

# Contents

<b>In memoriam</b> .....	v
<b>Introduction: The what and why</b> .....	vii
<i>The authors</i>	
<b>Section I: Learning through portfolios</b> .....	1
1. How portfolios enhance learning .....	3
<i>Deborah H. Sherrill</i>	
2. Portfolios: Moving beyond the scrapbook .....	5
<i>Ann Lockledge</i>	
<b>Section II: Portfolios across the curriculum</b> .....	9
3. Reflection collection: Portfolios that emerge from pastoral-care programs .....	11
<i>Barbara A. Smythe</i>	
4. Portfolios in a writing workshop .....	19
<i>Arlene M. Owens</i>	
5. Portfolios in society and environment .....	29
<i>Ann Lockledge</i>	
6. Portfolios in mathematics and science .....	37
<i>Kathleen Lynch</i>	
<b>Section III: Students and portfolios</b> .....	43
7. Helping students make selections .....	45
<i>Rhonda E. Benton</i>	
8. What students say about portfolios .....	49
<i>Deborah H. Sherriff</i>	
<b>Section IV: Unique uses for portfolios</b> .....	51
9. Students as employees: Integrating portfolios across the curriculum .....	55
<i>Angela Joyner</i>	
10. Developing portfolio assessment: A team effort .....	69
<i>Ann Lockledge</i>	
<b>Section V: Putting it all together</b> .....	77
11. A professional portfolio as a model .....	79
<i>Judith A. Hayn</i>	
<b>Resources</b> .....	85
<b>References</b> .....	87



## Introduction: The what and the why

*My reports are due by 3.30 today.  
I have bus duty this afternoon. Could we schedule  
the parent conference a little later?  
My student teacher needs me to observe her lesson  
third period.*

Sound familiar? Another day in the life of a typical middle-school teacher. Often the harried pace required of middle-school teachers leaves us drained and exhausted by the end of the day. With the growing demands on us as teachers, both in and out of the classroom, the idea of making major changes in instruction and assessment seems unfathomable. In our inservice workshops we are encouraged to use portfolio assessment and integrated curriculum but with the day-to-day responsibilities and mandates we already carry, adding other responsibilities seems impossible.

This collection of articles seeks to make the impossible possible. Portfolios may be used in many different ways and in various subjects. They may also be used to bridge one subject with another. While we recognise the value of fully integrated units, we also acknowledge the time and skills needed for their development. We suggest that team planning and portfolio implementation can serve a similar purpose for the middle-years student, that of adding new information to existing knowledge in meaningful ways.

After introductory pieces by Deborah Sherrill and Ann Lockledge we take you through the day in a typical middle school and demonstrate how real teachers use portfolio assessment in their classrooms. Our first visit is to Bobbie Smythe's home group period where she describes how students develop ownership of the classroom through using portfolios. Arlene Owens, Ann Lockledge and Kathleen Lynch explain how portfolios are used in a writing workshop, society and environment and maths and science classes.

In Section III, Rhonda Benton describes helping her students make selections and justify their choices for their portfolios. Following, Deborah Sherrill presents important information about what students say about portfolios.

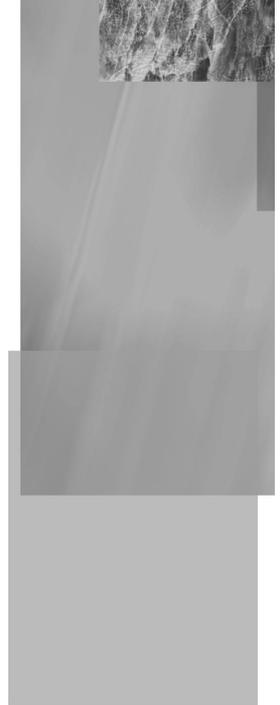
In Section IV, teams' experiences using student portfolios are presented. Angela Joyner describes her team's approach with integrating portfolios across the curriculum which involved setting up students as 'employees' and each classroom as a 'business'. Then, Ann Lockledge describes the roles of teams as a critical element in using portfolios.



Our fifth section includes Judy Hayn's advice for creating a teacher portfolio that allows the teacher their own personal integration while providing a model of the process for students. She reminds us that in order to successfully implement portfolio integration in the classroom, we must examine our own learning and reflect on our own change and growth.

Finally, the Resources section contains a bibliography of portfolio-related materials.

– *The authors*



# 1. How portfolios enhance learning

Deborah H. Sherrill

As I reflect on myself as a learner, I am often dismayed at all the facts I had drilled into my head that I can no longer recall. After four years of French, the only sentence I'm able to recall is *Je m'appelle Henri Martin* – not something I've found useful in my adult life. I was taught in classrooms where there was never any mention of other subjects. We did maths in maths, science in science and never the twain did meet. Today we know that real learning occurs when our brains make connections between things we already know and things we are being taught; connecting the new with the known enables our students to process material in meaningful ways. Portfolios provide a framework for making these kinds of connections in your classroom.

Portfolios used across the curriculum encourage students to view themselves as complete learners, not compartmentalised cogs in the separate subject wheel. When they are asked to choose pieces of their best work from every core subject, students begin to see their strengths and weaknesses. For example, lack of attention to detail may be a problem that crosses every subject area. A talent for writing may surface in science as well as English. Portfolio assessment across the curriculum enables students to recognise patterns in their learning.

Another connection portfolio assessment encourages is that of commonalities of various disciplines and their relationships to each other.

When asked to write a maths journal, one student replied, 'It's hard to do English in maths class.' When teachers require common artefacts in portfolios such as journals, concept maps, writings and projects, students begin to apply what was learned in one subject to that of another. By using portfolios consistently across the curriculum this type of comment will be less common. By using portfolios, students begin to see that reading and writing are necessary in every discipline and that measurement may be necessary in maths, science and society and environment.

Perhaps the most important contribution portfolios make to student learning is that of requiring student metacognition and reflection. By requiring students to regularly answer questions such as, 'What were the steps I took to produce this work?' or 'What piece of work reflects my best efforts?' they develop lifelong habits of critical thinking that enable them to make connections and become problem-solvers. Using portfolios that require students to consistently assess themselves before, during and after their learning assures that students will see this evaluation as a useful tool transcending subject areas. This process also gives students the role of decision-maker, validating their responsibilities as learners in all subjects. Portfolios belong to the students who complete the work, assess its strengths and weaknesses, choose its contents, explain their decisions and then celebrate their successes.

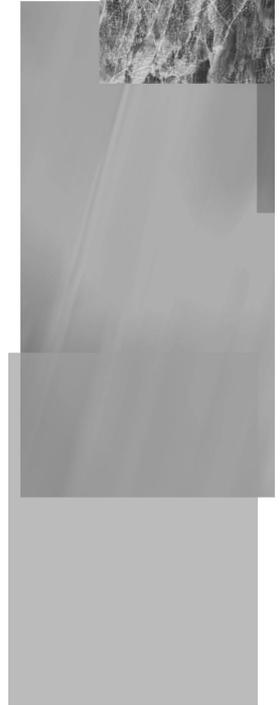
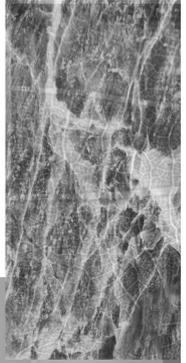
As you read through the real-life uses of portfolios presented in this book, keep this statement in mind:



It is taken for granted, apparently, that in time students will see for themselves how things fit together. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation is that they tend to learn what we teach. If we teach connectedness and integration they learn that. If we teach separation and discontinuity, that is what they learn. To suppose otherwise would be incongruous.

(Humphreys 1981, p. xi.)

We think portfolios provide connectedness and enhance learning.



## 2. Portfolios: Moving beyond the scrapbook

Ann Lockledge

*How can I know what I think till I see what I say?*

– E. M. Forster

For years I have kept scrapbooks. They are not particularly well organised, but they contain bits and pieces of the lives of my family. Each page is relatively well arranged, but the order is helter-skelter although somewhat chronological in nature. I label these scrapbooks only by the span of years each covers. I always kept adding to the scrapbooks as a place to keep pictures sent by friends or relatives or as a depository for something that seemed significant about a conference. I did not really know why each piece found its way onto the pages. But when there was enough accumulation of this and that plus another batch of pictures taken quite haphazardly, I filled a few more pages.

There was no thought of justifying what went in and what might be left out. There was precious little thought of even trying to keep a given page to the same topic. There certainly has been no theme other than the flow of my life. Yet these scrapbooks are satisfying as I look back at them and I can explain the contents if asked to do so. I can share my scrapbook with others who travel down a particular memory lane with me – either adding their own versions or accepting mine as valid family history.

This is not the story of the portfolio. The portfolio has the value of the scrapbook in that it makes permanent aspects of a given period of time. And it is a selection of artefacts from the period in question.

But the portfolio is not haphazard. It is organised and thoughtful. There are as many items excluded as make their way onto the pages. Each selection is picked with care, its inclusion justified according to a theme and the selections are organised to tell the intended story.

Teachers kept anecdotal running records and folders of student work long before such records were recognised as a legitimate means of assessment. But when the demand for accountability became coupled with increasing criticism of standardised, multiple-choice tests, this manner of looking at accomplishments was seen as holding considerable promise, and the portfolio moved beyond a mere collection of available materials.

Writing teachers and art teachers, in particular, have used portfolios extensively. In fact they want students to go back to look at different pieces they had produced and perhaps think about how their work might be improved. Portfolios were used for reflection but usually not in an organised, written fashion. Past work was used to influence future work and to promote skill development.

When other disciplines began using portfolios, some of the products were larger than would easily fit in a folder or notebook. Suddenly selection of samples became imperative. It is not feasible to include a poster, model or biological specimen; one can include pictures or selections from work undertaken. Such representations of student work need more explanation than a painting or piece of writing.



### Why portfolios promote learning

- They enable us to look at how students learn and the processes they use in various disciplines.
- They encourage metacognition and reflection that help students make connections between subjects.
- They permit students to view their learning as a whole, not just as unrelated subjects.
- They encourage depth and breadth of learning.
- They offer students a framework for organising their learning thereby making personal connections between subjects.
- They give students the role of decision-maker which helps to validate their responsibilities as learners in all subjects.

Believing that students should be responsible not only for reporting but for assessing their own learning, teachers emphasised that the portfolio should be selective. Why would anyone want to show a piece that was of doubtful quality – unless they intended to include another that showed considerable progress in what was to be judged? Why would people want to look at something that had not been organised to convey a message? When these concerns were answered, the portfolio became an extension of the individual learner.

An integrated portfolio as well as a portfolio for a specific class should not contain all of the material produced or collected during the semester – it needs to be an effort at highlighting individual understanding and growth. Portfolios should be limited to a reasonable number of entries with each topic represented by a minimal number of pieces.

As students assemble portfolios of their work, they begin to think about the organisation of the selections and the message to be communicated. Themes begin to emerge. Some students wish to show how they have grown. Others wish to emphasise a particular ability or interest that carried throughout their work. Still others simply want to display their best work. The most important part of the selection process is the connections students make about their work as they consider it. It is metacognition at its best.

The portfolio format combined with reflective thinking can be very useful in helping students make choices based on knowledge. As students are confronted with the challenge of selecting their best work and justifying that selection, they work and think critically about it.

Over time, each student can assemble a portfolio to represent their growth as a learner. Students may be invited to include such things as pieces of writing, samples from projects, pictures, descriptions and examples of whatever they consider to be their best work. Each piece of work should be accompanied by a reflection explaining why it has been selected. Reflections may include comments on motivation, appropriateness or students' involvement as team players.

If such effort is going into a portfolio, then it must be shared with someone other than the teacher. Presenting the portfolio to parents is one way. Having a class celebration at the end of the marking period is another. An open day reaches beyond parents and classmates into the entire school community.



To prepare for these activities, students can work in pairs or in groups of three to assess progress and to help one another reflect and organise work. When doing this, students need some type of rubric so they have a measuring stick to judge quality. It is not difficult for students to help each other judge where their work fails on a continuum between inappropriate and inadequate to innovative and integrated, from limited descriptive value to selective and reflective. At first students feel most at ease with a simplistic, generalised rubric with no more than three or four levels such as

1. Made a collection. Attempted to explain contents.
2. Selected from collected materials. Explained why pieces were included.
3. Made a balanced selection of samples. Included a thoughtful reflection that justified inclusion of pieces.

The assessment will become authentic for them because they will see that it measures depth of understanding and they can deal with both content and process across disciplines.

And as for my scrapbooks? My children have begun to take an interest in my collections – but they always have to ask me for explanations. I have been thinking that I should start including pages of reflections explaining why I chose to preserve certain artefacts for future years, but then I wouldn't have a scrapbook anymore.