Doc. 1: Portfolios as authentic assessment tools

Time suggested: 15 minutes

**WHAT IS AN ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIO?**

Fundamental to "authentic assessment" or "performance assessment" in educational theory is the principle that students should demonstrate, rather than tell about, what they know and can do. Documenting progress toward higher order goals such as application of skills and synthesis of experience requires obtaining information beyond what can be provided by standardized or norm-based tests.

An assessment portfolio is the systematic collection of student work measured against predetermined scoring criteria. These criteria may include scoring guides, rubrics, check lists, or rating scales. In "authentic assessment", information or data is collected from various sources, through multiple methods, and over multiple points in time.

Assessment portfolios can include performance-based assessments, such as writing samples that illustrate different genres, solutions to math problems that show problem-solving ability, lab reports that demonstrate an understanding of a scientific approach, or social studies research reports that show the ability to use multiple sources. In addition, assessment portfolios can include scores on standardized, program-specific tests.

**WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF USING ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIOS?**

**Providing schools with more accurate information**

Being a richer source of information about learning, assessment portfolios can help schools identify and meet the needs of diverse students.
A shared vision of student goals and learning

Developing assessment portfolios that include teachers, administrators and students can shape a common vision of what students should know and be able to do as a result of their course work. By clearly articulating expectations and the criteria upon which to assess attainment of these expectations, the school helps create a shared vision of the purpose of education.

Authentic picture of learning

Assessment portfolios can be designed to measure virtually any observable skill or process or content-area knowledge. A wide range of student products can be included in assessment portfolios as long as predetermined scoring criteria are in place. Portfolios are designed to be inclusive and to provide an authentic description of what students can do.

Improved teaching and student learning

Using assessment portfolios not only provides improved information about student achievement but also makes a positive impact on teaching and student learning. Once trained to use and score portfolios based on agreed-upon criteria, teachers will tend to move toward a more learner-centered teaching model, which encourages students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Through such training, teachers develop an understanding of the quality of student work that meets specific achievement levels according to the scoring criteria.
WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIOS?

Lower comparability and reliability

Portfolios do not easily or meaningfully translate into a single score or set of scores. The public has become accustomed to single scores, such as those used to describe the results of standardized or norm-referenced tests. Single scores are comparable across systems and from one year to the next. It is not the purpose of the portfolio to rank participants or programs in a quantitative or standardized way.

In addition, it is difficult to implement assessment portfolios that meet the reliability requirements many school systems want. Achieving a certain degree of reliability among raters or test evaluators is important. Without high inter-rater agreement figures, the usefulness of the scores as an accountability tool diminishes, because the results cannot be used to compare scores reliably between schools or over time (see cost and scoring below).

Difficulty ensuring standardized testing conditions

When using portfolio assessments, performance conditions may vary, and teacher bias can affect students' performance. For example, the amount of support teachers provide to students, the amount of time students are allowed to spend on portfolio samples, and the extent to which student work is augmented by support from external sources have raised questions about the validity of inferences about student competence based on portfolio work.

Cost

One obstacle to developing an assessment portfolio system is the ongoing expense of the program. Designing, implementing and scoring portfolio items is labor intensive and therefore costly. Practitioners invest a substantial amount of time to align the
Scoring

Portfolios pose a difficult scoring dilemma for three reasons. First, developing and using scoring criteria requires labor-intensive staff discussion and training. Second, inter-rater agreement among teachers and other scorers requires intensive staff development. Third, scoring student work using predetermined criteria is more time consuming than scoring a single-occasion, traditional test. Fortunately, these same activities also lead to improved teaching and learning.

(Based on Emily Gomez “Assessment Portfolios: Including English Language Learners in Large-Scale Assessments” ERIC Digest and Meg Sewell, Mary Marczak, & Melanie Horn “The Use of Portfolio Assessment in Evaluation”, Cyfernet Evaluation).

Guidelines for group work:

- From the reading of this document, how useful will portfolio assessment be for you as a teacher?
- What benefits and problems can you foresee?
- Can you think of any other aspects not referred here?

Answer these questions briefly and include them in your portfolio draft presentation.