ABSTRACT
          A methods course teacher, as part of a newly
developed 12-hour integrated block that combines reading, social
studies and science methods courses with clinical field experience,
used student-negotiated assessment in one section and
teacher-directed assignments and assessment in another section. In
the portfolio section, the instructor could see the connections
between what was taught and what students learned through the
evidence in the portfolios. The other section ended with a
traditional final exam. Many students struggled with the effort, and
connections between what was taught and what students wrote sometimes
were not obvious. In the portfolio section, the instructor began
introducing portfolios to the students the first day of class. The
second day of class they began to co-construct a framework for
guiding the portfolio process. The students collectively decided how
much to weigh the portfolio as a part of their overall final grade
and were given the option of deciding individually how much a of a
role the instructor had in evaluating the portfolio. Overall, the
instructor and the students agreed on the general grade for the
learning documented in the portfolio. While most students effectively
documented the acquisition of new knowledge, fewer were effective at
documenting how they applied that knowledge. The use of
student-negotiated evaluation through the portfolio process provided
the instructor opportunities to model effective strategies for
alternative assessment. The portfolio helped students to see
connections between the methods class and their clinical experience.
(Contains 8 references.) (RS)

BEGIN WITH THE END IN SIGHT:
STUDENT NEGOTIATED EVALUATION
IN A PRESERVICE LITERACY EDUCATION COURSE

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Dear Dr. Ford,

I was curious at the grade I got on my final exam, since I walked

into the final with a solid A. With all due respect, after looking up

my grade on your door and from much talk within my section, I find

it extremely unfair that two classes learning the same material could

Have such a difference in grades. I am aware that section one was

graded on a portfolio and all received A's. Our class only received

5. I don't feel I put any less effort into this class than anyone from

section one did. I want you to know that I learned a lot from your class

and I'm thankful for that, but I don't like the feeling I have that we

were treated as guinea pigs at my section's expense. Like I said

earlier, I learned a lot from your class, but I'm just really disappointed

in the way things turned out in the end.

Sincerely,

Jeanne

How Am I Using Portfolios?

Perhaps it is only appropriate that a paper entitled "Begin with the End in Sight" starts at the end of the story. The 1995 spring semester provided me an opportunity to explore the use of portfolios with preservice teachers in a course entitled Reading Methods and Strategies. This course is part of a newly developed 12-hour integrated block that combines reading, social studies and science methods courses with a clinical field experience. I was assigned to teach two sections of the course with similar cohort groups of 24 students. I decided to use student-negotiated

assessment in one section and teacher-directed assignments and assessment in the other. I discovered that choice meant the semester would end quite differently for each course. One course ended with students sharing evidence with one another from their portfolios discussing the most significant changes they had made during the semester. Many students also chose to conference with me to talk further about those changes while we reviewed their portfolios together. Others left their portfolios with me and I was able to view concrete evidence of their growth and change. I could see connections between what I had taught and what students learned through the evidence which was in their portfolios. It was a very positive way to reach closure on our semester together.

On the other hand, as Jeanne's e-mail message revealed, the other section ended traditionally with a final examination. Even though the final was an application-oriented exam during which students could use their resources to help them apply issues and ideas explored during the last part of the semester, many students struggled with the effort. They wrote continuously during the three-hour block and walked away shaking wrists as they quietly headed out of the room. I consumed more time grading the exams often shaking my head at responses which made me wonder what my students had learned. Connections between what I taught and what they had written sometimes were not obvious. They ended the semester less than happy about their performances and I felt the same way. It was not a very positive way to reach closure on our fourteen weeks together. It was clear to me from these two experiences that there was a dramatic shift in classroom dynamics when control over evaluation was shifted to the students.

How I Came to Use Portfolios in this Way?

My journey with the portfolio process began in 1990 when I was asked initially to teach a graduate course on whole language. I knew that the topic of portfolios and alternative assessment needed to be one of the issues we should examine in the course. I decided that perhaps the best way to teach about portfolios was through first-hand experience. I incorporated a portfolio self-evaluation component in that course. At the same time, my colleague Marilyn McKinney (Ohlhausen) was struggling with aligning her traditional assessment techniques with a more holistic view of instruction in her college courses. She decided the use of portfolios would enable her to better align those elements of her teaching. Together we supported one another as we moved through the process for the first time. We decided to make the experience a focus of our research. (Ohlhausen & Ford, 1990; Ford & Ohlhausen, 1991; Ohlhausen & Ford, 1992).

As I continued my use of portfolios with graduate students in subsequent offerings of the whole language course, I became increasingly convinced that this tool provided a vehicle for accomplishing a more important goal in my teaching. Portfolios became a way for me to turn over responsibility for learning to the learner. I began to see the value of portfolios as a way to guide students in directing and documenting their own learning. I saw this as critical if I was going to help my students become lifelong learners and reflective practioners. Each time I taught the course, I became more willing to turn over control to the students. We began to negotiate evaluation criteria and co-construct rubrics to guide the process. The portfolio became the primary evidence used for evaluation and grading in this course (Ford, 1994; Ford, 1996).

With preservice teachers, however, I had only experimented with more teacher-directed portfolios. These portfolios often were constructed from a more prescriptive framework. This resulted in portfolios which were basically collections of teacher-selected assignments students had completed independently (Stahle & Mitchell, 1993). While these portfolios usually had some

open-ended component, they were primarily shaped by my decisions. I also retained a fifty percent stake in the final grading of the portfolio. I began to wonder how the use of student-negotiated evaluation would work with preservice teachers. What would happen if I turned over more control for directing and documenting their own learning to the students? This impending project motivated me to explore those questions. With two sections of similar classes, I was able to provide contrasting experiences for myself. In one class, I retained teacher-directed assignments and assessments. In the other, I implemented a portfolio component and negotiated aspects of evaluation with the students. This article examines that experience.

How Do I Introduce Students to Using Portfolios?

Asked to rate their knowledge of portfolios on a scale of one to five, my students indicated a mean knowledge level of 2.7. All but one student had heard of portfolios. The topic of portfolios within the context of writing instruction was addressed in the language arts methods course which many students had already taken. Students knew they were tools for evaluating learners over time, often contained representative samples of work to show a learner's improvement, could be shared with parents and other teachers, and sometimes involved the learner in the selection of contents. When asked to rate their experience with portfolios, however, the students indicated a mean experience level of 1.5. Most of the students had no experience with portfolios. Some of the students had put together portfolios for art courses and one student had experienced portfolio assessment as a high school student in a district which used writing portfolios. My students could be characterized as students who had heard about portfolios but had very little experience with them.

Knowing that, I decided to discuss orally what I had presented in written form on the

syllabus. I discussed the constraints for evaluation within which I was operating as a college instructor and how teachers faced similar constraints. I explained my typical way of conducting student evaluation and then suggested that we use portfolios as an alternative system of evaluation. I surfaced issues which would be open for negotiation and invited students "to live with the idea" until the next class. Prior to leaving the first class, I asked students to provide a quick reaction to the idea of using portfolios. While not unanimous in responding positively to the idea, their responses suggested that they were ready to agree with the general decision to use portfolios. As one student responded: "I think this is a wonderful idea. I have never had a teacher/ professor view his students as capable of taking on such an important and involved role in determining their own grades. This will be a very inspirational experience for me and because of this I believe I will put forth a much more sincere amount of effort. This makes it seem as though I really count." This was the first step toward launching student-negotiated evaluation.

What Processes Are Used to Guide the Development of Categories and Criteria?

During the first class, I asked my students to "begin with the end in sight." I wanted them to reflect on what it was they would need to learn in this class to be a good teacher of reading. I invited them to examine their own experiences and explore any resources -- human and material -- which might provide them with greater insights into what a good reading teacher needs to know and be able to do. Students were to return to class with a list of desired outcomes. We used this input during the second class to begin to co-construct a framework for guiding the portfolio process.

Modeling a technique for organizing ideas which students could use in their clinical classrooms, I gave everyone a paper with boxes on it. Using their written reflections, students

were asked to write down one idea of what a reading teacher needs to learn in each of the boxes filling as many boxes as they could. They quickly cut their boxes apart and took their pile of ideas into a small group to be shared with others. In the small groups, students began to compare and contrast their ideas and tried to decide on a joint list of common outcomes. The joint lists of small groups were shared. In a large group, students collectively began to construct a list of outcomes.

In reviewing the joint lists, a student suggested that the outcomes were clustered in three categories: teaching techniques, materials and assessment. Another student observed that some issue and ideas were also specifically focused on integrating reading into other subject areas. Those four topics became the foundation for building a framework to guide the development and evaluation of the portfolios. In the next class, I provided students with a specific framework developed from that discussion. The framework stated that students would provide evidence that they had acquired and applied new ideas about teaching reading, become familiar with and used reading materials, acquired and applied knowledge about evaluating reading programs/lessons and the growth of students in those programs and could integrate reading with other subject areas. Since additional student outcomes were eliminated in the process of co-constructing a framework, a fifth criteria was established: providing evidence that the student had initiated additional personal inquiry on some other aspect of reading instruction.

When compared with the expected outcomes of my teacher-directed assessment and assignments, the list was very compatible. Of the nine outcomes I had outlined for the course, seven were incorporated into the framework co-constructed with students. One area overlooked by students was examining who they were as readers and addressing concerns they had about themselves as readers. Many students, however, used this topic for the additional personal inquiry section of their portfolios. Another area not addressed directly by the students was an outcome

that related to the students having a working knowledge of phonics terms, rules and techniques. This was addressed in class content, but students were not held accountable for this outcome in their portfolios.

Knowing what the expected outcomes were, we began to turn our attention to questions related to evidence. Students worked together to brainstorm suggestions on how to document growth and change in regards to the five outcomes. A list of potential evidence for the learning portfolios was generated, compiled and distributed to all students. (To assist students in need of greater teacher direction, I also distributed assignment guidelines being completed by the students in the other section of the class.) Students were asked to begin to take first steps toward starting their portfolios. Students needed to return to class with "embryonic" portfolios which would show their first steps toward directing and documenting growth and change. Whenever in-progress portfolios were brought to class, we set aside time for peer sharing. Sharing with peers was one way to involve students in clarifying the process for each other. I also extended an open invitation to review students' in-progress portfolios whenever they felt like they needed outside feedback.

How Are They Evaluated and Used in Determining the Final Grade?

It was my intent to shift the responsibility for evaluation to the learner. Early in the semester the students collectively decided how much to weigh the portfolio as a part of their overall final grade. They decided to have the portfolio account for 80% of the final grade. Jointly evaluated participation and attendance would account for the remaining 20% of the grade. On a 100 point scale the portfolio accounted for 80 points and participation and attendance accounted for 20 points.

Towards the end of the semester, I asked students to indicate what my role should be in evaluating their portfolios. Students were given the option of providing a rationale for complete self-evaluation, shared evaluation between the instructor and student, or complete evaluation by the instructor. Eight students argued for total control of the evaluation decision. Some provided extensive rationales for retaining the control. Ownership was a recurring theme in those arguments -- ownership that came from intense familiarity. Kerry surfaced that "my portfolio has really become mine." Patti argued that "I know how my portfolio works and my reasoning for why everything is there." Patrick stated that "I think the grade for the portfolio should be left up to the person who did the work (me)." Mary explained that "I planned on control of my entire grade. I did this because I know best how I learned." They agreed that since they knew best what they had done, they were the best person to evaluate their effort and evidence. As Peggy stated: "It seems to me that I would have a better idea of a grade because I really know how much growth and change has occurred." Elizabeth concluded: "Because no one knows my portfolio as well as I do, I have decided to give myself 100% control of assessment."

The students also admitted that self-evaluation was a guarantee of getting the grade, as Peggy remarked: "I felt I deserved." In fact Patti stated she was "determined to get the grade" she deserved. They talked about having done their best work and being in the best position to judge what that was, though Mary admitted that was "a lot harder than I expected." Surprisingly, students still qualified their self-evaluation decisions and left the door open for the instructor to review the decisions. Patrick stated: "I respect and honor your opinion on my performance. Please feel free to make an evaluation on my portfolio and assign a grade accordingly." Likewise, Peggy commented: "I would like your personal feedback on the evidence I have provided."

Elizabeth made a similar comment: "I would however, appreciate any constructive feedback you may have." Kerry even rather skeptically remarked: "I know if you don't agree [with the decision], you will change it."

Only one student opted out of having any say in the evaluation decision. Katie explained: "I have decided to give complete evaluation of my portfolio over to you. I think that I have shown growth in all areas. I know that I have learned a great deal about how to teach reading. The challenge is to be able to adequately show that to someone else, to be able to prove that I have grown and changed. I can not evaluate that part of this assignment. For this reason, I would like for you to take all the 80 points and give me whatever grade you see fit."

The majority of students designed some scheme for sharing the evaluation decision with me. Seven students retained at least two-thirds of the control of the evaluation decision. Like those students who argued for complete control of the evaluation decision, these students also suggested that they knew best how much time and effort went into the work. Ann further explained: "I feel a reviewer is only able to witness what my portfolio contains...not the stages and processes that I went through mentally to get to the point of documentation and incorporating the information into the portfolio." They also suggested they knew best what their goals were and whether they were accomplished. As Kay observed: "I figure I am my best judge on my work so that is why I am taking over 75% of my grade decision." Matthew suggested that the instructor's role might be to use 25% of the decision to judge "how well I documented growth and change."

Some students still felt uncomfortable with complete control. Rose explained: "I realize that I am still a student and have a lot to learn. I respect your opinion as a professor and would appreciate your insight on my portfolio. I feel I would actually be cheating myself if I were the

sole decision maker concerning my grade...I would not feel the semester were complete if I did not receive some feedback from you as my professor." Though others grew more comfortable with the idea as the semester continued. Ilith stated: "The idea of evaluating my portfolio scared me in the beginning, but eventually I started to like the idea. I thought that you should grade the entire thing because you are the teacher and I am the student, but now I think differently. I now see myself as the one who should have the majority say in terms of grading my growth and development this semester. I know better than anyone else how much I have changed this semester and that is why I decided to give myself the majority of the points in terms of grade."

Five students suggested sharing the decision equally. Joe explained: "I am still not too clear on portfolios. I think I need another person's opinion and assessment so I can make the necessary changes for next time." Only one student gave me the greater control in the evaluation decision. Oletha argued: "I believe even though students should be a part of their grading process, the teacher should still have a bigger portion of the decision."

Before turning in portfolios, each student was asked to include a table of contents outlining what was in the portfolio, final "Dear Reviewer" letter explaining components of the portfolio and final grade decision with supporting rationale.   Since the framework provided a way for students to organize their portfolios, this was reflected in their tables of contents. Most students also used the framework to structure their final "Dear Reviewer" letters discussing the evidence in their portfolios as it related to each of the five goal areas. Some students even used the framework as a way to explain their grading decisions. Four students allotted points for each of the five goals and then rated their success in each area and explained their rationales for each decision. Elizabeth even divided each goal area into three

12

criteria (evidence of change, meeting objective, and neatness) and used individual ratings to get an overall rating for the goal area. Patrick added four additional categories (appearance, streamlining, quality and effort) to the five goal areas in deciding how to distribute his points. Paul developed a grading sheet for me to use to rate each goal area as he had done.

Generally, students used a variety of reasons to justify their uniformly high ratings. They looked at the product and talked about the portfolio being an excellent resource -- a resource they would use in the future. They looked at the evidence and described it as being neat, organized, thorough, personalized, accessible, clear, varied, captioned and streamlined. They talked about the process especially the time and effort they invested. They talked about their learning, growth, change and successful accomplishment of goals.

I reviewed all portfolios and entered into evaluation decisions as negotiated by the students. All but two students evaluated their work at the "A" level. The remaining students evaluated their work at the "AB" level. I honored all self-assessment decisions. In comparing my independent evaluations with the students, my ratings were often lower than those awarded by the students (though in three cases my points were higher.) Overall, however, we usually agreed on the general grade for the learning documented in the portfolio. In the three cases where there was a discrepancy, I would have adjusted students' grades down one-half step ("A" to "AB"). In the end, with attendance and participation points included, all students received an "A" in the course. (Two students were at the AB cutoff point and I decided to adjust those grades upward.) In contrast, my grade distribution for the class with teacher-directed assignments and assessment, as Jeanne pointed out, was quite different. It included 5 "A's", 7 "AB's" and 12 "B's."

This type of uniformly high distribution of grades seems somewhat inherent in the

portfolio process (Stowell, 1993; Vogt, McLaughlin & Rapp Ruddell, 1993). For me the quality

of the portfolios were distinguishable in two ways, but I did not use those factors as criteria for

grading this set of portfolios. First while most students were able to collect, organize and identify

evidence, some students also included a layer of reflection discussing their evidence. This allowed

them to provide evidence which reflected a deeper level of understanding and a greater degree of

effort. Captioning evidence was discussed in class, but often captions were limited to labeling the

evidence and providing a general evaluative statement. For example, Joe saw his portfolio "as an

excellent way for me to keep organized all the important and very useful ideas and activities I

have collected this semester." Whereas, Oletha explained "that this portfolio made me examine

everything I learned and made me analyze things in a critical way. I never would have thought

about these subjects as in depth as I did with this process." Those two distinct visions --

portfolios as collections and portfolios as reflections -- were noticeable in reviewing students'

efforts.

Secondly while most students effectively documented the acquisition of new knowledge,

less were effective at documenting how they applied that knowledge especially showing direct

connections between what was learned in class and what was done in the field. Since students

were assigned to classrooms completing a clinical experience as they were taking the course, I

assumed they would have many opportunities to apply techniques from class. I learned that the

contexts in which they were working sometimes placed limits on their ability to apply ideas. For

most students, however, those constraints were not present and I wasn't as convinced that they

were using as many ideas from class as they could have. It may have been that they were using

ideas, but they did not as effectively document those applications in their portfolios as other

students had.

While I did note these differences in responding to portfolios or in conferencing with individuals, I did not adjust grades based on these differences. I know that I may need to focus more on these aspects of the process in the future. By choosing not to adjust the grades to reflect these distinctions, I had to be comfortable living with the high grading pattern. In part that is possible, because I observed the rigor of the process. This was reflected in the comments of the students. As Patrick explained in his grading decision in a category called effort: "I put an amazing amount of effort in this portfolio. I spent more time on this than I did on most of my other classes. But I only gave myself 4 [out of 5] points because I could have done more with it." Ilith agreed: "I have put more time into this class and the completion of my portfolio than I think I have ever put into any other course." While we can attest to the rigor of the process, the constraints under which we operate continue to surface the question of whether the process can withstand the scrutiny of outside reviewers who only see the final grade distribution.

How Does Using Portfolios Effect Teaching and Learning in These Contexts?

What was different about these two courses which involved similar students and were taken within similar contexts but differed in the way students were assessed? In regards to my teaching, the use of student-negotiated evaluation through the portfolio process provided me opportunities to model effective strategies for alternative assessment. My students experienced as learners issues and ideas such as constructing rubrics and captioning evidence. They gained insights about student goal setting and documenting progress because they were involved in those processes. They saw ways to share and respond to portfolios as peers and as an instructor. I felt

this content was addressed more completely and effectively with this group of students. It allowed me to present my beliefs (and rhetoric) about instruction in alignment with -- not in contrast to -- my assessment practices. They could see that I was practicing what I preached.

In order to do that, I had to devote greater classtime to the portfolio process. During almost every class session, some time was set aside to make contact with the portfolio process. What I realized was that I devoted at least six hours to teacher-directed assessment in my other section. I also spent additional time explaining, discussing and sharing teacher-directed assignments. With the exception of the topic of assessment, the variations in content between the two sections were not that noticeable. If the portfolio process better equips students to become self-directed lifelong learners, then I can be less anxious about what content is sacrificed for the sake of the process.

How did it impact on the students' learning? Because my students had selected integration as one area of focus, they made many connections among the three methods courses. Lessons that needed to be created for science and social studies methods became natural vehicles for integrating reading and writing providing evidence that the students could integrate literacy techniques into the subject areas. As students learned about materials and assessment techniques in other courses, they incorporated that as evidence in sections of their portfolios. Similarly the portfolio helped students see connections between the class and their clinical experience. One cooperating teacher observed that the portfolio seemed to give the students a greater degree of professionalism. The students sought out external feedback from lessons taught, so they would have evidence for their portfolios. They carefully documented what they taught and what the children learned so they would have more evidence to show growth and change in their portfolios.

While my teacher-directed assignments asked students to make similar connections, the portfolio was seen as an ongoing responsibility. Students were constantly looking for evidence they needed/wanted for their portfolios.

The different effects are hard to document, but I will conclude with this paper as I began with the voice of one of my students. Peggy included a final reflection on portfolios in her portfolio:

Putting together this portfolio was harder than taking an exam.

But I feel I gained more from putting it together than an exam

could show. The growth and change I reflected in my portfolio

will be long remembered after this class is over...Throughout the

semester I changed my ideas about portfolios. I believe it is a way

to assess students progress while letting them be involved in the

the process. This is important for students because a sense of

ownership and empowerment about ability to learn will develop. I

also believe it will allow for individual students to achieve their full

potential. I plan to continue my portfolio and continue to grow and

change my ideas to become the best teacher I can be. I also plan

to use portfolio assessment in my classroom. I feel that I can

maximize the potential of my students by doing this."

At some point during the semester, Peggy took responsibility for directing and documenting her own learning. Her motivation seemed to be the realization that this was something that would help her in the future. She could see the relevancy, the potential applications, and the future possibilities. The contrast between the voices of Peggy and Jeanne, not just in tone, but how they are viewing their experiences may best illustrate the impact on students. Even though Jenna was careful to qualify her criticism with two references to how much she had learned, she was leaving the class disappointed because in part she could not see beyond her grade. It tarnished that experience and obstructed her vision as she needed to think about looking ahead. For Peggy, directing, documenting and evaluating her own learning allowed her to end the semester with her future in clearly in sight.

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