15

Portfolios as a Way to Encourage Reflective Practice Among Preservice English Teachers

Robert P. Yagelski[1]

ONE OF THE TENETS TO HAVE EMERGED IN THE BURGEONING LITERATURE ON portfolios is the importance of self-evaluation. Linda Rief writes that portfolios offer "possibilities in diversity, depth, growth, and self-evaluation" (Rief 1990, 26). She asserts that when her seventh grade students used portfolios, "[t]hey thoughtfully and honestly evaluated their own learning with far more detail and introspection than I thought possible" (Rief 1990, 26). Others have made similar claims for portfolio use in their writing classrooms (see Belanoff and Dickson 1991; Yancey 1992b). Dennie Wolf writes that "portfolios can promote a climate of reflection" (Wolf 1989, 37). This potential of the portfolio to promote self-evaluation among student writers also makes it a powerful vehicle for critical reflection in the training of preservice English teachers. Used in this way, portfolios can help teacher educators address one of the most challenging tasks they face: training new teachers to be what Donald Schon has called "reflective practitioners" (Schon 1987).

In this chapter, we examine some of the difficulties that teacher educators face in preparing preservice English teachers for critical, reflective practice, and we describe a portfolio system we developed as part of an effort to address those difficulties. Our goal was to find ways to make critical reflection routine among our preservice teachers; the portfolio system we describe here provided a means to that end in the way it enabled us to integrate theory, observation, and practice and encouraged our students to engage in ongoing self-assessment. In the course of our discussion, we

argue that the use of portfolios, if carefully designed for specific contexts of use, can become a crucial element in the effective preparation of English teachers to meet the difficult challenges of the secondary school language arts classroom in the 1990s and beyond.

Preparing Reflective Teachers

The difficulties of preparing student teachers to become effective educators are by now well documented (Blanton et al. 1993; Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann 1985; Goodman 1985; Richardson-Koehler 1988; Zeichner 1990). For us, chief among those difficulties is the apparent tension between the need to prepare student teachers for the day-to-day pressures and practicalities of classroom instruction and our desire to encourage among student teachers what Schon calls "reflection-in-action," the ability to think critically about what they are doing as they face unfamiliar or difficult situations in their practice as teachers (Schon 1987, 26). Understandably, many of the preservice teachers we work with are anxious about their ability to handle the many practical tasks facing classroom teachers: developing and carrying out effective lesson plans; dealing with student behavior in the classroom; accommodating school and state curriculum guidelines; handling mundane but pressing daily responsibilities like attendance and discipline; and managing the paper load. For our English preservice teachers, these anxieties are exacerbated by their belief that they must become expert grammarians if they are to be successful teachers—a belief that is reinforced by many inservice teachers and by the important place of formal grammar instruction in the English curricula of many of the middle schools and high schools in which our students work. As a result, we feel a need to acquaint our preservice teachers with the traditional content and methods of instruction that they will likely be expected to know when they leave our program and to prepare them to handle the many practical tasks that often characterize the work of secondary school English teachers.

At the same time, we are also committed to the broader, ongoing project of improving practice in English classrooms. We believe, as Marilyn Cochran-Smith puts it, that "[p]rospective teachers need to know from the start that they are part of a larger struggle and that they have a responsibility to reform, not just replicate, standard school practice" (Cochran-Smith 1991, 280). Furthermore, we share the concern of many teacher educators that field experiences, which are a standard part of most teacher prepara-

tion programs, can reinforce problematic classroom practices and lead to unthinking acceptance of those practices, that, as Salzillo and Van Fleet put it in their review of teacher education field experiences, "student teaching [can] become simply an exercise in adapting new personnel into old patterns" (Salzillo and Van Fleet 1977, 28; see also Feinman-Nemser and Buchmann 1985; Goodman 1985; Zeichner 1990). In many cases, anxious preservice teachers placed in classrooms for field experiences may focus on the obvious responsibilities of daily classroom teaching, such as managing student behavior, taking attendance, covering required content, grading, and so on, and abandon important theoretical perspectives they may have gained in their university courses. In one study of student teaching, for example, researchers reported that student teachers rejected much of the content of their university courses in as little as two weeks after they began student teaching (Richardson-Koehler 1988). In such instances, early field experiences could, as Jesse Goodman phrases it, "stifle students' potential for reflective inquiry and experimental action, while encouraging mindless imitation" (Goodman 1985, 46). Goodman's study of the effects of an early field experience revealed that the majority of the preservice teachers in his study "learned that teaching was primarily the transmission of utilitarian skills to children and the efficient management of curriculum and pupils" (Goodman 1985, 46).

Yet it is during student teaching and related early field experiences that preservice teachers are most likely to have opportunities for the kind of careful, critical reflection on their own teaching that can result in effective classroom practice and in their participation in efforts to improve current practice. In order to avoid the kinds of problems Goodman describes, field experiences must be constructed in a way that makes ongoing critical reflection as routine for preservice teachers as the practical, everyday responsibilities of the secondary English classroom. In our view, such field experiences should engage student teachers in "authentic" classroom practice over an extended time period but also protect student teachers in some sense from many of the day-to-day pressures of classroom management and "curriculum delivery." Furthermore, field experiences should provide regular, structured opportunities for reflection on that classroom experience in a way that fosters examination, not only of classroom practice itself, but also of the assumptions that inform that practice. As John Mayher writes, "Questioning such assumptions requires both reexamining and reinterpreting the meaning of our own learning experiences in and out of school by looking

at them through new theoretical lenses" (Mayher 1990, 1). Our goal, then, is to develop in our preservice teachers a critical awareness of what they do as English teachers that becomes a lens through which they view their teaching, their colleagues' teaching, and curriculum and schools in general.

In order to accomplish this goal, Joy Seybold, the English department head at Jefferson High School in Lafayette, Indiana, and I worked together with two other members of Joy's department, Bonnie Fusiek and Lana Snellgrove, to redesign a university English methods course required of all secondary English education majors. That course became the centerpiece of our efforts to prepare preservice English teachers for reflective practice, and portfolios were the critical element in making the course a practicum for reflective practice. Drawing on the experience of the Jefferson High English department in designing and implementing a portfolio system for grades nine through twelve, we emphasized the potential of a portfolio to provide opportunities for ongoing self-reflection that becomes a routine part of the process of completing the portfolio. Just as students in English classes must regularly evaluate their own writing as they compile portfolios, our preservice teachers, we hoped, would evaluate their own work—and that of the experienced English teachers they observed—in secondary English classrooms as they completed portfolios for the methods course. Moreover, in the same way that writing portfolios can provide a detailed picture of a student's written work over time, we wanted to use portfolios to encourage our preservice teachers to reconsider and assess their work in high school classrooms over the course of a semester. Although we believe the portfolio system we eventually designed enabled us to accomplish these goals, the task was not an easy one and reveals the complexities of designing and implementing effective portfolio systems.

Beginnings: The Methods Mentor Program

Our early efforts to address the problems described above focused on expanding the field experiences for preservice English teachers at Purdue University. Before we began our project, English education students at Purdue had only one formal early field experience prior to their student teaching semester. That field experience was generally limited to observation and often involved little or no hands-on classroom work; students thus had few opportunities to engage in active learning in their field experiences. Many students were unhappy with this situation since they believed they needed

more time in classrooms in order to prepare them adequately for full-time teaching. Many teachers agreed. At Jefferson High School, located a few miles from the Purdue University campus, teachers' concerns about the preparation of preservice teachers led many of them to agree to participate in our project when we proposed incorporating a field experience into the existing English methods course at Purdue.

Initially, this project, which we called the Methods Mentor Program, involved developing a limited field experience component for the methods course. Students would be paired with "mentor" teachers at Jefferson High School and would work with those teachers over a two-week period to design, develop, and teach several lessons in a high school English class. The students would then write a detailed report in which they would describe and reflect on their experiences in the high school classrooms. We conducted the program in this manner for three semesters.

Although in many ways our program seemed beneficial, a number of problems emerged. First, the field experience was simply too limited for the methods students to gain the perspective they needed to begin to reflect critically on teaching English in a high school setting. Second, the limited nature of the experience encouraged students to focus on the practical pressures, especially the need to learn to deal with student behavior, and to ignore the broader issues of curriculum and theory we wished to highlight. Finally, other than the written reports the students produced after their field experience, nothing about the program itself promoted the kind of critical reflection we had hoped to encourage among our students.

As a result, we spent several weeks during the summer of 1993 radically redesigning the methods course for the upcoming fall semester. A faculty retirement in the English education program at Purdue left a vacancy that provided an opportunity for the methods course to be team-taught by Joy, Bonnie, Lana, and me. We thus reconceived the course as a collaborative effort between the university and the high school. Next, we expanded the field experience component so that it became the focus of the students' work in the course: instead of two weeks, students would spend ten weeks working in a classroom at the high school. Then, we paired students with classroom teachers at the high school so that each student teacher worked closely with a mentor teacher during those ten weeks. And finally, we divided the students (usually twenty each semester) into smaller discussion groups of five or six students; these groups, led by one of the course instructors, met weekly to discuss assigned readings and related assignments

and to reflect on their classroom experiences. In essence, we restructured the course so that it became an extended on-site practicum at the high school.

The most important change we made in the course involved portfolios. In redesigning the course, the stickiest problem we faced concerned assessment: If we sent students off to work independently with classroom teachers, how would we assess their growth and learning? The crucial issue was to develop an assessment method that might document learning but also encourage critical reflection on the part of our students. The portfolio enabled us to do so.

The Reflective Portfolio

Although the portfolio we designed was intended to be the vehicle for the kind of critical reflection we hoped to encourage in our new version of the methods course in the fall of 1993, the flaws in the design of that portfolio quickly became apparent. We asked students to collect a series of documents, most of which we specified, that they had produced during the course of the semester. Although some of these documents (such as lesson plans and self-evaluations of their teaching) were related to the students' classroom experiences and resulted from their independent efforts and self-reflection, most were simply course assignments that the students had completed at various points in the semester (e.g., sample unit or lesson plans and responses to assigned readings). Unwittingly, in trying to make the portfolio a comprehensive portrait of the students' work in high school classrooms over the semester, we had squelched the opportunity for careful reflection and ended up with what amounted to collections of documents; moreover, what reflection did occur was largely summative in the sense that students were evaluating their work for the portfolio *after* the fact and not in an ongoing fashion.

Our dissatisfaction—and the students'—with the portfolios led us to reexamine our approach. At the end of the fall 1993 semester, we discussed the problems we had experienced with the portfolios and considered adjustments. In doing so, we identified three key features that should characterize the portfolios:

1. the portfolio should encourage ongoing reflection and not simply document the students' work;
2. the portfolio should grow out of and reflect a range of experiences and competencies related to teaching and learning;

3. the portfolio should include a variety of student-selected materials related to those experiences and competencies.

In short, the portfolio would be not simply a means to *assess* growth and reflection but a vehicle for that growth and reflection.

We identified four areas of teaching secondary school English in which competency and experience were, we believed, essential for our students as they prepared for student teaching and beyond:

1. design and development of effective lessons and curriculum;
2. observation and critique of classroom practice;
3. assessment of adolescent students' reading and writing;
4. teaching performance.

These four areas represented key objectives we set for our students as they trained to become effective classroom teachers. At the same time, as we note above, we were not interested in simply helping students learn, for instance, to design good lesson plans. We also wanted them to understand the complex connections between classroom activities and the assumptions about language and learning that drive those activities; we wanted them to be able to identify those connections, to understand their assumptions and the implications of those assumptions, and to develop lesson plans accordingly. In short, we wanted to encourage our student teachers to be critically reflective in these four crucial areas of their practice.

With these goals in mind, we restructured the course portfolio for spring semester 1994 as an ongoing, semester-long activity—one that required students not only to document competency in these four areas but also demonstrate their own efforts to think critically about what they were doing and to examine carefully why and how they engaged in the various activities described in their portfolios. During the first few weeks of the semester, before the students began working in the high school classrooms, we set forth the guidelines for the portfolios (see Appendix). From that point, their work in the course, and particularly in the high school classrooms to which they were assigned, was shaped by these guidelines. In effect, each student was being asked to construct a critical portrait of her or his learning and growth as a teacher during the semester; that portrait would emerge in the documents each student selected for the portfolio and in how those documents were presented and evaluated by the student.

The Reflective Portfolio in Practice

The reflective portfolios shaped the students' work in the methods course in two important ways. First, the portfolio assignment encouraged the students to evaluate and reflect on their work in the course *as they engaged in it*. Since they were responsible for documenting their learning and growth in the four areas listed above *over time*, they could not wait until the end of the semester to think about these four areas. Instead, they had to structure their work in ways that would enable them to engage in, for example, assessment of student writing or reading; moreover, they had to find ways to demonstrate that they had engaged in such work and had also reflected on their learning in that area. As a result, the students made decisions throughout the semester about what their classroom experiences should include and how to document those experiences. These decisions represented perhaps the most important reflection they engaged in during the semester.

This sort of reflection was illustrated in a conversation that occurred approximately halfway through the semester on the electronic bulletin board that we established for the class.[2] In this instance, Abbie[3] comments on her first experience in teaching a lesson to the high school class in which she was working:

> Initially, I was a bit frustrated, but I soon realized that I had to remain poised and confident in my abilities. Usually I am easygoing, a real "softy", but today I proved that, although I may be little, I can be quite firm. The student evaluations that I got were very good. I plan to include them in my final portfolio, for they seemed to show that I had good rapport with my students. Of course some students judge your teaching abilities on the basis of your physical qualities. One student wrote, "She had my attention because she was pretty." Others thought I could have done a better job by "handing out cokes." Though these comments lacked instructional value, they were OK, for they too indirectly say that I am approachable, OK to joke with. As my teacher remarked, "It's OK Sometimes you have to use other things to gain attention." Teaching is just not a transmission of knowledge. It is energy, personality, appearance, credibility, rapport, communication skills, confidence, patience, delivery, organization, planning, creativity, and spontaneity, all in one person. It is a skill, an art, and a talent.

Here Abbie is reflecting on her experience in the high school classroom and drawing conclusions from that experience about what it means to be a teacher. Although it's quite possible that she might have made such a

comment even if she was not required to document the experience for her portfolio, it's likely that the portfolio encouraged this kind of reflection on her experience. As she thought about how to document her experience for her portfolio, Abbie had to reflect on the experience itself and what it might have revealed to her about her own teaching and teaching in general. In addition, she had to think about such issues *during* the experience, since she knew that the portfolio required her to document and reflect on her learning in a way that precluded waiting until the end of the semester. In other words, it would have been impractical (and perhaps impossible) for Abbie to return to the high school classroom several weeks later at the end of the semester and ask for student evaluations. Instead, she had to gather and think about student evaluations as she was in the midst of the experience; she also had to decide what these evaluations revealed about her teaching and about teaching in general. In the end, she did include the student evaluations in her portfolio among the other materials she selected to document her teaching performance and growth during the semester. Her decisions about what to include in her portfolio thus reflect her thinking about what that experience meant. But as her comment suggests, she was already thinking carefully about what the students had said long before the semester was over and while she was still working with those students in the classroom. In this way, the portfolio encouraged ongoing reflection as preservice teachers like Abbie engaged in various experiences related to the course requirements.

The portfolios also encouraged a kind of critical reflection that went beyond the examination of a classroom experience described in this example. Whereas Abbie was encouraged to examine her experience in a way that might enable her to document what she learned about classroom teaching, we also saw evidence that students were beginning to develop an understanding of what it means to be *critically reflective*. For example, as the deadline for the portfolio approached near the end of the semester, several students discussed on the electronic bulletin board the ways in which the portfolio assignment required them to reexamine their work. Again Abbie commented, but this time she focuses on the portfolio itself:

> This final task is the kind that students need, for it demands creativity, organization, originality, reflection, and revision. There are no "right" answers and no amount of "cramming" will help get it together. Furthermore, the portfolio doesn't isolate learning into a restricted time frame. Instead, it is the culmination of weeks of observation, critique, teaching, assessment, and

reflection. The value of the portfolio rests on one's ability to synthesize and apply, to fit the weekly "pieces" of knowledge we gain into a complete puzzle. Isn't this exactly what Wiggins encourages in education?

In her comment Abbie relates the activity of completing her portfolio to the use of portfolios in high school English classrooms. In addition, she refers to an article on assessment that we had asked the students to read (Wiggins 1993b), drawing from that article an important theoretical perspective that she then applies to her own practice. In other words, the act of compiling the portfolio encouraged her to make connections between new theoretical concepts she was learning and her own experience as a student and preservice teacher.

A few days later, Abbie remarked:

> With a portfolio project, it is impossible to just get by without it showing in your final product. I've been working on my portfolio, so this has become abundantly clear. It just demands so much from the student, and in order to develop a well-organized, coherent, reflective representation of hard work, mental growth, and engaging thought, the student has to be fully engaged and aware of the material.

Such comments are all the more meaningful because they were unsolicited and occurred in a forum in which we as course instructors participated but which we did not moderate or control in the way we might manage an in-class discussion. As a result, the students often spoke more freely on the electronic bulletin board than they might have in a face-to-face group discussion (see Riedl 1989).

The variety of materials the students included in their portfolios was remarkable and indicated, we believe, the kind of careful reexamination of their experiences we hoped to encourage. These materials included:

- lesson plans, assignment prompts, quizzes, exams, etc. that they had developed
- copies of student essays to which they had responded or which they had graded
- evaluations of their classroom performance from teachers, from high school students, and from their peers in the methods course
- evaluations of other teachers' classroom performances
- evaluations of their peers' classroom performances
- notes made of various classes they observed

- handouts, overheads, and other materials they developed for use in the classes in which they worked
- reflections on the assigned course readings as they related to one of the four areas they were to document in the portfolio
- a videotape of a lesson taught by the student teacher

In most cases, these materials were accompanied by a statement or self-evaluation by the student describing and explaining the documents. These statements amounted to written descriptions of the kind of reflection students engaged in as they selected and gathered the documents for their portfolios. For example, in reexamining for her portfolio the lesson she taught from a rhetorical perspective set forth in some of the assigned course readings, Abbie concluded that the assignment, in which she asked students to write letters to a newspaper editor, "had one major flaw":

> Though I concentrated on making this a realistic task, it ultimately became another writing assignment for the teacher to grade. Now, I can think of a more realistic approach. Perhaps the disturbing problem of grammar would have been eliminated if the context were real. Obviously, it is impossible to completely disregard academic focus. However, by encouraging students to actually send their letters to the newspaper for publication, assessment could have taken place amidst a practical task.

Here, Abbie assesses her experience in teaching her lesson from a perspective provided by the course readings, a perspective that enables her to draw conclusions about what happened and why. In other words, as she tries to document her experience for her portfolio, she attempts to evaluate her own practice, using theoretical ideas provided by the course readings, and then considers how to adjust her practice accordingly.

Using Portfolios to Encourage Reflection: Implications

Our experience with portfolios in a university English methods course adds another bit of evidence to the growing literature that suggests that portfolios can indeed promote critical reflection. But the process of designing, developing, and implementing a portfolio system—in any course—is a decidedly complex one that requires teachers to adapt the portfolio to the specific contexts within which they teach. Portfolios in and of themselves will neither solve the problems of assessment that confront teachers nor promote the kind of self-evaluation or reflection teachers often hope to

encourage among their students. Such goals must be integral to the portfolio process and must inform the design and development of that system within a specific classroom context. To do so requires adjustments that may significantly influence pedagogy. For instance, one case study of a teacher who implemented portfolios in her classroom reveals the ways in which her teaching "was clearly changed by using portfolios with her students" (Gomez et al. 1991, 627). In addition, the teacher "found that instruction is not a one-size-fits-all proposition," and that she needed to make significant changes in the organization of her classroom and the ways in which she monitored her students' work (Gomez et al. 1991, 627). We also needed to make such adjustments, and as we changed our portfolio system, we also changed the course in which we used it, as we note above. In short, the portfolios were integral to the structure of the course; one would not, we believe, be effective without the other. Although such an assertion is not new to those who use portfolios, we found this notion of the integral relationship between the portfolio and the course context to be perhaps the most important implication of our experience.

A second and related implication is that such uses of portfolios as we employed in our methods course can result in, as Gomez, Graue, and Bloch point out, "a new role for teachers and students, requiring collaboration in a way that honors learners as makers of knowledge" (Gomez et al. 1991, 627). Encouraging our students to engage in reflective practice led us all— instructors and students alike—to adopt new roles and new perspectives on the work we were doing and on how to accomplish that work. As course instructors we ultimately had to become mentors at the same time that we retained responsibility for evaluating the students' performance— something not always comfortable for us.[4] In addition, in evaluating the portfolios at the end of the course, we found it necessary to adapt to new criteria that grew out of the ways in which students had constructed their portfolios. For example, we allowed the students great flexibility in deciding what kinds of documents to include in their portfolios, and we had to be careful about comparing one portfolio to another because of the variety of documents the students chose to include. In this sense, we could assess the portfolios using neither a norm-referenced nor a criterion-referenced approach; rather, we needed to develop some hybrid approach that grew out of our objectives for our students and the flexibility we allowed them in completing their portfolios. For the students the task was something like what Grant Wiggins describes as an "ill-structured and authentic task . . . though the methods and the criteria are quite clear to all students in

the course, there are no pat routines, procedures, or recipes for solving the problem" (Wiggins 1993b, 205). As a result, not only did students have to think in new and perhaps unfamiliar ways to solve the "problem" of putting together their portfolios, but our assessment methods needed to be flexible as well.

In order to address these complexities, we found we needed to engage in an assessment session similar to the kind of rating session Edward White describes in his discussion of large-scale holistic assessment (White 1993, 163-167). White asserts that readers of essays in large-scale holistic scoring need to become "an assenting community that feels a sense of ownership of the standards and the process" of the scoring (White 1993, 164). Similarly, we found a need to read through several portfolios, sort them in a general way, compare our initial evaluations, then begin to identify shared criteria. Once we did so, all four course instructors read and evaluated each portfolio, then compared evaluations before agreeing on a final grade. Such an approach took a great deal of time, but it was necessary in order to achieve reliability in our assessments of the students' work.

Initially, the process was uncomfortable, since we sometimes felt that the criteria that were emerging through our discussions of the portfolios had not necessarily been made explicit to students at the outset of the course. For example, as we read through and discussed the students' portfolios, it became clear that having a variety of perspectives on their classroom performance was crucial in helping us "see" and understand what they did as they taught their lessons. Although we had suggested early in the semester that students might gather a variety of evaluations of their teaching (from their mentor teacher, their peers, the students they taught), we did not "require" it; we wanted to open up rather than limit possibilities for documenting teaching performance, so we remained general in our guidelines. Yet as we tried to assess the portfolios, we realized that the most effective portfolios had this variety of perspectives and documents. This variety of perspective thus became an important criterion in our assessment of the students' portfolios. Eventually, we formalized these criteria to some extent and made them explicit to students in subsequent semesters at the outset of the course. In this way, our criteria for evaluating these portfolios have emerged from our own views about what the portfolios should be like, from our shared (and sometimes negotiated) standards for student performance, and from our evaluations of previous student portfolios.

For the students, a different problem emerged as they engaged in thinking about and completing their portfolios. They felt a tension between the role of professional educator—which in many ways our portfolio system encouraged them to adopt—and their official status as students. Although such a problem is typical of student teachers (see Richardson-Koehler 1988), in this case the tensions created problems that we had not foreseen and which we needed to respond to during the semester. Some students were frustrated by the lack of *specific* requirements for the portfolios. They saw the flexibility as a liability, one that made it difficult for them to determine what they needed to do to achieve a good grade. In retrospect, we realize that this tension grew out of their desire to do well in the course and perhaps their unfamiliarity with adopting the perspective of a professional educator. At the time, we pressed them to think like teachers and not like students, to see their work as part of their professional development and not as a set of requirements they needed to fulfill in order to complete their programs. Despite our efforts to encourage such a stance, some students felt uneasy, some resisted openly, and a few believed we were being unfair.

Although such uneasiness and resistance represented a minority view among the students (at least as reflected in their anonymous final course evaluations), it raises concerns about the pressures we can inadvertently place on students in using a portfolio system. We believe the same kinds of uneasiness can occur among students in a portfolio-based writing class, as some researchers have found (Gomez et al. 1991). Although our students, as preprofessional educators, were in a position that differed in significant ways from students in, say, a freshman composition course, students in any kind of course often feel the same pressure to achieve a high grade. That pressure can emerge as an obstacle in courses structured around portfolios. As Burnham writes of the demands a portfolio can place on students, "It asks students to strive for excellence and long-term development rather than settling for the immediate gratification available through traditional grading" (Burnham 1986, 136). Teachers thus need to be aware of such pressures and adapt their portfolio systems accordingly.

One final implication of our work had to do with the kind of collaboration we saw our students engaging in as they put their portfolios together. A few weeks before the deadline for the portfolios, one student, Don, posted the following message to the electronic course bulletin board:

> Since we are getting down to the wire, I'd like to talk about peer tutoring as it pertains to our portfolios. Help! I would like to get together and read some of

each others stuff some time before the portfolios are due. I know we are all busy, but I think it's important to get feedback on this. Jake and I met last Friday evening to discuss what we are putting into our portfolios and to discuss our impressions of the whole 422 experience. I found this experience very useful although somewhat unfocused. Anyone wanting to share work, post a note about it.

We learned that a number of students had, with no prompting from us, begun to gather together to do just what Don proposed: consult with each other and assist each other in compiling their portfolios. In retrospect, we realize that the entire course was structured in a way that encouraged collaboration among the students, and the portfolio was integral to that structure. And although we were never present at any of these student gatherings (we were, in fact, never invited), we suspect that the kind of collaborative efforts in which the students engaged encouraged the very kind of reflection we hoped the course would encourage. Our belief is that portfolios can foster such collaboration in a way that enhances the critical reflection students might engage in as they compile their portfolios—in a writing class, a methods class, or any other sort of class.

Conclusion

At the end of the 1993 to 1994 academic year, we assessed the adjustments we had made to the course and the course portfolio. Our own view, which was supported by virtually all of the students in their anonymous course evaluations, was that we had taken a big step toward achieving the goal we had set for ourselves at the outset: to design a field-based course that fostered our students' development as reflective teachers. We also concluded the portfolio we had designed was integral to achieving that goal. Although circumstances in our respective institutions have made it impossible to continue the team-teaching arrangement we enjoyed during 1993 to 1994, the methods course remains structured around the reflective portfolio we developed during that year. That portfolio, we believe, enabled us to assess our students' work much more accurately and fully than we might otherwise have been able to do. But the greatest benefit we saw has been in the critical reflection that the act of constructing the portfolios seems to have encouraged among our preservice teachers. It is impossible to say whether the portfolio will have lasting effects in encouraging our students to become lifelong reflective practitioners of the kind Donald Schon writes so compellingly about, but we see the portfolio—and the course into which

it is built—as an important step in their training as thoughtful teachers. We hope a comment one student wrote anonymously on a final course evaluation speaks for most of our students:

> More than anything, this course has showed me the importance of thoughtful reflection. I appreciated the opportunity to think for myself and make my own decisions with regard to teaching decisions and the construction of the portfolio. The final portfolio was one of the most valuable academic tasks that I have done. It provided helpful guidance, but it also allowed us to be individuals. There were no right or wrong answers, so to speak, and you could not study for this test of learning. Instead, the portfolio demonstrated each individual's mental growth during the semester. The portfolio taught me more about myself and my abilities than any test could ever do.

Notes

1.   This chapter was prepared with invaluable help from Bonnie Fusiek, Joy Seybold, and Lana Snellgrove of Jefferson High School in Lafayette, Indiana, who helped develop the course and the portfolio system described below. The "we" in this article refers to me, Bonnie, Joy, and Lana.
2.   The electronic bulletin board we set up was a Usenet newsgroup established for the course to allow students to engage in asynchronous "discussions" at their leisure about their work in the course. Students could log into the newsgroup at any time to read comments posted by their classmates or to post their own comments. These online discussions usually focused on issues we discussed in class, the students' experiences at the high school, and sometimes events elsewhere that related to the educational issues we were discussing (such as the development of a new standardized test in Indiana).
3.   Pseudonyms are used in place of the students' real names throughout this article.
4.   Burnham discusses the same kind of tension in working with new teaching assistants for a first year college composition course.

Appendix
Guidelines for Course Portfolio

The portfolio is the major project for this course. It is intended to reflect your efforts and learning in the class and to provide you with the opportunity to document demonstrated competencies in the teaching of English which you have developed over the course of the semester. Although you should construct a portfolio that best reflects your work in this course, you should adhere to the following guidelines as you put together your portfolio.

Contents. In essence, the portfolio will contain materials that document each student's learn and competency in five key areas in the teaching of English: (1) designing, developing, and planning lessons; (2) assessment; (3) observation and critique of instruction; (4) teaching performance; and (5) understanding diversity. The specific contents of the portfolios will vary from student to student, and you should choose materials that best exemplify and document your work in the four areas discussed below. At the same time, several specific requirements for each of these five areas should be met. These are described below.

1. *Designing, Developing, and Planning Lessons.* This section of your portfolio may include a variety of materials, such as lesson plans and materials you developed and used at Jefferson, assignments you might have given, notes you made as you designed lessons, etc. It must include one complete unit plan. This unit plan, which should cover at least a two-week period, should include the following components:
   a) a day-by-day outline of the unit;
   b) at least five complete lesson plans that best reflect the activities, design, and objectives of the unit;
   c) a rationale of approximately five pages which discusses the objectives of the unit and how the specific activities and assignments meet those objectives.

   Ideally, the unit plan will grow out of the lessons you developed and taught in the class you were assigned to at Jefferson, but it need not. You may decide to develop a different unit or you may rethink the lessons you taught at Jefferson. Each section of the unit plan should be clearly labeled and you should indicate the appropriate grade level and time of year for implementing your unit plan.

2. *Assessment.* This section of the portfolio should document efforts you have made during the semester to develop understanding and competency in assessing students' reading, writing, speaking, etc. in English classes. Some possibilities:
   • develop and assess a specific writing or reading assignment in the lessons you teach at Jefferson and include appropriate copies in your portfolio;

- assist your mentor teacher in assessing students' essays or exams; include copies of these materials along with a discussion and critique of what you did in assessing the students' work;
- include copies of tests or quizzes you gave to students and discuss these;
- observe and participate in the use of portfolios in Jefferson English classes, describing and critiquing your participation for your portfolio.

The documents you include in this section should show clearly what you did and what you learned about assessment. You should also attempt to draw on the assigned readings in your discussion/critique of your assessment work.

3. *Observation and Critique of Instruction.* In this section you should document efforts you have made to learn from other teachers by observing and critically reflecting on their teaching. Some possibilities: include notes and descriptions of your mentor teacher's lessons; observe other teachers and write a critique of their classroom performance; observe and critique one of your classmates as she or he teaches a lesson.

The purpose of this section of your portfolio is to demonstrate that you have learned how to observe and assess what occurs in a classroom from a teacher's perspective.

4. *Teaching Performance.* This section should document your actual classroom teaching. It should show clearly what you did as you taught lessons, how you performed as a teacher, and what you learned from your teaching experiences. Documents might include some or all of the following:
   - a written evaluation of your teaching by your mentor teacher;
   - a written evaluation of your teaching by one or more of your classmates;
   - written evaluations of your teaching by your students;
   - notes made by your teacher during your lessons;
   - notes you made on your own classroom performance.

This section should not only demonstrate preparation and actual class-room performance, but it should also show evidence of careful reflection on your teaching: what happened and why; what went well and why; what did not go well and why; what you might have done better.

5. *Understanding Diversity.* This section of your portfolio should document your efforts to understand and accommodate diversity in the secondary school classroom, particularly with respect to teaching the language arts. Obviously, your efforts to understand and accommodate diversity in the classroom should always inform your teaching, but this section of your portfolio should highlight those efforts. Some possible documents to include:
   - a discussion of your experiences with students of varied ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, religious, or cultural backgrounds in the classroom in which you worked;
   - your ESL assignment essay or a revision of that essay;

- copies lesson plans or assignments you developed that specifically address issues of diversity;
- a discussion and critique of those lessons or assignments.

In addition to the documents you include in each of the five sections described above, two other documents are required in your portfolio:

1. *An Introductory Overview.* This document should serve as a kind of table of contents and guide to your portfolio; it should let a reader know what the contents of your portfolio are and how they are arranged. It is also an introductory statement by you that should set the tone for your portfolio.
2. *A Self-Evaluation.* This document should be a careful, critical reflection on your portfolio and the work and learning it represents. It should include specific reference to each of the four areas of competency described above, and it should reflect your learning and growth as a teacher during the semester. Please note that this is a key part of your portfolio.

In all, then, your portfolio will contain five sections and two separate documents. You will decide which specific documents to include in each of the five sections, but you should do so according to the guidelines described here.

Format. The format of your portfolio is up to you and should reflect to some extent your sense of your work in the course. But keep in mind that the format and organization of your portfolio will influence how a reader evaluates that portfolio and thus affects your grade. Above all, you should strive to make your portfolio understandable and readable so that it best reflects your work in this course. Be sure to type all documents you write for the portfolio. (Class notes, student work, etc., of course, need not be typed.) Also be sure to label each document clearly and organize the portfolio so that it is easy for a reader to read and make sense of.

Grading. As the syllabus indicates, the portfolio is worth 50% of your grade for the course. The grade for the portfolio will be determined on the basis of the completeness of the portfolio, the relevance of the documents, the organization of the portfolio, and the depth of thought and self-reflection demonstrated in the portfolio.

A Final Note. Although this portfolio is primarily designed to shape your work for this course and provide the instructor with a vehicle for evaluating that work, it is also intended as the first step in developing a professional portfolio, which may help you have a worthwhile student teaching experience and a successful search for a full-time teaching position after you graduate. As a result, it makes sense to put together a good portfolio that you can use as you move through your undergraduate program and into a professional position.