ABSTRACT
        A study surveyed teacher education students'
attitudes, beliefs, and habits concerning portfolio assessment.
Subjects were 230 students in 10 different graduate courses on
literacy education at two colleges: the University of Wisconsin and
the University of Nevada. One hundred fifteen subjects (a 50%
response) responded to a questionnaire. Results indicated that: (1)
although 90% of the subjects had little or no knowledge of portfolio
assessment prior to the course, 86% rated their knowledge of
portfolio assessment as moderate to high at the end of the course;
(2) 91% stated their beliefs about assessment had changed over the
years, and that participation in a course which involved portfolio
assessment played a critical role in such change; (3) 75% were not
using any form of portfolio assessment at the start of the course,
while only 12% were not using portfolios after the course; and (4)
although only 46% reported that they continued to develop their
literacy portfolios after the course, almost one-third of the
teachers continued to pursue many of the personal goals they had set
for themselves as readers and writers even though they were not
updating their portfolios. Findings suggest that: graduate coursework
has the potential of playing a critical role in positively
influencing teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practices
related to alternative forms of assessment; portfolios create the
opportunity to involve learners in directing, documenting, and
evaluating their own learning; and teacher educators have the
potential to actually touch the lives of teachers as literate beings.
(Six tables of data are attached.) (RS)

Portfolio Assessment in Teacher Education Courses: Impact on Students' Beliefs, Attitudes and Habits

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This paper focuses on two issues we believe need to be addressed by the literacy community: concerns about traditional forms of assessment in literacy programs and the lack of opportunities for learners to control their own learning at all levels (from early childhood through graduate programs). The use of portfolio self-assessment in teacher education classes affords one means of addressing these concerns. Portfolio assessment not only offers an alternative to traditional forms of assessment (Tierney, Carter & Desai, 1991), but in its best conceptualization it also provides opportunities for learners to take control of the learning process (Vavrus, 1990).

For the past two years, we have attempted to address these concerns within the contexts of our own teaching. In January 1990, we began to incorporate a portfolio self-assessment component in selective graduate courses in literacy education (10 different classes on two campuses involving 230 students). We saw this as a way to provide students with ownership of their own learning while at the same time providing a model for an alternative form of assessment which could be used within their teaching contexts. Through this experience, we hoped to influence students' knowledge, beliefs, practices and habits related to learning and assessment.

Through a survey of students participating in classes which included a portfolio self-assessment component, we have begun to investigate the following questions: 1) How does the knowledge base of teachers change and what factors are most influential in causing the changes? 2) What are teachers' beliefs about assessment and how do they change? 3) How do teachers describe their current use of portfolio assessment within their classrooms? and 4) How does the experience of developing a literacy portfolio impact on their personal habits related to themselves as language learners and users? The data reported in this paper reflect the results of this survey. (115 students responded for a return rate of 50%). Follow-up interviews and on-site visits are planned to provide additional insights.

Question #1: Since approximately 90% of the teachers indicated they had little to no knowledge about portfolio assessment prior to the course, we were able to see major changes in this area. In fact, post class survey results indicated that 86% of the teachers rated their current knowledge of portfolio assessment as moderate to high. Teachers identified three of the in-class experiences as most helpful in developing their knowledge base: constructing their own portfolios, receiving responses from the instructors and discussing their portfolios with peers. Teachers also identified two important outside influences: reading articles in professional publications and continuing to develop their own portfolios.

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Question #2: Ninety-one percent of the teachers stated that their beliefs about assessment had changed over the past few years. Responses to an open-ended question asking them to identify factors responsible for those changes revealed that participation in a course which involved portfolio assessment played a critical role. As one student reflected: "In struggling to grasp the concept of portfolio development, I looked at assessment in a different light. I became aware of this only through doing. This transfers to my belief on assessing children." Using an item from a similar survey by Johns and VanLeirsburg (1991), we asked teachers to indicate how strongly they agreed with four belief statements about assessment (Valencia, 1990). While 69% of teachers agreed that assessment should be anchored in authentic texts, tasks, and learning contexts, over 90% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the other three belief statements: assessment should 1) be a continuous, ongoing process, 2) be multidimensional, and 3) provide for active collaboration by both teacher and student.

Question #3: While the number of teachers using portfolio assessment in their classrooms increased, changes were also seen in the way teachers were using portfolios. Initially, 75% of the teachers were not using any form of portfolio assessment in their classrooms; the majority of those teachers who were using portfolios described their use as primarily work folders. In describing their current use of portfolios, only 12% stated they were not using portfolios; of those teachers using portfolios, 3% were using them as work folders, 21% were using them as writing folders, 53% as a part of grading and evaluation procedures, and 11% were using portfolios to assist students in directing and assessing their own learning. In fact, 49% of the teachers reported that students were involved in the selection of documents for their portfolios. When asked to identify strengths and disadvantages of portfolio assessment in their own classrooms, the strengths most frequently identified were: they provided a positive indicator of student growth and they helped teachers feel more confident in documenting growth when talking with parents. Not surprisingly, the most frequently identified disadvantage was that they were time-consuming. The most frequently cited reasons for not using portfolio assessment were having too many students and too little time.

Question #4: Although forty-six percent of the teachers reported that they had continued to develop their literacy portfolios after class had ended, their comments suggested that this development was on a much smaller scale than what they had done in class and that it varied from individual to individual. It should be noted that many teachers reported they were continuing to develop their portfolios as a result of current enrollment in other courses requiring portfolios. Keeping logs of their reading as well as adding journal entries and other pieces of writing were the most frequently mentioned activities which teachers continued to do beyond the end of the class. A lack of time seemed to be the primary deterrent to continuing portfolio development. There was evidence, however, that almost one third of the teachers were continuing to pursue many of the personal goals they had set for themselves as readers and writers even though they were no longer updating their portfolios.

Conclusions and Implications:
1) Graduate coursework has the potential of playing a critical role in positively influencing teachers' knowledge, beliefs and classroom practices related to alternative forms of assessment. However, the most helpful learning experiences seem to be ones that invite teachers to actively construct their own understandings about this issue. By changing our own assessment procedures we were able to provide teachers with meaningful contexts in which to learn about portfolio assessment. These experiences were consistently rated as more helpful than other

outside learning contexts experienced by the teachers (e.g., school district inservices or professional conferences). Therefore, as teacher educators we need to realize that graduate courses provide a powerful forum for addressing and affecting change. However, to realize that goal, we must provide experiences that go beyond traditional instruction and assessment.

2) Beyond their appeal as an alternative assessment technique, portfolios create the opportunity to involve learners in directing, documenting and evaluating their own learning. Providing learners with these opportunities enhances the possibility for a shift in our view of what it means to be a learner. Teacher educators have the opportunity to support this changing view of learning by refusing to be the exclusive definers of the goals, expectations and efforts of our students. Our survey results suggest that this effort does translate into classroom practice. As one teacher noted, "Even a K-1 child 'knows what he knows' and 'knows what he wants to know'. I have learned this through student portfolios."

3) While the primary role of teacher educators is often viewed as one of assisting teachers to improve classroom practice, we are beginning to realize that we have the potential to go beyond classroom practices and actually touch the lives of teachers as literate beings. We have found that portfolio assessment which asks learners to reflect upon their personal habits related to language usage begins to create an awareness in our students and helps them (re)discover who they are as readers and writers. Our surveys provide evidence that this literate activity which may flourish during our classes, often moves to the back burner due to lack of time and conflicting priorities. As we examine our own habits, we've found that we share the same concerns. In seeking to resolve these issues for ourselves we hope to be able to better model and provide support for teachers as readers and writers.

References

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table 1

Reported Development of
Knowledge about Portfolio Assessment

	Before	_During_	_Current_
None	49%	0%	0%
Little	42%	0%	0%
Some	10%	17%	14%
Moderate	0%	55%	62%
High	0%	29%	24%

table 2

Influences Affecting Development of Knowledge Base

In-class Factors

Going through the process of constructing my own portfolio	4.5 (.852)	N=115
Responses from the instructor along the way based on reviews of in-process portfolios	4.3 (.897)	N=113
Discussing portfolio assessment with peers in class	4.2 (.849)	N=115
Reading professional literature on portfolio assessment	4.0 (.069)	N=115
In-class instructor mini-lessons on the portfolio proces	4.0 (1.01)	N=108
Attempting to implement portfolios in my own classroom	3.7 (1.259)	N=100

Outside Factors

Continuing to develop my own portfolio	3.4 (1.275)	N=104
Articles in professional journals	3.4 (1.119)	N=108
Fellow teachers	3.1 (1.408)	N=105
Other University classes	3.0 (1.461)	N=98
Conference presentation/professional meetings	2.7 (1.376)	N=98
Portfolio components accompanying commercial materials	1.9 (.991)	N=98
School/District inservices	1.6 (1.008)	N=89

table 3

Classroom Practices Related to Portfolio Self-assessment

	Before	_During_	_Current_
Not using	75%	32%	12%
Work folders	14%	11%	03%
Writing folders	06%	35%	21%
Evaluation & Grading	05%	10%	53%
Involving student in directing own learning	01%	02%	10%

table 4

Reasons for Not Using Portfolio Assessment

Too many students	35%
Too time consuming	28%
Students can't handle the decisions	21%
Not enough knowledge	20%
Parents would not support	8%
School district would not support	2%
Don't believe portfolios assessment is a valid assessment tool	2%
Principal would not support	0%

Ford and Ohlhausen/NRC 1991 p. 2

table 5

Strengths of using Portfolio Assessment

Positive indicator of student growth	91%
More confident in documenting growth when talking with parents	89%
Helps me know my students better	80%
Students are more aware of own growth	72%
More consistent with beliefs about evaluation	67%
Promote student ownership and responsibility	63%
Parents like them	59%
Foster student reflection	52%
Provide a way to organize student work	46%
Aid in planning	28%

table 6

Reasons for Not Using Portfolio Assessment

Too time consuming	44%
Storage problems	33%
Conflict with district/administrative expectations	29%
Require orienting parents	27%
Don't provide grades	18%
Don't seem appropriate for all grades	16%
Can't deal with uncertainty of what should go into them	15%
Students can't deal with uncertainty of what to include	13%

Ford and Ohlhausen/NRC 1991 p. 3