Implementation of writing portfolios into a fourth grade classroom

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Implementation of writing portfolios into a fourth grade classroom

Abstract
Portfolios can allow educators to assess student progress in an authentic way that relates instruction to assessment. Through portfolio collection, students can become actively involved in their own learning as they reflect on their work and establish personal instructional goals for future learning. Writing portfolios in a fourth grade classroom were used as an authentic form of assessment. The implementation of this form of assessment is described. Three students were followed through their initial year of writing portfolio collection. Through selection of exhibits and conferences with the teacher, the students examined their writing, reflected on its strengths, and established goals for future writing.
Implementation of Writing Portfolios
Into a Fourth Grade Classroom

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into a Fourth Grade Classroom

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Abstract

Portfolios can allow educators to assess student progress in an authentic way that relates instruction to assessment. Through portfolio collection, students can become actively involved in their own learning as they reflect on their work and establish personal instructional goals for future learning.

Writing portfolios in a fourth grade classroom were used as an authentic form of assessment. The implementation of this form of assessment is described. Three students were followed through their initial year of writing portfolio collection. Through selection of exhibits and conferences with the teacher, the students examined their writing, reflected on its strengths, and established goals for future writing.
The use of portfolios, as one form of qualitative assessment, is a recent trend. Many educators see them as an authentic form of assessment, for they produce tangible evidence of students' growth and instructional needs (Vavrus, 1990).

A portfolio is an ongoing collection of a student's work. It should be a collaborative effort of the student and the teacher as they organize information that relates instruction to assessment (Kingore, 1993).

After a review of professional literature in this article, a fourth grade classroom teacher will share her experiences in implementing writing portfolios into her classroom program. Three students have been followed through this implementation as they collaborated with their teacher to reflect upon their progress in developing writing abilities and in recognizing instructional needs, and then in setting goals for further involvement in the writing process.

**Portfolios as a Qualitative Assessment Tool**

**Benefits of Portfolios in Qualitative Assessment**

Portfolios are more than just a collection of students' final products used for assessment. Vavrus (1990) states that portfolios should be an "organized collection of evidence used by teacher and student to monitor growth of student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a specific subject area" (p. 48).
Portfolios should strive to establish standards without standardizing assessment. Then, educators and students can assess growth in writing through using the processes of writing versus the final product (Kingore, 1993). Students' work that is produced naturally in a daily classroom setting can be collected to monitor growth in writing abilities as well as emergent attitudes towards themselves and their writing. Tierney (1991) suggests that portfolios should evidence over time these features: power, versatility, effort, use of processes, self-reflection, growth, and using a broad perspective to monitor growth.

Routman (1991) states, "A portfolio approach to evaluation assumes knowledgeable teachers who understand and integrate [thinking-language] processes in their teaching and who are ready to give up some control and ownership of the learning-evaluation process to students" (p. 330). This statement describes the principle behind the use of portfolios--students and teachers working together to identify strengths and goals in students' work. Teachers and students learn more about writing in reflecting on the process than from reading the final product.

Students benefit from the use of portfolios. During portfolio conferencing, they are able to make decisions about their own learning and become involved in the evaluation of their writing. Their assessment is closely related to the instruction
of writing in the classroom (Frank, 1994). This type of assessment is authentic because it represents actual learning going on in a classroom with individual students (Vavrus, 1990). If students are involved in the selection process, it can improve their organizational habits (Milliken in Graves and Sunstein, 1992). Students need to feel ownership of their portfolios to engage in this new level of involvement (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Portfolio collection increases students' responsibility for their own learning, improves self-esteem, builds pride in their work, and can increase intrinsic motivation (Kingore, 1993).

The portfolio becomes an important tool to help students see where they have been, where they are currently and how they got there, and where they need to go in their personal writing process (Porter & Cleland, 1995). Routman (1991) discusses the importance of students evaluating their own work. She states that students need to examine and appraise their own work. In thinking about evaluation, students become independent learners and critical thinkers.

Self-reflections are not a natural process for young writers. This practice needs to be learned and used through instruction, modeling, and other classroom conditions that are nurturing. Children should be given regular opportunities to review their portfolio contents to find strengths and weaknesses,
areas of growth and change, and areas that require improvement (Frank, 1994).

Individual students may notice different aspects of their writing depending on their developmental stage in the writing process. Some areas that they may wish to address include the following: appearance and conventions, ideas and content, writing forms and techniques, processes, and growth (Frank, 1994). Teachers can use mini-lessons to aid students in focusing on these aspects of their writing.

Portfolios can be shared in additional ways. One type of sharing that has several benefits is the use of peer reflections. When students are given the opportunity to prepare reflections of another student’s portfolio, they may see things to help them improve areas in their own writing (Frank, 1994). Positive peer reflections can build up students’ self-concepts.

Writing portfolios provide a more truthful and conclusive picture of students’ writing abilities and development. This assessment allows teachers to better understand the needs of the students, and, as a result, they can better address those needs (Wasserstein, 1994). Through portfolios, a teacher can assess not only a final product, but also the processes students use to complete them. A reading/writing portfolio can give teachers an efficient overview of children’s growth in story elements, writing forms and other abilities (Voss in Graves & Sunstein,
1992). They offer information about how students think, how they process work, and their attitudes about their work (Wasserstein, 1994).

Teachers can use portfolios with both formal and informal assessment techniques. They can use samples of writing produced during the writers' workshop to observe growth in the writing process, conventions of writing, and types of techniques being used (Au in Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994). The student self-assessments can be used to help teachers plan for mini-lessons and identify areas in which individual students need instruction. Teachers can also use checklists, anecdotal records, conference notes, and other informal assessment tools to report growth and needs to students, parents, and administration.

Another option in using portfolios is allowing parents the opportunity to respond to their children's writing by examining portfolios. Then, parents have a chance to observe what their children are learning. It also gives them a way to support and affirm their children's growth in positive ways (Frank, 1994).

Types of Portfolios

Several types of writing portfolios can be used for assessment (Frank, 1994). The working portfolio is used to collect the students' writing in all stages of the writing process. From the contents of this portfolio, the other types are formed. The showcase portfolio contains exhibits selected
periodically from the working portfolio that represents a collaborative reflection on the part of the students and the teacher. This collection showcases the students’ progress and instructional needs. At the end of the year, a few samples of students’ work are selected as part of an ongoing record from year to year of their progress.

Introduction of Portfolios to Students

Traditionally, portfolios have been used by architects, artists, and models as work samples to show employers (Jongsma, 1995). When introducing the portfolio to students, it is important to show models of writing portfolios to help students develop a concept of a collection of exhibits (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991).

Teachers should explain to the students that they will be creating their own writing portfolio. This portfolio will represent their involvement in the writing process and their writing process (Tierney et al., 1991).

Students need to be given examples of the types of writing that can be placed in their portfolio. They need to understand that the contents of each portfolio will vary depending on the individual. The contents become reflective of the types of learning experiences that students are involved in throughout the year (Porter & Cleland, 1995). Some types of writing that can be placed in a portfolio include creative writing pieces, written
responses to reading, writing at various stages, unit projects, letters, and research reports (Valencia, 1990).

As each new selection is added to the showcase portfolio, the students can attach a label to it, justifying the addition of the exhibit to the collection. The label form should include the reason for it being chosen, the piece's strengths, and the instructional goals for future writing (Frank, 1994). Paulson et al. (1991) state, "This self-reflective statement helps illustrate a key value associated with student portfolios and a rationale for using them: portfolios permit instruction and assessment to be woven together in a way more traditional approaches do not" (p. 60).

As students begin to reflect on their portfolio selections, they may need teacher support. The labeling of their work will progressively show reflections more closely related to their writing goals and involvement in the writing process (Tierney et al., 1991).

Portfolios need to be easily accessible by students and teachers. Their location in the classroom should be inviting so that student and teacher can easily contribute to portfolios on an on-going basis. The location of the portfolio may be on a table or shelf in the classroom writing center (Valencia, 1990).
Portfolio Conferences

A portfolio conference is a meeting between a teacher and a student to reflect upon the pieces of writing within the student’s portfolio and to select additional exhibits (Frank, 1994). They allow students to examine their involvement in the writing process and to take responsibility for their own growth as they self-assess their work (Porter & Cleland, 1995). Portfolio conferences can occur as often as the teacher and student see the need for them. At least four conferences should be held throughout the year with each student.

Portfolio conferences can be beneficial to both student and teacher. Students are able to elaborate orally what they think about while engaged in the writing process and what they have learned from their writing. Individual conferences with teachers give each student opportunities to receive responses and instruction from the teacher (Frank, 1994).

Portfolio Collection in a Fourth Grade Classroom

Writing portfolios were initiated for the first time in the author’s fourth grade classroom. Her writing program emphasized process; therefore, portfolios as an instruction-assessment technique were appropriate. The types of portfolios selected were working and showcase portfolios with pass-along portfolios developed at the end of the year.
Introduction to Students

After several weeks of exploring the components of the writing process, writing several pieces, and working in writers' workshop, the working portfolio and its purposes were introduced to the students. The teacher explained that teacher-student conferences would be conducted approximately once a month. At this time, students could select pieces from their writing folders to add to their showcase portfolios. She suggested types of writing that the children might select to place in their portfolio, such as their favorite piece, a piece in which they tried a new strategy, a letter to a friend, or an entry from their journals. The students were shown a labeling form that would be included on each piece. On this form, students would be asked to give a reason for selecting the piece, identify its strength, and set up an instructional goal for future writing.

How to record the ongoing collection on the table of contents form for the portfolio was demonstrated. This form included the title of the piece and the date it was added to the collection of writing.

The writers' workshop and portfolios were also introduced to parents at the beginning of the school year. During Curriculum Night in September, the teacher showed examples of writing portfolios to the parents and explained the purposes of them. They were told that they would be given opportunities during
student-parent-teacher conferences and at the end of the year to examine the children's portfolios. They were also welcome to examine them at anytime throughout the year.

Selection of Writing Pieces

The showcase portfolio was started during the final week of September about one month after the beginning of the school year. The children had been adding pieces to their working portfolio since the beginning of the school year. They had many pieces of writing to choose from for their first contribution to their showcase portfolio.

A mini-lesson was presented to model for students how to select a piece of writing to include as an exhibit in their showcase portfolio. The teacher used her own portfolio to give examples of reasons why a piece might be chosen. The students came up with additional ideas, such as fun to read, words spelled correctly, good describing words, and effective lead sentence. Using this list, the students were to look through their working portfolio and find a piece of writing that they wanted to include in their showcase portfolio. They were given a labeling form to attach to their selection. The students then added this piece to their showcase portfolio and added its title and the date to the attached table of contents sheet.

This selection process was done approximately once a month throughout the school year during writers' workshop. It was
followed up with an individual portfolio conference between teacher and student to discuss their selection, writing strengths, and instructional needs. The students usually chose one piece to be added at each selection setting; however, at other times they chose two.

**Portfolio Conferences**

In the portfolio collection process in this fourth grade classroom program, conferences were used after each showcase portfolio selection session. The conferences were held after the students made their selection to allow them a chance to assess their work alone and then to discuss their assessment with the teacher. The students met individually with the teacher to discuss their newest addition to their portfolios and their growth and needs as a writer. Students were given an opportunity to talk about their writing and the processes and techniques they used. At the end of each conference, students verbalized strengths in their work and set goals for further writing.

After each conference, the teacher made notes about what was discussed with each child. She recorded their assessment of their strengths and needs and her own assessment of their progress. She also documented any new strategies that the child may have used. These notes were placed in student files to be used at student-parent-teacher conferences and to make notes on report cards.
Other Assessment Activities Associated With Portfolios

Approximately a week before student-parent-teacher conferences, students completed a written reflection questionnaire on their writing. They examined their working and showcase portfolios and used them as references to complete the questionnaire. They shared their responses to the questionnaires with their parents during the conferences.

Nearing the end of the school year, students were given opportunity to examine and reflect upon a peer’s showcase portfolio. They were given a questionnaire to complete that aided them in making positive, constructive comments. This questionnaire included the following sentence starters: "My favorite part of your portfolio is . . . because . . .," "I noticed you are good at . . .," "I think your best piece of writing is . . . because . . .," and "Something I learned from you is . . . ." When they had completed their reviews they returned them to the owner along with the questionnaire. As a result of this review, the peers saw the progress in writing each other made during the year.

Portfolios were also a source of information in the fourth grade classroom about students’ progress shared with parents. Before the student-parent-teacher conferences were held at the end of the third quarter of the school year, the showcase portfolios were sent home with a note asking parents to respond
to their children's writing and to discuss these collections with their children. Accompanying the portfolio was a questionnaire on the parents' reactions to the collection. It included questions about the parents' favorite part of the portfolio, what surprised them, what they learned about the students' writing from the portfolios, and a place for compliments and comments. At the next portfolio conference, the students were given the opportunity to talk about their parents' reactions. The parents and teacher discussed the parents' response on the questionnaire at the spring conference. The parents' reactions were positive. They indicated appreciation of specific examples over time of their children's progress in writing as showcased by the portfolios.

During the final week of school, the students selected three exhibits from their showcase portfolios for their pass-along portfolios. The pieces of writing also included the label form that they placed on it when adding it to their showcase portfolio.

Student Responses During Portfolio Collection

During the school year, the teacher followed three students through the portfolio collection process to study how they were involved in the writing process, progressed in gaining writing abilities, and developed showcase portfolios. These students were of varying abilities.
Student A

This boy is a high academic achiever that comes from a middle class family. He is enthusiastic about learning and excels in all areas of the curriculum. He is extremely interested in science and sports.

Student A's first contribution to his portfolio in September was a personal experience story about his trip to Disney World. He chose this piece because, as he wrote on the label, "I did a lot of good writing habits in it." During the portfolio conference, Student A described what good writing habits he had used. He explained that he spelled words correctly, put in periods after sentences, used capital letters and commas, and developed good ideas.

During this first portfolio conference, Student A decided that he showed strength in punctuation, good topic sentences and relating his stories to his own life. He was able to quickly assess strengths in his work, and he showed proof of these ideas in his piece of writing. The student and the teacher discussed what instructional goals that he could establish to strengthen his writing. From reviewing his work, he decided that he wanted to work on writing longer stories. When they discussed how he could do this, he concluded that by adding more details to his stories they would be longer and more interesting.
In November, Student A chose an entry from his Reading Response Journal to add to his portfolio. His response was to the story, "Farmer Schultz's Ducks." His reason for choosing this piece was, "I think I included a lot of good ideas for Farmer Schulz [Schultz]." He explained that its strengths were including good ideas and comparing the story to his own life experiences. He thought he could improve on this piece by writing from Anna's (another character in the story) point of view.

During the conference with the teacher following this selection, Student A explained that he wrote about what he would have done if he were in Farmer Schultz's situation. Such an approach made him think about the story and identify closely with one of the characters.

Student A examined his work and decided on two writing goals for his future work. He wanted to continue to write more stories. From his assessment of his working and showcase portfolio, he believed that he had not been writing enough to show his best work.

Following this conference, the teacher made notes about the thought processes of Student A. She saw him moving beyond the mechanics of writing and focusing on the content of his work. He had shown much growth in only three months.

In January, Student A chose a fictional piece entitled, "The Worst Day." In this story, he created events that may have
happened during a bad day. On his label form, he gave the reason for choosing this piece: He had met all his goals for writing. He thought the writing strengths were correct usage of spelling and punctuation. In the future, he wanted to try to think of better ideas to write about. This piece was two and a half pages long, much longer than any other piece that he had chosen before.

During the portfolio conference, the teacher and student discussed how he had met all of his goals. He explained that his previous writing goals had been to write longer stories and to spell words correctly. He said that this story was the longest that he had written. He explained that he had added details, such as times, descriptions and exact numbers of things. He also concluded that he had used a much better lead sentence in this story. He thought it could get the audience excited about reading the rest of the story immediately. He had spelled all the words correctly except one, and he had corrected that word later. He set his two goals for future writing as choosing better ideas and writing even longer stories.

The final piece of writing that Student A contributed to his portfolio at the end of the year was a humorous piece entitled, "If I Was A Sub Teacher." In this piece he explained how he would run the school if he were the substitute teacher. The reason he selected this piece was because he thought it had
good ideas and he used details well. He believed that its details and correct punctuation were its strengths.

In the final conference of the year, Student A and the teacher reviewed the pieces within his portfolio to discuss how he had grown throughout the year. Student A decided that he had written progressively longer stories by adding more details. However, he set one of his final writing goals as writing longer stories. He seemed to equate length of his work with quality of work. Student A also stated that his mechanics, such as spelling and punctuation, had improved greatly from the beginning of the year. He was also amazed at how his ideas of his writing had changed over the year. He set two other goals for writing at the end of this conference: He wanted to work on better titles and topic sentences for his writing.

Student A showed growth in many areas of the writing process over the fourth grade year. His self-assessments of his writing showed that he connected with his writing on a more personal level at the end of the year compared to the beginning. His ideas and mechanics improved as he became more involved in addressing his strengths and weaknesses in the portfolio selection and conferences.

Student B

Student B is a girl who is in the Title I reading program and has difficulty with reading and the mechanics of writing, yet
she is full of energy and enthusiasm about writing. Her writing showed the largest amount of improvement of the three students focused on in this project.

Student B chose for her first portfolio exhibit in September a personal experience story about her birthday party at her grandmother's home. Her reasons for choosing this piece reflected her inability to assess her writing. Her response included,

"I choose this piece because it is in the crat [correct] order. I asol [also] Picked it because it has a good ending. I asol Picked it because it Keeps on moving. I asol Picked it because it was all spel [spelled] right. I asol Picked it because it is indention. I asol Picked it because it makes sense."

The teacher listed these ideas on the chalkboard as the student gave her reasons for selecting the piece.

During the portfolio conference, the teacher helped Student B focus on certain aspects of her written piece that were positive. Student B decided that most of the words were spelled correctly and that details in the story were in the correct order. She chose these two ideas as her strengths.

Student B worked with the teacher to establish goals for her future writing. As they examined her story, Student B saw a need to use more exciting words and to add details to her story.
She and the teacher discussed what some exciting words may be and how she could use them in her writing. They also discussed adding details to a story to improve its quality.

In November, Student B chose an entry from her Reading Response Journal to add to her portfolio. She had responded to the story, "The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig." On her label form for this contribution, Student B focused on the length of her story. Her reason for choosing this was, "I think I did good work on it and I think that I can right [write] even more." She stated that the strengths were correct spelling and order. She claimed that she learned that you can write long summaries in your reading response journal. Her goal was to write even longer stories. This response was approximately three-fourths of a page long.

On the selection form, Student B was better able to focus on certain aspects of her writing instead of writing unrelated ideas. During the portfolio conference, she said by writing a longer entry in her Reading Response Journal, her reader was better able to understand what she was trying to say. She was excited about seeing how her responses had lengthened and improved since the beginning of the year.

Student B saw her strengths in this entry as being a longer piece, and using more punctuation and exciting words. She identified "tough," "faster," and "strong" as exciting words.
After discussing and examining this selection, Student B saw her future needs as writing even longer stories and remembering to indent in important places.

After this conference, the teacher noted the improvement in Student B’s assessment abilities. The student, in comparison to the first two conferences of the year, was able to identify positive aspects of her writing and to support them with examples from her selected piece of work.

In January and March, Student B used the same piece of writing in different stages to contribute to her portfolio. It was a fictional story about her worst day. In January it was an unfinished piece in the first draft form, and in March it was a published piece. She chose this piece in March because, "I went back through [through] it to check [check] if there was any mistakes [mistakes] at the beginning [beginning] of the story to the end." Student B identified closely with this story because she had spent much time on it.

Student B saw a strength of this piece as being long because it was her longest composition. During the portfolio conference, she commented several times on how she thought it was good because it was long and she had included many details. She was also proud of herself because she had invested so much time revising the piece. Her own assessment showed that she understood more about the writing process. Her instructional goals were to
use more exciting words and to check for places that might need different words.

Student B's final piece was a fiction story entitled, "My Car." She described the car that she would like to have in the future. The reason she chose this piece was that she wrote it in one day.

During this portfolio conference, Student B and the teacher examined the contents of her portfolio and discussed ways in which she had grown as a writer. She assessed that she was able to write longer stories and to add more details than she had at the beginning of the year. She also observed that she had made much improvement in her spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. She had begun to see revising as a natural part of the writing process. She set her final goals as being more creative in her work and getting new ideas to write about.

As she reflected on her portfolio collection, Student B began to see herself as a writer. She became more involved in her work, and her self-assessment of her work greatly improved. She was also more willing to take risks and attempt new ideas as the year progressed.

Student C

Student C is a boy of average ability. He is reserved and does not take risks readily. He had difficulty selecting topics for writing throughout the year and did not see writing as an
important part of his learning. Student C enjoyed working with other students as he wrote and could collaborate with his peers on a piece of writing that was unique in content.

In September, Student C made his first contribution to his portfolio. He chose a personal experience story about a trip he had taken with his mother to South Dakota. His reason for choosing this piece was, "I spelled all most every word correctly." During the portfolio conference, he pointed out words that he thought were challenging, yet he spelled them correctly. Some of these words included, "Dakota," "Rushmore," and "buffalo." Student C and the teacher discussed different strategies that he had used to spell the words correctly and new strategies that he could use if those did not work in the future.

Spelling was the only positive thing that Student C could identify in his story at this time. Because Student C had difficulty assessing his writing, the teacher helped point out positive aspects of his writing, such as, the details of his trip that he had included, the use of commas in a series, and a correct sequence of ideas. On his conference record form, he chose punctuation, spelling correctly, and capitalization as strengths.

Also in this conference, Student C was asked if there were any goals that he wanted to work on in his future writing. He responded that he needed to write longer stories and more
stories. He said he had difficulty coming up with topics to write about. At this time, Student C and the teacher listed ideas that he could write about during writers' workshop. This list was placed in his portfolio for reference if he needed it. In the teacher's conference notes, she commented on the difficult time Student C had in assessing his own work.

In January, Student C chose a fantasy story, "My Dream Vehicle," to add to his portfolio. It was a story about a make-believe vehicle that he would like to own. He chose this piece of writing because "I think I did good and added details." He thought he showed that he was good at adding details. In the future, he wanted to work on writing longer stories.

During the portfolio conference, the teacher asked Student C what parts of his writing showed that he had done a good job. After a great deal of thought, he stated, "I wrote about what I thought would be neat." He then showed the teacher some details that he had added to his story that made it interesting. For example, he indicated that the section in which he wrote how fast the vehicle could go, "50 billion, five trillion, 65 million, 5 thousand, 100 miles per second," made this piece of writing more exciting.

The idea of writing a longer story was also discussed during the conference. Student C talked about different ways that
he could lengthen his stories, such as by adding details, telling more of the actions, and telling what happened before or after the main event. Then, he set as his future goal, writing longer stories by adding details. He also indicated that he would like to try to use more exciting words in his writing. He said his work was boring to read, and different words would add interest to it.

After this conference, the teacher made several notes about the changes in Student C's ability to assess his writing. She noted that his assessments had changed from focusing on form, such as capitalization and punctuation, to the content of his work. He was more concerned with making his writing more interesting to read and easier to understand.

During the March selection period, Student C chose a piece of writing entitled, "The Foods and Drinks I Like," which was a long list of his favorite foods and drinks. He said he chose this piece because it was the longest he had written and it told about things he likes to eat and drink. He had shared this piece during writers' workshop, and his classmates made many positive comments about it.

As Student C and the teacher discussed this piece of writing during the conference, he was able to discuss many positive aspects of his writing. He thought the piece showed unique ideas in writing because no one else had written a piece
like it. He also was proud of his use of commas to separate words in a series. He indicated three strengths in his writing as "putting good ideas down, good imagination, and use commas in correct places." These ideas were recorded on his conference records by the teacher.

At this time, Student C and the teacher also discussed some areas of the writing process that he could work on in his future writing. His goals were to focus on proper placement of periods and to avoid writing long lists because they were not fun to read and they did not have people or action in them. As this discussion continued, Student C began to see a need to work on adding details to his stories through using actions and words that showed more precisely what was going on in the story. He also established this need as another instructional goal.

The final piece that Student C added to his portfolio in May was a fantasy piece that he had written with another student entitled, "Our Mansion." In this piece, he describes a make-believe mansion that he would like to live in. His reason for choosing this piece was "I think I did good on it." He saw his strengths as using appropriate punctuation.

During this portfolio conference, Student C and the teacher examined all the pieces in his portfolio and discussed ways in which he had grown in the writing process. He pointed out that he had much longer and better developed sentences on the present
piece of writing compared to sentences he had written at the beginning of the year. He did not see any growth in his ability to add details to his work. He set this element as a future goal.

Student C had a difficult time assessing his work in a positive manner throughout the year. He quickly found the negative aspects of his writing and had more difficulty finding the positive ones. Through individual conferences with the teacher, he was given the opportunity to find some positives in his writing and to elaborate upon them. As a result, he began to gain more confidence in his writing ability as the year progressed. This increasing confidence showed in his writing samples and his topic choices.

Conclusion

Using writing portfolios for the first time in a fourth grade classroom was a positive experience for the students and teacher. The students in the classroom were able to assess their own work and grow from their own observations. They also saw themselves as part of the writing process and not just producing final products.

The teacher saw portfolios as an authentic way to provide evidence of growth in the writing process to the students and their parents. She, herself, grew as she watched the students become and see themselves as writers.
References


