

What Educators & Parents Need to Know About Student Portfolios

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A portfolio is more than just a container full of stuff. It's a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the teacher and student to monitor growth or the student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a specific subject area.

– Vavrus

Practitioners' Guide - A9510

Implications for the Classroom

Portfolios have traditionally been used within the artistic community, but recently this authentic form of assessment has captured the attention of a wider audience. A portfolio is a carefully selected collection of a student's efforts, achievements, and reflections that provides a complete picture of the student's learning.

Portfolios allow students to:

- *demonstrate their skills, strengths, diversity, and interests*
- *select items that reflect their learning (struggles, best work, etc.)*
- *share their learning with an interested audience*
- *set future goals*
- *trace the development of their talent over time*
- *reflect on their learning*
- *make connections.*



There are as many varieties of portfolios as there are classrooms. Portfolios may be found in hanging file folders, boxes, notebooks, or on videotapes and laser discs. They may contain works in progress, finished products, pictures, journals, creative endeavors, cassettes, video tapes, transcripts, and other evidence of performances.

Portfolios help students to tell the story of their own learning and talent development. Choice and reflection are key elements. Assembling a portfolio and reflecting on personal achievements develop ownership and understanding of learning preferences and process. Portfolios may be shared with teachers and parents as well as with interested peers and community members. Parents may be invited to a portfolio conference where their child presents his/her portfolio and reflects on his/her learning.

Portfolios are useful to those in the field of gifted education. They provide a logical place to record modifications such as curriculum compacting. This strategy allows teachers to identify student strengths, document mastery of content, and replace learned material with challenging opportunities. Examples of enrichment activities, acceleration opportunities, and evidence of involvement with real-world problems and audiences can be included within students' portfolios.

Assessment of portfolios may include a combination of self-assessment, teacher assessment of individual items, and assessment from appropriate audiences. Portfolio assessment complements traditional forms of student evaluation because it provides a more complex and comprehensive view of student learning over time and allows for individual expression.

Before using portfolios, teachers should consider several planning issues:

- 1) *What is the purpose of the portfolio?*
- 2) *What items should be included?*
- 3) *How will the items be selected?*
- 4) *How will the items be organized?*
- 5) *How will the portfolios be stored?*
- 6) *How will the portfolios be assessed?*
- 7) *What formats will be used to allow students to share their portfolios?*

Topic Notes

- **Portfolios** accurately illustrate student growth over time.
- **Portfolios** offer students an opportunity to learn about their own learning.
- **Portfolios** allow students to document their learning progress.
- **Portfolios** encourage students to develop the abilities they need to become self-directed learners.
- **Portfolios** provide profiles of student strengths that highlight interests, talents, learning styles, and achievements.
- **Portfolios** provide a forum for talent identification and development.

References

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