Using portfolios as an integral part of the writing process

Cheryl A. Calease Fox

University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract
The use of writing portfolios to enhance elements of the writing process is investigated. The writing process includes planning, writing the first draft, revising, editing and publishing (Graves, 1983). During the last three stages of the writing process procedures of student participation, reflection and self-evaluation are encouraged and enhanced through teacher-student collaboration. Students select writings based on values where various attributes are assessed (Graves, 1983). Authentic assessment based on criteria informs instruction. The findings of published literature shows strong support for incorporating the writing portfolio as a teaching tool.
USING PORTFOLIOS
AS AN INTEGRAL PART
OF THE WRITING PROCESS

A Graduate Review
Submitted to the
Division of Elementary Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
in Partial Fulfillment
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Masters of Arts in Education
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By
Cheryl A. Calease Fox
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Titled:  Using Portfolios as an Integral Part of the Writing Process has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

May 15, 1996
Date Approved

Marvin Heller
Graduate Faculty Reader

Donna Schumacher
Graduate Faculty Reader

Peggy Ishler
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Using Portfolios as an Integral Part of the Writing Process

Introduction

Portfolios are becoming a popular tool for assessment. While teaching sixth grade writing skills, I have discovered that many students seem unable to self-assess writing accurately during the revising and editing stages. Students who learn to revise and edit through conferencing and self-reflection, however, seem to understand more easily that writing is a process not a product. It is when this realization occurs that students become self-motivated and understand that these stages help them grow; they become cognizant of their own learning process. Writing is a personal act; it reflects students' thoughts and feelings. For this reason, it is important that growth be encouraged, rather than hampered by teacher corrections. These corrections diminish students' self-esteem and undermine their desire to write. The need to explore my role as a facilitator of student learning by becoming an active participant in the writing processes was the primary motivation for this investigation and analysis of writing portfolios.

Portfolio assessment is an accurate form of authentic assessment when implemented correctly, but it does not easily fit into the current educational structure used to grade and evaluate student learning. Issuing report cards and recording grades in their traditional numerical form can be difficult when using portfolio assessment. Because of these difficulties, portfolios are often avoided or see limited use. But even if they are not conducive to traditional grading, portfolios should still be used as a means of teaching writing. They should be a part of the writing process. They can also be an aid in reaching final
evaluations and grades (Tierney, Carter, Desai, & Cutler, 1991). The change of purpose from teaching isolated writing skills to that of teaching writing as a process for conveying an important message to the reader also naturally leads to the utilization of portfolios for self-assessment (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991).

The change from rote teaching of writing skills evaluated by standardized tests, to holistic teaching calls for different and additional means of assessment. Alternative authentic assessment instruments such as the portfolio tend to appear in combination with other elements: whole language rather than basal readers, cooperative instruction rather than basal readers, cooperative instruction rather than didactic teacher talk, school-based decision making rather than toppdown decisions, the teacher as professional rather than as civil servant (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993). Teachers have been on the forefront of this shift to authentic assessment by experimenting with writing portfolios.

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to (a) analyze the elements of the writing process, (b) analyze the benefits of portfolio maintenance, and (c) investigate how making portfolio maintenance an integral part of the writing activities in an elementary classroom can improve the students' writing.

This study also addresses the following specific questions:
1. What elements of the writing process can be enhanced by the use of portfolios?
2. What aspects of the process of maintaining a portfolio are relevant to the writing process?
3. How can portfolios be used as a tool for teaching the writing process?

Significance of the Review

This review presents reasons for continued use of portfolios as a teaching tool. This review promotes and explains how portfolios are best suited for personal assessment and reflection by students as they grow as writers and then as a means of final assessment by the teacher. It is essential that teachers understand how their role must change as they become the facilitator of learning rather than the director of learning. Students, too, must realize how their role changes when teachers empower them to be worthy individuals, capable of being responsible for their own learning.

It is by using portfolios as an integral part of the writing process, for reflection and self-assessment, that students begin to see their own learning take place and begin to perceive themselves as writers and learners. The greatest value of portfolios lies in the students' use of them for their own self-assessment and learning, not as a teacher-tool for final assessment. After all, it is through portfolios that teachers are able to guide students to reflect on their own writing and help them perceive themselves as writers.

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this review, the following terms are defined:
Writing Process--The student is engaged in the five stages of the writing process: prewriting, writing, revising, editing, and publishing.
Portfolio--"A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits to the student (and/or others) the student’s efforts, progress
or achievement in given area(s). This collection must include: student participation in selection of portfolio content; the criteria for selection; the criteria for judging merit; and evidence of student self-reflection." (Arter, 1990, p. 2).

Whole Language Philosophy-- "The core of beliefs derived from the understanding that language and literacy are best developed when language (oral or written) is not fragmented, but kept whole; when listening and speaking and reading and writing are not isolated for study, but permeate the whole curriculum; when students are encouraged and allowed to develop language and literacy as they engage in authentic language/literacy events; and when the whole curriculum, instead of being isolated from the perceived needs, thoughts, and feelings of students, is integrated with their whole lives" (Weaver, 1990, p. 30).

Methodology

This analysis of literature examines how portfolios might become an integral and significant part of the teaching of the writing process. It also examines the natural match between this approach and the whole language approach. The writing process is examined first in order to determine its critical elements and to identify elements that might be compatible with portfolios. Next, the many purposes and types of portfolios are explored. An analysis is made of how they are implemented, and the components of effective portfolios. Then, the uses of portfolios for learning and for self-assessment and growth are examined to determine if they can become an effective and integral part of a strategy for teaching writing.
Analysis and Discussion

The Writing Process

"In writing the move is away from primary attention to handwriting, spelling, grammar, and usage toward an interest in communication, organization, purposes for writing, and attitudes toward writing" (Leonard Lamme & Hysmith, 1991, p. 629; McCormick Calkins, 1986; Parry & Hornsby, 1985). "The writing process does not fit into teacher-led, whole-class methods of instruction" (Tierney et al., 1991, p. 19).

The writing process has four or five stages of development depending upon a given expert: planning, drafting, revising, editing, publishing (Graves 1983). In Donald Murray's terms: rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing. McCormic Calkins (1986), and Parry and Hornsby (1985) suggest rehearsal (prewriting), writing (drafting/revising), conferencing, and publishing (sharing). Whatever the terminology chosen for naming the stages, the total process still remains much the same.

The first stage of the writing process is called planning (Graves, 1983) or rehearsal (McCormick Calkins, 1986; Parry & Hornsby, 1985). In this stage students consciously choose their own topics according to their interests or purpose of writing. These topics may include a variety of genres.

During the second stage students write their first draft (Graves, 1983; McCormic Calkins, 1986; Parry & Hornsby, 1985). This is where students record their thoughts or ideas by writing them on paper. The focus is on content, the true reason for writing, rather than on mechanics. Students begin to make connections as events in their story
take place. Gradually, as they feel more comfortable with writing, students begin to take more risks in their writing.

Stage three, revision, (Graves, 1983; McCormick Calkins, 1986; Parry & Hornsby, 1985) is where students reread their story, viewing it again from the angle of the reader to be sure that their ideas are being presented accurately. "The writing stands apart from the writer, and the writer interacts with it, first to find out what the writing has to say and then to help the writing say it clearly and gracefully" (Murray, 1982, p. 5).

After the act of composing and revising, the work is edited in the fourth stage. Students read with an objective eye. The focus is on organization and mechanics to make the text sound precise. Ideas are organized and clarified to help the written work emerge as a whole, rather than as fragmented pieces.

The last stage of writing is publishing. It is important for all children to share their written works with the intended audience, often students are given the opportunity to read their story aloud or make a book for others to read themselves. Younger children may publish more frequently, while older students may take longer periods of time to publish because of the complexity of their piece.

What Elements of the Writing Process can be Enhanced by the Use of Portfolios?

The impact of portfolios particularly presents itself during the last three stages of the writing process. It is during these stages that the student begins to analyze and assess his or her own writing. The task of developing a portfolio makes it necessary for the student to stop and think about the development of his/her writing. This self-
assessment and personal reflection are vital for the student to learn to think about his/her writing progress and learning.

As students revise, they reflect and make decisions by analyzing whether the piece conveys the intended meaning to the reader. Pertinent, interesting information of ideas without too much detail that bores the reader, needs to be included for the intended audience. Through self-evaluation, students become cognizant of their own learning. During teacher and peer conferences, comments focus on positive examples of success; these serve as models for future student reference. Questions can be used to help the student focus on areas that might be confusing to the reader. As students verbalize their thinking, their understanding of the writing process is enhanced and reinforced. Antecdotal records of these student comments can help a teacher assess the students' progress. When they explain what they believe a good writing piece needs to have and what strengths they feel they possess as a writer, they give their teacher great insight into their progress. Portfolios provide an opportunity to review the progress of developing and expressing ideas over time.

During the editing stage, ideas are reorganized so that confusion is prevented. Ideas that flow smoothly with one another give a complete, uniform picture of what the writer is expressing. Standard mechanics support the meaning of these ideas. By comparing and analyzing writings in portfolios, patterns evolve. These patterns indicate student success; they illustrate that a skill or concept has been learned. Patterns can also indicate a student's readiness to learn other skills and concepts. When a student consistently demonstrates inability to use a skill or concept correctly, it is an indication that
the skill or concept has not yet been learned. When these indications occur, students are involved in purposeful learning through individual teacher instruction, in small groups, or as a class.

The publishing stage of writing connects the student with their intended audience, and adds a sense of culmination to the writing process. The addition of these published pieces to the students' portfolios allows for students to assess their writings by making comparisons with other writings. As students compare and contrast writings, their understanding of the writing process is enhanced and reinforced. Various attributes in the writing process are compared in terms of importance. Students reflect as they analyze the elements of writing and the significance of their ideas. This reflection draws together a better understanding of the significance of the writing process internalized by students. The desire to succeed in presenting their intended ideas to the audience reinforces meaningful success. As a writer, continued growth and development is fostered. Antecdotel records of student comments can help a teacher assess students' progress. When students explain what they believe a good writing piece needs to have and what strengths they feel they possess as a writer, they give their teacher great insight into their progress.

General Overview

Portfolios are now seen as an essential part of the writing classroom. The purpose of a writing portfolio, which is determined by teachers and students, dictates what is to be included in the portfolio (Graves, 1994). There are two kinds of portfolios found in writing classrooms. Portfolios sometimes contain all the writing students have done throughout the year. Sometimes the portfolio is a folder
containing work students have thoughtfully selected from their total-set of writings (Graves, 1994). It is critical, however, that the teacher match the purpose of the portfolios with the instructional strategy used in the classroom (Cambourne & Turbill, 1990).

What Aspects of the Process of Maintaining a Portfolio are Relevant to the Writing Process?

Encouraging students to be lifelong learners is a major thrust of the whole language philosophy; writing portfolios can help evaluate this continued learning. Several important characteristics of this method of evaluation are:

1. Student-centeredness--The power rests with the student writer. She/he has a strong sense of ownership (Tierney et al., 1991). He or she must have the authority to choose the contents of what is to be included in the portfolio (Graves, 1983). When a student selects what goes into the portfolio, it reveals and supports the finest the student has to present.

2. Use of the writing process--Portfolios demonstrate that writing is an ongoing process. Various pieces of writing are often at different stages of development, and each stage requires a different task. Over time, students learn to take risks, have the opportunity to write about a variety of experiences or genres that facilitate writing, and learn that to produce quality work takes effort (Tierney et al., 1991).

3. Active learners--As students choose pieces for their portfolio based on attributes, they reflect on learning and record their assessment in writing. Students become active learners because they become aware of how and what they are learning when they critically
analyze their work (Grady, 1992). Portfolios encourage multidimensional development, including the cognitive, affective, and social processes of learning (Tierney et al., 1991).

4. Authentic assessment--All students keep customized portfolios that contain authentic documents evidencing their growth and development. They share them with other students, teachers, administrators, and parents (Graves, 1983).

5. Informs instruction--(Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994) Student reflections indicate what is meaningful to the student and serve as a guide to the teacher in making important instructional decisions (Tierney et al., 1991). These actual examples of student growth aid in informing teachers of their own success in teaching the writing curriculum. For example, If teachers notice a trend where students are having difficulty with identical concepts or fail to show development in particular areas of writing, mini-lessons can be presented to assist students in mastering these concepts or to extend their writing experiences.

**How can Portfolios be used as a Tool for Teaching the Writing Process?**

There are several essential stages of development when utilizing the portfolio as a teaching tool. The first element is student participation, especially during the revising, editing, and publishing stages of the writing process. While revising and editing, peer and teacher conferences encourage students to reflect and self-evaluate their writing. Collaboration with the teacher guides the student toward adult expectations of writing by emphasizing and encouraging the awareness of writing elements. During publishing, further reflection of writing takes place when students select writing samples for the
portfolio based on values. These selections of student performances are based on specific writing standards. Formal self-evaluation procedures allow students the opportunity to observe their own patterns of learning over time. Teacher assessment of the writing portfolio documents student growth, achievement, and needs for future goal setting.

**Student Participation**

The degree of student participation in developing the portfolio is directly related to the success of the portfolio and writing experience. Student participation needs to be carefully guided, encouraged, and modeled by the teacher during conferencing. According to Gomez, Graue, and Bloch (1991), portfolios themselves are not independently sufficient in facilitating students' self-understanding as a learner. They believe it is the teacher's responsibility to encourage student participation. This can best be done through (a) collaboration during conferences and (b) modeling questioning techniques that encourage students to reflect on their progress and their decision making.

For example, one question posed to a student during a student-teacher conference asked him to choose writings that represented similarities of past and recent writing. After reviewing his collection the student concluded that all of his writings were stories about wolves. This questioning technique gave the student an opportunity to evaluate and reflect on his own progress. He came to the realization that as a writer, he needed to take risks by expanding his range of topics. This student was empowered. He saw his own need to explore and develop further as a writer, rather than acting passively and depending on the teacher as the authority figure.

Teachers act as facilitators when they share authority with the
student (Bishop & Crossley, 1993). First, students clarify the ideas in their composition, then they compare this writing efforts with their other writings. Students gradually understand the uniqueness of each composition. These comparisons enables them to see changes over time. Graves (1983) supports this. He labels the writing process approach the conference approach; it is, as he suggests, at the heart of writing. It is through conferences that students learn to interact with their own writing and internalize the teacher’s questions. They, then, often pose them to other students during peer-conferences.

Routine ways of conferencing with students need to be developed. A systematic approach ensures that each child has an opportunity to examine and analyze his/her collection to notice trends in growth and reflect on items he/she enjoyed and benefited from (Black, 1993; Tierney et al., 1991). During teacher-student conferences when students were asked to select writings for their portfolios in class, I found that the latest writings were almost always chosen. Students’ comments indicated that they realized their success in holding the audience’s interest through their awareness and utilization of various writing techniques and genres, organization of ideas, and use of mechanics. Over time, they were able to observe and evaluate their progress by making comparisons of writing elements, especially during the revision, editing, and publishing stages. The more students reflect and self-assess, the better they become at reflecting and self-assessing their work.

Student participation then is guided by teacher questions and expectations. These questions are guided by the agenda of the child, as the teacher is aware of and frames questions which meet each student’s
personal needs, academic goals, and concerns (Tierney et al., 1991). Portfolio interviews with peers follow a similar general order. According to Graves (1983), first the author comments on the value of each writing. Peers discuss the relationship of the similarities and differences of each piece. This is reiterated by others thus clarifying and reinforcing what was shared. The group reflects on the discussion by sharing their observations about the collection.

**Student Reflection and Self-Evaluation**

The key to any successful portfolio is student involvement. Writing portfolios serve as a method for instructing, learning, and self-assessing. It is during student reflection and self-assessment of their portfolio that the students begin to experience and assume responsibility for their own learning and writing. This participation gives students an opportunity to become autonomous and to form an opinion about how they learn best as writers.

Graves (1983) emphasized that the focus when reviewing portfolios should be on assessing the student's ability to evaluate his/her own work. Rief (1990) found that, over time, students became able to set goals and assess their accomplishments. She noticed growth in the diversity and complexity of student writing and in their expressions pertaining to literature. Black (1993) was astonished to find that children accurately rated themselves on a writing scale of development when identifying the level of their own work. She also found that her students were more satisfied with their development as writers. They also took more risks because they understood the developmental process of writing. Students accept responsibility and show pride and ownership for their learning when they are allowed to be active participants in
the entire writing and evaluation process.

"We have found that teachers and students who critically analyze the contents of writing portfolios over time will develop a comprehensive understanding of achievement and growth that is rooted in the students' actual classroom performance" (Tierney et al., 1991, p. 93). These students have learned that it is important for them to analyze and assess growth over time. "They comment on being aware of the quality of ideas, organization, mechanics, effort and amount of writing, the motivations for writing, and their own personal development as human beings" (Tierney et al., 1991, p. 94). When students begin making these types of observations and comments, then learning about writing and about their own learning is occurring.

As students learn to self-assess and become cognizant of their own learning, the experience is enriched by their active participation and thoughts on their learning. One study conducted by Tierney et al. (1991), focused on analyzing students' self-assessments of material they had included in their portfolios over the course of a one-year period. It was found that over time, students' self-assessment matured in the following ways: "the number of comments increased, student comments focused on more aspects of writing, comments became more focused on both personal and community expectations, students begin to notice growth through comparisons with previous work, and students' ability to evaluate their total performance increased" (Tierney et al., 1991, p. 122). The reliability of student evaluations were found to have increased as the year progressed. Students were involved in more opportunities to evaluate their work comparing recent with earlier pieces of writing. These student's evaluations focused on important
features such as the purpose and relevance of the topic they viewed as important; this surpasses the traditional foci on handwriting, linguistics, and mechanics (Tierney et al., 1991). "The guiding idea is that portfolios provide an opportunity for richer, more authentic, and more valid assessment of student achievement; educators will learn what students can do when given adequate time and resources" (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993, p. 533).

As students evaluate, their reflections may not be based on the same standards that adults value (Tierney et al., 1991; Graves, 1994). Instead, Graves (1994) suggests, their personal perspective plays a dominant role as the writing may be chosen based on a meaningful event rather than being recognized for stronger elements. Powerful ownership of the writing may sometimes prevent these elements from being observed by the student. This illustrates that the writing process and the purpose of writing has value to the author. A child may give one reason for making his/her selection, yet overlook another, stronger component of the piece. The teacher may see evidence of progress and change, but the child may only perceive whether or not a topic still interests him/her.

Collaboration

Collaboration between student and teacher takes place during both the selection of content to be included in the portfolio and the evaluation of the writing (Hoepfl, 1993). The teacher needs to be responsible for facilitating and expanding student self-evaluation so that adult expectations as well as personal expectations are covered. In these instances, Graves (1994) believes the teacher should point out the improvement the child has made rather than remaining silent. The
decision for selecting the piece, however, is still the student's. It is imperative that they have a personal investment in the evaluation and decision-making process. This in-depth reflection where students feel comfortable in sharing their feelings, requires time for personal growth and maturity to develop.

Student self-assessment and reflection needs to be carefully guided and organized by the teacher. Students should examine and analyze their writing periodically, looking for patterns and various writing features during these updates. Tierney et al. (1991) suggest that the teacher records these features or patterns as strengths of the student on a list or chart.

"Caution has to be taken here or students will begin to believe that teachers are looking for certain 'skills' only. Student samples should be viewed as a whole and in that context certain elements are judged, by teachers and students, to be used correctly and effectively. It is important that students are aware that the essence of the piece, its purpose and meaning, are more than just the sum of its parts. It is the orchestration of those elements that can occur in infinite patterns that is at the heart of writing." (Tierney et al., 1991, p. 96) The teacher should choose elements of the writing for self-assessment that emphasize the process of learning to write.

The teacher also plays a role in guiding the selection process. There are guidelines students need to understand as a part of the portfolio process. Selecting written works to be placed in the portfolio according to "their best" is a worthy goal, but is difficult. Each piece is meaningful, or the "best", from different vantage points. Some writings may have merit just because students have learned
something in doing them. Portfolios should include what Wolf (1989) refers to as "biographies of works" (p. 37). This means they show evidence of student development over time or a record of the various stages that led to completion of a major project. "Any work which can show where developmental leaps were made, or insights were gained--not just best work--should be included" (Hoepfl, 1993, p. 28).

Selecting Writing Samples

Graves (1983) suggests that students choose portfolio selections based on "values." Different writings are admired for different reasons by the author. Each is a representation of the student as a person from different perspectives. Distinct thoughts and feelings are exclusive to each piece. Assembling a portfolio that allows for different types of growth will aid students in comprehending these variations.

After students have had the opportunity to write for a period of time, children select five or six pieces of writing that interest them to be discussed during their student-teacher writing conference. After the teacher reads these selections to familiarize him/herself with the student's collection, the modeling process of helping children look at their work from many different vantage points or values takes place before students make their actual selections for placement in the portfolio. Students then label the pieces according to their values. Some selections within the portfolio may overlap; a writing may fit into more than one category or value, being labeled more than once. Students may also feel that some writings do not fit into any category or value label, there are no values attached to them (Graves, 1983). Labels according to values may include:

1. Learned something new--The emphasis in this category is on
learning and experimenting, for instance, work that demonstrates a new skill or topic.

2. Learn about the subject--A piece where the student learned something about the event or information. Maybe the student gained an insight into a person, put together some facts, or clarified a relationship.

3. Literacy important to the student as a person--This is a broad category and may include writing from the child’s favorite authors, a letter from a grandmother, a note from a friend or teacher, or a photo or artifact that shows the student as person.

4. Like--Students choose a piece they like.

5. Hang of it--A piece where the students might have said to themself, "I think I'm getting the hang of this."

6. First line--A piece in which first line is liked by the student.

7. See picture--A piece in which the student can find two places the reader is able to visualize the scene. The students put brackets around those lines.

8. Surprise--A piece in which something surprised the student during the writing--that is, the student didn’t know this new thing; now they do.

9. Writer--The students felt they were learning something as a writer. The students were aware that some things were happening in their writing that they wanted to have there as a writer.

10. History--When the student was writing it they might have said something like this to themselves: “Oh, I’m the same old writer I’ve always been.” The student may have wanted the words to be better, the
piece to be better, but they were aware that the piece resembled their old way of writing.

11. Teacher and/or peer favorite--Students receive responses to their portfolio collection from the teacher and selected peers.

12. Promise--A piece where the student would like to go back and rework the lines to make the writing more precise.

13. Keep going--A piece that the student wanted to keep writing even though they would run out of time.

14. Burn--A piece the student would just as soon forget they ever wrote. Then the student writes for three minutes about why they want to burn it. This writing is just for the student. Or the student may write for three minutes about why they want to keep two pieces.

15. Best writing--The student choose work they consider to be their best, based on as many factors as they are able to include in a single piece.

Students place what they value in their portfolio, however, they need to be able to justify their choices through reflection and self-assessment (Graves, 1994). This encourages their development as writers. Wilcox (cited in Graves, 1994, p. 173) observes the following rough sequence of the reasons young children give for their selections when asked why they have chosen a piece for their portfolio. These steps include:

Step 1. "This is a boat." The child merely names the object. She is unable to go beyond naming it. At the same time, this is probably a piece of high affect and one of her better pieces.

Step 2. "I like the boat." In this instance the child adds a value, "like," to the response. You might follow with a question,
"And what do you like in this piece?" But the child may only be able to respond, "I don't know, I just like it."

Step 3. "I like the boat because I love it." This statement may not seem to be much of an advance over the last one. Still, she recognizes that choices usually require reasoned evidence, and she introduces the word "because" as an important logical construction.

Step 4. "I like the boat because, you see this sail up here. I drew it good." For the first time, the child uses evidence from within the piece to support her judgment, although in this case, it is based on the drawing, not the writing. Still, this is progress.

Gradually, the sophistication of evidence will continue to grow when evidence is presented for their decision-making. Teachers who model this process and allow students to present their self-evaluation to various audiences, such as peers, and family members aid students in learning to read and evaluate their own work. Through this, students are empowered as they take responsibility for their own learning and evaluation.

Writing Standards

Teachers need to provide some standards of performance; students need to possess an approximate standard of excellence and apply it to works they desire to improve. Criteria for selecting pieces needs to be based on brief, distinct attributes that guide the students in their evaluation process. It is difficult to determine performance standards but they do send an important, clear message to the students signaling what is important and valued in writing. "This standard setting
requires an examination of 'what is at the heart of any and all competent performances,' without being tied to the specifics of a particular performance" (Hoepfl, 1993, p. 28).

For example, the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) developed a four-point rubric to use as a guide for scoring. It is based on the National Council of Teachers of English standards. Established criteria, in order of importance includes an awareness of audience and/or purpose, idea development and support, organization, sentence structure, wording, and surface features (Stroble, 1993, p. 55). This criteria prioritizes the effectiveness of the student's writing as a whole; it does not emphasize skill-oriented features.

Four performance levels helped KIRIS teachers and students focus on and determine what the student can do, rather than what he or she can not do. These ratings include the novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished performances. The first rating, "novice," suggests that the student is learning as a beginner with an ability to grow. "Apprentice," the second rating, indicates that the student has demonstrated the ability to do some parts of the task after they have gained more of an understanding. The third rating, "proficient," communicates that the student understands the major concept and completed almost all of the task. The last rating, "proficient," indicates that the student has communicated an in-depth understanding through his or her performance (Stroble, 1993). Written examples that serve as benchmarks provide teachers and students with characteristics that demonstrate the performance of each standard score on the rubric.

One key element, according to Tierney et al. (1991), is the student's view of what is good about his/her own writing to be displayed
and shared via a "showcase portfolio" with a real audience. Important qualities of writing are elicited during student examination and discussions over their work and their peers' work. While students construct their portfolios, they have occasion to look back at their achievements and personal needs and to set future goals.

**Formal Self-Evaluation Procedures**

Along with teacher-student conferencing, more formal self-assessment and reflection techniques are additional forms of assessing and documenting student growth, achievement, and needs. There are a variety of strategies that provide flexibility according to the needs of the classroom and the comfort level and preference of the individual teacher. Students allowed to maintain various types of their own records observe their own patterns of learning and reduce teacher time spent on assessment. Some possibilities include:

1. **Writing Logs**—Students maintain an ongoing list recording the titles of pieces written or in progress. In doing so, they are able to discover individual trends such as genres most commonly used, lengths of written work, and the amount of productive time utilized in completing a published piece (Tierney et al., 1991).

2. **Checklists**—Students evaluate their writing comparing it to established criteria (Graves, 1983).

3. **Questionnaires**—A self-assessment over a single piece of writing may be guided by questionnaires. These help students focus on reasons for selecting the piece, strengths, difficulties encountered, possible future changes, reactions from others, and how it differs from other written works (Tierney et al., 1991).

4. **Note Cards**—Students justify reasons a piece was selected for
the portfolio by writing explanations including statements centering on specific merits and background information about its origin. These justifications may be utilized in comparing various elements among the pieces in the portfolio (Tierney et al., 1991).

5. Writing Journals or Notebooks--Reviewing daily writing accomplishments and portfolio pieces, students continually reflect and record the amount of writing pursued, what they are learning about writing, achievements, and future goals for improving their own writing (Graves, 1983; Tierney et al., 1991).

6. Conferences and Summits--This includes three types: planning conferences, where students obtain help from the teacher in pulling together their portfolio as well as self-evaluative statements; sharing conferences, where the purpose is giving the opportunity for students to share their portfolio with classmates; and formative conferences, where the teacher and student collaborate in assessing the portfolio and set future goals (Graves, 1983; Tierney et al., 1991).

7. Responses by Peers--Teachers prepare peers for offering meaningful support to students by being reflective listeners, supporting strengths, and appreciating effort (Tierney et al., 1991).

8. Responses by Parents--An explanation of the contents of the portfolio and the evaluation questions briefly explains the assessment process and invites parents to become part of the audience and assessment process. Students then have the opportunity to reflect and react to their parents' assessment of their writing (Tierney et al., 1991).
Assessment

The use of portfolios demands that teachers be given diverse strategies and instruction on how and when to evaluate student writing progress. Portfolios incorporate several different strategies for gathering information based on a continuum with informal observations at one end and testing at the other. According to Teale (1990), portfolios typically include informal observations. They are used to collect data in a relaxed, natural manner during instruction. They often include examples selected by students and teachers to indicate typical performance and accomplishments of students. Students' progress may be analyzed based on these records. To obtain answers to specific questions that are not spontaneous, the teacher may need to set up situations where performance is recorded on surveys, checklists, or records of student responses, as suggested by Teale (1990). The use of informal and formal documentation of progress is necessary to give evidence of growth.

The collection of the student's work illustrates his/her progress to both the student and parents. An analysis of portfolio pieces gives specific examples of growth. For instance, it might show that a student's writings have become more lengthy, more reflective, more elaborate, more stimulating, or easier to read as the year has progressed (Black, 1993).

Four components aid teacher assessment (Tierney et al., 1991). First, anecdotal records from monthly portfolio conferences give the teacher an opportunity to record notes focusing on the student's needs. Records are kept of current writing and timeliness of up to date journals. Strengths and needs are noted accompanied by instructional
suggestions. The culmination of each grading period presents another opportunity to record notes from portfolio analysis. Analytic comments note overall characteristics and writing strengths and needs. A menu of specific attributes keep analytic comments focused. Checklists give an overall picture of the class and help the teacher set short term goals which can be addressed through mini-lessons. Student growth on a continuum of descriptors at various periods during the school year visually shows the student’s levels of performances.

Other Uses for Portfolios

The flexibility that portfolios provide enables teachers to align the purpose of their instruction with their philosophy. The philosophy of the instructional program influences what observational data to document (Black, 1993).

Calfee and Perfumo (1993) describe three types of portfolios. The first type is called the core component; it is kept by all elementary teachers in the school district. These components follow each student throughout their elementary school years as they move from teacher to teacher. Included are writing samples and books read. The second is the optional component. This portfolio is used to direct instruction, confer with parents, and report grades if needed. Items included vary depending on the teacher and the curriculum. The personal folder is used by teachers for parent communication. Attitude surveys, writing samples, and future goals may go home to accompany report cards.

The teacher needs to remember that the main purpose for using portfolios is to support teacher-student dialogue, a genuine strength of the method (Richert, 1990). Tierney et al. (1991) reminds teachers that what is selected by the students to be included in the portfolio
may not characterize the broad range and the richness teachers desire. His suggestion is that it may be necessary for the teacher and student to discuss and agree on what goes in the portfolio to make sure important information is included. A supplemental portfolio may also become part of a student's file.

Another strength of the portfolio is its ability to improve the communication explaining student growth during teacher-parent conferences. Information collected may include writing samples, notes from student-teacher conferences, anecdotal records, observations, checklists, scales, and spelling inventories. Information recorded during observations on the writing process that is not available elsewhere, such as in artifacts or checklists, are good sources of information (Black, 1993).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The sources dealing with assessment make a strong argument for using portfolios as a means of documenting student learning. Analysis of the existing literature confirms that portfolios are a credible means for teaching the writing process, particularly in the areas of self-assessment, student reflection, and student ownership. The teacher mindfully guides the student to self-assess and reflect through student-teacher dialogue.

Routine conferences provide an examination and analysis of student collections. Students learn to assume authority over their writing as they evaluate the quality and choose which writing samples are included in their portfolio. Approximate standards of excellence challenge students to evaluate and improve their performance on a comprehensive
level of understanding. Research has found that the reliability of student evaluations increased as the year progressed. Instructors are able to document and get insight as to the sophistication of the student’s thought process.

Instruction is based on what is relevant to the student’s individual needs, focusing on potential, rather than on what the student has not yet learned; therefore, it serves as a teaching and assessment tool. This shows regard for the learner’s integrity. Portfolio assessment empowers students as they are in control and are responsible for their learning during each stage of development. Cooperation with peers and teachers help in assessing and improving writing. The degree of student participation in developing the portfolio is directly related to the success of the writing experience.

Recommendations

Portfolios are a major assessment strategy that can be implemented in a classroom because of their flexible nature. Portfolios are also adaptable to various curricular areas. The process of implementing writing portfolios requires planning and organization. Learning how to use these new strategies requires training and experimentation. Interested schools need to define the primary purpose portfolios will play in their district. This role will determine the type of inservice needed in providing teachers with necessary background knowledge. Specific teaching and evaluating strategies would support consistent and appropriate implementation of the writing portfolio.

A systematic approach in maintaining portfolios must be devised by the teacher and/or school district. Written works included in the portfolio need to explain the objectives, expectations, and achievement
for each piece. In cases where the portfolio is passed onto the child's next teacher, inaccurate analysis of the student's overall progress can occur. To prevent an incorrect interpretation of a student's progress, a final analytical summary is recommended. This summary, supported by the written samples, would outline the student's strengths and future needs.

Much of the research addressing writing portfolios was based primarily on case studies at the lower elementary level. Other types of research studies focused mainly on the achievements of older students. Even though these research findings have found to be beneficial to junior and high school students, few teachers at this level continue the writing portfolio if previously in place. Further research that would specifically address the lack of interest at the junior and senior high level and the effectiveness of improving writing at the upper elementary level is recommended.
REFERENCES


