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## Portfolio assessment - Use of literacy portfolio in the primary classroom

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## Portfolio assessment - Use of literacy portfolio in the primary classroom

### Abstract

This study reviews the literature on portfolios by looking closely at the literature dealing with literacy portfolios in the primary classroom. The following questions were addressed: ( 1) why do we need portfolios; (2) what are the characteristics of portfolios; (3) what are some of the difficulties of portfolio assessment: and ( 4) what are the standards that a good portfolio should meet for use in a primary classroom? There is a move away from standardized testing and portfolios offer a promise of being a successful alternative form of assessment. Portfolios offer instructional guidance for student, teachers and parents. The portfolio encourages collaborative efforts between teacher and student. Students become more responsible for their own learning. The portfolio is a collection of student work reflecting growth in a variety of learning experiences. The assessments must be authentic, continuous, multidimensional, collaborative and reflect curricular goals. Difficulties include management, time, consistency, and support within the school and the school district. The literacy portfolio needs to contain a collection of items that show a student's efforts, growth, and achievement. The contents display a wide variety of literacy experiences and done over time. Portfolio assessment represents an attitude that allows teachers to focus on the child and develop a relationship with a child based on learning. The assessment system becomes a natural part of the daily classroom activities and is integrated into the curriculum. Portfolio assessment emphasizes product, process, content and effort.

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT--  
USE OF LITERACY PORTFOLIO  
IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

A Graduate Research Paper  
Submitted to the  
Division of Early Childhood  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

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This Research Paper by: Diane Rasmussen

Titled: Portfolio Assessment--

Use of Literacy Portfolio in Primary Classroom

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For many years assessment of students has depended on the standardized test method. Many educators have believed that standardized tests were the only way to ensure objectivity, fairness and consistency in student assessment. In the past teachers used standardized forms of assessment to determine children's growth, especially when reporting progress to parents. Standardized testing has always been one dimensional and only shows a student's brief encounter with an unnatural set of circumstances. The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) in its position paper dealing with testing (1991) stressed the inappropriateness of standardized testing. It argued that parents and teachers should oppose the use of test results for any important judgment about a child. Another aspect of the ACEI position is it they believe *all* standardized testing of young children in preschool and grades K-2 and the practice of testing all students in the later elementary grades should cease. The paper went on to describe what is known about standardized testing and children. Testing increases pressure on children; this sets too many of them up for failure. Testing does not provide useful information on each child, even though this information is used for placement in special programs, retentions, and promotions. Testing leads to harmful tracking and labeling. Teachers spend too much time preparing for the test instead of working on a

developmentally sound program that is responsive to the needs of the children. Testing can limit the educational possibilities for children. Also, the use of testing by itself can fail to set the conditions for problem-solving and cooperative learning (Perrone, 1991).

Testing is only one aspect of assessment. Good assessment is also an integral part of teaching (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Harp, 1991; Valencia, 1990). Both the assessment and the instruction has to reflect significant, agreed upon goals for students. Assessment should measure important classroom objectives; also, it should represent how a student performs on knowledge and skill domains stated by objectives; classroom instruction should provide students with the opportunity to learn and attain the knowledge and skills stated in the objectives (Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters, 1992).

Assessment needs for students are changing (Tierney et al., 1991; Bertrand, 1991). Today's students need to demonstrate abilities to learn and understand material beyond facts and basic knowledge. They need educational settings which demonstrate that getting the correct answer is valuable, but habits of the mind and justification of one's approach and results are at least of equal value (Wiggins, 1990). Educators have searched for ways to include and report on a wide range of tasks, materials and student abilities. Many educators are no longer willing to assess students on predetermined content that has no application to what is being taught and emphasized in classrooms (Polawski, 1993).



Portfolios offer an innovative approach for classroom assessment. Although the concept is new to education, portfolios have been used for years by other professionals. Artists, models, and commercial artists have used portfolios to demonstrate their achievements and skills (Tierney et al., 1991). "The portfolio is tangible evidence of accomplishments and skills that must be updated as a person changes and grows" (p. 43). Many people in today's work force are assessed on actual job performance and not on multiple-choice tests. The job performance is the most tangible evidence of accomplishment.

The concept of portfolios as an assessment framework moves away from the traditional, standardized assessment methods (Johns & VanLeirsburg, 1991). Teachers need to know more about students' performance and less about percentile rankings (Bertrand, 1991). The literacy portfolio looks beyond norm-referenced, standardized tests to find ways of assessing students' performance that are closely linked to the instruction in the classroom. Literacy portfolios provide students with many opportunities to demonstrate their strengths (Vavrus, 1990). The portfolio assessment is an important part of planning, implementing, and maintaining quality instruction. Assessment and instruction are interwoven to help individual students learn; it allows students, teachers and parents to know what and how they have learned the information.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the literature on portfolios by looking closely at the literature dealing with literacy portfolios in the primary classroom and setting up standards for quality portfolios to be used at the primary level. To achieve this purpose the following questions will be addressed:

1. Why do we need portfolios?
2. What are the characteristics of portfolios?
3. What are some of the difficulties of portfolio assessment?
4. What are the standards that a good portfolio should meet for use in an primary classroom?

### Need for the Study

There is a move away from standardized testing to a type of alternative assessment. Portfolios offer a promise of being a successful alternative. Donald Graves (1992) has described the portfolio as "one of the best opportunities for students to learn how to examine their own work and participate in the entire literacy/learning process" (p. 4).

Educators are recognizing the possibilities of assessment by the use of portfolios. In a survey done by Johns and VanLeirsburg in 1992, educators agreed overwhelmingly that portfolios should be used for instructional decision making. Professionals in education need to examine the use of both standardized tests and portfolios to provide a

more accurate and complete profile of the needs and abilities of the learner.

Portfolio assessment is part of the movement toward authentic instruction and assessment (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991). Educators are demanding a more positive, authentic look at students and students' abilities and progress. These educators are looking beyond normed tests, criterion-referenced assessments that accompany basal readers, for ways of sampling students' performance that are closely linked to instruction. The portfolio system presents an assessment tool that goes beyond standardized testing (Kingore, 1993).

### Limitations of the Study

The first limitation deals with the fact that the research has not been done on a nationwide basis. Some parts of the country have done a great deal of work in the area of portfolio assessment while other parts of the country have not been involved with this type of assessment.

The second limitation deals with the availability of resources at local University library. Some dissertations, reviews, research articles, and books were not accessible.

The third limitation deals with the fact that portfolios have not been used in education for very long; consequently, there are no longitudinal studies of the effectiveness of this alternative assessment approach.

## Definitions

The terms used in this study are defined in the following ways:

Anecdotal Records—written comments by the teacher relating the observed behavior of a student.

Assessment—is the process by which information is gathered.

Authentic—having real life connections, having genuine purpose, real learning activities in the classroom.

Authentic Assessment—a task or performance that has real life connections.

Captions—a capsule view of an activity which is attached to the project. These captions are written by the student and/or the teacher. The caption should include the "what" and "why" of a project, and possibly a students and/or teacher reflection of the activity.

Evaluation—is the process of interpreting the gathered information. The terms assessment and evaluation are so closely linked that you need one with the other (Bounffler, 1992).

Holistic Scoring—overall impression that is influenced by the writer's use of mechanics as well as the quality of content ( Cockrum & Castillo, 1991).

Norm-referenced tests—are graded on the curve to allow each student to be measured against the performance of other students across the state, region, or country. The California Achievement Test, for example, provides the percentile rank for each student.

Performance Assessment--development of a task that actually represents the task to be performed on the job (Farr, 1991). The terms authentic and performance assessment are used interchangeably.

Portfolio--a systematic, purposeful collection of student work by students and teachers. The collection serves as the basis to examine effort, improvement, processes, and achievement.

Showcase Portfolios--selected work from the working portfolio which represents a student's growth and development. The work stored here is selected according to some practical criteria such as the "best work" or "shows growth" or "demonstrates completion of project." This file can be invaluable at conference time.

Standardized Test-- are identical tests that are designed to be given in thousands of classrooms at different times under standard conditions. These tests are used to compare students throughout the country (e.g., SAT and Iowa Test of Basic Skills).

Working Portfolios--is the accumulation of a student's work, everything can go in this file.

CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW of the LITERATURE  
The Need for Portfolios

The portfolio is an assessment tool that goes beyond the one-dimensional scores of a multiple-choice test. The use of portfolios permits instruction and assessment to be woven together in a way that more traditional approaches do not permit (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). When instruction is linked to the portfolio it offers a better measure of what a student really knows and can do. The focus is on the positive rather than the negative and the strengths are noted using caption notes on items placed in the portfolio.

Portfolios encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning--through selection and reflection (Dalheim, 1993). This type of assessment has as its goal student self-assessment. This self-assessment has the students assessing their own progress and setting goals for the future. This is done at the primary level in partnership with the teacher. Conferencing with the student reveals the children's awareness of their learning , the assessment and evaluation comes from the children (Voss, 1992). Teachers are in the position to help students assume responsibility for understanding, capitalizing on their strengths, and finding ways to overcome their areas of weakness (Goodman, 1989).

Portfolios have the potential to create a more authentic picture of what students learn. By viewing the working and the showcase

portfolios at conference time, parents see first hand what their students are achieving. The documentation is specific; therefore parents and teachers can work together in determining the best course of action for the young child (Grace & Shores, 1992). There is an over-all picture of the growth and development of the child. This profile emphasizes the child's capabilities and points out possibilities. When shared with parents the assessment can be refined (Leavitt & Eheart, 1991). As a result, students, teachers, and parents develop an in-depth picture of the child's performance.

Portfolios can become a window into students' thinking. This form of alternative assessment can help both staff and students to understand the educational process at the level of the individual learner (Paulson, et al., 1991). Teachers can use this information to create educational experiences to have children go even further in their learning (Abruscato, 1993).

Portfolios encourage collaborative efforts between teacher and student. No longer is assessment as the isolated responsibility delegated to the teacher (Tierney, et al., 1991). Because the assessment is a collaborative effort, the competitiveness of assessment is not emphasized. Having the child tell why a piece of work is or is not a good effort makes the child an active participant in the evaluation process. Children typically do not understand grades (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991). They tend to think that teachers *give* them the grades on report cards; consequently, students view

assessment as something done to them rather than something to be done by them (Valencia, 1990). Also students become more responsible for their own learning when they are actively involved. The bond between teacher and student is strengthened with this collaborative assessment effort. As a result, students and teachers become partners in learning.

Kingore (1993) after much work in the field offered the following values and application for use of portfolios in the classroom. The following guidelines have paraphrased her suggestions:

1. Both the products and the process are accented with use of the portfolio. The products that are collected by all the students are used to provide a broad-based comparison and self-growth indications throughout the year.

2. Student's intrinsic motivation is increased. Encouraging students to select their best work instills within them the desire to perform at their highest level.

3. Teachers can monitor class progress, provide feedback to students and parents and share information with other teachers. Patterns of student abilities and needs will be revealed.

4. Educators increase their awareness of multiple kinds of student abilities by revealing a wide range of skills and understanding.

5. Portfolios help increase awareness and provide clues of higher abilities in some students that might not have shown up on a standardized test.



6. Portfolios offer a unique opportunity to identify students with special needs. Since all students develop portfolios, the process allows all students to be screened on their products. Every student has a portfolio; therefore, minority, handicapped, and economically disadvantaged students are not overlooked. Since there is a wide range of materials and contents the portfolio helps screen for special needs. These student needs are at all levels of development, whether the child needs gifted education or special intervention.

Portfolio assessment involves looking at the important aspects in a child's literacy learning. Topics such as motivation and strategies for learning which were formerly ignored are now assessed (Lamme, & Hysmith, 1991). Students can not only learn but they can understand how that learning took place.

The audience is an important aspect of the need for portfolios. Students, teachers, and parents are the most targeted audiences for portfolios (Siu-Runyan, 1991; Winograd, 1994). Students can use the portfolio to examine how they have grown as readers and writers. They can polish and refine their skills, and build on what they are already doing well. Students take the responsibility for their learning. They are the selector of work for the showcase portfolio. They need to reflect and do self-evaluation in order to substantiate their choices.

Teachers discover strengths and weaknesses of their students. Also, they need to use this information to plan effectively. Portfolios are used by teachers to monitor the efforts of the whole groups, small

groups, or individual students. They can also provide feedback to students, parents, and other teachers. The portfolio is a diagnostic tool for teachers to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the instructional needs of each student (Kingore, 1993).

Parents are a main audience for portfolio assessment. They need to know that their children are making progress, or if their children are not doing well, that appropriate steps can be and will be taken so that progress can take place. The portfolio gives the parent concrete evidence of what is happening with their children's learning. Parents can see evidence of what their children are experiencing (Leavitt & Eheart, 1991). The portfolio used during parent-teacher conferences show parents a picture of the child's progress (or lack of progress) by showing them a comparison of their child's performance from the beginning of the year to the time of the conference (Kingore, 1993). There is the documentation of how the child is developing (Tierney et al., 1991). Instead of presenting parents with single grades or a standardized test score that only represents a part of their child's development, the portfolio can show an array of data that demonstrates the growth the child has made (Flood & Lapp, 1989). With the student sharing in the preparation of this portfolio, it becomes a joint project for teacher and student, and there are two voices explaining progress to the parents.

### Characteristics of the Portfolio

A well developed portfolio assessment system has the following characteristics (Valencia, Au, Schen, and Kawakami, 1990):

1. captures and capitalizes on the best the student has to offer,
2. is continuous, on-going process that shows growth,
3. is anchored in authenticity—of tasks, texts, and contexts,
4. is multidimensional, including samples of a wide range of cognitive, affective, and social processes,
5. must provide for active, collaborative reflection by both teacher and student, and
6. informs instruction—teachers learn from portfolio assessment what, how and when to teach.

There is no set prescription for what should be in student portfolios. There are many different possibilities of contents. The portfolio samples must represent real learning. Samples must also come from a wide variety of tasks. Examples of possible products to include in a literacy portfolio are writing samples-both first and final drafts, reading inventories, audio and video tapes, interest surveys, self-evaluation and reflections, anecdotal records, reading and writing logs, and photographs of projects and activities. This list is not inclusive of all the possibilities. There needs to be a variety of authentic, meaningful literacy experiences included in the portfolio (Kingore, 1993; Jasmine, 1992).

As a collection of data reflecting literacy growth, portfolios must represent a shared communication between teacher and student about individual goals and progress. There is evidence and information that is both useful and specific in this documentation of growth in reading and writing ability. Products should not be only finished pieces. The first drafts as well as the finished work show the growth and reflect the student's stages in thinking and development.

At this point literacy portfolios have combined observation, conferences, the writing process, self-evaluation, and the traditional paper-and-pencil tests as a means of knowing more about students. There needs to be a balance of standardized and performance-based assessment in the portfolio. The goal is to look at the whole child and receive the widest range of information about students. The standardized and performance assessments need to be integrated into meaningful contexts. The collection needs to be authentic, ongoing, multifaceted and collaborative (Valencia, 1990).

### Difficulties of Portfolio Assessment

Jerry Johns and Peggy VanLeirsburg (1990, 1991, 1992) surveyed educational professionals three years in a row. This survey was conducted at literacy workshops held in 1990, 1991, and 1992, and it was sponsored by a midwestern reading council. The workshop participants were educators from many Northern Illinois school systems. In 1990, participants expressed concerns about initiating

and monitoring a portfolio assessment system. Participants felt that this was the genuine challenge that must be met and answered in order for portfolios to succeed and have a chance as an innovative form of literacy assessment (1990).

In 1991, the greatest concerns of educators who were using portfolios included planning, managing content, talking with students about content, and preparing notes and completing checklists. Of the educators who were not using portfolios the concerns were planning, organizing, managing content, preparing notes and completing checklists, and using portfolios as the sole means of evaluating student progress. Managing content was the major practical concern of both groups (1991).

By 1992, the greatest concern changed to the use of portfolio as the sole means of student evaluation. Decreased concerns were the practical problems of planning, managing content, and talking with students about content. The participants who were using portfolios expressed that practical problems appeared to be diminishing as more professionals put portfolios to use in the classroom (1992).

The portfolio assessment requires administrators and teachers who believe in its value and who are trained in its implementation. To implement a successful portfolio system adequate training of teachers is needed. Teachers have to develop a portfolio philosophy. This portfolio philosophy requires authenticity, relevance and the concentrated involvement of both teacher and student. There has to

be reading and reflecting on the part of the teacher to understand the philosophy. If teachers are to use portfolios effectively they need to know about how children learn and about effective instructional practices. Teachers also need adequate time and support for collaborating with their colleagues. Successful development of assessment and use of portfolios has taken place when small numbers of teachers work together (Winograd, 1994).

The teachers have to practice what Wolf (1993) calls *informed* assessment. *Informed* assessment in the classroom involves teachers using meaningful goals for instruction and clear purposes for assessment. A variety of strategies are used to observe and document their students' performances over time and across a wide range of contexts. These strategies include interviews with students, formal and informal observations, tapes of children reading stories, written stories, paper-and-pencil tests and performance tasks.

This *informed* assessment needs a knowledgeable teacher, one who knows how children develop and learn, one who knows about curriculum and instruction, one who knows about the roles of language, culture, and social context as it relates to learning (Wolf, 1993). To become an informed assessor, teachers need time to read, internalize, and discuss with colleagues instructional goals, curriculum, child development, and assessment strategies. Groups need to work together to develop a portfolio approach (Valencia & Place, 1994). This process requires teachers to identify the purposes

for the portfolio and then to develop a structure and strategy for meeting those purposes. Teachers collaborate on the needs of students and possible assessments needs of the school and district. This collaboration and training must be on-going.

Support can be a limitation of portfolio assessment. There needs to be district-wide or at least school-wide implementation of standards to achieve the greatest value, effect, and consistency (Kingore, 1993). Teachers and administrators need to believe in the philosophy of portfolio or performance assessment. They must adapt their objectives and instructional methods to guide students through the process. Commitment is needed if the district, the school, and teachers are to have a successful portfolio assessment system (Wolf, 1993).

There seems to be little consistency of portfolio assessment across classrooms (Calfée & Perfumo, 1993). Teachers must be involved in the design, development, and discussion of portfolios. The process clarifies teachers' understanding of the interdependence of curriculum, instructional strategies, learning, and assessment (Valencia & Place, 1994). Teachers need to understand that the portfolio must provide valid data for instructional decisions. Valencia (1990) prescribed two levels of evidence for portfolios to ensure consistency in the contents of the portfolio from one student to another. The first level, required evidence, is material that all students are required to have in their portfolios. This allows for comparison

across the classroom or district. The second level, supporting evidence, varies from student to student. The supporting evidence includes material chosen by the teacher and student to show literacy development.

Assessment is not standardized, but that does not imply that it is without standards (Kingore, 1993). It must have specific criteria and well-defined procedures. Districts and teachers need to work collaboratively to develop criteria for the content of the portfolio. Specifying criteria is important, clear guidelines for evaluating student work ensures appropriate consequences for students and for the education system (Herman, et al., 1992). Both student and teacher understand the portfolio criteria. The content of the portfolio needs to be viewed as a growing and an evolving description of students' literacy development.

Time and energy are required of teachers to manage, organize, and conference with students concerning their portfolio. Beginning the process does take more time at first, but as teachers gain experience and skills, portfolio assessment becomes less difficult. Several studies and articles have described how portfolio assessment becomes easier with time (Johns & VanLeirsburg, 1992 & Kingore, 1993).

Once implementing the portfolio, teachers have found that they have refocused and have used time differently (Kingore, 1993; Tierney, et al, 1991). Time is saved by having children learn and take



responsibility for filing material in the folder. Other possible ways to use time more efficiently are found by using some cooperative group work rather than all individual efforts. Also, an emphasis is placed on holistic tasks that cover a variety of skills, applying techniques that accent student thinking instead of lengthy written products (Kingore, 1993). Key to the time question is to realize that what is taking time is inspirationally worthwhile. Pulling together the showcase portfolio is the time students reflect on their work. They have the opportunity to evaluate what they have achieved or have not achieved, and to decide what future goals they have (Tierney, et al., 1991).

## CHAPTER 3

### STANDARDS of GOOD PORTFOLIOS

Standards need to be established in order to fulfill the potential power of portfolios. The recommended standards would include: (a) multiple assessments, (b) collected items need to exhibit student's achievements, growth, and efforts, (c) items need to be collected systematically over time, (d) contents need to be varied, (e) items need to be integrated with classroom activities, (f) items need to be collaboratively collected, (g) collected items need to be from multiple sources of information, and (h) observation, interaction, and analysis are need for effective evaluation in a primary class.

Realizing the need, Paulson, et al. (1991) developed guidelines for the successful use of portfolios. By using portfolios, students have an opportunity to learn about learning. This is done by the student not to the student. The portfolio should be separate from the cumulative folder. The purpose for portfolios changes from the beginning to the end of the year. The year is begun with a working portfolio and ends with a showcase portfolio. These multiple, but not conflicting, purposes must convey an assessment of the student's activities. The information in the portfolios must show growth. Students need some models to help them produce effective portfolios. These models serve as support to show students how others developed and presented their portfolios.

Reaching Potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment for Young Children (1992) discussed assessment in early childhood classrooms. The book stressed that assessment serves several purposes. These purposes are the following: "(1) to plan instruction for groups and for communication with parents, (2) to identify children who may be in need of specialized services or intervention, and (3) to evaluate how well the program is meeting its goals" (p. 22-23). The use of portfolio assessment fulfills all of these purposes, if done correctly (Tierney et al., 1991).

Portfolios contain more than stuff students produce, and then file away. The collection has to be done systematically to exhibit the student's achievements, growth, and efforts. The collection should include items that are integrated, complex, and challenging. The collected work should also contain open-ended products that are designed to elicit higher level thinking.

To ensure a successful display of student's work, portfolios must be longitudinal in nature, diverse in content, and collaborative in their selection. Emphasis must be on strengths, development of skills, improvements, and personal reflections and expectations (Dalheim, 1993).

There has to be a broad picture of the student's achievements; it should show the unfolding of skills over time. This unfolding can not be demonstrated by performance on a test. David Elkind (1989) talked about appropriate assessment in the early childhood classroom:

Developmental assessment involves documenting the work that a child has done over a period of time. Usually this is done by having a child keep a portfolio that includes all of his or her writing, drawings, math explorations, and so on. In looking through such a portfolio, we can get a good idea of the quality of work that a child is capable of doing and of his or her progress over a period of time. (p. 117)

The portfolio should assess and document the student's skills, knowledge, behavior, and accomplishments as displayed across a wide variety of classroom domains and as performed on multiple occasions. The contents of the portfolio should parallel classroom activities and lead to the development of new activities based on joint student/teacher assessments of the child's progress and interests (Meisels, 1993).

Assessments in an early childhood classroom are used to determine where students are developmentally, not to lock them into ability groups. For the literacy portfolio there should be multiple sources of information. Examples of student reading performances should be collected with the use of running records or miscue analysis. These records can provide concrete evidence of a student's reading performance.

Observation, interaction, and analysis are necessary for effective evaluation in a primary classroom (Goodman, 1989). Observation takes place when the teacher is an observer and examines

what students are doing. The teacher may choose to observe one child, a small group, or a child in the small group or the entire class. As teachers observe they are making judgments about language use, problem solving, leadership, and collaborative abilities. These observations are both planned and are done spontaneously (Leavitt & Eheart, 1991). Teachers listen and watch as students work individually or in groups. This information is collected by using anecdotal records. By collecting specific information about children in portfolios, objectives can be documented. Teachers in district-wide or school-wide settings need to decide on the critical objectives. These decisions about specific information will enable teachers to be more consistent in their portfolios.

Interaction includes the variety of ways a teacher works with a student. These interactions include the following: teacher conferences, journal writing with interaction, and student question sessions. All of these interactions are used to find out what the student knows. Goodman (1989) felt that interaction with the student may be the most powerful aspect of evaluation because it links evaluation to instruction. The teacher not only learns what the student knows about the particular learning but during the interaction the teacher can question, encourage, stimulate and challenge the student. These interactions can be formally planned or occur at spontaneous times. The student is to take the lead in these discussions especially after being introduced. Using open-ended questions, the teacher

listens and evaluates what the student knows about reading and writing. The student begins to reflect on their own learning and the self-evaluation process begins. Again consistency can be established when teachers have decided on the levels of literacy growth. Teachers then see where and how students are moving developmentally on the continuum of literacy. These interactions lead to critical teaching moments which integrate instruction with assessment (Meisels, 1993). Teachers use these moments to plan for students to continue moving along the literacy continuum. Notes can be taken to show growth over time, and these notes can be stored in the portfolio.

Analysis includes gathering information and analyzing that information in depth to learn what students know. With literacy, information is collected in the following ways; reading of a story, the writing response to a story, writing a story, or a taping of an oral conversation. The teacher interprets what the student can do and knows. There are many analytical tools that have been developed to help teachers evaluate literacy. Some of the various tools available are holistic scoring, analysis of story grammar, miscue analysis, and writing and reading bands. As teachers become competent with these tools they can be used informally (Goodman, 1989). The information gathered can be evaluated differently using different tools, depending on the needs of students and the particular focus a teacher wants to take. Consistency can be achieved when school districts and/or schools develop a literacy policy. Teachers then decide what aspect of

the analysis to focus on for a particular year. This information is stored in the portfolio.

Observation, interaction, and analysis are overlapping and integrated. These are strong evaluative tools which can be used in the primary classroom. These assessment tools help confirm the information collected on students.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to review the literature on portfolios and suggest standards for quality portfolio assessment in a primary classroom. To achieve these purpose, the following questions were addressed.

Why do we need portfolios? The traditional assessments no longer fit into today's classrooms. Most of the traditional forms of assessment have been designed to show comparisons, percentiles, mastery scores and other statistical information. They do not provide teachers with instructional guidance (Sumner, 1991). The audiences for the portfolio are the student, teacher, and parents.

What are the characteristics of a portfolio? The portfolio is a collection of student work that includes a wide variety of learning experiences. The assessments in the portfolio must be authentic, continuous, multidimensional, collaborative, and reflect curricular goals. The contents of the literacy portfolio reflects growth and level of the student in literacy development.

What are the difficulties of portfolio assessment? Difficulties include management, time, consistency, and support. As teachers work with portfolios the management issue resolves and lessens. Time needs to be refocused and used differently. Teachers realize more time as students take more responsibility in the portfolio



assessment system. Consistency fades as a difficulty when teachers are involved in the discussion, development, and design of the portfolio approach. Teacher in-service is necessary before educators can successfully implement a portfolio assessment approach.

Teachers need to practice *informed* assessment. They need to know how children learn, different instructional practices, and criteria for student work. Teachers need time to collaborate on the portfolio assessment philosophy, assessment needs of the district, and assessment needs of individual students. This inservice and training needs to be continuous. Commitment is needed to maintain a successful portfolio assessment system.

What are the standards of a good literacy portfolio in a primary classroom? A literacy portfolios contains a collection of items that show a student's efforts, growth, and achievement. The contents display a wide variety of literacy experiences. These are done over time. The work needs to be authentic, continuous, multidimensional, and a collaborative effort between teacher and student. Portfolios need to emphasize product, process, and content, as well as effort and achievement, student ownership, and self-evaluation.

### Conclusions

The portfolio movement promises to be one of the best opportunities for students to learn how to examine their work (Graves, 1992). The portfolio approach provides for the authentic, continuous,

multidimensional, interactive requirements of sound assessment as no single test, single observation, or single piece of student work could possibly demonstrate.

The teacher's use of good judgment is a key to effective assessment. Time needs to be taken to think about children and their behavior, abilities, needs, and growth. The assessment process is a vital part of planning, implementing, and maintaining developmentally appropriate practices in the classroom (Grace & Shores, 1992).

The time is right to change classroom assessment and evaluation. Portfolio assessment represents an attitude that allows the teacher to focus on the child and develop a relationship with the child based on learning. This assessment system becomes a natural part of daily classroom activities and is integrated into the curriculum. This approach incorporates not only learning task but also student's ideas, interests and attitudes. Portfolio assessment emphasizes product, process, content and effort. It also encourages student responsibility, ownership and pride of accomplishment.

### Recommendations

The literacy portfolio is used for assessing the growth of the child in the literacy area but all areas need to be assessed. Literacy is only part of the child. Therefore, teachers need to ask for samples of children's work across the curriculum in order to have a profile of the whole child. This expanded portfolio needs to reflect the students'

attitudes and thinking processes as well as provide evidence of achievement and success for the learner. There needs to be a wide variety of tasks from curriculum areas that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities. This information would serve as basis for discussion between the student, teacher, and parent. The portfolio collection could possibly include items such as science projects, art projects, photocopies of awards or honors students receive, various evidence of higher level thinking, and photographs of three-dimensional products. The developmentally appropriate goal is to look at the whole child. The more complete the picture becomes the easier it will be to discover what the child knows and can do in all areas of learning. The future instructional decisions are easier to make and substantiate.

Districts need to set aside time for teachers to receive training, practice strategies, collaborate with colleagues, and to implement portfolio assessment in their classrooms. This time must be on-going. The success of this alternative assessment system will depend on teachers. The challenge is to learn about portfolios and to use them effectively. The involvement of teachers with the developing of the standards for assessment must continue. This involvement helps clarify the understanding of the interdependence of curriculum, instructional strategies, learning, and assessment.

Parents are experts of their own children and they have valuable information for teachers; therefore, their input is necessary. Parents

need to be an integral part of the assessment process. Parents can tell the school staff what a child can do at home. This information can be incorporated into the child's program. Parents should express their child's needs as they view them. The parent also can indicate their priorities and goals for their children. Teacher can learn much about how the parent helps the student learn at home. They can communicate special conditions or schedules when they may affect the student's school performance. Working together the parent and teacher form a partnership that ensures success for the child.

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