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FOCUS SECTION

RESHAPING CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM THROUGH CULMINATING PORTFOLIOS

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This study analyzes qualitative data on student perceptions and curriculum transformation from a schoolwide culminating portfolio program of a small, urban, archdiocesan Catholic high school located on the West Coast. Over 4 years, all graduating students (n=102) developed culminating portfolios, evidencing their accomplishment of specific learning outcomes and presented those portfolios to panels of educators, parents, and community representatives. Students, teachers, and panelists were surveyed to determine their perceptions about the benefits and challenges of this process. The study found that (1) students' perceptions of the portfolio and panel processes were very positive, including the belief that the portfolios helped students determine for themselves the extent and quality of their learning; (2) panelists and school faculty reported the belief that the portfolio process better prepared students for college and helped students reflect upon and assume personal responsibility for their learning; and (3) significant curricular transformations had taken place in what was being taught at the school, how it was being taught, and how it was being assessed. Teachers, students, and panelists identified the benefits of the process for students as well as suggestions to increase the impact of the process on classroom teaching and learning. Challenges in the process included logistics of portfolio management, the amount of time required to develop and continue the process, and the development of methodologies for continued refinement of the program.

INTRODUCTION

Regional accrediting agencies such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and the Western Catholic Educational Association have made a significant paradigm shift in the past decade from assessing the quality of school programs based on self-study documents that answer questions about how teachers teach and how the school is organized for teaching to a focus on learning, emphasizing how students learn, what they learn, how

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their learning is assessed, how schools are organized to promote learning, and how resources are brought to bear on student learning. This focus on learning concept has been operationalized into an evaluation instrument commonly known by the same name. One of the major foci of that instrument is the collection and analysis of evidence of student learning and achievement of expected schoolwide learning results, known as ESLRs or SLEs (Expected Schoolwide Learning Results or Schoolwide Learning Expectations).

School and diocesan-level administrators have become immersed in the new vocabulary of assessment, including such terms as authentic and performance-based assessment, performance tasks, rubrics, and portfolios. Training sessions, faculty meetings, professional development workshops and conferences, and working retreats have increasingly devoted their efforts toward training school staff how to think about assessment in authentic and performance-based terms. A major outgrowth of these efforts is the push toward portfolio assessment. Catholic school educators and their public school counterparts have struggled with such issues as how to implement and manage portfolios at the classroom, school, and diocesan or district levels. Questions such as "Why have portfolios?" and "How will they be assessed?" have become the focus of much discussion. This study examined one school's end-product as a direct result of similar assessment discussions – a schoolwide, culminating portfolio process, involving all students and faculty across all academic disciplines.

SOME COMMON VOCABULARY

It is critical at the outset of a study on a topic as broad and misunderstood as portfolios to define terms used in the research. Portfolios came into widespread use in schools in the late 1980s. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction defined a portfolio as a "collection of examples of a student's work which may be used for evaluation, information, and celebration" (1992). Seidel and Walters define portfolios as "a record of learning that focuses on students' work and their reflections on the work" (1992, p. 34). Over the years, various classifications of portfolios have been developed. Some of the more common styles are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Portfolios (Adapted from Benson & Barnett, 1999, pp. 140-146)

Type of Portfolio	Purpose and Intent
Showcase or exhibition	To exhibit student work for an audience (parents, peers, community, etc.); students share with others the learning they have experienced
Process or progress	To focus on a particular skill or time period; students show their growth and skill development over time
Special project	To gather and display work relating to a particular class or school project; (e.g., a research paper with a student's reflection); students create this in lieu of a traditional essay or poster
Pass-along (Schoolwide portfolios)	To collect and follow student work in progress across grades and courses; allows student to see progress across grade levels; of great assistance in curriculum alignment
Culminating, passport, or graduation by exhibition	To collect evidence of satisfactory completion of meeting standards or other graduation requirements; required to exit one grade level in order to move to the next or required for graduation
Professional	To certify, credential, hire, or evaluate performance, used by teachers, principals, colleges, and/or state agencies

Note. For the purposes of this study, a culminating portfolio system (graduation by exhibition) in a single school was the unit of study.

RESEARCH ON PORTFOLIOS

A myriad of research exists on portfolios and their use in educational settings at all levels. Reasons for portfolio assessment abound in a survey of the literature. Three pedagogical reasons are given by Coppola (1999) for portfolio assessment: to reinforce the process of writing (sharing, feedback, and revision); to encourage communal learning; and to increase validity and reliability in the assessment process. Portfolios serve as tangible evidence of student learning, not just of declarative knowledge, but of procedural skills and dispositions as well (Anderson & Bachor, 1998; Campbell, Cignetti, Melenyzer, Nettles, & Wyman, 1997; Moran & Robinson, 1994). In addition, portfolio assessment is a means by which to effect "holistic evaluations of student achievement in school" (Birrell & Ross, 1996, p. 69).

Benefits to students are also espoused in the literature. Use of portfolios in an authentic environment helps students to think more critically within a more rigorous and demanding curriculum, emphasizing authentic and performance-based assessment, "emphasizing narrative grading, portfolio assessments, group projects and performances, individual exhibitions, and essay examinations that promote critical thinking instead of standardized or short-answer tests" (Shor, 1992, p. 144).

Anderson and Bachor (1998) report that higher order thinking is a significant byproduct of effective portfolio assessment practices because learners are required to reflect upon their learning, select evidence of learning, and identify areas for growth. Portfolios are also considered helpful means of communication between students, teachers, and parents (Lambdin & Walker, 1994). This communication centers around the evidence in portfolios as the basis for conversations about what has been learned, what processes have been used in teaching and learning, and what areas exist for further growth.

Portfolio work can be classified into four classes as defined by Collins (1991): artifacts, reproductions, attestations, and productions. Artifacts are papers produced through normal academic work during class. Reproductions are documentation of work completed outside of class. Attestations are teacher-generated acknowledgements of student success or achievement, and productions are things students prepare specifically for the portfolio, such as self-reflections, goal statements, and improvement plans (Barton & Collins, 1997). Barton and Collins also describe the importance of captions – the statements attached to pieces of student work that describe what the work is, why it should be included in the portfolio, and what learning outcomes they evidence.

Portfolios also benefit students by giving them:

> a chance to select many things that they have done over a given period of time, decide which had in fact contributed to their learning, write a rationale for each inclusion, and then have the collection prejudged according to a preset standard. (Lockledge, 1997, p. 34)

No longer will the teacher solely determine what is learned, how it is learned, and whether or not it has been learned and transfers much of this responsibility (and its accompanying sense of accomplishment) directly to the student.

The role of portfolios in educational reform is another broad theme in the literature. Portfolios have been in the forefront of pedagogical reform and been responsible for profound changes in instruction, curriculum, and assessment. Portfolios have resulted in powerful changes in school culture, including reforms in school missions, assessment, parent-school communication, and professional development. One important reason for this is the fact that portfolios serve as a "vehicle to focus the attention of students, parents, and teachers on what students are learning, how well they are learning it, and how they demonstrate that learning. Very few educational innovations can make such broad claims" (Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997, p. 19).

One systemic approach to implementing portfolios has been the trend toward culminating portfolios in teacher-education programs. In a large study of undergraduate teacher education students (n=621), students expressed pride in portfolios as tangible evidence of their learning and reported satisfaction with portfolio assessment as a more authentic means of evaluating student performance. Students did report challenges in identifying work to be included or eliminated from the portfolio, but stated that use of the portfolios as an authentic reference tool was an invaluable benefit (Dutt-Doner & Gilman, 1998).

Connecting the portfolio to the experience of the student is paramount to increasing student performance. According to Linn and Gronlund (1995), "the

process of identifying products for the portfolio and commenting on the entries can help students gain a better understanding of expectations and standards of excellence" (p. 339). They also make a further connection between portfolios, student achievement, and parent communication by pointing out that portfolios are "an effective means of making grades and other summary reports more concrete for parents and guardians by illustrating both progress and current levels of student achievement" (Linn & Gronlund, 1995, p. 339). Another powerful means by which portfolios can link student experience to the portfolio process is by means of student self-reflection.

Finally, the quality of the final version of the portfolio product itself is a necessary component of a successful portfolio process, as this would demonstrate more fully the quality of the learning process itself. Portfolios should ideally "carefully demonstrate [a] student's continued growth in and commitment to learning," and portfolios should "demonstrate the student's strong understanding of the learning process" (Lockledge, 1997, p. 36).

STATISTICS ON PORTFOLIO USE

The U.S. Department of Education report *The Condition of Education* (Smith, 1997) reported the following statistics on teacher portfolio use, the most recent national statistics on this topic:

- In the 1994-95 school year, 72% of public elementary teachers used student portfolios compared to 63% of private elementary teachers. Of those elementary teachers who used student portfolios, about 80% reported using them for more than one subject.
- Less experienced public elementary teachers (those with less than 4 years of teaching experience) were more likely to use student portfolios than elementary teachers with 4 or more years of teaching experience (79 versus 72%, respectively).
- Of those who used student portfolios, private elementary teachers were more likely to use them at least once a week to communicate student progress to parents and to determine student grades than were public elementary teachers.
- Of those who used student portfolios, public elementary teachers with 4 or more years of teaching experience were more likely to use student portfolios at least once a week to diagnose student learning problems and to make decisions about student placement than were less experienced public elementary teachers (those with less than 4 years of teaching experience).

CONTEXT

In 1995, a small, urban, archdiocesan Catholic high school in Southern California began a comprehensive effort to develop a portfolio process across all academic disciplines that would include a culminating portfolio and presentation to a panel of school and community members. The student population of nearly 500 young women is almost entirely Latina (95.65%) and from a low socioeconomic level. More than two-thirds of the families qualify for financial assistance (71%) and the school is subsidized financially by its local archdio-

cese. More than half of the entering freshmen from the Class of 2002 (56%) had Stanford 9 "Total Battery" scores in the bottom quartile.

The process of portfolios across the curriculum began with the identification of 14 broad Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLRs), which then became the linchpins of the curriculum. All course content, instructional materials, and teaching methodologies were aligned fully with those ESLRs. Faculty worked tirelessly to develop a syllabus for each curricular offering, stating which ESLRs could be met as a result of taking the class. Each syllabus eventually included very specific Expected Course Learning Results (ECLRs) aligned to specific ESLRs and descriptions of student work that would evidence achievement of the ECLRs and ESLRs, as well as instructional methodologies that would be employed to assist students with the successful production of evidence of their learning. Learning results for courses were organized around knowledge, skills, and dispositions – all of which were aligned with national and state academic content standards.

Type of Portfolio	Purpose and Intent
Showcase or exhibition	To exhibit student work for an audience (parents, peers, community, etc.); students share with others the learning they have experienced
Process or progress	To focus on a particular skill or time period; students show their growth and skill development over time
Special project	To gather and display work relating to a particular class or school project; (e.g., a research paper with a student's reflection); students create this in lieu of a traditional essay or poster

A key component of this process was the development of lists, eventually referred to as descriptors of suggested evidence of what it meant to *meet, exceed,* and *far exceed* the ESLRs. *Meet* was used to refer to ECLRs that all students should be able to know and do by the time they had graduated from high school. *Exceed* and *far exceed* were used to describe Honors and Highest Honors levels of work, respectively. Faculty met in academic departments as well as in interdisciplinary teams for over 100 hours to develop lists of student work that might evidence achievement of the ESLRs. These lists were aligned with the content of academic courses, so that students were provided opportunities to accomplish work both they and the teachers knew would be considered acceptable evidence of meeting, exceeding, or far exceeding the ESLRs. Early on in the process of developing these lists of acceptable evidence, teachers decided that since the ESLRs reflected minimal student competencies, it was important to create descriptors of work that would exceed and far exceed the minimum requirements. It was decided in 1997 that, in order to graduate and receive a diploma, students would be required to provide evidence that they had met all 14 ESLRs, but that graduation with honors or high honors could only be achieved by exceeding and far exceeding the ESLRs.

Teachers were then expected to ensure that what they were teaching was aligned with the ESLRs and that all students understood the connection between course content and the ESLRs. Students were expected to collect evidence that they had met, exceeded, or far exceeded the ESLRs. The expectation that teachers align curricula to the ESLRs and that students collect evidence of their learning and ESLR achievement led to the creation of the culminating portfolio system.

THE PORTFOLIO PROCESS

Beginning in their freshman year, students were taught what the Expected Schoolwide Learning Expectations were and told that receiving a diploma would be contingent not just on passing required courses, but on successfully producing and presenting to a community panel a culminating portfolio in their senior year which evidenced their having successfully met each of the ESLRs.

Table 3. Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLR) Descriptors

1.	Exhibit knowledge of Catholic doctrine, traditions, and moral teaching as a basis for responsible and informed decision making.
2.	Be actively involved in their faith communities by full and conscious participation in worship, service activities, or leadership roles.
3.	Use the library and other resources to access, compile, synthesize, and organize information into a research paper or project.
4.	Effectively communicate ideas through written and oral expression.
5.	Successfully read and interpret literature from diverse texts.
6.	Demonstrate an understanding of the features of the government of the United States on all levels (national, state, and local) and a willingness to become an active participant in the political process.
7.	Display an understanding of major historical events in terms of their causes and effects by identifying and explaining their political, sociological, economic, and geographic factors.
8.	Demonstrate a knowledge of and appreciation for the geographic and cultural diversity of the world.
9.	Express ideas and feelings through visual or performing arts.
10.	Demonstrate the ability to read, write, speak, and understand a language other than English.
11.	Utilize technology to access, evaluate, and communicate information.
12.	Perform algorithms and apply mathematical concepts in problem-solving situations.
13.	Explore questions about the natural world by applying scientific principles and utilizing the scientific method.
14.	Demonstrate an understanding of good health habits and physical fitness.

Each teacher helped students understand the lists of descriptors of acceptable evidence of meeting the ESLRs and provided class time for students to identify which student work would best serve as evidence. Teachers also provided time for whole class discussion and individual reflection upon how particular assignments evidenced achievement of the ESLRs and whether the student work met, exceeded, or far exceeded each ESLR and offered suggestions for how to change work that only met each ESLR into work that exceeded or far exceeded each ESLR. To this end, reflection forms (see Figure 1), where students were asked to reflect upon their learning as well as how well each individual assignment met each ESLR, were developed initially by a few teachers and eventually were adopted and expanded by others so that students had a stronger framework for reflecting upon the work they chose to include in their portfolios.

Student ESLR Reflection Form
Which ESLR does this assignment meet?
Does this assignment meet, exceed, or far exceed the ESLR? Explain why…
How did completing this assignment help you grow as a learner?
What could you have done to improve your growth as a learner on this assignment?

Figure 1. Student ESLR Reflection Form

In the nascent stages of the portfolio process, the management and organization of all student work was relatively simple. Each teacher had a file cabinet in his or her classroom that served as a repository for student folders. This permitted easy access by all constituents. The logistics of portfolio management became more of a challenge as time went on and the sheer volume of student work exponentially increased until the file cabinets no longer provided adequate storage space. A spare classroom was christened the ESLR Evidence Room and was used to store student work. In this way, students could keep multiple years' worth of evidence all in one location. Individual classrooms were only used to store current work from that school year or old work from similar subjects so that students could add work or remove work during the year. At the end of each school year, students placed all of their individual class portfolios into canvas bags (much like those teachers receive at conferences), hung alphabetically on custom-made racks in the ESLR Evidence Room. Luggage tags were used for ease in identifying the student to whom the bag belonged.

Then, at the beginning of each school year, time was provided for students to collect the folders in their bags for subjects they would be taking that year. In this way, students and teachers had immediate access to work from previous years (in the classroom filing cabinets). The folders for subjects the student was no longer taking were stored in each student's bag in the evidence room.

As students entered their senior year, they were allowed to check out their bags and take them home in preparation for the final portfolio production and panel presentation. Special sessions were also scheduled for seniors to work with student-selected teacher-mentors in selecting evidence for and organizing their culminating portfolios.

THE CULMINATING PORTFOLIO

The culminating portfolio required students to select the one best piece of work from each ESLR, work that demonstrated significant growth over time, and work that indicated a need for continued growth. This portfolio also included the portfolio stamp checklist(s) which had been stamped by teachers throughout the school year as each student successfully completed each ESLR and ECLR, evidencing the meeting, exceeding, or far exceeding status of each ESLR. Finally, the portfolio included a reflective essay where each student identified areas of strength, areas of significant growth, and targeted areas for continued improvement.

CHECKLISTS AND STAMPS

Early in 1997, the faculty realized that there was a need to provide a central place for students to record which ESLRs they had evidenced and which ones were still works in progress. Checklists were created on which teachers could stamp an indication that the "Evidence [was] Accepted for ESLR #___" using custom-designed stamps for that purpose. In meeting with parents and students to review ESLR portfolio progress, the checklists proved helpful as quick records of student progress rather than reviewing every entry in the portfolio. Both the counseling staff and principal scheduled regular meetings with students and their parents (two times per year) to discuss individual students' checklist progress and to plan necessary remediation.

THE PANELS

Once a senior had put together the culminating portfolio, she was required to prepare for a presentation to a panel of community members. Panels consisted of school faculty and staff, parents, college and university faculty, business and civic leaders, as well as faculty members and parents from local Catholic elementary schools. Each student's presentation could vary in length from 7 minutes to 30 minutes, depending upon the level of academic honors for which the senior was aiming. Students completing the minimum requirement for a diploma, *meets expectations*, participated in panels of 7 to 10 minutes. Seniors who were aiming for graduation with honors, *exceeds expectations*, participated in panels of 15 to 20 minutes, and those aiming for graduation with high honors, *far exceeds expectations*, participated in panels of 25 to 30 minutes. Student presentations consisted of a tour through the portfolio as well as sharing the major themes of their reflective essays. Panelists also asked a series of questions so that students could flesh out reflective statements as necessary.

GRADUATION WITH HONORS AND HIGH HONORS

Students wishing to graduate with honors and high honors were required to go beyond the minimal meets expectations of the ESLR portfolio. They were required to provide evidence of exceeding and far exceeding the ESLRs. The descriptors defined by the faculty for each ESLR included suggested evidence which would indicate that the student had moved beyond or far beyond the level of minimal competency for each ESLR.

In 1997, it was decided that a point system should be created to award graduation with honors or high honors to students whose minimum academic GPA was 3.0. Students were given one point for each ESLR they had met, two points for each ESLR they had exceeded, and three points for each ESLR they had far exceeded. Receipt of a diploma required a minimum of 14 earned points (one for each met ESLR). Graduation with honors required 21 points, and graduation with high honors required 31 points. The decisions about the number of points earned were made by faculty mentors in each content area who worked with students on selection of evidence. These points were calculated and recorded on the checklists – one for meeting, one for exceeding, and one for far exceeding the ESLRs.

HIGH STAKES

The graduation requirements at this school were changed in 1997 to include a one-Carnegie-unit course on "ESLR Portfolio and Panel." Students whose portfolios were incomplete (lacking either evidence or the reflection piece), or students whose panel presentation did not meet the minimally acceptable level on the schoolwide rubric for that purpose were allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony, but were required to attend a summer school session to remediate the portfolio or reattempt the panel presentation. Students were not granted diplomas until they had met the 241-credit graduation requirement, which included the one-credit course on the ESLR portfolio and panel.

CONTEXT

This study was conducted by surveying all of the seniors of the Class of 2002 and all faculty who were on the staff of this school during the 2001-2002 school year, as well as panelists who participated in the 2002 panel process. Surveys were open-ended, asking participants to evaluate the benefits as well as ways to improve the entire ESLR portfolio process. Respondents were asked to be critically evaluative of the process and indicate specific suggestions for improvement. The survey for the panelists included opportunities for respondents to:

- Indicate what benefits they saw for students who had completed the ESLR process.
- Indicate what benefits they saw in the portfolio and panel process and specific skills they thought students had learned or refined in the process.
- Indicate what about the ESLR process they thought might be improved. They were also asked to include any suggestions they might have for how to do this.

- Indicate on a Likert-scale the extent to which they thought the process was worthwhile (5 being *very worthwhile*, 4 being *worthwhile*, 3 being *somewhat worthwhile*, 2 being *not very worthwhile*, and 1 being *not worthwhile at all*).
- Indicate the ways they thought the process needed to be improved.

In addition, the survey for the 12th-grade students included opportunities for respondents to:

- Indicate what benefits they saw in participating in the ESLR process.
- Indicate what skills they had learned or refined during the ESLR process.
- Indicate what advice, if any, they could give to upcoming seniors who would participate in the ESLR process in the future.
- Indicate on a Likert-scale the extent to which they thought the process was worthwhile (5 being *very worthwhile*, 4 being *worthwhile*, 3 being *somewhat worthwhile*, 2 being *not very worthwhile*, and 1 being *not worthwhile at all*).
- Indicate why they thought they had to complete the ESLR process (besides being required to do so).
- Indicate what strategies they thought the school could implement to help students be more successful in the ESLR process in the future (what should be continued, what should be omitted, or what should be added).

One hundred and two students participated in the study, along with 26 faculty members, and 14 other panelists. These numbers represent a return rate of 100% of those surveyed. Follow-up interviews were conducted with all 28 students, 9 faculty members, and 3 other panelists who indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. The interviews were conducted in the week immediately following the panel presentations. Phone interviews were conducted with panelists from off-campus, whereas faculty, staff, and student-participants were interviewed in person during their preparation or homeroom periods, respectively. The questions asked in follow-up interviews were designed to elicit additional qualitative data, regarding the pros and cons of both the portfolio and panel processes.

RESULTS

Ninety-eight of the 102 students (96%) felt the ESLR process was a good one and should be continued. One hundred percent of the faculty and 100% of the other panelists felt the process was a good one and should be continued. Table 4 summarizes the Likert Scale findings.

Type of Portfolio	Purpose and Intent
Showcase or exhibition	To exhibit student work for an audience (parents, peers, community, etc.); students share with others the learning they have experienced
Process or progress	To focus on a particular skill or time period; students show their growth and skill development over time
Special project	To gather and display work relating to a particular class or school project; (e.g., a research paper with a student's reflection); students create this in lieu of a traditional essay or poster

According to the students, some benefits they gained by participating in the process included:

- Goal-setting, both short and long-term
- Developing organizational skills and long-range planning
- Following directions
- Avoiding procrastination
- Gaining a sense of self-improvement and accomplishment
- Practicing interview skills

Representative quotes from student surveys and follow-up interviews included the following:

- "It helped me see how much I had learned and accomplished over the 4 years of high school. I was amazed."
- "I learned about setting goals and planning to meet those goals. I learned how to organize my time and my materials to be better prepared. I also learned to prioritize things in my life and budget my time and deal with stress."
- "It made me see that I can accomplish anything. This was a difficult process and if I could do this, I can do anything."
- "Being prepared and self-confident are important in interviews and the best way to be prepared is to know what is expected of you and PRACTICE."
- "Procrastination will kill you. I have to 'keep the end in mind' and work backwards from that, planning out what I will do to accomplish that end result."
- "I felt like I had to take responsibility for my learning. It was not the teacher's job to give me work and mine just to do it. It was my job to prove to myself and others that I had learned something and to produce evidence of that learning."
- "Comparing my work over time helped me see how much I had grown and how much I really have been taught by the teachers here."
- "The portfolio process allowed me to constantly reflect upon my learning – to consider how I was learning and where I was struggling. It gave me the chance to know my strengths and weaknesses so I could share those with teachers so they could help me more."

The few students who felt the process was not worthwhile stated that it was too much work and that they saw no benefits for themselves. In follow-up interviews, 2 of the 4 students stated that they felt the process was "not like anything (their) friends in other schools were doing" and that "the faculty was just trying to make it harder to graduate."

The following specific suggestions for improving the process were made by seniors:

- "We just needed a little more time."
- "Try to have practice ESLR panels during school and get more teachers to help during class."
- "Have one-on-one meetings between students and teachers so that students can better understand the evidence that needs to be stamped."
- "Maybe not having such a huge group of teachers at stamping sessions, maybe just one or two."
- "I think it's a good idea to let juniors be part of the panels to get an idea of what to do when it's their turn."
- "Teachers should only assign things that specifically meet ESLRs."
- "You should have a week at the end of each school year in which students choose work from specific grades to meet certain ESLRs; that way students do not have to organize and sort out things at the end of their senior year because seniors have college and graduation to deal with."
- "I think all the evidence should be put on disks. It will be less stressful and easier to access."
- "Teachers should stamp homework and classwork with ESLR stamps instead of 'Good Job' stamps."

Faculty members were overwhelmingly positive regarding the process. The researcher, based on statements made in the surveys and follow-up interviews, identified five themes that emerged from these data. First, the process gave students a great sense of accomplishment and validated their efforts over time. Second, the process taught skills of organization, time management, stress management, goal setting, and oral speaking. Third, students had meaningful opportunities to reflect upon the learning process and their own areas of strength and weakness. Fourth, the process empowered students with the sense that learning was their responsibility and that teachers were facilitators of learning rather than the people primarily responsible for sharing information. (Each person interviewed emphatically stressed this last point.) The portfolio process helped students take ownership of both their work and their grades. Respondents reported that there was a paradigm shift away from teacher-as-knower toward student-as-learner with increased student responsibility for owning the learning process and being an active participant in that process.

Follow-up interviews also revealed the fifth and final theme – that of curricular change. Students and teachers reported that teachers created classrooms which were clearly focused around the accomplishment of ESLRs. Class objectives were inextricably linked to the ESLRs and production of evidence that would demonstrate successful accomplishment of the ESLRs. One teacher may have summed it up best when she said:

> This has forced me to collaborate with others on what we were teaching. We had to agree upon the key content of the courses, the assignments we would give, how we graded those assignments, and how we helped students be successful on those assignments.

Faculty noted that this "was a lot of work" and that "the time spent developing the ESLRs, writing the descriptors, and revamping the course syllabi was very demanding." The self-described "most outspoken opponent of the process" in the early years, concluded that "we were forced to rewrite our courses and our tests and assignments" and "though at first it seemed like a waste of time, seeing these students take such responsibility for their learning and seeing how closely matched our courses are makes things seem fairer for the students." The following specific suggestions for improvement were made by the faculty for improving the process:

- "Specify how long the student presentation should be, i.e., 10 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for questions. We tended to fill up the students' time by asking questions when their presentations were short."
- "The students need to go into more detail about their work."
- "Interview coaching with students would help them better succeed in the presentational (sic) aspect.
- "A 5-minute break in between each presentation before the next one begins so that the panel members can confer about each presenter and complete each rubric before the next presenter enters the room."
- "Information for panelists should have been given out at least 1 day in advance."
- "Some students seemed confused about what was expected."
- "Students who 'meet' need to present for a longer period of time."

CONCLUSIONS

The portfolio process used by this school appears to have been successful at: (1) helping students reflect upon their learning; (2) recognizing their accomplishments and growth over time; (3) developing personal responsibility for their learning; and 4) developing organization and time management skills.

The process also appears to have helped teachers: (1) focus curricular decisions around schoolwide learning expectations; (2) change their understanding of the role of teachers to that of helping students become more active participants in their own learning by producing and evaluating whether or not they have met those expectations; and (3) align their curricular decisions so that there was agreement about what to teach, how to assess student learning, and share strategies about how to best teach key concepts.

This study sought findings for a single school participating in a comprehensive portfolio process. More research needs to be done with a larger sample of diverse school populations to see if similar results will be obtained. The research showed that the small size of the school studied, in part, made this kind of paradigm shift possible; the school administrators commented in interviews that

having a small student population and correspondingly small faculty made the process of effecting change more manageable. The school also invested significant money in providing time for teachers to participate in this reform process – paying for multi-day retreats off campus and stipends for faculty participation in various professional development opportunities. Finally, the school leadership had a very clear vision of curricular reform centered around the development of the ESLRs and a process by which students would develop the portfolios to evidence their achievement of the ESLRs.

This study reveals the powerful potential of the portfolio process as a valuable tool for schoolwide reform on a much larger scale. This study also reveals the benefits of participating in a process that requires students to manage their own learning by collecting data about their own progress toward graduation. The process of continually assessing, reassessing, and reflecting upon that progress, culminating in a presentation of their findings to a representative body of their community makes students feel vested and empowered in their own learning process. This study, with its focus on one school, demonstrates how all members of school communities participating in a culminating portfolio process could benefit, most especially the students, themselves.

Challenges to implementation of schoolwide portfolio programs are one major area of further study, specifically examining if and how the model described herein can be replicated in schools with larger and more diverse student populations. With regional accrediting agencies moving toward a "focus on learning" approach to school assessment, it is incumbent upon researchers to continue to analyze this paradigm shift and its powerful impact on student achievement.

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