as capitalization, punctuation, spacing, and the structures of sentences, were taught. Lists of words were generated from the ideas that were dictated and discussed and then displayed in the room to use as a reference in their writing.

Each student was given a spiral notebook and a manila pocket folder for a working portfolio to facilitate involvement in the writing program. The notebook was used as a daily journal. The students were asked to create a list of ideas they would like to write about that was ongoing as the year progressed. The list was stapled to the journal so the student could refer to it easily. The journal along with my modeling of the writing process
launched the writers workshop, or assigned small groups of students interacting over their involvement in the writing process. A laminated form suggesting constructive responses for this small group activity was used as a guide in the beginning. As the students became more comfortable with each other, they started creating their own questions. Every afternoon the students wrote in their journals for 10-15 minutes about a topic of their choice. The writing time increased as the year progressed because the students found writing a fulfilling experience and also had gained more ability.

The manila pocket folder was used as a working portfolio. Students designed the covers of the folders to show their individuality. The journal along with selected writing samples was housed in their folder. The portfolios were stored in a central location in the room that was easily assessable to the students as well as the teacher. This accessibility promoted the students' ownership of their writing activity.

A writing center was set up in the classroom. It offered an assortment of writing tools, such as pens, markers, crayons, and chalk and different sizes and colors of paper, both lined and unlined. Also, included in the center were staplers, stickers, date stamps, other stamps, and stencils. I demonstrated how to use the center: Getting things out, keeping things
organized while using the center, and putting the items away in the appropriate places. The students were responsible for keeping the center organized and clean.

Throughout the writers workshop period, as the children created meaning, many aspects of the writing process were apparent from the students' activity — selecting a topic, drafting or redrafting a piece, publishing a work, sharing a story or a poem with others in a writers workshop or with the class, or reflecting on the writing process in a conference with the teacher. Students learned about writing through making decisions, while engaged in the recursive writing process. They moved back and forth among the aspects of the writing process. At the beginning of the school year, these second graders engaged in a linear approach to writing. They were not proficient in redrafting or revising their pieces. In fact, they saw no need to edit their writing.

I had many assessment responsibilities during writers workshop — conferencing with the students, recording observations of students' involvement in writing activities in a journal, answering children's questions, listening to parts of their stories to promote their progress in the writing process, and collaborating with them as they engaged in portfolio collection. At the beginning of the school year, I scheduled conferences once a week, approximately 5 minutes in duration, with the
students to establish a relationship with them. These cursive monitoring sessions offered information about the students' writing activity and an opportunity for students to ask questions about the writing process. As the year progressed, the amount of time for the conferences was extended. This time was used for mini-lessons, to document students' progress, and to set goals for further writing activity.

During the portfolio conferences, I assessed the students' exhibits by a rubric adapted from Batzel's (1992) portfolios. The criteria of the rubric included ideas, organization, word choice, sentence structure, and mechanics. At the close of each quarter of the school year, the students and I decided on two or more pieces that could serve as exhibits for the working portfolio. The writing pieces could represent their favorite piece, their best work, or something they spent much time on. During the portfolio conferences, the students labeled their work: The name of the student, the type of writing, the reason for choosing the piece, the progress and instructional needs, and the goals for future writing. The pieces in the portfolios were shared with their parents during conferences. At the end of the school year, the students with the support of the teacher selected representative pieces of their work that showed writing progress, interest, and activity in writing for a showcase portfolio. This portfolio was passed on to the following
year as one aspect of assessment. The other exhibits in the working portfolio were sent home.

In-depth Study of Three Students’ Portfolio Assessment

In implementing portfolios in grade two, I chose three students’ writing to examine closely from a classroom of twenty-one. The three students selected for my study had different abilities, experiences, and interests in writing. I studied their involvement in the writing process, their gains in writing ability, and their writing portfolios development. A summary of these second graders’ experiences in portfolio collection is reported in the following pages.

Student A

Student A was a boy of below average abilities. His personal-social development was not as advanced as many of his peers. He had difficulty focusing on tasks and frequently was observed playing with objects, such as pencils, erasers, paper clips, and small pieces of paper. The boy lacked confidence in academic work but was confident in physical activities.

We worked on the writing survey together. As indicated on this survey, he did not like school and did not find writing a meaningful experience. The student believed that most people liked to write and that the reasons for writing might be a letter to a friend or homework. He related that his
mother wrote letters and lists for the store and that his brother wrote while he did his homework. During the first quarter, Student A was reluctant to engage in the writing process. During conferences, we explored his interests for possible writing topics.

**First quarter.** Student A's first selection for his portfolio was an ABC book (see Figure 1). Because his self-confidence was so low, I wanted to make writing a good experience for him. When we had independent reading, I noticed he liked to look at ABC books with many illustrations. We talked about how he could make a book similar to this book. He developed some interest in this type of writing because he loved to draw pictures and did not have to do much writing. During this period, he started to write some sentences in his journal. His entries were short, and he struggled with ideas to transpose into writing. He was not consistent in using capital letters or punctuation and did develop complete sentences.

During the conference, Student A seemed proud of his book. Not only did he make the book, but also he could read the book with ease. He was proud of his pictures and wanted me to look at several of them again and again. His goal for the next quarter was to write about one of the animals in his ABC book.

Student A's mother attended the first parent-teacher conference. Student A, who was also present, was anxious to share his book with his mother. She
stated that she was proud of his pictures. She thought his confidence was growing as a writer. He was doing more writing at home.

Figure 1

First Quarter Selection

Second quarter. Student A said he chose a piece on the topic of dogs for a portfolio exhibit because he liked dogs and was going to get one (see Figure 2). As his family was in the process of choosing a dog, he discovered that there were different kinds of dogs. In reflecting on the piece, the student thought it showed progress compared to the one selected for the first quarter. He said he had done better writing because it was neater and had more sentences. The student stated that he enjoyed writing this piece because he liked to write about topics that he knew about. He said it was easy for him to spell some of the words. He felt better about writing but he still had a hard time coming up with ideas to write on his own. Drawing accompanying pictures was still his favorite part about writing.
In assessing the story, it had a simple sentence pattern. Capital letters and punctuation were used correctly along with the proper spacing of words. Student A set as future goals to add more details to his sentences and to try a different form of writing. We discussed varying the beginning of his sentences. He would like to write more animal stories.

Second Quarter Selection

![Second Quarter Selection Image]

**Third quarter.** For the third quarter selection, Student A had a difficult time deciding what piece to place in his showcase portfolio. Finally, he selected two exhibits because they both showed progress, and they were different types of writing. The first selection as shown in Figure 3 was a concrete poem about a turtle. In his self-reflection, Student A believed that he had contributed many details about a turtle. His background for
this poem was a favorite book on turtles that he had at home. He said he knew a lot about turtles.

In the concrete poem, Student A used some writing conventions, such as capitalization and punctuation, although this use was not consistent. He had few misspelled words and did not receive help spelling the words. He felt confident about his writing pieces and believed his writing was improving because he was adding more details to his writing and he felt spelling was easier for him.

Figure 3

Third Quarter Selection
The second piece that Student A chose for his portfolio selection was about bees (see Figure 4). He had had a personal experience with a bee stinging his mother so he had a purpose for writing the story. He varied the beginning of his sentences that was a goal we had discussed earlier. His handwriting was neat, and he used correct writing conventions. Student A believed that his writing was getting better, and he looked forward to writers workshop each day. He still wanted to do more writing about animals.

His mother attended his third quarter conference. She was still concerned about his reading ability but was very impressed with his improvements made in writing. Again, she commented that he was more interested in writing at home because he felt so good about it.
Fourth quarter. During this period, the class studied a unit about migrating animals that appealed to Student A’s high interest in animals.

He wrote facts about whales in his journal. For his fourth quarter
selection, he chose his paper on the gray whale (see Figure 5). He was excited about this paper because he said he learned many facts about whales, and he could write about them. Although he knew where to find the facts, he had difficulty reading his piece without assistance. Student A believed that he had included many details in his paper. He used complete sentences, varied sentence beginnings, and used form elements correctly.

The teacher and Student A surveyed his writing progress over the year and discussed his improvements as a writer. He pointed out that he could only write letters when he started writing in kindergarten and now he could write sentences. His goal for the summer was to keep a journal everyday.

Figure 5

Fourth Quarter Selection
Student B

Student B was a girl who had average or above average abilities. She was self-motivated, and her confidence in herself was high. It was important to her to do her best. She played the roles of a peacemaker and cheerleader in the class. Her mother was supportive of her child and was interested in the school program. She was frequently seen at school and was active in PTA.

According to Student B's writing survey, she considered herself a writer because she liked to write letters to her grandmother. She believed that most people liked to write, and saw her parents writing all the time. Her mom wrote cards, letters, and lists, and did much writing for her activities outside the home. Student B liked to write in her room at home and in a tree outside her house. Her favorite topics were animals and people.

First quarter. Student B's first portfolio selection in October was about dolphins that help people (see Figure 6). The content of this well-developed selection was based on her viewing of a television special. She said the reason she wrote this piece was to let others know how dolphins can help people. In her story, she used capitalization and punctuation correctly and wrote well-constructed sentences. When the teacher asked her how she felt about this writing piece, she said she felt good about it, but she wanted more information on dolphins. Her goal was to write longer stories in the form of a chapter book.
Second quarter. The selection that Student B chose for the second quarter was an unedited piece from her journal. With each new writing piece in her journal, she labeled it as another chapter. The selected exhibit was Chapter 8, and it was entitled “2000” (see Figure 7). The story was about the fun she and her brother had had the last day before winter break was over. When I asked her why she wrote about this topic, she said it was a happy but sad day. They had so much fun on their winter break, but she knew it was time to go back to school.
The sentences were clearly sequenced and complete. Some of the words were misspelled because it was not an edited piece. Student B said she felt good about this piece because she had had so much fun that day that she just wanted to remember it forever.

Figure 7

Second Quarter Selection
Third quarter. For her third quarter piece, Student B chose another dolphin story (see Figure 8). It was an informational piece about dolphin characteristics. She said her reason for writing this piece was to keep people informed about dolphins so they can be kept alive. She found some of her information from a book that she was reading, and the rest she saw on television. The title of her story was in the form of a question. She again used complete sentences and correct punctuation and capitalization.

Figure 8

Third Quarter Selection

Shelby
November 2, 1999

Do You Know?

Dolphins help people, like fishermen. And they like to play on waves from fishing boats. Dolphins can go to sleep. Half the brain stays awake and half it brain is asleep. It is hard work to learn about dolphins. Dolphins love us so keep dolphins alive.
Fourth quarter. Student B selected a poem that she wrote about school
for her fourth quarter exhibit (see Figure 9). The piece showed her
enthusiasm for learning at school. This unedited piece that was written
in her journal had a lyrical quality as she read it to her teacher. She said
she enjoyed writing it, but it made her sad to say good-bye to second grade.
She used form elements, capitalization, and punctuation correctly.

Reflecting on her writing throughout the year, student B said that she
understood the writing process more and knows the importance of editing.
She thought her spelling was improving. She plans to continue with her
journal writing for the summer.
Student C

Student C was an above average student who was confident in her abilities but at times lacked motivation especially when it came to writing. She considered herself a writer and believed that most people liked to write. Her parents wrote at home. Her father did some paperwork for his job at home, and her mom wrote letters and lists. Her favorite topics to write about were animals, camping, and friends; her favorite place to write is in her room.
First quarter. Student C's first contribution to her writing portfolio was well developed for a student who was in the first quarter of second grade. She wrote about a trip to Kansas City (see Figure 10) because she really enjoyed this vacation and wanted to share about what happened. She included many details that were in a logical sequence, much sensory awareness to expand her ideas, and feelings about the experience.

When reflecting on the story, Student C believed that the story was an average story. What she enjoys most about writing is that she can write about her different trips. This year she had learned that a story has a beginning, middle, and ending. Her goal for her future writing was to try different types of writing. She said she had difficulty coming up with topics to write about.
Second quarter. The piece that Student C chose for an exhibit for the second quarter had not been edited but it was still a well-developed piece. She stated the events in the story did not happen, but many days are bad because of the weather. The fanciful story was about a tornado that blew
through the woods (see Figure 11). Her ideas were stated in a logical sequence. There were some errors in writing conventions throughout the piece. She started the story with a capital letter but did not use any more capital letters throughout the piece or punctuation at the end of sentences.
The day that she wrote the story she could not go outside because of the weather. The wind was blowing so hard, it blew the rest of the leaves off the trees. It made her feel crabby.

When asked what she was learning about writing from her portfolios, she said that she was learning that a story can be made from any of her thoughts. She was discovering that it was becoming easier to find topics for her writing.

Figure 11

Second Quarter Selection
Third quarter. Student C chose a story written from the point of view of a ladybug and its problem of being so small for the third quarter exhibit. The ladybug pondered what it would do if it were big (see Figure 12). The student had written the story on a computer. The teacher asked her how she ever thought of writing such a story. She said that it was from an experience she had while sitting outside: She was watching a ladybug and wondered what it would be like to be so small. Then, she thought maybe the ladybug had the same thoughts. She said that so far the story was her favorite written piece because she wrote it on the computer and the other kids thought it was a funny story.

Figure 12

Third Quarter Selection
Fourth quarter. Student C wanted to submit two of her shape poems for the fourth quarter. One was about a dandelion and the other was about the sun. During the fourth quarter, the class went outside to look for dandelions on a spring day. The students had learned about shape poems and wanted to write poems about the dandelions. Student C wrote two poems that day (see Figure 13). She included imagery in both the poems. When asked if this type of writing was difficult, Student C said that it was easy to describe what things look like. She related how she decided what exhibits to select for her portfolio: She chose those that made her feel good.

Figure 13

Fourth Quarter Selection
Writing poetry and using the computer made writing pleasurable for Student C during this school year. She said that poetry was much easier for her to write than stories. We discussed her success as a writer and her lack of interest in writing stories. I assured her that the process of writing stories takes time and hard work, but the final draft can be one to be proud of. She would like to continue writing during the summer if she has time.

Conclusions

Assessing the writing process through portfolio assessment in my second grade classroom was an important experience for my students and me. A strong partnership was created as we collaborated each quarter in selecting and reflecting on their exhibits. This reflection allowed the children to see their growth and instructional needs and to set goals for further writing activity. From the portfolio collection conferences, I was able to plan mini lessons on specific aspects of the writing process. The children’s portfolio exhibits and their exhibits showed parents their progress in writing.
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