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4.2.2 Promising Practice 2: Transition Student Portfolio Model

Research on Student Portfolios

Barrett (2005) writes that most of the empirical research on portfolios deals specifically with teaching portfolios or the process of creating electronic portfolios rather than the use of portfolios by students in the classroom. And, she notes, the multiple purposes of portfolios complicate drawing firm research conclusions about this instructional tool. In another review of the research, Cook-Benjamin (2001) noted the benefits of portfolios include the opportunity to do holistic assessment and use multiple sources of evidence for assessment, along with increased student-parent-teacher communication (in the K-12 system) and a more positive student and teacher attitude.

Within college settings, portfolios are fairly common, especially in developmental writing courses. Miholic and Moss (2001) see these portfolios as formative tools to individualize instruction, document progress, engage students in reflection about their work, and promote revision. One of their major concerns is that "many instructors who claim to use portfolios...merely ask students to assemble a folio" (p. 10), amounting to little more than an accumulation of everything the student produces in class.

Recent dissertations on portfolios demonstrate that student attitude plays an important role (Liu, 2003). In a small case study of selected ESL students (N=7) in a college composition course, students with positive opinions were those who spent considerable time and effort on their portfolios. In another small study of high school students (N for experimental=41 and control=32) (Seals, 2001), math portfolios were considered to be an excellent diagnostic tool although pre- and post-test results for the experimental and control groups showed no significant variation. Lastly, a study of prior learning assessment (the PLA portfolio process) was found to have a dramatic positive effect on persistence in college when used with adults students studying part-time at a small liberal arts college (Pearson, 2000). This study noted the complex interplay between several variables. Significant variables predicting persistence included grade point average, number of prior college credits, and participation in prior learning assessment (PLA portfolio process).

References

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (n.d.) *Portfolio assessment*. Retrieved on October 22, 2009 from <http://www.aacu.org/resources/>

[assessment/portfolio.cfm](#). This web resource provides a variety of links to specific program examples in college, K-12, and career-oriented portfolios.

Barrett, H.C. (2005). The research on portfolios in education. Retrieved on February 16, 2005 from <http://electronicportfolios.org/ALI/research.html>. Dr. Barrett's online paper includes her overall assessment of the research on portfolios. A longer reference list of individual studies is available for download as a PDF file.

Cook-Benjamin, L. (2001). Portfolio assessment: Benefits, issues of implementation, and reflections on its use. *Assessment Update* 13(4), 6-7. This two-page document briefly reviews the trend in portfolio research, including references for the 19 studies cited in the paper.

Liu, Y. (2003). *A case study of selected ESL students' experiences with writing portfolios in college composition courses* (Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 2003).

Miholic, V., & Moss, M. (2001). Rethinking portfolio applications and assessment. *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 32(1), 9-14. The authors review the essential parts of the portfolio model and describe how form and function need to closely relate in order to produce a successful learning experience.

Pearson, W.S. (2000). *Enhancing adult student persistence: The relationship between prior learning assessment and persistence toward the baccalaureate degree* (Doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University, 2000).

Seals, G.J. (2001). *The effects of portfolio use as a learning tool on Algebra II students' achievement and their attitude toward mathematics* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Mississippi, 2001).