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WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR USING SHOWCASE PORTFOLIOS IN A CLASSROOM?

Once the teacher has made some of the initial decisions, the use of the portfolio with students follows a seven-step sequence (see Box 2.3). This sequence is the same whether the portfolios are being used for one class project or for projects the entire year. Because the process for developing student portfolios is consistent for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade, teachers can encourage, assist, and support one another across grade levels as their students work on their portfolios.

Box 2.3 Sequence for Showcase Portfolios

- Explain portfolios and their use to students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.
- Set quality standards.
- Develop the habit of reflection.
- Teach organizational methods.
- Collect all relevant work samples.
- Select works for inclusion.
- Assess and evaluate portfolios.

Explain Portfolios and Their Uses to Students and Parents

This should be done at the same time that the teacher informs students and parents about the student-led conferencing, whether in a meeting or through a letter. For both students and parents, seeing actual portfolios is very useful. If no student portfolios are available, teachers can create a sample to show, share a professional portfolio, invite local professionals who have portfolios to come to class to share them, or ask older students who have showcase portfolios to come and share them with the class. If models of student portfolios are available, they can be left on display in the classroom for students and parents to view throughout the year. In addition to gaining a vision of what a portfolio is, parents and students need to know the purpose for the portfolios, who the intended audience will be, and how, if at all, this portfolio will be evaluated and counted toward credit for completing the year. All this information should be shared to begin the process.

Set Quality Standards

The most important step in setting quality standards for class portfolios is creating a culture in the classroom that promotes and insists on quality work from students at all times. Deming (in Aguayo, 1990) observes "quality is only possible when the people in the system feel secure and experience joy in what they do" (p. 50). The goal of educators involved in promoting quality work must be to create schools and classrooms where students feel secure and enjoy

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3

Planning and Preparing Student-Led Conferences

Although most student-led conferences are not scheduled until near the end of the grading period or term, it is essential that the teacher think through the student-led conferencing process well in advance of the actual conference date to ensure a successful conference experience for students, parents, and teachers.

The ideas offered here are suggestions based on the experiences of teachers at all grade levels. Teachers will want to modify the ideas to suit their unique assignments and the developmental level of their students. Samples of some generic and more specific handouts used in actual classrooms are included in Resource A in hopes that they will assist teachers in creating forms appropriate to their own classes. The material that follows is organized according to the sequence of preparing for conferences and questions that teachers have asked as they helped students get ready to meet with parents and guests (see Resource A for a timeline).

WHEN AND WHERE WILL WE CONDUCT THE CONFERENCES?

In Elementary Schools

We recommended setting aside three dates during the school year for student-led conferences. In most elementary schools, the first conference date is already set in the school calendar and occurs sometime in October. If the school

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Writing Reflection

As you think about yourself as a writer, answer the following questions:

1. You have worked hard as a writer these nine weeks. As you look over your work, what are two things you would want someone to notice about you as a writer?

2. You have completed many types of writing these nine weeks. Which type of writing do you like best?

3. How can the writing skills you learned help you away from school?

4. What do you find most difficult in writing? How can I help you?

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To Our First Student-Led Conference

Dear Parents,

The students have worked very hard to prepare for this day. Your child will be sharing his or her portfolio with you. The work samples in the portfolio represent all areas of the curriculum and incorporate many skills. I ask that you praise your child because every child has made progress and has had accomplishments.

As your child shares the portfolio, you might want to ask the following questions:

- "What can you tell me about this piece or assignment?"
- "What did you have to do in the assignment?"
- "What skills did you have to use?"
- "If you had to do this assignment again, what would you do to improve it?"

Following the conference, I would like all parents or guests to write a letter to their child commenting on the portfolio and the child's performance during the student-led conference. You may want to include some of the parent reflection ideas in your letter. Please return or mail your letter to school within the next week so that I can place the letter in your child's portfolio. The children will love to hear your reactions to their conferences. The school address is:

c/o _____ Child's name
_____ Teacher's name
_____ School address
_____
_____

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

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