Using Interactive Home-School Portfolio Assessment Systems for Parental Communication

Nancy L. Stirm

University of Northern Iowa

Copyright ©1997 Nancy L. Stirm

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1809

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.
Using Interactive Home-School Portfolio Assessment Systems for Parental Communication

Abstract
Scheduled conferences and report cards do not adequately tell parents how their children are progressing academically. Some parents have stated they would like to obtain more frequent communication from schools concerning their children's progress. The monthly portfolios at a private, urban, Midwest, elementary school are being used as a tool for reporting progress to parents as well as a venue for showcasing students' talents, a way of self-reflection, and an instrument for goal-setting and evaluation. Monthly interactive portfolios are shared with K-8 parents as an alternative authentic assessment system. Currently in the second year of implementation, the author shares the success story of home-school interactive student portfolios as a supplement to traditional progress reporting systems. The uniqueness of the portfolio system lies in the fact that it is used comprehensively in kindergarten through eighth grade, and is an interactive system. It has become an asset to the progress reporting system as well as a great community building tool for the school. The article explains the steps in the development and implementation of portfolios, the method of reporting to parents, the benefits of home-school communication, and the results of a recent parent survey regarding the portfolio system. Many parents are quoted throughout the article extolling specific benefits of portfolio assessment. A question and answer format is used to address the most commonly asked questions about the interactive home-school portfolios.
Using Interactive Home-School Portfolio Assessment Systems for Parental Communication

A Graduate Article for Publication
Submitted to the
Division of Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Nancy L. Stirm
June 7, 1997
This Research Paper by: Nancy L. Stirm

Titled: Using Interactive Home-School Portfolio Assessment Systems for Parental Communication

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts (or Master of Arts in Education in Education)

Date Approved

Linda F. Quinn
Graduate Faculty Reader

Mary J. Selke
Graduate Faculty Reader

Greg P. Stefanich
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Abstract

Scheduled conferences and report cards do not adequately tell parents how their children are progressing academically. Some parents have stated they would like to obtain more frequent communication from schools concerning their children's progress. The monthly portfolios at a private, urban, Midwest, elementary school are being used as a tool for reporting progress to parents as well as a venue for showcasing students' talents, a way of self-reflection, and an instrument for goal-setting and evaluation. Monthly interactive portfolios are shared with K-8 parents as an alternative authentic assessment system.

Currently in the second year of implementation, the author shares the success story of home-school interactive student portfolios as a supplement to traditional progress reporting systems. The uniqueness of the portfolio system lies in the fact that it is used comprehensively in kindergarten through eighth grade, and is an interactive system. It has become an asset to the progress reporting system as well as a great community building tool for the school. The article explains the steps in the development and implementation of portfolios, the method of reporting to parents, the benefits of home-school communication, and the results of a recent parent survey regarding the portfolio system. Many parents are quoted throughout the article extolling specific benefits of portfolio assessment. A question and answer format is used to address the most commonly asked questions about the interactive home-school portfolios.
How many times have parents told you their children do not share what they do in school? The portfolio assessment system can be used as a "tool for communication" (Kallick, 1993). It can be used as a means for parents to "collaborate and talk with their children about their [school] work at home" (Kallick, 1993).

Do the monthly portfolios implemented at a private, urban, Midwest, elementary school sufficiently inform the parents of their child's progress? YES! Blessed Sacrament School has successfully used the portfolio system for the last two years. In a recent survey (Stirm, 1997), almost 90% of the parents responding were in favor of our present portfolio system. Why did our school initially adopt the portfolio system? What changes have we made and why? What changes might be made in the future? In this journal article, the author will share the success story of interactive student portfolios as an interactive authentic assessment instrument and a supplement to the school's quarterly progress reporting system.

Our school has traditionally scheduled two conferences each year (1st and 3rd quarter) and two report card periods each year (2nd and 4th quarter). In the past, our parents have asked for more frequent communications concerning their child's academic progress.

In the summer and fall of 1994 our staff attended workshops on alternative assessment sponsored by the local state education agency. The portfolio as an assessment tool was discussed and explored as a viable option for our students. Several teachers decided to develop a portfolio system, a letter of explanation for the parents (see Appendix A), and a "compliments and goal" sheet (see Appendix B). The proposed
system was presented to the entire staff. After several collaborative revisions, the portfolio system was ready for presentation at our 1995 fall open house.

In September of 1995, we asked for a "parents only" open house. Each homeroom teacher presented the portfolio, explained the compliment and goal sheet, and answered questions from the parents. Most parents were receptive to this form of assessment.

Initially, we sent the portfolios home every other week. Students and teachers selected papers to be included in the portfolios. After parents and students shared contents of the portfolio, the parents were asked to give two written compliments about the student's work on the enclosed compliments and goal sheet. We also asked the parents, with the student, to formulate a goal to work on for the next month. Our reason for this was to have parents more actively involved in their child's education. The portfolio enables parent and child to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the student's work, and then create a goal for improvement in a weak area. This process assists parents and children in forming bonds that can impact the child's life-long learning.

Goals formulated by parents and children do not have to change each month. Some parents and students felt they would like to continue to work toward a goal if it has not been achieved by the end of the month. One parent stated the compliments and goal sheet "...gives us a chance to talk about and set goals, an important part of life and growing as a person. The compliments are wonderful to help build self-esteem." The portfolio adds this extra dimension for parents and children. It showcases their school work in an organized manner. Students are
proud to show off their work.

In the second year of using portfolios, the teachers decided to send the portfolios home once a month. They felt that to adequately see some growth in subject areas a one month time span was needed. Over 90% of the parents that responded to a 1997 survey felt the new time span was adequate to convey progress. We now make sure each paper in the portfolio is dated. This enables parents to see the sequence of additions throughout the year as work is accumulated. A parent commented, "It's wonderful to see real work on a regular basis. It gets you prepared for conferences." Another parent said, "Their report cards were fairly predictable since I'd seen their work."

Fischer and King (1995, p. 44) underscored the positive aspects for parents:

By sharing authentic assessments with parents and community they will feel that the home-school connection is strengthened, that their input is valued. Authentic assessment helps parents and the community realize that they are an important part of the learning process and that facilitated learning is not just the responsibility of the teacher.

The work included in the portfolios is not focused on a limited number of subjects but is instead comprehensive.

Grades K-2 include

- Reading
- Handwriting
- Math
- Science

- Language
- Creative Writing
- Religion
- Social Studies
Grades 3-8 include

- Comprehension
- Handwriting
- Vocabulary
- Creative Writing
- Language
- Spelling
- Math
- Word Attack Skills

Teachers felt that parents of students in the primary grades would like to see all the subject areas included. In grades three to eight the Language Arts and Math classes are highlighted. One parent stated, "I like the fact that I see a good variety of the work my child is doing, and in a very organized manner. Which makes it easier to comment and see their goals and where improvements need to be made."

MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION ABOUT OUR PORTFOLIOS

1. How are the portfolios organized?

   Each student, upon entering kindergarten, purchases a three-ring, two inch size notebook from the school for $2.50. The subject areas are identified by dividers.

2. What about split family situations?

   We include two "compliments and goal" sheets at the beginning of the portfolios, one for each parent to complete. We usually send the portfolios home on Friday and ask that they be returned on the following Wednesday. That time is extended if the child's portfolio goes to two households or if copies of work must be mailed out of town.

3. What is unique about your portfolios?

   Our portfolio system includes all grades K-8. It's an accumulation of work throughout the year. Parents can see growth in handwriting, sentence structure, and creative writing, for example, when they compare
their student's work from September to May. Hopefully, student test scores improve throughout the year. But most importantly, it builds an interactive bridge between home and school. In the survey a parent stated, "It gives parents an indication of what levels or 'areas' our kids can manage easily and which could use some extra effort from home." Kallick (1993) would add that "a school wide commitment to portfolios is a commitment to helping students move more naturally through the system."

4. Have you made any changes since implementing the system?

Yes, since beginning portfolio assessment we have changed the time span for sending the portfolios home. The kindergarten and first grade teachers now include a sheet that informs parents what skills will be taught the next month and provide a space for students to indicate their favorite portfolio piece (see Appendixes D and E). Seventh and eighth grade students include a half sheet of paper which states, "I chose this piece for my portfolio because...I think this piece shows my progress because... and I want the reader to notice...."

5. What do you do at the end of the year?

We decided, due to the size and the scope of the portfolio papers, to send the contents of the portfolio home at the end of the year. All papers are removed, labeled, put in a large envelope and given to the children's parents. Teachers decorate each child's envelope with their name, grade, and lots of stickers. What a great memento for the school year! The empty three-ring binders are stored for the summer and sent to the next teacher the following fall. Sending the papers home each spring alleviates the potential concern that the portfolio contents could be used
for "tracking" or future groupings.

Blessed Sacrament School has successfully used the portfolio system for the last two years. In a recent survey, almost 90% of the parents responding were in favor of our present portfolio system. Other parents felt the portfolios were more effective in the lower grades. They emphasized that students at the junior high level need letter grades in addition to the portfolios to prepare them for high school. Our community high school uses a traditional letter grading system.

At all grade levels there is a spirit of community when students proudly take home their portfolios each month. A parent stated, "It really gives us and our son time together to look at his work. He seems really proud to show us his work."

The portfolio fosters open communication between school and parents: parents and children. "In an effective assessment program, parents become partners with teachers and students, and parents are seen as a rich source of information" (Fischer & King, 1995, p. 39). A parent recently confirmed what is professed in current professional literature, stating the portfolio "... shows me and the child how they are doing. It also keeps communication between the child and an adult open." When addressing the survey question about whether or not the portfolios are communicating your child's progress another parent wrote that the portfolios "... keep parents up to date, help to involve us in our child's education. Helps us to be responsible, and for all of us to work together."

Interactive home-school portfolios can be an effective communication tool for parents. Used as assessment, the portfolio may
be an effective "supplement or alternative to report cards and standardized tests...and a better way to communicate student progress to parents" (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). The portfolio system shifts the focus from the teacher grading papers to the parent and the child discussing strengths, weaknesses, and goals.

As a teacher, I enjoy seeing my students complete papers for their portfolios. They enjoy the challenge of doing their best, knowing this work will be something they will be sharing with their parents in the portfolio. I love to hear the question, "can I put this in my portfolio?" Students have become more diligent in their work as they become conscious that their work is a reflection of them.

Our school has strengthened the home-school bond through our interactive portfolio system. Initially the portfolio is "a collection, [emphasis added] which over time is reduced to a selection, which becomes a reflection of the learner. The power is in the reflective process" (Kallick, 1993). Our portfolios offer a focused opportunity for parent and child to reflect. The interactive portfolio system has become a powerful community building tool for our entire educational community.
References


Dear Family,

The in-services that we have attended have emphasized assessment and evaluation. We have been encouraged to look at alternative assessment methods. With this in mind, we would like to implement a growth and development portfolio for grades K-8 in all content areas. Each portfolio will contain completed and evaluated work.

In order to begin the process of compiling student work, the school will purchase these notebooks and dividers. Each student needs to contribute $2.50 to the cost of the portfolio. Please send the money to school. We will begin using these at the beginning of the 1995-96 school year.

The portfolio will be a valuable tool for assessing your child's growth and development from the beginning of the school year until the end. Therefore, we ask that you do not remove any items from the portfolio. By the end of the school year, you and your child will have a progressive chronicle of growth and development.

You are an important part of the portfolio process! A unique feature of this assessment tool is the response sheet for parents entitled "Two Compliments and a Goal." After listening to your compliments, you and your child will be ready to discuss the goal (a goal indicates an area of improvement), and develop a goal for growth. Only one goal is required, as too many goals can be discouraging. Please review the contents of the portfolio with your child. The portfolio will be sent home once a month on a Friday. Record your compliments and goal and return the entire portfolio to school by the following Wednesday.

We are hopeful that this portfolio will capture the progress your child is making as a learner, build self-confidence, provide opportunities for self evaluation and allow time for communication between you and your child.

Sincerely,
Blessed Sacrament Staff
## Appendix B

### Two Compliments and a Goal

#### Unit A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Two Compliments:

1. ______________
2. ______________

#### Goal:

1. ______________

**Parents Signature:**

#### Date: ________

#### Two Compliments:

1. ______________
2. ______________

#### Goal:

1. ______________

**Parents Signature:**

#### Date: ________

#### Two Compliments:

1. ______________
2. ______________

#### Goal:

1. ______________

**Parents Signature:**

#### Date: ________

#### Two Compliments:

1. ______________
2. ______________

#### Goal:

1. ______________

**Parents Signature:**

**Note:** It is not necessary to write a new goal each time if the previous one has not been accomplished.
Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am taking a class on research at U.N.I. For this class, I would like to ask your opinion of our portfolios as communication tools. We are not thinking of changing our present system at this time. I am only using this survey for research purposes.

Please take a few minutes to answer these questions. Comments are welcome; your name is optional. Please return to the office by Friday, Feb. 7. Thank you.

1. Are the portfolios communicating your child's progress to you?
   _______ Yes _______ No

   Comments:

2. Is the monthly time span between portfolios sufficient?
   _______ Yes _______ No

   Comments:

3. Do the subject areas included in the portfolio give you an adequate measure of your child's work?
   _______ Yes _______ No

   Comments:

4. Would you like to see any other subjects included?
   _______ Yes _______ No
Comments:

5. Does the compliment and goal sheet seem beneficial?
   ________Yes ________No

Comments:

6. What do you like best about the portfolios?

7. If you could change one thing about the portfolios what would you change?

8. Other questions or comments.

Please return to the office by Friday, February 7. Thank you for your time.

Mrs. Nancy Stirm
Appendix D

Interactive Portfolios 15

Name ____________________________ Date _______

Portfolio Progress
First Grade

The following subjects/skills listed below are the areas we will be working on in the next three weeks:

Reading: __________________________

Language: _______________________

Math: ____________________________

Science: _________________________

Social Studies: ____________________

Religion: __________________________

Child's Self-Evaluation: As I look over my work from the last few weeks, I feel _________, because ____________________

I feel proud of ____________________________

My desk goal for this month was ____________________________ . I worked hard on my goal. yes no needs more work.

I have worked on my portfolio goals? yes no needs more work.

Teacher's Comments: ________________________________

______________________________

______________________________
Kindergarten Portfolio Update

Month: ________________

Reading:

Language/Listening:

Math:

Religion:

Handwriting:

Science/Health:

Social Studies:

Creative Writing:

______________'s comments:

Teacher's comments:
Complete List of References Used to Prepare the Article


