

PORTFOLIOS AND REFLECTION IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

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(Under the Direction of Michelle Ballif)

ABSTRACT

This study examines portfolios as a tool to use within the high school English/Language Arts classroom. After a review of the theory related to portfolios, reflection in student writing is addressed in a separate chapter, and a tool for implementing reflective writing, the reflective journal, is described. In addition, a case study is presented which examines the portfolio program currently being used by Peachtree Ridge High School in Georgia. Likewise, this study presents survey results from teachers in Cobb County Georgia who were asked questions regarding their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to portfolio use in the classroom. Finally, suggestions are presented for the implementation of a portfolio program at North Oconee High School in Georgia.

INDEX WORDS: Assessment, Portfolio, Reflection

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Study

After four years of teaching high school English, I realized that something was lacking. No one ever taught me how to teach writing. So instead of relying on instruction and theory, I tried to remember the way that I was taught writing, and I modeled that approach. I marked every grammar mistake I could find and added brief commentary to the bottom of each paper justifying the grade that I had assigned. It worked for my teachers, so why wouldn't it work for my students? Then I remembered grading eleventh grade research papers in the Salt Lake City airport on my way home from a spring break trip. Frustrated at having to work during my vacation, I actually calculated the number of hours I would spend outside of school "grading" these papers. Astonished at the figure (around forty hours if my memory holds), I remember wondering if I was wasting my time. How many of these students would simply look at their grade, throw their papers away, and never look back?

As it turns out, some did and some did not. I remember a spring day when one of my brighter students approached me about her paper that I had recently returned. Expecting the usual complaints about grades or comments, I braced for the worse. I was surprised to see her smiling. She proudly pointed out to me that this was the first time she had received a paper back that did not say, "Work on your transitions between paragraphs." After I congratulated her and she left, I felt embarrassed that I did not remember that she had a problem with transitions. I had written that comment on all of her papers and could not remember doing so. I realized, like my students, I "threw away" student papers after I had graded them. How could I help students improve their

writing when I couldn't even remember what their basic problems were as writers? I could sit back and complain about the number of students that I had to teach or the limited amount of time I got to spend with them, but I knew that complaints wouldn't help my students become better writers. I realized that I had to search for a better way to evaluate student writing.

After reading Kathleen Blake Yancey's "On Reflection," a moment of inspiration hit me. Maybe I didn't have to keep a mental catalog of my students' strengths and weaknesses as writers. Maybe they could do that for themselves. Yancey sums it up quite simply when she states, "You want to know how students learn to write? *Try asking 'em* [...] You want to know how they arrive at certain conclusions, what discourses they are drawing on? *Try asking 'em*" (5). As a teacher, I had been using "reflection" to assess my teaching strategies quite successfully for some time. I just never thought to apply this tool to student writing. While I felt quite comfortable asking my students to reflect on our study of Hawthorne or Shakespeare, I never thought to ask them why they wrote the way that they did.

Now, I am back in the classroom, and I see teachers around me struggling with these same writing issues. North Oconee High School (NOHS), the school where I currently teach has made improvement in writing one of its school-wide improvement goals. The faculty and administrators believe that we, as teachers, need to have a clearer picture of what students are writing at each grade level and develop a plan to help students become better writers as they progress through high school. The school is looking for an alternative to the "write, grade, and trash" cycle that seems to pervade student essay writing, and the English department is researching writing strategies to bring back to the faculty as a whole. Thus, this study will serve two purposes. It is being written to fulfill the final requirements for my Master's in English, but it is also designed to give NOHS researched suggestions to help improve student writing. As a

department, we kept returning to the idea of student portfolios. We wanted to look at the research related to portfolios as well as case studies of schools that are actually using portfolios.

Therefore, this study is divided into several parts. The first chapter in this research study presents an overview of portfolio theory. It begins by looking at diverse definitions of the term “portfolio” and explains how portfolios emerged as a reaction to standardized tests of writing. It also looks at state and institutional portfolio projects in the United States including Kentucky and Vermont’s state-wide programs, several college portfolio programs, and a few programs developed by individual high school teachers. Grading and assessment is also discussed, and the overview concludes with the benefits and concerns for portfolio use.

The second chapter presents an overview of the research and theory related to "reflection" which, according to most theorists, is an integral part of the portfolio process. By actively working with their portfolios and reflecting on their writing, students can see patterns in their writing and their approach to writing. By building on their strengths and striving to improve the weaknesses, students should be able to see real improvements in their writing. Likewise, teachers can use these student reflections to guide classroom instruction. Rather than finding the same mistakes over and over, teachers can look to student reflections to see if improvements have been made from previous papers.

Our teachers were interested in theory, but they also wanted to know how portfolios were being used in real classrooms around the state of Georgia. Thus, the final section of this study contains two practical components. First, it will look at Peachtree Ridge High School’s portfolio program. While the school is much larger than NOHS, it shares two common characteristics that make it ideal for this study. Peachtree Ridge, like NOHS, is a relatively new school. Peachtree Ridge opened in 2003, and North Oconee opened in 2004. But more importantly, the decision to

implement portfolios at Peachtree Ridge began with the English department faculty. Like NOHS, the faculty felt a need to focus on writing instruction and felt that the use of portfolios fit their needs. The second practical component contains the results of a survey completed by 79 high school English teachers in Cobb County, Georgia. At one point in time, Cobb County required portfolios, but since that time, individual schools have been given the freedom to choose their own approach to writing instruction. These surveys are divided among teachers who have never used portfolios, those who used them in the past but quit using them, and those who currently use portfolios as an integral part of writing instruction.

Lastly, I have offered a few recommendations for North Oconee High School based on the results of this research study. While this study does not substitute for individual teachers conducting their own investigation into portfolios, it does give them a thorough overview of the history of portfolios as well as practical applications.

CHAPTER 1

PORTFOLIO THEORY AND PRACTICE

A recent conversation with another teacher helped inspire the discussion of portfolio theory that makes up this chapter. Since I teach ninth grade students, I spend a great deal of time at the beginning of each semester trying to assess my students' writing abilities. When I saw one of our eighth grade teachers at a conference, I asked her whether or not she could keep writing samples from her students that I could look over before classes began. That would not be a problem, she responded, because her students kept portfolios of their writing. But, when I suggested that she simply send me the portfolios, she said I would not want the whole thing since it contained every piece of writing they had completed for the class. While I graciously accepted the pieces of writing that she had to offer, I noted the disparity between her definition of a "portfolio" and the one I had been reading about in my studies.

So when my high school English department started discussing using portfolios to meet our school-wide writing goal, I wanted to make sure that when we talked about "portfolios" we were all referring to the same thing. The study that follows begins by looking at the various definitions of "portfolios" that exist in published research and theory. In addition, I have documented the emergence of portfolios that seemed to stem from a country of educators frustrated by standardized tests of writing. Next, I have presented an overview of state and institutional programs that use portfolios. In particular, I thought that the Kentucky program might help inform my school's program since they have "benchmark" papers based on consistent rubrics. Since so much emphasis is placed on grading and assessment in high schools, I have

devoted the next section to look at these two key areas in relation to portfolios. Grades are a reality, and if North Oconee High School chooses to switch to portfolios, we must have an agreed-upon approach to grading as well as strategies for formal as well as informal assessments. This chapter concludes with the benefits of portfolio use as well as a discussion of the concerns that many theorists and educators have with portfolios. Hopefully, this chapter will help the faculty of North Oconee High School make an informed decision regarding portfolio use with our own students.

Portfolios Defined: Collection, Selection, Reflection

One of the most complicated aspects of portfolio use is the fact that so many teachers and theorists have different definitions for the term itself. To some like our eighth grade teacher, a portfolio may be nothing more than a folder where students keep drafts of papers that their students have written for class. At the same time, others, especially those who have published books and articles about portfolios, go to great lengths to explain that a portfolio is not simply a writing folder. Most educators and theorists who write about portfolios insist that they must have a specific purpose. Instead of archived collections of writings, portfolios are collections of writing that are constantly changing. Students and teachers work together to shape the portfolios to satisfy the goals that they have set together.

While definitions for “portfolios” vary widely among educators and theorists, most definitions include one or all of the terms “collection, selection, and reflection” or some variation of these three elements. Sandra Murphy and Mary Ann Smith offer one of the most concise definitions when they suggest that a portfolio is a “*selection* of student writing for a purpose.” These teachers go on to say that portfolios are not folders of student writing. Instead someone

must “do something with them” (Murphy and Smith 8). In this type of classroom, students “reflect” on what they have written and see how their writings are meeting their goals.

In Portfolios in the Writing Classroom, Kathleen Blake Yancey embraces the diversity of portfolios and points out that they are “defined variously as cultural artifacts, as collection devises, as instruments of process, as assessment tools, as means of education reform, as resources for teachers, as pictures of and guides for curriculum” (12). Later in her book, Yancey narrows this definition by insisting that all portfolios are longitudinal, diverse in content, and collaborative (102).

Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon get more specific when they talk of portfolios. According to their definition, portfolios must include a variety of writing including preliminary drafts and writing completed under different circumstances. These writings must include different audiences and allow room for student reflection. For Hamp-Lyons and Condon, reflection is the key component that separates a writing folder from a portfolio. They also claim that portfolios must include delayed evaluation. By delaying grading, students have ample time to accumulate enough writing to be able to reflect and select their best work to revise (118-123).

Tierney et al. state that portfolios are “vehicles for ongoing assessment by students,” and they base their broader definition on the purposes that portfolios can serve. They suggest that portfolios can help measure improvement and achievement, examine processes, and replace more formal testing procedures (41). This frustration with and desire to replace formal writing tests inspired teachers and institutions across the country to begin experimenting with portfolios.

Reactions to Standardized Tests

In analyzing the explosion of portfolio use in the 1990s, Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff are quick to note that teachers were using portfolios in their own classrooms long before the mid

1980s. However, increased pressure for assessment and distrust of teachers fueled a testing movement in education that continues to grow into the 21st century.

Teachers, who realized that standardized testing measures contradicted the process movement in composition theory, looked for an alternative assessment and found portfolios. The biggest complaint that Elbow, Belanoff, and a host of other theorists have with standardized tests of writing is that these tests assess a student's ability to write one type of writing, on one particular day. Elbow and Belanoff argue that the results can be "skewed by the genre, the prompt, the student's mood, health, and so on" ("Reflections" 25). Other theorists worry that these tests, which can compare school districts to each other, do not benefit daily instruction in the classroom (Johnson 4). Standardized tests do not measure students' abilities to generate their own ideas, structure tasks accordingly, and thus solve their own problems. Teachers tend to concentrate on the format of the standardized writing assessment, and while basic skills increase, higher order thinking skills and problems solving skills decline (Johnson 18-19). Likewise, many educators argue that current testing measures are not aligned with the expectations placed on students once they reach college or careers (Darling-Hammond 7).

Simply put, standardized tests do not measure how real writers act under real circumstances. Belanoff and Elbow argue that real world writing is collaborative. Even published authors must face their editors who offer suggestions for revisions and corrections. Students, however, are often given controversial topics and two hours to produce a final product that does not exceed a set number of words or pages. They are not allowed to research the topic or consult their peers, skills that teachers demand within the writing classroom and editors demand in the world of publishing ("Reflections" 17-19).

In “The Lunar Light of Student Writing: Portfolios and Literary Theory,” Robert Leigh Davis reminds educators that most literary theorists have rejected the idea of the autonomous text, but this view has not filtered into the world of assessment. He argues that if context is essential for understanding literature, then why should context be ignored when assessing writing? (36). Davis likens writing produced in testing situations to a “note in a bottle—detached from specific uses and situations” (37). Standardized tests silence the voices that help form a context for the writer. He or she is not allowed to consult research, peers, or family members who would normally shape the basis for his or her argument. As a result, students write predictable writing with little substance. These tests contradict what teachers stress in the classroom, and when the stakes are high, Davis argues, “we are still New Critics” (37).

As a classroom teacher, I have felt these same frustrations with the Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT). This test, which is given at the beginning of the 11th grade year, is designed to measure a high school student’s ability to write. Students are given a topic and then have 90 minutes to brainstorm, draft, revise, edit, and create a final version of an essay. Students do not see the topic before the day of the test and are not allowed to conduct any research or ask any questions. In fact, students are encouraged to fabricate facts and statistics to support the ideas presented in their essays. Needless to say, I have concerns with the design of this test. If a student has a bad day or has no interest in the test topic, they risk failing the test; if they fail the test, they do not graduate high school. Granted, they are given opportunities to take the test again before graduating, but at that point, they have already been labeled as a “writing failure” and have little confidence taking the test again. I also have a problem with students being encouraged to create their own data to use as evidence. I spend a great deal of class time every semester trying to explain plagiarism only to have that message negated by the state of Georgia and the

GHSWT. There has got to be a better way to assess student writing than this test. Maybe the state should take Kathleen Blake Yancey's advice as well. If you want to know whether high school student's can write, why don't you ask them? If students created portfolios of writing, the GHSWT could be transformed into a reflective piece where students defend their abilities as writers using their portfolios as evidence. There are states and colleges that use portfolios to assess student writing; an overview of these programs are explained in the next section of this study.

State and Institutional Portfolio Projects

While portfolios are used in K-12 classrooms, colleges, and graduate programs, this study will focus primarily on portfolio projects for secondary schools. A brief overview of Kentucky and Vermont's required statewide portfolio projects will be given, while teacher and school district initiated programs will be discussed later in this study. Since high school teachers are often concerned with college expectations, a glimpse of specific college portfolio uses will also be included.

The state of Kentucky currently requires portfolios from all students in the 4th, 7th, and 12th grades. The Kentucky Writing Handbook outlines scoring domains and guidelines for each grade level portfolio. The 12th grade portfolio must contain one reflective essay, one personal expressive or literary essay, one transactive essay, and one transactive essay with an analytical or technical focus. Of these four pieces, one must have originated in a content area class other than English Language Arts. Students must also prepare a table of contents and include a student signature page attesting to the originality and authorship of the portfolio pieces.

Portfolios are scored by two teachers each spring, and as of the 2006-2007 school year, schools must use double-blind scoring.¹ If there are non-adjacent scores² in any domain, then the

portfolio is assigned a third reader. Portfolios are graded for content that includes purpose, audience, idea development and support; structure which includes organization, unity, coherence, sentence structure, and length; and conventions which includes grammar, usage, word choice, correctness, spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, and documentation. Each piece is assigned a four for distinguished, a three for proficient, a two for apprentice, or a one for novice.

While local teachers grade their own school's portfolios, the state provides guidelines that should be followed at all schools. For example, the Kentucky state board of education encourages districts to give teachers release time to evaluate portfolios during the school day or pay the teachers per hour or per portfolio to evaluate them after school. The Kentucky Writing Handbook also contains benchmark essays to show what a transactive essay with a four content score would look like. This same handbook also stipulates guidelines to minimize biases in scoring and presents rubrics outlining the criteria for each genre of writing.

The handbook reports that the purpose of statewide portfolios is to integrate reading and writing assessment with classroom instruction, but it offers little advice on how to connect the portfolio or the end *product* with classroom instruction and the *process* of actually creating the portfolio. The Kentucky Department of Education does offer training sessions that occur at the beginning of each school year, and one would hope that training is extended beyond the final evaluation of the portfolio to guidance in daily instruction for creating the portfolio.

Vermont established a similar program requiring portfolios from students in grades four, eight, and eleven (Black 50). In 1994, the Rand Corporation analyzed Vermont's program and found positive anecdotal evidence but also found problems with low reliability scores. Reliability scores were around .40 in the 4th and 8th grade portfolios, but investigators believe that the low scores were due primarily to the raters' confusion about the rubrics and the way Vermont

separated writing genres. Teachers, on the other hand, felt that the program had a positive impact on instruction, and many principals were so convinced with the program that they expanded local requirements beyond those required by the state (Bracey 642-644).

In addition to Kentucky and Vermont's mandated portfolio systems, several flagship universities have started accepting or requiring portfolios for incoming freshmen. Since 1989, Miami University of Ohio has allowed students the option of presenting a portfolio for admission purposes, and in 1994, the University of Michigan began requiring portfolios from all incoming and transfer applicants (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 86). Even though Michigan abolished the portfolio program in 1999, it proved to be successful during its five-year tenure. In 1994, student surveys revealed that incoming freshmen spent two to four hours preparing their portfolios and enjoyed the individual attention that they were given by such a large university (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 88). In addition, the portfolio requirement served the university's goal of improving education in secondary schools that feed into the university. By requiring portfolios of incoming freshmen, the university is expecting that students have spent time practicing the types of writing that are required in the portfolio. This program inspired high schools in the area to establish their own portfolio programs that mirrored the ones required for admissions by Michigan (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 90). Michigan also achieved overall interrater reliability of .85, higher than the .8 standard for holistic grading of timed writings, thus deflecting many of the complaints that were raised with the reliability of Vermont's K-12 portfolio project (Hamp-Lyons 135).

While Miami of Ohio and Michigan set the trend for portfolios as entrance requirements, State University of New York at Stony Brook piloted one of the first programs to replace proficiency or regents' exams with portfolios created in freshmen composition. Professors, notably Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, were frustrated with the proficiency exam and instituted a

project whereby students were required to create a portfolio of writing that had to score a “C” or better as judged by their own teacher and one other teacher who did not know the student. Students created mid-semester “dry run” papers to get an idea of how they might do on their final portfolio. Teachers met in small groups at the midpoint and end of the semester to read sample papers and agree on scoring standards. Elbow notes that the program was time consuming for teachers and many felt personally responsible if their students failed, but it had several strengths as well. Students began to see the value in revision and discussing their work with their teachers and peers. The portfolios also helped students see that real writing has a much broader audience than the teacher who assigns the writing. The individual teacher’s role shifted from that of evaluator to that of coach, and teachers found themselves having more discussions about standards and teaching methods (Elbow and Belanoff, “State” 5-16).

Models for Secondary Schools

In Power and Portfolios, Jim Mahoney describes his high school literature class that was inspired by Nancy Atwell and Peter Elbow’s expressivist writings. For the most part, students in Mahoney’s class read what they want and write what they want, communicating with each other through the use of literary letters. In these letters students write to a classmate, friend or the teacher once a week to discuss the current book that he/she is reading. The letters, documenting their one hundred pages of reading per week, should be more than mere summaries. They should pinpoint specific issues in the book and include at least two quotes or excerpts from the book. Mahoney even got the PTA to fund a small copy machine to have in the room so that students could copy excerpts instead of hand writing them. As a result, students began to include quotes that had more “length and depth” (127-129). Students keep up with these letters in his/her literature logs and turn them in during each grading period.

In addition to these letters, Mahoney's students write two pages a week in their writer's notebook and finish one complete piece of writing every week and a half. From these writings, Mahoney helps his students select their best work to compile into a final portfolio. The portfolio begins with a "Dear Reader" letter that explains the five pieces of writing that are included. He allows one entry to be a poem, and one must be an expository essay. To help students improve their own writing, Mahoney uses mini-lessons to explain the styles of various authors. He asks students to look for these traits in the books that they are reading and to reflect on them in their literary letters. The ultimate goal is for students to begin to use the successful stylistic traits of published authors within their own writing (134).

Mahoney believes that students appreciate his approach to teaching and benefit from it as well. He notes that one student who lost her portfolio posted signs offering a fifty dollar reward for its safe return (20). Mahoney does not grade each individual piece of writing, but holds frequent, individual conferences with students discussing their progress. "If I remove myself from being the constant critic, I could allow students to make more intelligent decisions about their own work" (138). The metacognitive or reflective element in Mahoney's curriculum forms the cornerstone of many portfolio programs such as the ones described by Roberta Camp in Portfolios in the Writing Classroom.

Roberta Camp describes portfolios used in middle and high school classrooms that are based on the Arts PROPEL model. In creating these portfolios, students help develop criteria and standards for their own work. Once they have written drafts, students read their drafts out loud to a group of peers. The other students respond with what they like best, what they want to hear more about, etc. The oral reading encourages students to focus on the overall piece instead of surface features of correctness. The teacher follows this same pattern in individual conferences

by focusing on a strength in each piece and a goal for future writing (66). After students have completed several pieces of writing, they choose one and complete their first written reflection. Students address what they like about the piece, why they chose it, and what this piece says about their skills as writers.

As students progress through the term, they complete a writing inventory where they look at the writings they have completed and note what types of writing they do most often. They discuss what types of writing they like most and least as well as their own strengths as writers. After the inventory and students have written even more, students select the first piece of writing for their portfolios. They submit this piece and reflect on their rationale for choosing it. They also explain its strengths and weaknesses and what they learned from writing it.

Later in the semester, students repeat this process with a second portfolio selection and choose a third piece for their “Biography of a Work.” For the “Biography,” students pick one piece of writing and describe the inspiration for the work as well as the steps taken in its creation. They are encouraged to compare the process that they used for this piece of writing to other successful or not so successful pieces of writing (Camp 70-76).

In “Producing Purposeful Portfolios,” Mary Perry explains the first two years that she experimented with portfolios in her high school classroom. The first year, she required a resume, two pieces of writing, and a letter explaining the writing choices. She noticed that students threw these together at the last minute and spent little time on revision. After much reflection over the summer, she realized that her students did not have a real audience or purpose and did not see a need to spend much time on the portfolios (183).

Half way through the second year, Perry had her students create three lists of possible portfolio purposes, audiences, and contents. The students ended up dividing themselves into two

main groups, those who wanted a portfolio to get a job and those who wanted a portfolio to aid in college admissions. Students within these groups conducted interviews and collected data to decide upon content for the portfolio and then developed rubrics for scoring. Once they had completed their portfolios, students self-assessed using their own rubrics, and Perry found that her scores aligned with the ones students gave themselves. In her review of this project, Perry stresses that portfolios must have a clear purpose and audience to be meaningful to students. (187-189).

Grading and Assessment in a Portfolio Based Class

Dr. John Hennelly of Conrad High School has writing and the writing portfolio count for 50% of his students' final averages. The remaining 50% is divided among tests, quizzes, homework, and participation. He schedules one writing workshop for every six days of class, and students submit proposals for the types of writings that they would like to complete during these class days. These portfolios are evaluated quarterly, and he provides an evaluation sheet for students which breaks down the grade into five categories. First, students must write an introduction that gives an overview of the portfolio (10% of the final grade). Next, students must select three pieces of writing to include and discuss these works. They must explain their writing processes and submit written notes and drafts that led to the creation of these pieces (60%). Students must also pick another reader to review the portfolio and make some comments about the author's work (10%). They must also submit written answers to a series of questions that should guide a student's reflection about the class. They must explain how well they have kept up with reading assignments, participated in discussions, utilized writing workshop, met their writing goals, etc. (10%). Lastly, students must suggest readings for the next quarter and assign themselves a grade with an A being superior, excellent; B being good, solid; C being OK, but

less than it could be; D being poor, last minute, hardly worth the effort (10%). After students submit their portfolios, Dr. Hennelly responds to each portfolio with a short memo where he addresses each of these sections in a few sentences. He ends the memo by either agreeing or disagreeing with the student's grading recommendations and an explanation for the grade (Purves 163).

In Writing Portfolios: A Bridge from Teaching to Assessment, Sandra Murphy and Mary Ann Smith devote an entire chapter to grading and assessing high school writing portfolios. Within this chapter, Murphy and Smith look at statewide assessments such as those completed by teachers in Vermont, departmental rubrics such as those at Mt. Vernon High School in Virginia, and individual teachers such as Margie Krest in Colorado.

Since Vermont's purpose is to compare students from one school to the next, their rubric is very general. Classroom teachers are given a series of questions about their students' individual portfolios and answer by checking "rarely," "sometimes," "frequently," or "extensively." Teachers are asked the following questions:

- Is the writer's purpose clear?
- Does the use of specific detail add to clarity?
- Does the writing exhibit a sense of personal expression, voice or effective tone?
- Does the final draft exhibit a sense of personal expression, voice or effective tone?
- Does the final draft exhibit appropriate usage, mechanics and grammar?

Next, teachers answer the following questions that are used to measure the school wide program:

- Is there progress from earliest dated works to most recently dated works?
- Is there sufficient variety to challenge all students and to allow each student an opportunity for success?
- Is there evidence of teacher/peer response to the student's drafts, and is there opportunity for the student to revise?

After teachers assess their own students' portfolios, they take a sample of their school portfolios to a regional meeting where these portfolios are rescored to check reliability, and then an even

smaller number of papers are taken to a state scoring session. Murphy and Smith note that for students to receive meaningful feedback, teachers in Vermont must go beyond the state assessments using methods that meet the needs of their students within their own classrooms (69-70).

The English department at Mt. Vernon High School in Virginia has developed a rubric that they use with each grade level to assess the final portfolio. The rubric allows teachers to assign a numeric value of four (most of the time) to a one (none of the time) to a series of questions divided into five categories. The first category, labeled “Versatility and Adaptability” asks, “Is there a variety of forms? Is there a variety of voices and purposes? Are there writings for a variety of audiences?” The second category labeled “Completeness” asks, “Is there a sustained focus? Is there coherence? Is there appropriate balance of specificity and generality? Do the forms (letters, essays, research papers, etc.) have appropriate characteristics?” The category labeled “Carefulness” simply asks, “Is there carefulness in grammar and mechanics?” For “Beauty and Power” teachers must decide, “Is the wording precise? Powerful? Beautiful? Is there a natural and effective voice? Are the arguments or images moving?” The last category, “Responsibility” questions, “Does the student select topics and forms? Does the student make choices based on comments of readers? Does the student revise? Does the student edit?” (Murphy and Smith 67-68).

Some teachers feel that they must grade individual pieces of writing and the final portfolio as well. For those teachers, Murphy and Smith offer Margie Krest’s Colorado high school class as possible model to follow. Krest grades the individual essays based on specific criteria that change with each piece of writing. She grades the final portfolio based on the amount of “revision, risk taking, and changing they did on all their papers” (71).

However, Edward White, in “The Scoring of Writing Portfolios: Phase 2” suggests that grading the portfolio as a whole can be problematic. Due to the “high cost of scoring, uncertainty about the authorship of the contents, low reliability among raters,” a better approach would be to assess the student’s ability to reflect upon his or her writing, an approach that he claims is more in line with the theory behind portfolios (582). White proposes that the faculty and/or students create goals for their writing, and write reflective letters at the end of the semester noting how they have or have not met the stated goals. To score well on the portfolio, students must demonstrate that they have met the class goals and use the individual papers as evidence. White sums up the advantages of this approach by claiming, “It reinforces the entire point of portfolios by making the assessor of first resort the student submitting the portfolio, who, in the reflective letter, performs the self-assessment that is the true goal of all academic assessment” (594). White’s method successfully links reflection and portfolios in classrooms where deferred grading is not a real option.

Benefits of a Portfolio Based Class

Teachers who use portfolios often cite its connection with the process movement. Primarily, students have more freedom to take risks and experiment with their writing than they do with traditional, isolated assignments. A student can draft a piece of writing and then distance herself from it before deciding if she wants to revise it (Gold 29-30). Peter Elbow claims that portfolios allow students to complete more “exploratory” writing, have deeper discussions with teachers and peers about their work, get feedback on multiple drafts, and complete substantive revisions (Elbow, “Foreword” xv).

Theorists also claim that students who use portfolios are more likely to take responsibility for their own learning. Johnson and Rose point out that in successful portfolio based classrooms

students help set the goals, create plans to reach them, and document their progression toward these goals (11). They go on to state that adults who think critically must make wise choices and understand the criteria that they use to reach their decisions. Johnson and Rose believe that schools must provide opportunities for students to make these types of decisions at all grade levels and prepare themselves for the critical decision making skills they will need as adults (78).

Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon also cite student decision making as a benefit of portfolio production. They claim that students have to make choices when writing an individual piece, but they also have to choose among pieces when it is time to assemble the portfolio. This “encourages writers to make conscious, deliberate choices regarding the quality of their writing” (5).

Portfolios can bring more equity into a classroom where students enter with varying abilities. For example, portfolios can be especially beneficial for students such as English language learners who struggle in traditional literature classes. Giving these students the opportunity to take advantage of peer evaluation and revise their original works helps eliminate many of the grammatical and mechanical mistakes that account for low grades on single draft assignments (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 112). The delayed grading of portfolios also gives students time to acquire the knowledge and skills that they may lack when they enter a high school English classroom (Johnson and Rose 205).

Portfolio use can also change the nature of the teacher student relationship. William Condon, Peter Elbow, Pat Belanoff, Nancy Johnson, Leonie Rose, Irwin Weiser, Sandra Murphy, and Mary Ann Smith all discuss the transition of the teacher as “examiner” or “evaluator” role³ to the role of demonstrator, collaborator, facilitator, or coach in a portfolio classroom. However, most of these theorists are basing this transition on the assumption that

grading of portfolios is delayed until the final product is complete. For example, Elbow and Belanoff note that teachers in freshmen composition tended to have a better relationship with their students when they switched to portfolios, but the portfolios, which were not graded until the end of the semester, formed a majority of the student's semester grade (Elbow and Belanoff, "State" 15). Likewise, Irwin Weiser describes portfolios used in Purdue University developmental writing courses. The portfolio, which is graded at the end of the semester, accounts for 70% of a student's grade. Weiser says that the portfolios allow students to "put aside...the paralyzing effect of grades and concentrate instead on improving their writing" (93). The teacher is able to separate his role as a teacher from that of evaluator. It is unclear if this role change would occur in a class where teachers are not allowed to defer grading until the portfolio is complete.⁴

When a school decides to create portfolio-based classrooms, teachers often emerge from their isolated classrooms and make departmental curriculum decisions. When Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida began using portfolios across the curriculum, the entire faculty began to discuss theories of learning that were previously discussed within individual departments, if at all. This school wide project also forces teachers to learn how writing expectations vary in different disciplines (Hamp-Lyons and Condon 95-99). Belanoff and Elbow point out that the portfolio keeps teachers from depending upon the weekly papers, and teachers write better comments on those student papers that they do assess because they do not feel like they have to justify a grade (Belanoff and Elbow 25).

The key component to many of these benefits seems to be student reflection. While some theorists argue that reflection is a benefit or byproduct of portfolios, some go so far as to claim that a portfolio does not even qualify as a portfolio if it does not contain student reflection

(Hamp-Lyons, Condon, Yancey, Mary Perry). Hamp-Lyons and Condon claim that reflection is the “point at which a collection of texts begin to take on life and shape” (119). Peter Elbow, in his foreward to Portfolios: Process and Product, pronounces that portfolios are the great “vehicles” for metacognitive awareness (xxiii) . In Portfolios: Clarifying, Constructing, and Enhancing, Johnson and Rose claim that portfolios must contain evidence of self-reflection. According to their model, students self-evaluate by several methods including writing goal statements and statements that detail what the student has learned by creating the portfolio (7). Catharine Lucas argues that “reflective evaluation” is essential to a writer’s growth and confidence (1-2). Likewise, Roberta Camp notes that portfolios promote learning, and reflection is essential to learning (62). Brian Huot and Michael Williamson liken this reflection to a “journey” whereby the student begins to understand herself as a writer (54). Lastly, Sandra Murphy and Mary Ann Smith feel so strongly about reflection that they devote an entire section of Writing Portfolios: A Bridge from Teaching to Assessment to reflection in student portfolios (38-45). They define reflection as the writer’s ability to evaluate his or her own writing and use Thomas L. Hilger’s analogy of the ability to self-evaluate as a “cornerstone” upon which a students composing skills rest (38). Murphy and Smith suggest that students can help learn reflection by questioning each other in peer response sessions, and they offer a list of questions to help guide these students. They also present lists of questions to guide students through reflection of a single piece of writing as well as an additional list that guides reflection on the portfolio as a whole. Since these theorists feel so strongly about reflection, I have included an additional chapter that looks at student reflection in more detail.

Portfolio Concerns

Catharine Lucas, Peter Elbow, Patricia Belanoff and others are concerned that teachers will carelessly adopt portfolios as a classroom strategy without taking the time to fully research the issue. Lucas worries that large scale external testing companies will try to use portfolios and thus reduce the portfolio's effectiveness within an individual teacher's classroom (5). When portfolios are used to compare one school to another, the writing assignments are reduced and standardized to simplify the data, and teachers begin to let these portfolios "dictate rather than reflect curriculum" (Lucas 8).

Equity and fairness also become an issue when the portfolio becomes high stakes. In other words, if the portfolio grade is a major factor in the student's average or can determine whether or not students pass or fail a course, teachers need to address issues of bias that may influence grading decisions. Johnson and Rose suggest that portfolio entries must be "judged in a fair, consistent, non-arbitrary, non-prejudicial way" (202). They maintain that teachers should have clear criteria and sample responses for each level of performance to justify the portfolio grade. Irwin Weiser of Purdue also cautions that if teachers abandon individual grades on essays, they must give specific comments so that students know what they have to do to improve (99). Johnson and Rose remind educators that parents have a right to know how students will be evaluated and must be involved in this non-traditional method of grading (202). Likewise, Susan Black cautions that a portfolio program without a clear purpose will cause communication problems among teachers, students, parents, and administrators (48).

Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon point out that while portfolio programs can strengthen a program with a sound theoretical base, it can also reveal weaknesses in struggling programs. When these weaknesses become evident, teachers tend to want to fix them all at once

creating frustration within the department (63-64). These same frustrations and outright resistance may occur when teachers are forced to adopt portfolio methods.

In an article about electronic portfolios, Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe point out additional concerns. They note that portfolios can turn into record keeping devices. If a student completes a certain number of papers and keeps errors to a minimum, then they receive a predetermined grade. Likewise, since technology is seen as an innovative device, it may mask problems inherent in schooling, specifically those of “surveillance, competition, outdated assessment methods, and the continued oppression of women and students from underrepresented groups in our culture” (318). They also worry that since teachers have full access to student portfolios, they may use student work without their permission.

While better student-teacher relationships are often cited as a benefit for portfolios, this “teacher as coach” role can also lead to problems. For example, Yancey questions whether or not students will be honest and admit that they waited until the last minute to write a particular assignment. Teachers have to decide before they implement reflective portfolios if they truly want to know about their students’ writing processes. Irwin Weiser notes that students are used to traditional grades on essays, and some, needing the security the grade provides, will resist the change to delayed grading (99).

Conclusions

As these “concerns” bear out, there are inherent problems with any system of writing instruction, and portfolios are not immune to problems. However, I think the benefits outweigh the problems, and teachers who have been properly educated about portfolios can minimize many of these negative aspects. When it comes to benefits, portfolios might help address the problems teachers at North Oconee High School (NOHS) have been facing with mixed ability

level English/literature classes. Since we have students who can barely write complete sentences in classes with relatively competent writers, portfolios seem to be an effective approach to differentiating our approach to writing and meeting the needs of a diverse student population. Likewise, portfolios might help end the cycle of “write, grade, trash” that we have been experiencing with students. The renewed emphasis that a portfolio program would place on “process” as well as the “reflective” components might encourage students to make connections from one writing assignment to the next. Since reflection is so critical to the success of portfolios, I have followed this discussion with a closer look at reflection and suggested reflective journals as an optional component of our portfolio program.

CHAPTER 2

REFLECTION AND STUDENT WRITING

In “Behind the Scenes: Portfolios in a Classroom Learning Community,” Mary Ann Smith argues that in order to create a successful portfolio a student must be a “thoughtful observer and critic of her work” (158). Most teachers that I know are keenly aware of what works in their own classrooms and what does not. Each semester we look over what has transpired in our classes and begin to institute any necessary changes for the next time we teach the class.

While this “reflection” may be second nature to teachers, many students do not naturally reflect upon their work. Students often view each test, project, or writing assignment as the end of a unit and feel no need to reflect upon that material once it is “complete.” Just this past year, I had a student ask me why were discussing the end of Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities if we were not going to have a test over it. This feeling of finality is especially evident in students’ perceptions of essays. At least with subjective material, students may need to refer back to it for final exams or future courses. But student writing seems disposable. And while portfolios may help the “read, write, trash” problem, they run the risk of becoming just as disposable if teachers do not guide students in reflective practices.

Since reflection is so critical to the portfolio process, I thought it would be helpful to devote a chapter of this study to the process that has become known as reflection. This study of reflection will begin with John Dewey in 1910, review how reflection developed during the process movement of the 1970s and 1980s, and conclude with Kathleen Blake Yancey's

contribution in the late 1990s. Based on these theorists' discussions, I will propose a practical tool to implement reflection in the modern writing classroom, reflective journals. Actively using these journals would prevent student portfolios from turning into a folder to store major essays.

Before I go any further, I feel the need to define the elusive term “reflection.” John Dewey initiated the discussion about reflection in his 1910 book titled, How We Think. He claimed that reflective thought is the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (6). In his 1938 book, Experience and Education, Dewey clarifies this definition when he notes that reflective thinking entails stepping back from an event and using previous knowledge and experience to make sense of the new experience. While Dewey’s observations made a huge impact on education, it was not until the 1970s that educational theorists discussed reflection in terms of students, and, at the time, they usually referred to reflection as student “self-evaluation.”

While Kathleen Blake Yancey cites Sharon Pianko as one of the earliest to encourage reflection with students, I would contend that Richard Beach argued for its necessity three years earlier, in his article, “Self-Evaluation of Extensive Revisers and Nonrevisers.” Beach uses the term “self-evaluation” instead of reflection, but the term reflection could easily be substituted.

Many students have difficulty in evaluating their own writing, difficulty in describing and judging strengths and weaknesses of a draft, defining and predicting necessary changes for a subsequent draft, and judging the worth of those changes [...]. Because students learn to become dependent on the teacher’s evaluation and because they are rarely given assistance in formal, systematic self-

evaluation, many students do not develop the ability to critically evaluate their own writing. (160)

The bulk of Beach's article focuses on his study of the revising habits of 26 pre-service English teachers, but his conclusions lead him right back to the call for more self-evaluation, or "students' recorded thinking about their writing," in the classroom (164).

Sharon Pianko actually uses a much more narrow definition of reflection than Beach. Pianko, after observing seventeen college freshman writers compose an essay and subsequently interviewing these writers, concludes that, "the ability to reflect on what is being written seems to be the essence of the difference between able and not so able writers from their initial writing experience onward" (277). To Pianko, reflection consists of the "pauses" and "rescanning" that occurs during the writing process.

A year later, Sondra Perl continues this discussion in "Understanding Composing," but she argues that these "recursive" activities such as pausing and scanning vary from writer to writer and from one topic to the next. She claims that skilled writers rely on inner reflections to guide them through the composing process, and unskilled writers can be taught to use these reflections (366).

Arguments for Reflective Writing: Self-Efficacy and Self-Evaluation

Composition theorists and researchers agree upon the necessity of reflection for a variety of reasons. One of the more convincing arguments for the use of reflective writing can be found in an article by Patricia McCarthy, Scott Meier, and Regina Rinderer. These authors claim that reflective writing improves self-efficacy in students. McCarthy et al. describe learning theorist Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory, upon which they base their argument.

He suggests that individuals will perform a task successfully if they know what behaviors will produce desired outcomes *and* if they evaluate themselves as capable of performing the necessary behaviors. In this way, a student might know what is expected in an effective piece of writing and might even know the steps necessary to produce such a piece. But if the person lacks the belief that he or she can achieve the desired outcome, then effective behavior will likely not result.

(466)

Bandura contends that self-evaluation and performance are cyclical. When students perform better, their belief in their own abilities increases, and vice-versa. McCarthy et al. take this one step further by arguing that students with weak efficacy expectations may not attempt certain tasks because they do not feel themselves capable. This theory would explain the basic writer who simply refuses to attempt a writing assignment rather than suffering through the creation of another substandard paper. McCarthy et al. tested Bandura's theory by assessing the writing of 137 freshmen. They found that the "evaluation of one's writing abilities is connected with the quality of one's written products" (469). In other words, students with low self-efficacy get caught up in a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts; they refuse to attempt complex rhetorical strategies because they don't feel capable of adequately completing the task. These researchers conclude that "self-evaluation" needs to be expanded to self-reflection. Students need to evaluate their own writing abilities as well as their written products (470).

Susan Miller takes up Beach's topic of "self-evaluation" in "How Writers Evaluate Their Own Writing." She interviews teachers, professional writers, undergraduate and graduate students to learn more about self-evaluation techniques and concludes that self-evaluation is critical if students are to look toward writing as a way to solve problems (182). She argues that

self-evaluation after writing is just as important as planning at the outset. She goes on to note that simply marking errors on a paper rather than looking at its quality may actually hinder the transference of knowledge from one learning experience to others. She claims that writing becomes developmental only when followed with self-evaluations (182). Miller concludes her article by claiming, “self-evaluation—experiencing the quality of one’s writing in relation to subjective standards—is crucial to the development of an individual’s perception of writing as an important and ‘natural’ way to investigate problems and represent ideas” (182). Miller’s observations are especially pertinent when it comes to portfolios. After all, a goal for any portfolio program should include transference of knowledge from one piece of writing to the next.

Acknowledging Multiple Processes

While reflective writing may have been encouraged during the height of the process movement, this type of writing also addresses post-process concerns because it challenges the existence of one single process and addresses the individual needs of students. In “Understanding Composing,” written in 1980, Sondra Perl challenges the linear model of writing and focuses on the recursiveness in student writing (366). Around the same time, Nancy Sommers argues that revision (or re-vision) occurs throughout the writing process, not just at the end (43-44). Similarly, Linda Flower and John Hayes replace the traditional model of “plan, write, revise” with “planning, translating, and reviewing.” They also provide a new process model that demonstrates the endless number of directions that a writer can follow in any given writing situation (277-278). But it is Jack Selzer, in his 1984 article “Exploring Options in Composing,” who denies the existence of a single, ideal composing style most convincingly. In the following passage, he explains how textbooks contribute to this misconception.

Nearly every “process-based” text states that writing ought to proceed through stages of prewriting, writing, and revising; even if a particular text is thoughtful enough to acknowledge that those stages are recursive, it will fail to note that good writers might legitimately skip or truncate one of those stages. The books sometimes acknowledge that differences in habits of composing exist *among* writers, but never within a single writer who is confronted with different writing tasks [...]. Nowhere does the [text] book encourage flexibility in composing habits or direct students to develop several composing styles to serve the variable writing situations they face. (279)

Selzer challenges his reader to consider the different number of composing styles that he or she uses in different writing situations. For example, he points out the different approach taken by an author when writing a letter to a friend rather than a letter to the editor, or a memo to one’s employees rather than a memo to one’s boss. Selzer argues that teachers must resist imposing a strict, clear-cut process on every writing situation (281). Instead, he suggests that teachers should demonstrate a wide range of composing processes and students should keep a log or journal wherein they record their own, individual writing behaviors (283). The student portfolio could easily provide the framework for this log or journal.

Reflection According to Kathleen Blake Yancey

In 1998, Kathleen Blake Yancey, building on the work of Donald Schon, devoted an entire book to the subject in Reflection in the Writing Classroom. Yancey defines reflection for herself as “1) the process by which we know what we have accomplished and by which we articulate accomplishment and 2) the products of those processes (e.g., as in, ‘a reflection’)” (6).

In theory, the “reflection” that I am promoting in this chapter is very similar to the one defined by Yancey, with one notable exception. I would change Yancey’s first point to read, “(1) the process by which we know what we have accomplished *or not accomplished* and by which we articulate accomplishment *or lack thereof*.” While this addition may seem to be a minor change (without reading Yancey’s book, one might assume she would agree with the addition of the negation), it actually points to a major theoretical difference between my views and Yancey’s.

Yancey borrows Peter Elbow’s ideas of “believing” and “doubting.” Elbow describes “believing” as “listening, affirming, entering in, trying to experience more fully, and restating—understanding ideas from the inside” (Yancey, *Reflection* xxii). “Doubting,” on the other hand, is “criticizing, debating, arguing, and trying to extricate oneself from any personal involvement with ideas through using logic” (Yancey, *Reflection* xxii). While Yancey, in her “Talk to” essays, asks students to expand on two dichotomous statements in their reflections, (*believe* that this is the best paper you’ve ever written and then to *doubt* that this text is any good at all) she reiterates Elbow’s concerns that the use of these contrary statements will reinforce the binaries that anti-foundationalists try to eliminate. Yancey justifies these reservations by claiming that a reflective activity such as her “Talk-to” helps students “move beyond dualism and toward a more complex, sophisticated view of their own texts” (Yancey, *Reflection* 33). I agree with Yancey’s goals and claims, but I think that teachers would shortchange their students if they emphasize accomplishments without acknowledging the shortcomings. As composition teachers we need to show our students that there are no perfect papers. We can avoid the binaries (this paper is either “good” or “bad”) by encouraging our students to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses

within the paper itself and measure those strengths and weaknesses against previous papers that they have written.

In practice, my view of a reflective writing classroom looks very similar to the one proposed by Yancey. She proposes the use of what Jeff Sommers has named Writer's Memos. After completing a piece of writing, students write about the process that led them to the creation of a final draft. Yancey acknowledges the limitations of these Memos when she writes, "The principle here seems obvious, but it bears articulation: *We cannot reflect upon what we do not know*" (Yancey, *Reflection* 27). She goes on to point out that some students do not know their own processes and are uncomfortable discussing them. I would argue after reading Susan Miller's work that these feelings of unease will decrease as students write more Memos. Anytime we ask our students to try something new we should expect a little anxiety, especially when we are asking them to focus on something as personal as their own writing styles. If students don't *know* their own processes as Yancey claims, then they need the Memos even more. Until they know their own processes, they cannot improve upon them.

Reflective Journals

While each of the theorists discussed earlier has a unique concept of reflection, the student reflection that I am encouraging would take the form of reflective journals. Reflective journals should improve students' self-confidence as writers and encourage the transfer of knowledge from one writing situation to the next. I will expand upon these results in a moment, but first, I feel the need to clarify exactly what a reflective journal would look like.

When a student is given a writing assignment, he or she would begin by writing in his or her journal about the assignment. This journal exercise should give students a chance to think about the assignment in terms of their own experience. They might think about their prior

knowledge of the subject matter or their own familiarity with the particular mode of writing that they have been assigned. Students may set their own goals for the writing assignment and address any questions they might have about the topic. I am going to resist the temptation to give a generic journal prompt because the journal content should change with each and every writing assignment. On the other hand, the pre-writing journal entry should be more than an exercise in freewriting. The teacher should guide the students in shaping the reflection based on the topic, audience, form, and the student's individual writing level. For example, a student's pre-writing journal entry for a letter to the editor would look very different from a journal entry for a literary essay.

A teacher who has the time may encourage a mid-draft journal entry, especially if students have problems during the drafting phase and need assistance. However, Susan Miller cautions against forcing students to reflect while they are still composing. She warns that premature evaluation of one's writing may interfere with the writing process. Once the writer looks at and reflects on the work as a whole, he or she may find it impossible to alter or finish the writing (181). For this reason, I would leave the mid-draft journal entry as an option for students to exercise at their own will.

I would, however, require a post-writing journal entry to be completed. This crucial step encourages students to look back at the writing they have just completed and judge its effectiveness for themselves. Again, the teacher may provide some guiding questions for the reflection, but each writing assignment will warrant its own set of questions. As students become more familiar with reflective writing, they may not need the prompts or questions. Students need to think not only about the quality of the finished product, but also about the steps they took toward its completion. They need to decide which techniques worked well and which did not.

This reflection about their processes will help guide them when they are faced with a similar writing assignment in the future. Likewise, these reflections could help guide a final reflection of their writing growth for the semester which should be a part of their writing portfolio.

Benefits of a Reflective Journal

Reflective journals would allow transfer of knowledge from one writing situation to the next. As a teacher, I found it so frustrating to see students repeat the same mistakes they made in an earlier paper. Then I returned to graduate school, and I understood why this happens so often. In my high school and undergraduate days I did not have to worry about writing. I knew the “big errors” and knew how to avoid them. My writing was not perfect, but it was good enough to warrant A's and B's, which were good enough for me. I always read my teacher's comments, but I certainly did not think about them when I started a new paper. To me, each assignment was like a clean slate. I had the same “terminal” approach to writing that I now find in my students. Then I entered graduate school where writing became a conscious struggle to conform to a higher standard. I learned that I had to review previous papers and learn from my mistakes. Why can't we teach our students this valuable skill in high school instead of waiting for college failures?

Reflective journals would also satisfy the individual needs of students. The traditional method of grading student papers does little to challenge a grammatically correct writer. Even a progressive teacher with a defined rubric would have difficulty encouraging development in a good writer. Janet Emig encountered this phenomenon with Lynn, the student who had mastered the art of writing just enough to get a good grade without having to address complex issues (87-88). Through reflective journals, teachers can raise expectations for talented writers and encourage them to employ challenging rhetorical strategies. In the same respect, reflective journals allow teachers to dialogue with basic writers without branding them as writing failures.

Teachers who combine these journals with the writing portfolio should be able to see easily how much a student has or has not progressed during the class.

Reflection and Resistance

Upon first attempts, reflective journals are uncomfortable for both teachers and students. As a student teacher, my supervising professor required that I keep a reflective journal. At first, I was nervous. In writing about my successes and failures, I opened myself up for critique. I was worried that my supervising teacher would realize that sometimes I really didn't know what I was doing. But once he started writing back to me, I began to be more comfortable with the process. He responded positively to my journal entries and gave helpful suggestions when I expressed difficulty. More than likely, high school students will be uncomfortable with this process initially. Of the student writers and professional writers that Susan Miller interviewed in her 1982 study, 70% did not want to evaluate themselves at first (178). Teachers must respond in support of their students' reflections in order to increase their comfort level with the journals.

Conclusions

Reflective journals provide one strategy to manage the student reflection process in a classroom. Regardless of which strategy teachers employ, they must encourage students to think about their writing processes in regards to individual papers as well as their growth and progress as writers from one paper to the next. In the past, I have had students write reflective letters about their writing, and I am always amazed at the level of insight that some students have about their own writing once they are given the opportunity to be an advocate for themselves. I have had students argue that the particular writing assignment that I created did not allow them to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject and suggest alternative assignments for the future. In this kind of reflective environment, not only is the student learning about her writing, but she is

also shaping the curriculum for the class. And while reflective writing could provide a manageable strategy for maintaining portfolios, they could also be used in and of themselves to help students grow as writers and to allow students to visualize that growth as it is occurring.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY: PEACHTREE RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

Peachtree Ridge, located in Suwanee, Georgia, is a relatively new school. It opened in August of 2003 with 1900 students. Today, Peachtree Ridge has more than 3100 students and has 24 language arts teachers. When the school opened, the language arts teachers met to discuss writing instruction and decided to use portfolios in all language arts classes. The department still uses portfolios, and the department head agreed to provide an overview of how the staff at Peachtree Ridge uses portfolios in the classroom. This study will begin with the Peachtree Ridge English department's shared beliefs and their decision to implement portfolios. An explanation of the structure or overall framework of the portfolio will be given as well as specific documents that students complete which become part of the portfolios. Folder reviews, peer review, assessment, and collaboration will also be discussed. Lastly, it will address storage issues and other challenges that Peachtree Ridge teachers face when using portfolios. By reading this chapter, teachers at North Oconee High School can see how one school has incorporated the use of portfolios into each of their classes. While we may not want to follow this model in its entirety, it may provide components that we would like to use as well.

Why Portfolios?

When Peachtree Ridge was under construction, the teachers who would make up the new English department met and discussed how to best teach writing at their new school. These teachers, like many of the theorists cited in earlier chapters, believed very strongly that reflection is essential for students to improve their writing. They also believed in teaching the process of

writing, but they also realized that students would only take advantage of the full writing process if they were working toward some end product or goal. These teachers were bound by Gwinnett County's curriculum of "Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS)." According to the county website, AKS state what a child in each class and grade level should be learning each year. This group of teachers sat down to look at the AKS related to writing and what they could do to meet the AKS using the best practices of writing. During these early discussions, the teachers decided that portfolios were both in line with their beliefs as a department and would also aid them in teaching the AKS for writing. They wanted a tool that they could use to improve writing instruction within the classroom but also serve as a record of students' accomplishments over four years in high school.

The Original Plan/Structure

When the teachers at Peachtree Ridge laid out their plans for portfolios, they decided to set the minimum standards. Students would submit three formal pieces of writing per academic class and select one additional "wild card" piece to include in the year's collection. For example, in Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, students have to submit a personal narrative, a literary analysis, a comparison or contrast piece, and their wild card. According to the department head, these founding teachers intended to have students writing eight to ten major pieces of writing each semester. However, once the program got underway, they realized that they simply did not have enough time to complete that many formal writing assignments. They believed and still work under the assumption that students should be reading, writing, listening, and speaking every day in class. They realized that this belief infused a great deal of informal writing into the curriculum and limited the amount of time to devote to formal essays.

The Current Program

Currently, portfolios at Peachtree Ridge open with a table of contents. This table of contents lists the required pieces of writing for each grade level and blank lines for students to insert the titles of their individual pieces. They also record the grade that they earned as well as the date the writing was completed. Each semester these “cover sheets” travel with the portfolio to the next year’s English teacher.

A “Reflective Cover Sheet” should also accompany each individual piece of writing submitted as part of the portfolio. The original group of teachers designed the “Reflective Cover Sheets” because they wanted students to do more than place writing in a folder and forget about it. They thought it would be beneficial for students to spend some time reading the comments that teachers made as well as reflecting upon their own processes that went into that particular piece of writing. The cover sheet begins with the title of the piece, grade level, and type of writing (“timed writing” or “process piece”). Students must also circle the purpose(s) for that piece of writing. Options include: inform, describe, narrate events/tell a story, persuade, record thoughts, present research, and analyze literature. They must also list the intended audience and answer the following five specific questions.

1. When I look back at this piece of writing, I think about...
2. The strength(s) in this piece of writing is/are...
3. The weakest aspect(s) of this piece is/are...
4. In my next piece, I want to work on...
5. This piece has helped me realize that I need to improve/work on/focus on...

When she was discussing the “Reflective Cover Sheet,” the department head noted that answers to questions four and five are usually not consistent with the founding teachers’ intentions. In

answering question four, they wanted students to set a very specific goal while question five was meant to target a larger, more general writing goal. She also noted that some teachers are more consistent with having students complete the cover sheets than others.

At the end of each semester students complete a “Formal Portfolio End-of-Term Self Evaluation” which encourages them to look at all of the writings they have completed that term. Students are asked to discuss their favorite piece of writing and give specific reasons to justify their answer. They are also asked which piece best demonstrates their skills as a writer, and again, they are asked to give specific reasons. They list three overall strengths of their writing as well as three weaknesses. The final four questions relate to the “process” of writing. They are asked to list the stage that they find the easiest or most productive, the most difficult or challenging, and the stage that they need to spend more time on. Lastly, they are asked (in future writings) what they need to do differently in the writing process. This final reflection helps serve two purposes. It allows students to practice evaluating their own writing, and it gives the student’s next teacher a brief glimpse of what the writer considers to be his or her own strengths and weaknesses. These reflective pieces, portfolio theorists would argue, are what keeps the portfolio from becoming simply a place to store student papers.

Folder Reviews and Peer Reviews

Teachers at Peachtree Ridge are asked to conduct folder reviews before or after school. These reviews are basically writing conferences where a student can discuss his or her writing individually with the teacher. Either the teacher or the student can initiate the conferences, and while some teachers conduct two or three of these per student each term, others find it difficult to complete one. The department head claims that those teachers who “buy into” that aspect of the program find the time to do the reviews. Apparently the folder review was added after the initial

program was established, and some teachers do not see it as an essential part of the portfolio process.

Peer review is not a mandatory part of the portfolio process at Peachtree Ridge because so many teachers, especially new teachers, find it difficult to manage. Often, teachers give students papers to peer review without specific review instructions, and inevitably, the reviewer will say, “It’s great,” without offering any substantive comments. To avoid this, teachers at Peachtree Ridge have begun to give students the rubrics or scoring guides for essays and encouraging them to score each other’s essays. The peer review grade may not be the student’s final grade on the paper, but it helps them to think about the reasoning behind the score. Teachers at Peachtree Ridge have also been successful with “whole class” peer reviews. For example, if two teachers have classes completing research papers at the same time, the classes will swap papers and review each other’s work. Some of these teachers give students grades for peer review based on the quality of the review. Teachers who are most effective with peer review take the time to train students in how to complete a peer review.

Assessing the Portfolio

Peachtree Ridge does not have specific guidelines when it comes to assessing the portfolio. They do encourage teachers to have students complete a “self-diagnosis” after they discuss specific writing strategies. For example, one teacher had students read an article about style and then analyze the writing in their portfolio to see whether or not their writing met the style standards discussed in the article. Students had to quote specific lines from their own essays to support their answers.

When it comes to assessing the portfolio, most teachers do not grade it as a whole; instead, they grade the individual pieces. The school does have guidelines on grades where they

designate specific percentages for major grades and daily grades. Most teachers grade the individual pieces of writing as major grades or daily grades if the writings were drafts. Some teachers do grade the “End-of-Term Self Evaluation” forms, and while there is not a right or wrong answer, many look for the quality and depth of reflection. In addition, some teachers have students write a reflective essay about their writing. In these essays, students look back through their writing for the semester and try to draw conclusions about themselves as writers based on these pieces.

While the teachers at Peachtree Ridge do not spend a great deal of time collaboratively scoring essays, they do take time to create common rubrics and ensure that members of the faculty are emphasizing the same things across a grade level. Like NOHS, they have started a scope and sequence where they state which aspects of grammar, usage, and punctuation should be mastered at each grade level. They recognize that these skills are developmental, but they also believe that students need boundaries and clear expectations for their writing. They want students to realize that the goal for writing is clear communication, and frequent errors do stand in the way of clear communication.

The Logistics

One reservation that many teachers have about portfolios is the physical aspect of retaining and storing student writing. Some schools have started using electronic portfolios to ease these storage needs, but some schools do not have the electronic storage space to retain a large collection of student essays or the technological capabilities to move to electronic or “e-portfolios.” Peachtree Ridge still uses traditional file folders and paper copies of essays for their portfolios. Teachers store their students’ current portfolios in banker’s boxes or crates housed in their own classrooms. At the beginning of the next year, the teacher makes a list of those

teachers who taught the previous grade level. Students list their names under their previous teacher's. The current teacher cuts the lists into strips and places them in the previous teacher's box. Once the previous teacher receives all of his or her slips, the files are distributed to the current teachers.

To make sure that portfolios do not get lost, students are not allowed to take them home. When teachers give back a piece of writing, the student looks over it and completes the "Reflective Cover Sheet" and then places it directly into their portfolio. Teachers inform parents and students at the beginning of the year that these essays are tools to use in the classroom and will not be sent home. On the other hand, the portfolios remain available for students to use in class and parents to peruse at parent-teacher conferences.

Challenges

While Gwinnett County does not require portfolios, the most recent county curriculum director heavily advocated for portfolios. Some schools within the county use them, but others do not. Peachtree Ridge's department head believes that teachers have to be committed to the process and have to be willing to sacrifice classroom time to devote to the portfolios. Teachers have to believe in the benefits of portfolios and be organized in order for them to work well.

She also noted difficulties within her own school, especially when dealing with honors, AP, or gifted students. These students do not like process writing, and they fight the pre-writing and revision aspects. Since the AP test reinforces "quick" writing, these students have a hard time valuing the lengthier process pieces.

A Program in Transition...Lessons for North Oconee High School

Peachtree Ridge is in the process of revising their portfolio program. The teachers still believe in the use of portfolios, but they recognize the need to revisit the specific layout of the

program. Many teachers have joined the staff since the school opened, and they want the program to continue to be teacher driven and directed. If teachers who are new to the school feel like they can have input into the specifics of the program, they will be more likely to follow the guidelines set by the department and fully implement them in their own classroom. If teachers are encouraging students to be reflective about their own writing, then it stands to reason that teachers should also be equally reflective in their teaching of writing.

As a department, what can we at North Oconee High School learn from Peachtree Ridge? First, I think we are wise in creating our own program and not waiting for the county to create a program for us. One of the main reasons teachers at Peachtree Ridge seem to embrace their portfolio program is because they were given a voice in its creation. We can also learn from their efforts to revise the program. We should be consistently revisiting whatever program we put into place and be open to suggestions for change. In addition, our county is growing rapidly, and changes in our student population may necessitate changes to our portfolio program.

I also think NOHS would be wise to develop easy to use “reflection” tools like those used at Peachtree Ridge. While some teachers, like myself, would be more comfortable creating their own individual pre and post-writing assignments, other teachers may not have the time. Rather than have reflection be neglected in the portfolio process, I would rather see a list of general questions that students could use to reflect upon their writing experiences.

Lastly, I think that we could use Peachtree Ridge’s table of contents for their portfolios as a model for our own. It is a simple, easy to read document that helps students and teachers keep track of papers placed into the portfolios. In addition, it would allow students not only to see the papers required for the course they are taking, but also allow them to see the scope and sequence of writing for their four years of high school. After all, the point of the portfolio is to encourage

students to learn more about their own writing styles and help them develop as writers. Peachtree Ridge has made communication of their writing goals a priority; I think NOHS would be wise to articulate our writing goals to students, parents, and administrators.

CHAPTER 4

A SURVEY OF ENGLISH TEACHERS

Cobb County, located northwest of Atlanta, Georgia, contains the second largest school system in the state of Georgia. With fifteen high schools, the school district is the largest employer in the county. Cobb County teachers were chosen for participation in this study for a couple of reasons. Two years ago, Oconee County hired Dr. Tom Dohrmann who was working for the Cobb County Board of Education to serve as Oconee's new superintendent of schools. When Dr. Dohrmann moved to Oconee, he brought a few people from Cobb County to work with him at the board office including our Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Since that time, it has become apparent that Cobb County is serving as a model for change in Oconee. Our school's leadership team visited Sprayberry High School, in particular, to try and emulate their academic standards in regards to our Advanced Placement program. When I began this research, our Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction suggested that I contact Cobb County because many of their high schools use portfolios in English classrooms.

Dr. Carolyn Waters, Cobb County's Curriculum Supervisor for 9-12 Language Arts and Reading, encouraged me to survey high school teachers and discern their attitudes regarding portfolios. Dr. Waters believes strongly in the use of portfolios, and she was equally interested in the results of the surveys. With the assistance of Dr. Waters, surveys were sent out to 15 Cobb County high schools. Eighty-four teachers responded to the surveys, and those teachers form the basis of this case study. (A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix A.)

The survey was designed to be quick and easy for teachers to complete. There were four demographic questions as well as three quantitative questions regarding teachers' knowledge about portfolios. In particular, the questions asked teachers how extensively they had read about portfolios, what inspired their readings, and which definition of a "portfolio" most closely resembled their own. Then the survey was divided into three sections. Teachers who have never used portfolios were to answer questions from part one, teachers who used them in the past but quit using them were to answer questions from part two, and teachers who currently use portfolios were to answer questions from part three. Of the 84 surveys returned, five had to be eliminated because teachers did not clearly mark answers in only one section. That left 79 surveys to analyze.

The four demographic questions answered by all participants revealed little significant findings. Teachers surveyed ranged in ages from 21 to 66 or older with every age group in between represented. As far as the number of years taught, the distribution seemed to be a little more unequal. Twelve respondents have been teaching one to three years, 12 have been teaching four to six years, and 12 have been teaching for 28 years or more. The remaining respondents were spread between seven and 27 years of teaching. Of the 79 respondents, only nine or 12% were males. This is not surprising since a majority of high school English teachers tend to be females. The only surprising results from the demographic data were related to educational degrees. Teachers were asked about the highest educational degree earned. Overall, 29% held only a bachelor's degree with 71% holding a master's degree or higher. But, once the surveys were separated by categories, most of those who held bachelor's degrees had never used portfolios. Of those who currently used portfolios, 75% held a master's degree or higher. Of those who used portfolios but quit, 71% held higher degrees, while those who had never used

portfolios only had 57% with higher degrees. At least among these teachers, those with the higher degrees were more likely to use or have used portfolios at one point in time.

Overall, these teachers seemed to be knowledgeable about portfolios. Only six of the respondents said that they had never read a book or article about portfolios. The majority had read between one and four books or articles about the subject. They reported reading these articles for graduate work, professional development, teacher education courses, and personal knowledge (in that order). Sixty-six percent agreed that a portfolio is a “selection of student writing for a purpose” while 34% believed that it is a “folder or file used to retain student writing.”

The remaining questions are different for each subcategoryⁱ and will be addressed separately starting with those who have never used portfolios. Interestingly enough, of those who have never used portfolios, 83% of respondents (19 out of 23) agree that portfolios are an excellent tool to assess student writing in the classroom. However, 74% (17 people) agree that they are too time intensive to use in the high school classroom. Seventy percent (16 people) do not feel that they have had adequate training/education to implement portfolios, but only 50% (11 people) would implement them even if they had the training/education. Only 43% (nine people) do not feel the need to change their current method of writing instruction. Overall, it seems that this group feels that portfolios are a good tool to assess student writing but also feels that they are too time intensive to implement. This concern for “time” is also an issue for the next group, those who used portfolios in the past but are not using them currently.

Teachers who used portfolios in the past were asked whether they were required to use portfolios by their school/department or if they chose to implement them on their own. A majority (17 out of 26) responded that they chose to implement them, and nine were required to

use them. I did not see any common characteristics among those who were required to use portfolios versus those who chose to implement them. Next, these teachers were asked whether they felt that they were adequately educated about the best way to organize (question two) or assess (question three) portfolios. The response was the same for both questions; 56% (14) felt adequately educated while 44% did not. When asked if the use of portfolios helped students become better writers, again, 56% responded in the affirmative. However, these were not the exact same 14 respondents who felt that they were adequately educated.

The most telling responses for this group were apparent in the last four questions. Eighty-eight percent (22) agree that portfolios allow students to have more control of their writing, and 92% (23) agree that portfolios encourage students to reflect on their own writing. Next, these teachers were asked to check the box that most closely matches their reason for discontinuing the use of portfolios. Since many checked more than one box, percentages cannot be used. However, the results were pretty obvious. Half of the respondents (13) said that portfolios took too much time to assess while 12 said they took too much time to complete. Only five said they found a better approach to writing instruction, and four said that their school/district quit requiring portfolios. When asked if they were likely to use portfolios again in the future, the responses were almost exactly divided among those that were “likely,” “undecided,” or “not likely” to use them again.

The last two questions were free response questions. First teachers were asked to describe the format that they used for portfolios. (For example, did you require a certain number of writings be included?) Twenty-two chose to answer this question, and the results varied. There were, however, a couple of common threads to responses. Twelve of the 22 mentioned including all writing assignments in the folder as opposed to only five who mentioned students selecting

essays to include. Several gave specific reasons for abandoning portfolios. Two reiterated the “time” factor,” and two others mentioned organizational difficulties. The second free response questions asked teachers to describe how they evaluated the portfolios. Overwhelmingly, teachers responded that they did not grade the portfolio as a whole but graded individual writing assignments with rubrics. Only four mentioned allowing students to choose selections for the portfolio and then grading only those that the students selected. Three chose this opportunity to voice concerns about assessing the portfolio. For example, one respondent stated, “That was the problem. I love the idea of portfolios, but found the assessment problematic.” Another said, “because of time and management of the process, we did not realize the potential of such a system.” Alternatively, many seemed to have positive experiences with portfolios, and three specifically mentioned the benefits of student reflection.

The last subcategory includes those teachers who are currently using portfolios. Of these 30 teachers, 18 said that their departments or schools require portfolios, and 12 chose to implement them on their own. When asked about the purpose of their portfolios, the top two responses (15 each) were to “assess a student’s writing ability during a semester” and “to have tangible evidence for parents or administrators of writing completed in the classroom.” The response, “to aid future teachers in assessing a student’s current writing ability,” had 13 responses, and the least cited reason with only five responses was to “aid students in preparing writings that they could use to gain admission to college or secure a job.”

The next set of questions was designed to gauge teachers’ confidence in the portfolio process based on the amount of education/training they had received. Seventy-five percent (22) agreed that they had been adequately educated about the best way to organize portfolios as well as the best way to assess portfolios.

The next three questions assessed teachers' beliefs about students' interactions with portfolios. Seventy-one percent (21) agree that the use of portfolios helps their students become better writers. Five of those 21 "strongly agreed." Likewise, 64% (19) agree that portfolios allow students to have more control of their own writing with six "strongly agree" responses included. The most positive response came to the statement, "Portfolios encourage students to reflect on their own writing processes," with all but two respondents agreeing and seven "strongly agree" responses.

The final quantitative question for this group reveals that only two of the respondents use deferred grading. All others grade individual papers as they are written. This response reveals the most drastic difference between most college portfolio programs and those used in high schools. Teachers, and those in Cobb County seem to be no exception, feel obligated or are required to give grades throughout the semester as opposed to giving a final portfolio grade at the end of the semester. Open, electronic grade books such as the ones used in Oconee County and every other public school system I know also limit a teacher's ability to defer grading.

Like the previous group of teachers, the survey concluded with two open-ended questions. When asked about the format for the portfolios, 25 responded and seven said that all student work is placed in the portfolio. Ten of those 25 mentioned using only certain pieces for the portfolio, and three mentioned a focus on growth and reflection in student writing. When asked about assessing the portfolios, 24 responded and confirmed the results of the delayed grading question. A majority mentioned that they do not grade the overall portfolio, but grade individual essays instead. However, two mentioned grading the portfolios with detailed rubrics, and a number mentioned using the portfolios to assess the growth and development of their students as writers.

Survey Conclusions

For the most part, these survey respondents maintained positive attitudes and beliefs in regards to portfolios. Even those teachers who have never used portfolios overwhelmingly reported that portfolios are excellent tools to assess student writing. Likewise, teachers who currently use portfolios and those who did at one time both agreed that portfolios help students become better writers have more control over their own writing.

These teachers, while they had read several books or articles about portfolios, did seem concerned about adequate training when it comes to implementing portfolios. The level of training teachers receive may also determine whether or not they continue to use portfolios. For example, 44% of those who quit using portfolios did not feel adequately educated as compared to only 25% of those who currently use them. If teachers are expected to use portfolios, then they need to be given both researched information about portfolios as well as suggestions and strategies to successfully implement portfolio programs.

In addition to these findings, I would argue that the single most important word that surfaced during this survey was that of “time.” Teachers who quit using portfolios most often cited “time” as their reason for discontinuing the use of portfolios. They believe that portfolios are too time intensive to complete and assess. Seventy-four percent of teachers who have never even used portfolios also believe that they are too time intensive. Thus, if portfolio programs are to be successful, teachers must be given some direction in time management. Time may be an issue for this group if they felt like they had to grade each individual paper and then re-grade these papers in the form of a portfolio. In my final “Recommendations” chapter, I will provide suggestions for assessment that should eliminate many of these time concerns.

Overall, Cobb County teachers who participated in this survey confirmed my belief that portfolios are good tools for assessing student writing in the classroom. By making note of their concerns with portfolios, North Oconee High School may avoid many of these problems and create a manageable portfolio program that both teachers and students find beneficial.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In May of 2007, the English department of North Oconee High School met to discuss the school writing goal. At that time, we decided to require a minimum of four major essays to be completed at each grade level and defined what each of those essays would be. For example, ninth graders will write two technical essays, one documented essay, and one literary essay using quotations. These essays will be kept in folders and forwarded to the student's next English teacher. While we were successful in designing a scope and sequence for writing in grades nine through twelve, we did not have time to discuss what we should do with these folders of essays once we have them. This recommendation, drawing upon the research that I have conducted into portfolios and reflection, will suggest ways in which we can manage the portfolios and make them useful tools for classroom instruction. As the data from Cobb County has made clear, teachers are more likely to "buy into" portfolio programs if they feel that they can easily manage them under the time restraints of a semester long "block scheduling" class.

If our real goal is to *improve* writing instruction, we cannot simply place pieces of student writing in a folder and let them collect dust. I agree with Sandra Murphy and Mary Ann Smith in Writing Portfolios: A Bridge from Teaching to Assessment when they state that students must "do" something with portfolios for them to be effective. The teachers from Cobb County who seemed the most dissatisfied with portfolios were the ones who simply placed essays in a folder and passed them on. They saw no purpose in the portfolios, and very likely their students found

little purpose in them as well. As reported previously, Mary Perry found little success the first two years she used portfolios because she failed to help students see a purpose for the portfolios.

Since we seem to agree that improvement in individual student writing is our goal, then we need to help students clarify that goal in regards to their own writing. I am proposing that we use Edward White's "goal statements" and "reflective letters" as tools to manage portfolios. While deferred grading seems to have advantages, especially in building better relationships between teachers and students, it is not a viable option for our high school. Parents, students, and administrators want "progress" grades throughout the semester, and we are expected to grade individual papers. Rather than re-grading these papers again in the portfolio or collecting them for no purpose, why not use the portfolios to guide student writers toward our goals for each class? At the beginning of each semester, teachers could help students craft goal statements for the semester. Since we have already established what technical aspects of writing we want students in each grade level to master, we need to share those expectations with our students. This approach also fits into our Learning Focused Schools model that encourages teachers to have a concept map of each unit. The goals statement could serve as our "map" for writing.

As students write individual essays, they could use reflective journals or another method devised by the individual teacher to look back at the goals for the semester to ensure that this new piece of writing attempts to meet their semester goals. The post-writing entries into the journals would aid students in crafting their final reflective essay and help students see connections between various pieces of their own writing. As I noted in my conclusions to the Peachtree Ridge Case Study, we could use reproducible templates for reflection to assist those teachers who do not have time to create their own. Edward White, who based his suggestions on a college writing class, noted that students who connect one piece of writing to the next "no

longer see their college careers as a random set of courses; they must somehow put them together, seek for coherence” (592). In the same respect, the final reflective essays should help students find “coherence” in their writings for the semester. After six years of teaching, I have learned that students must see the purpose for what they are doing in the classroom. If not, they will often do the bare minimum to get by. The goals statements allow students to see, before they ever begin writing essays, the purpose for writing them. Likewise, the reflective essays put the burden of assessment back into their own hands allowing them to become the self-directed learners that colleges and employers seek.

As a department, we need to meet frequently to assess the portfolio process and discuss our assessment of the required portfolio papers. If we have decided that all ninth graders should write a literary essay with quotes, then we need to come together and look at samples of these essays. We need to come to an agreement as a department which of these essays warrants an “A,” “B,” “C,” or “F.” Then we need to share sample papers with our students so that they can visualize their “goals.” In these meetings we also need to discuss the progress of the portfolio program as a whole taking care to keep the lines of communication open. The success of this program ultimately falls upon the teachers and students. If our teachers do not support it, our students will rebel against it. Like our school improvement plan, the strategies that we put in place to meet our writing goals need to remain open to alterations as needed. New teachers need to know that they have a voice in this program and feel comfortable stating their opinions as well.

Lastly, the English department needs to present this program to the entire school and community and solicit their feedback as well. We can start by sharing our expectations for writers at each grade level with teachers from other departments. If students are taking A.P. US

History in the tenth grade, they need to have certain writing skills that may differ from those students in Chemistry. Teachers from other areas could see if our scope and sequence for writing meets the writing needs for students in their subject areas. If there are conflicts, teachers can make suggestions, and we can revise the scope and sequence as needed. Eventually, we need to share these goals with parents and the community at large and again, keep the lines of communication open, welcoming suggestions from all stakeholders.

In conclusion, teachers must have a “plan” or strategy for teaching writing. Regardless of which writing “plan” a teacher uses, student reflection is essential. Without it, most students will continue to make the same mistakes from one writing situation to the next. They may not realize that it is perfectly acceptable, if not advisable, to approach different writing situations with different strategies. Student reflection opens the lines of communication from student to teacher, and students begin to feel more control over their own writing. If students combine these reflections and essays into a portfolio, they are more likely to see their writing skills develop.

If the portfolio approach is used to teach writing in high school classes, the program must be designed and continually refined by the teachers who are active participants in the program. As Cobb County proved, the program needs to be easy to manage, and teachers must feel educated about the program for it to be successful.

If teachers want to help students break the “write, grade, trash” cycle, then they must find a way for students to connect their various essays and find a purpose for their writing. I believe that the research presented in this study proves that portfolio programs, when combined with student reflective writings, can foster successful writing programs at the high school level. Given adequate education and guidance, teachers will be more effective at assessing student writing and seeing students’ writing strengths and weaknesses more quickly and clearly. Rather than

spending hours marking mistakes and writing commentary destined for trashcans, teachers can begin to have real dialogues with students about their writing—conversations which will allow the writer move to the next level and the allow the teacher to recognize what is working instructionally in the class.

Notes

¹ In double-blind scoring, the second scorer is unaware of the previous scorers identity and the score given by the first scorer.

² For example, if a scorer assigned the portfolio a four in one domain and a second scorer assigned the same domain a two, a third scorer would be used.

³ For an explanation of the teacher as “examiner” role, see James Britton et. al. in *The Development of Writing Abilities*.

⁴ Oconee County requires a certain number of grades to be taken during each nine weeks period and also uses an open grade book where grades are posted electronically and available online to parents. Delayed grading for a large portion of a student’s grade is not allowed under current board policy.

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APPENDIX A

Survey of Cobb County English Teachers**All participants, please answer questions 1-7.**

1. What is your current age?

21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45
 46-50 51-55 56-60 61-65 66+

2. How many years have you been teaching?

1-3 4-6 7-9 10-12 13-15
 16-18 19-21 22-24 25-27 28+

3. What is your highest educational degree earned?

Bachelors Masters Specialist Doctorate

4. Please check the box that matches your gender.

Male Female

5. How extensively have you read (books or articles) about the use of portfolios in the high school classroom?

None 1-2 books/articles 3-4 books/articles 5+ books/articles

6. Which of the following inspired your readings. Check all that apply.

teacher education course graduate work
 professional development personal knowledge N/A

7. Which of the following most closely matches your definition of a "portfolio?"

a folder or file used to retain student writing
 a selection of student writing for a purpose
 Other...Please enter your definition in the space provided

This survey is divided into three additional sections. Please read the following statements and answer only the questions that match your response.

- I. "I have never used portfolios as an integral part of classroom instruction."
Please answer the questions only in section I.
- II. "I used portfolios in the past as a part of classroom instruction but do not use them currently." Please answer the questions only in section II.
- III. "I currently use portfolios as an integral part of classroom instruction."
Please answer the questions only in section III.

Please find the section below (I, II, or III) that matches your answer and complete the questions in that section only.

Section I: This section should be completed by teachers who have never used portfolios in classroom instruction.

1. Portfolios are an excellent tool to assess student writing in the classroom.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. Portfolios are too time intensive to use in the high school classroom.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I do not feel as if I have had adequate training/education to implement the use of portfolios.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. If I had more training/education, I would implement portfolios in my classroom.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. I do not feel the need to change my current method of writing instruction.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

(Please see the instructions at the end of this document that explain how to submit your survey.)

Section II: This section should be completed by teachers who have used portfolios in the past but do not use them currently.

1. Please check the reason why you used portfolios in the past.
 They were required by my department or school district.
 I chose to implement them on my own.
2. When I was using portfolios, I felt like I was adequately educated about the best way to organize portfolios.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. When I was using portfolios, I felt like I was adequately educated about the best way to assess portfolios.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. The use of portfolios in my class helped my students become better writers.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. Portfolios allow students to have more control of their own writing.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Portfolios encourage students to reflect on their own writing processes.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. Check the box that most closely matches your reason for discontinuing the use of portfolios. You may check more than one box if multiple reasons apply.
 They took too much time to complete.
 They took too much time to assess.
 My school/district no longer required portfolios.
 I found a better approach to writing instruction.
8. How likely is it that you will choose to use portfolios again in the future?
 Likely Undecided Not likely

For questions seven and eight, please type your response in the shaded box.

9. Please describe the format that you used for your portfolios. (For example, did you require a certain number of writings be included?)
10. How did you evaluate the portfolios?

(Please see the instructions at the end of this document that explains how to submit your survey.)

Section III: This section should be completed by teachers who currently use portfolios as an integral part of instruction.

1. Please check the reason why you currently use portfolios.
 They are required by my department or school district.
 I chose to implement them on my own.
2. How many years have you been using portfolios in your classroom?
 1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8
 9-10 11-12 13-14 15+
3. Which of the following most closely matches the primary purpose of your portfolios?
 To aid future teachers in assessing a student's current writing ability
 To assess a student's writing ability during a semester.
 To aid students in preparing writings that they could use to gain admission to colleges or secure a job
 To have tangible evidence for parents or administrators of writing completed in the classroom.
4. I feel like I have been adequately educated about the best way to organize portfolios.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. I feel like I have been adequately educated about the best way to assess portfolios.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. The use of portfolios in my class helps my students become better writers.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. Portfolios allow students to have more control of their own writing.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. Portfolios encourage students to reflect on their own writing processes.
 Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. I do not assign grades to individual papers until they are presented in the final portfolio.
 Agree Disagree

For questions seven and eight, please type your response in the shaded box.

1. Please describe the format that you use for your portfolios. (For example, did you require a certain number of writings be included?)
2. How did you evaluate the portfolios?

Thank you again for your participation in this survey. Please save your answers and return them to me via email (scasey@uga.edu).