



THE PORTFOLIO ORGANIZER

SUCCEEDING WITH PORTFOLIOS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

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FOREWORD

In the age of accountability and the improvement of student learning, a new and powerful set of skills has come on the scene. We call it “assessment literacy” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). Assessment literacy refers to the capacity of teachers (individually, but especially together) to (1) examine and critically understand achievement and performance data concerning student learning outcomes, (2) develop classroom and school improvement plans based on the data, and directed at improving results, and (3) use their political ability to participate in local debates about the uses and misuses of achievement data in order to be positively influential in using accountability for learning and improvement.

There is a paucity of good literature on the topic of assessment literacy. *The Portfolio Organizer* stands out as a superb contribution to the vital field of accountability for learning. This book is distinguished by the presence and integration of a conceptual framework and a superb array of practical examples. Nearly every key issue is

anticipated and addressed in this accessible and clear treatment of a complex topic. The purposes and audience are carefully presented along with corresponding descriptions of samples, sharing of learning, evaluation and grading, and using portfolios for professional development as well as for improving student performance.

The authors have been immersed in pioneering work on portfolios for a decade. They have developed their ideas through work with their own students and through a wide range of research and evaluation projects including new initiatives involving elementary and secondary school students, initial preparation of teachers, and continuous professional development of teachers and administrators. They have learned by grappling with the complex issues of introducing evaluation that simultaneously serves improvement and accountability goals.

The result is a great practical book that can help educators develop their understanding and use of portfolios as a route to reform.

—MICHAEL FULLAN



PREFACE

The Portfolio Organizer evolved from our work in a variety of educational contexts and our belief in the development of high-quality teaching and learning relationships. After 10 years of experimenting and using portfolio in many different ways, we share a passionate belief in the power of portfolios. Our portfolio adventures have included work with teachers, students, parents, and administrators in elementary and secondary schools, with students and professors in universities, as well as with colleagues involved in professional development. Our collective experimentation has illuminated the many productive paths that portfolio assessment can take. Together we have grappled with the nuts and bolts of managing the portfolio process, crafted user-friendly materials, created frameworks for thinking flexibly about the many choices to be made, developed procedures for use across ages and curriculums, and adapted the process to meet the demands of local requirements and standards.

Through our work with diverse groups, we have realized that regardless of the educational setting in which portfolios are used, there are common areas that demand decision making. *The Portfolio Organizer* addresses those areas. We have designed it as a practical tool for critically thinking through the issues in each area and making sound choices that result in optimal learning. It is also a tool that acknowledges the importance of the many relationships that strengthen student learning.

This book provides educators—experienced and inexperienced—with a flexible framework to guide decision making for effective and efficient use of portfolios in classrooms and schools. The decision making provides a coherent conceptual

and structural framework for dealing with the broad and complex array of issues educators face when using portfolios in educational settings. As a tool for decision making, this book is designed to assist educators in identifying, organizing, and acting upon the many challenges and possibilities inherent in portfolio implementation. *The Portfolio Organizer* targets major categories of decision making, which are reflected in the first 10 chapters. In the final chapter, we help educators explore how to develop and maintain professional portfolios.

In light of our diversity—and yours—we have not prescribed one way of implementing portfolios. *The Portfolio Organizer* illustrates a range of possibilities. While we have made connections to relevant theory to illustrate powerful dimensions of portfolio assessment, our main focus is on implementation. We want the process to be meaningful and manageable for all participants. Portfolio assessment is not effective if teachers cannot manage it; we offer teachers many practical ideas that can make the process workable for them and their students. For those who say portfolio assessment is challenging, time-consuming, and complex, we agree; but good teaching and learning are all these things. Throughout our experiences with portfolios, our colleagues and students have communicated that both the process and product are meaningful and authentic, and that caring and pride naturally evolve when something genuinely matters.

We hope that in your portfolio journeys you will discover as many treasures, experience as much pleasure, and celebrate as much student success as we have, and we wish you well.

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And finally, but most importantly, to our students: You make teaching the passionate and rewarding profession that it is. You have trusted us, taught us, questioned us, and celebrated with us as we have explored portfolio assessment with you. We thank you for your effort, ownership, and accomplishments. It is a privilege to have been partners with you.

To all, thank you. You are a part of this.

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DETERMINING THE BASICS OF STUDENT PORTFOLIOS

KEY IDEAS

- Establishing the goals and overall purpose of the portfolio
- Choosing a type of portfolio
- Considering the audiences for the portfolio
- Determining the time frame for maintaining the portfolio

OVERVIEW

The material in this chapter helps you make decisions about the use and purpose of portfolio assessment in your classroom, school, or district. Focusing on and clarifying your educational goals is crucial groundwork for all other decisions. To define those goals, you'll work through an activity that is designed to identify the purpose of the portfolio. Once the purpose of the portfolio has been determined, a particular type of portfolio—either growth or best work—can be chosen, and the time frame for portfolio maintenance can be set. Through another activity you'll think about the different audiences for students' portfolios and plan to address their various needs. Use the figures to help you make and record key decisions about the purpose, type, audiences, and time frame for your students' portfolios.

ESTABLISHING GOALS AND PURPOSES

Beginning with your broader educational goals will help you focus decision making about the implementation of portfolios in your educational setting and clarify the purpose of the portfolios. Goals often emerge from an external source (state, provincial, or district guidelines) or an internal source (personal philosophy). Goals that are determined by external guidelines usually form the initial basis for classroom instruction and assessment; however, teachers tend to merge these external goals with personal goals that reflect their philosophical and pragmatic orientations. **Activity 1** will help you articulate your “dream goals” for students. See **Figure 1.1** for examples of dream goals, or responses, to **Activity 1**.

Helping students “develop a love of learning,” “become self-directed learners,” and “have a positive sense of self” are often identified by teachers as the most important goals to achieve with their students. When teachers articulate these or other personal goals, they are better able to select instructional and assessment approaches that will help them and their students achieve both personal goals and external goals. Portfolio assessment enables teachers to meet both personal and external goals because the process of developing a portfolio and the product created can target a variety of goals.

ACTIVITY 1

Identifying Dream Goals

Whether you are implementing portfolio assessment for personal or external reasons, identifying your dream goals will help you and your students maintain focus, direction, and motivation. Use the following steps to think about and share dream goals with other professionals. Samples of responses are shared in **Figure 1.1**.

- Form groups of three teachers. Teacher A serves as the interviewer, B the responder, and C the recorder.
- Teacher A interviews Teacher B, while Teacher C records the response to these questions:
 - What are some things you would like your students to achieve this year?
 - What is your dream goal for your students and why is it important?
- Teachers rotate roles after each interview, until each teacher has been interviewed. (Allow 3-5 minutes for each interview.)
- Discuss how your dream goals will influence instructional and assessment choices.
- Responses can also be shared in a large group.

Identifying the purpose of the portfolio is an essential decision that will influence many facets of organizing the portfolio. Given the importance of this decision, think carefully about the fundamental reasons you are considering the implementation of portfolio assessment. Here are some questions you may want to consider:

- Why am I implementing portfolio assessment? Is it mandated by an external body or is it a personal choice?
- Why do I want to involve students in collecting and evaluating their own work?
- How will portfolios help me achieve my personal goals with my students?
- Is my purpose to show the process and product of work or just the product itself?

- Is my purpose to have students accumulate a sampling of “best work” for admission to a particular program or for employment?
- Is my purpose to carry out large-scale assessment or to report progress and inform instruction at the classroom level?
- Is my purpose to evaluate overall student performance or to target specific areas?

Your answers to these questions will be influenced by the control that you have within your educational setting and will determine the overall purpose of the portfolios. The more that you are able to incorporate your personal goals into the portfolio model, the more ownership and motivation you will feel throughout the process.

FIGURE 1.1

Sample Responses to Activity 1 (Dream Goals)

The following thoughts are from teachers who identified dream goals for their students. Use their responses to **Activity 1** to prompt your thinking as you consider your personal goals.

Winnie's Dream Goals

My dream goal for my students is that they begin to take responsibility for their own learning. I teach middle school students and I often think they come to school expecting to be told what they have to know and learn. My goal is to help them find relevance in their learning and recognize the importance of their own ideas, feelings, and questions. I want them to start making connections between what they are learning in school and who they are as individuals. To accomplish this goal, I need to find out for myself what is important to them and give them opportunities to reflect on what they are learning. I also need to provide experiences that are meaningful to them, that excite them, and that tap into their interests and needs.

Portfolios can certainly help me understand my students better and come to know where their interests are, what their goals are, and what kinds of experiences they enjoy the most. Portfolios also give them a way to think about what they are learning and connect that with their own lives.

Barb's Dream Goals

I would like my high school students to be self-directed learners who are able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and are able to set realistic goals for themselves. I have always understood that kids know themselves better than anyone else, yet I haven't always tapped into that knowledge appropriately. It is usually pretty easy to tell students how they need to improve, but it is so much more powerful if they can articulate that themselves. My dream goal this semester is for my kids to say, "These are things I am good at, these are things I am not good at, and this is how I am going to improve." Then they can work toward their goals as I assist them in that process.

My dream goal will influence my instructional and assessment choices because I need to teach my students how to self-evaluate more effectively as they acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for each class. My assessment approaches will have to include giving students many opportunities to practice self-evaluation and I will have to share some of the "power" in the overall assessment and evaluation process. My students' judgments must count for something if they are going to become more self-directed in their learning.

TYPES OF PORTFOLIOS

After identifying the reasons for using portfolio assessment, you need to determine what type of portfolio best suits your needs. The literature on the types, or categories, of portfolio assessment shows many different ways that portfolios have been conceptualized. For example, Danielson and Abrutyn (1997) identify three major types of portfolios: working portfolios, display portfolios, and assessment portfolios. Seely (1996) identifies four types of portfolios: showcase, documentation,

evaluation, and process. Burke, Fogarty, and Belgrad (1994) discuss three major categories for portfolios: personal, academic, and professional. Campbell, Cignetti, Melenyzer, Nettles, and Wyman (1997) elaborate on a working and a presentation portfolio in their discussion of portfolios.

Although the conceptualizations of these authors are different, the common theme in determining the type of portfolio to use is that "it is important for educators to be clear about their goals, the reasons they are engaging in a portfolio project, and the intended audience for the