

Situating Portfolios

An Introduction

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WHEN TEACHERS BEGAN DEVELOPING PORTFOLIOS OVER A DECADE AGO, we knew that what we were about—with process writing and collaborative pedagogies and, not least, portfolios—was pretty ambitious: it was, in fact, nothing short of changing the face of American education.

College and University Portfolio *Assessment*

At the postsecondary level, the efforts were initiated more often than not by a demand for accountability, an insistence that students demonstrate they could write well enough to move to the next level or to graduate. Portfolios, then—as documented by Pat Belanoff, Peter Elbow, and William Condon—comprised a creative response to that demand for accountability. At the same time, portfolios also became the resolution to the widespread perception of a mismatch between, on the one hand, what writers did in class and on the other, the way students were asked to demonstrate they could write. In the classroom, they were asked to write on topics of interest them, to share that writing, and to revise and/or rewrite on the basis of that response. When asked to *demonstrate* they could write, however, students found the conditions radically different: assigned topics, limited times for writing (typically, thirty to forty-five minutes), and a demand for editing above all else. Portfolios provided a way to bridge classroom and test, and most of the early work in collegiate portfolios (e.g., Belanoff and Dick-

son 1991) focused, not surprisingly, on the assessment strand of portfolio assessment.

Portfolio Assessment in K-12 Schooling

In the K-12 context, unlike the postsecondary context, the motivation for portfolios was provided, typically, not by an external demand for testing or accountability, but by the teachers themselves, by *their* sense that there was something missing in their classrooms, that there had to be a better way to invite students to show what they had learned. Across the country—sometimes quietly and alone, sometimes in groups and quite deliberately—teachers in elementary and middle and high schools introduced portfolios to their students, with results that are now well-documented (e.g., Graves and Sunstein 1992; Yancey 1992b). Given this freedom, they designed diverse models—writing portfolios and literature portfolios and reading portfolios and journalism portfolios and literacy portfolios—all of them sensitive to their local communities, to their educational contexts, and perhaps most important, to their students' needs. The fact that teachers are still engaged in this conversation, and expanding it as well, testifies to the ability of portfolios to link and to showcase multiple variables: student growth, student achievement, commentary about learning, rich curricula, and innovative teachers and administrators. In the K-12 context, then, the portfolio strand motivated the primary interest in portfolio assessment.

Portfolio Assessment

Currently, both threads of the phrase portfolio assessment—portfolio and assessment—inform work in portfolios in educational contexts ranging from early childhood to graduate school. And in the intervening years between the time the first portfolio volumes were published—1991 to 1992—and now, much has changed: the situations described above have almost reversed themselves. In colleges and universities, portfolios are currently situated within classrooms as often as within programs and institutions. Current questions regarding portfolios in this context focus not on portfolios' legitimacy, but rather on issues both pragmatic and theoretical, and frequently on learning: what new portfolio models can we develop; how does reading a set of portfolios help us understand our own curriculum; how might one develop an elec-

tronic portfolio, and how might one assess it? In contrast, as we hear from Sandra Murphy and Susan Callahan particularly, teachers in the kindergarten through twelfth context have found themselves more constrained and increasingly under pressure as states—from Vermont to Kentucky to Connecticut—have designed statewide portfolio models used for assessment—models often imposed from state capitals, often by administrators with little understanding of what is involved in daily teaching and learning.

Not that these changes should surprise us. Catharine Lucas predicted them several years ago. In an essay outlining her cautions about portfolio use, she identifies three factors that the portfolio movement, should it be successful, needs to address:

- 1) the weakening of effect through careless imitation, 2) the failure of research to validate the pedagogy, and 3) the co-option by large-scale external testing programs. (Lucas 1992, 3)

It is our purpose here to consider these cautions as a frame for introducing the current volume and for commenting on the status of portfolios today: what we know, what we understand, what we need to learn about portfolio—a set of texts whose intent is purposeful, whose audience is specific, and whose metacommentary, or reflection, makes sense of the portfolio.

Weakening of Effect

The Classroom Portfolio, The Bridge Portfolio

Lucas locates her concern about weakening of effect with a single question: “Can this spirit of exploration remain central to the use of portfolios as they become more commonplace?” (Lucas 1992, 6) The chapters here suggest that the answer to this question is yes: portfolio models have moved beyond the writing classroom to other classrooms and programs, beyond print literacy into electronic literacy, have expanded in multiple, complex, and interesting ways. Classroom versions, for example, from the early developmental model for preschoolers to “bridge” portfolios—those whose purpose and/or contents are explicitly intended to create links between and among students’ diverse experiences—demonstrate new iterations, raise new questions, help us understand in new ways what and how our students learn.

Specifically, we see in Mary Ann Smith's chapter the interaction between classroom culture and the portfolio model. Addressed briefly in earlier portfolio texts (Graves and Sunstein 1992; Yancey 1992b) the classroom context, as Smith outlines it, is perhaps the central factor related to portfolios that promote learning; a point to which Sandra Murphy, among others, will return. Classrooms hospitable to portfolios center on partnership and collaboration; they foster active construction of knowledge, student reflection and self-evaluation, and community structures in which students and teachers work together as readers, writers, thinkers, researchers, and learners. Sandra Stone likewise explores the value of partnership, of using portfolios to have even very young students show teachers what they are learning; such portfolios both shape curriculum and provide a vehicle for communication with parents as well. Thomas Phillion's chapter connects theory with practice in its description of portfolios, arguing that because they can be fluid contexts for growth and learning, portfolios are consistent with what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his colleagues refer to as "flow," an involvement in learning that usually occurs when there are clear goals for learning, immediate feedback, and an opportunity to act on that feedback. At its best, then, the portfolio enacts our understandings about how learners learn.

Others discuss classroom portfolios as well, but their emphasis reveals another quality of this next wave of portfolio: its power to "bridge" across classes, across experiences, between schools, and from school to work. This kind of portfolio, while documented briefly elsewhere (Kneeshaw 1992), is examined as a specific type here by three contributors. Mary Perry, for instance, invites high school students to situate portfolios within rhetorical situations of their own design. In assembling portfolios for employment and for college scholarships, students "bridge" school and work as they are invited to take what is learned in one situation and apply it as they prepare to move on to the next. Perry notes the influence of a real "exigence": when students see practical functions for portfolios, they are much more engaged in developing them than when the portfolio seems to lack a purpose beyond classroom assessment. In "Building Bridges, Closing Gaps," William Condon emphasizes the potential for portfolios to provide continuity for teachers and students; he also comments on the power of the portfolio to shape both educational contexts, high school and college. In her discussion of portfolios in law school courses, Susan R. Dailey discusses a bridging approach: the intersection portfolios can provide between the academic world and the working world.

Overall, what we see in this section both heartens and concerns. We see very different models of portfolios, different not just from institution to institution, but different in their understandings of and response to student needs. And at the same time, we note similar purposes—like those informing Perry’s portfolios and Dailey’s—beginning to form a coherent pattern across educational contexts. As important, we see bridging portfolios inviting students—from high school to law school—to make a whole text from the fragments of their academic and non-academic experiences, to include in their school work new, real exigence and new, real audiences. We see new partnerships and collaborations; we see teachers and students learning both with and from each other. Over and over and over, we see the importance of classroom culture.

Still, the bridging portfolios, particularly, invite us to issue some cautions ourselves. Bridging portfolios, because they operate in more than one context, seem an especially valuable means of resisting Lucas’s weakening of effect, it’s true. But at the same time, precisely because they cross disciplines and boundaries and institutions and cultures, there is likely to be a countervailing effect: an invitation to centralize, to standardize, to enable the demands of one context to dictate the text produced in another, and ultimately to make the portfolios crossing those boundaries look alike. Both the University of Michigan and Miami University (see Stygall et al. 1994, for instance) seem to do some of this already; they define a particular type of portfolio which schools prepare students to construct, just in the same way they prepared students for the timed writing placement essay, as Condon points out. This kind of shaping effect could lead, we think, to an undesirable weakening of effect indeed. One way to assure it does not is to follow Mary Perry’s lead: to help students themselves understand the theory contextualizing portfolios. Portfolios are texts serving the needs of a particular rhetorical situation, and they can take many forms, can answer many questions, can present many selves.

Electronic Literacy, Electronic Portfolios

And just as writing is changing, so too are writing portfolios: enter a portfolio untreated in the earlier volumes addressing portfolios, the electronic portfolio. This portfolio is a new kind of “literacy portfolio,” an e-literacy portfolio perhaps, one characterized more by Cynthia Selfe’s notion of layered literacy than by print discourse. Print documents may well be included in such a portfolio (see, e.g., Mayers 1996), but the electronic portfolio can take another form: completely electronic. And it

can be multiply formed, multiply linear: hypertextual. Clearly, this is no weakening of effect, and clearly, the questions generated by this kind of portfolio are numerous and go to the heart of what it is we think we mean when we use the word literacy.

Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe begin answering these questions by showing us, in a thoughtful reflection, how the two technologies—computers and portfolios—offer opportunities that can only be realized if we theorize our work, and if we begin to include work in electronic literacy and in portfolios with our prospective colleagues as well as with our colleagues already practicing. Greg Wickliff and, then, Katherine Fischer introduce us to different versions of hypertext portfolios—one for a professional writing class, the other for a creative writing class—showing us how, again, each serves the specified and appropriate needs of students, course, and institution. As they describe their practice, Wickliff and Fischer also theorize about what they experienced so that those of us who have yet to develop such a model have one we might adapt, but one whose limits we also understand. And again, as they describe each iteration of portfolio, we see partnerships: students and teacher together negotiating a portfolio model very much under construction.

Pam Takayoshi and Kristine Blair also describe a hypertext portfolio, but their focus serves more to illustrate the evaluation issues an electronic portfolio raises. Given the shifting roles of writer and reader in hypertext, as well as the different kinds of thinking animating the text, how do we read this kind of portfolio, how do we evaluate it, and how do we grade it? Finally, six members of “Portnet,” a group of college faculty from across the country, discuss their on-line reading and evaluation of a single WAC portfolio, showing in the process how similar readers construct and interpret the same texts differently, how expectations we bring to text shape our reading processes, and how a listserv discussion group might be used by others—not for large-scale scoring of portfolios and ranking and numbering of students, but for uncovering assumptions, for creating new hypotheses, and for another kind of testing—seeing if what we claim to practice and reward is indeed what we do practice and reward.

Hawisher and Selfe are correct, we think, in their understanding of both the opportunities and the dangers that a wedding of portfolios and electronics presents. There is a party line, advocated in each camp, that insists that each technology necessarily brings with it desired ends: student empowerment, new collaboration, and indeed new education. Practice simply does not bear this out, as Susan Callahan, Sandy Murphy, and Pam

Takayoshi (Takayoshi 1994) make clear. Each opportunity is just that: an opportunity that has quite possibly equal potential to do harm (and worse, because it's in the name of good). To make good use of the opportunity the electronic portfolio offers and to prevent a weakening of even this portfolio's effect, we must commit to three actions:

1. continue to describe our practices fully, including in those descriptions accounts of what didn't work and of what issues remain;
2. begin to answer, no matter how incompletely, the questions raised by Takayoshi and Blair; and
3. use collaborative groups like Portnet to serve students, not to provide new sites for the same evaluation practices.

Teacher Portfolios

All portfolios, of course, are not writing portfolios, though it is the writing portfolio that is often credited with generating this newer model, the teacher portfolio, and in this volume, the student-teacher portfolio as well. The teacher portfolio also suggests strengthening rather than weakening of effect, and it too—like the writing portfolio—is often prompted by a need to address that which is perceived as inadequate or even wrongheaded in the current system.

Robert P. Yagelski links portfolios explicitly to reflective practice and examines some of the difficulties teacher educators face in preparing preservice English teachers for such practice. His portfolio, of course, is intended as one piece of an effort to address those difficulties. Kathleen Blake Yancey reads with us three of her students' portfolios, finding in them grounds for a new understanding of the intersection between the articulated curriculum and the experienced curriculum; the former planned and perhaps delivered by the faculty member, and the latter perceived and experienced by the student. Working more quantitatively and from a still different model of teacher portfolio, C. Beth Burch details the findings of her investigation of the documents secondary English education students chose to place in their course portfolios. Her findings argue that secondary English education programs frequently shortchange students, who are too often inadequately prepared to teach writing and language and whose understanding of literature is frequently limited to a very narrow canon and to a literary-historical approach to texts. For undergraduates, then, teacher portfolios provide one way to encourage professional identity, one means for us to understand the processes contributing to that identity.

Pearl and Leon Paulson use the portfolio for a similar purpose, for faculty development, though the faculty they work with are already practicing teachers. Paulson and Paulson explain how teachers in continuing education classes planned and prepared their own portfolios as a means of learning how to implement portfolios with their students. Through this process, teachers—like Mary Perry’s students—learned of the complexity of choosing appropriate material according to the purpose of the portfolio, of organizing it effectively, and of determining their own evaluative standards for their work. Irwin Weiser focuses on graduate students, describing how teacher portfolios are situated within a practicum for students-who-are-becoming-teachers. These student-teachers are learning to teach at the same time they are learning about portfolios, the practicum and the portfolio providing a safe place for learning about process pedagogy and successful writing.

Here we see no weakening of effect, but again, we have concerns. That teacher educators have moved so quickly to incorporate portfolios into the curriculum, we think, is commendable. To put the point directly, teacher education is in the process of being rescripted by portfolios. We can use them for a variety of tasks: to learn about the curriculum as it is experienced by our students and to help our students apply for teaching jobs. We are developing alternative models for graduate students and for practicing teachers. At the same time, a theme sounded in Yagelski, in Yancey, and in Burch—student resistance—is one we resist at our peril. It’s interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that even beginning teachers resist portfolios. Learning is, after all, culture-bound, and the students going into teaching right now are those who have done well with the old game in the old culture. Based on their own experience, they may have less rather than more reason to change practice, especially when the new practice of resisting fixed answers poses so many risks and uncertainties. If we don’t acknowledge that resistance, seek to understand it on its own terms, and respond to it in appropriate ways, we may well lose the chance to affect education as we have hoped (Bishop 1991; Yancey 1994).

Failure of Research

A second concern articulated by Catharine Lucas is research-based: “The danger here is that those who cling to the illusion that only what can be measured or counted is worth doing will find the effects of portfolios . . . not only resistant to measurement but initially resistant even to definition” (Lucas 1992, 7). As an alternative, Lucas recommends “Ethnographic

research that ‘looks into’ the portfolios rather than attempts to prove them worthwhile” (Lucas 1992, 7) and “reporting in” before reporting out.

Lucas’s concern here is almost prescient. Not two years later, we began hearing such calls for research, first from Brian Huot, and then from Sandra Stotsky. Huot calls the early work in portfolios “show-and-tell,” suggesting now that practice is defined, we need research; since we have now described the “show-and-tell” of practice, we should move ahead to the next stage which is research and/or theory. Sandra Stotsky, then editor of *Research in the Teaching of English (RTE)*, relies on the same understanding of how we will know about portfolios when she calls for *research* that will confirm or disconfirm what has been claimed for portfolios in practitioner accounts. In the introduction to the October 1992 issue of *RTE*, Stotsky calls for such knowledge. There is, she says, “a conspicuous absence of research studies on portfolio assessment and other alternative forms of assessment. Portfolio assessment has increased markedly in the past six years . . . and it is truly puzzling to me why *RTE* has so far received *no empirical studies* in this area” (italics added, Stotsky 1992, 246). The claim, then, in this view of how we know what we know is that we need to move *beyond* accounts of practice.

But the teachers, administrators, and assessment specialists working with portfolios have constructed this “how we learn” process another way, as the editors of the most recent text on portfolios, *New Directions in Portfolio Assessment*, make quite clear. This understanding of the research that has helped us *know* about portfolios is arguably the major contribution this volume makes to the conversation about portfolio assessment. Black, Daiker, Sommers, and Stygall define the accounts in their edited collection as “well-theorized reflective practice” grounded in a “felt experience,” which they define by specific reference to Nancy Baker’s May 1993 *RTE* article on portfolios. In that study, Baker used the methodology of positivism, through matching an experimental group of students with a control group, to test the idea that portfolios would help students produce better writing. Although the results did not confirm her hypothesis, Baker argues, “in its result the experiment was incomplete.” It failed to account for her “felt experience” that the students were writing better. Using this example of research as a point of departure, the *New Directions* editors articulate a different kind of research connected to portfolios:

The felt knowledge of writing teachers, the one that says portfolios adequately address the connection between classroom and writing, is tenacious. In spite of a number of calls for experimental and positivistic research to “prove” that

portfolios do a better job of teaching or assessing writing, the discipline has resisted this specific call. Instead, the research on portfolios has been more classroom-based, more reflective, and more qualitative in nature. Even when the traditional educational research paradigm is invoked and presented, the researcher can still “feel” that somehow such research couldn’t capture what portfolios were about. (Stygall et al. 1994, 2)

Their aim in creating the *New Directions* text was to honor this “felt experience,” to learn from it what it had to teach: “In order to reflect teachers’ felt experience, we present essays that closely examine individual classrooms, problematize particular practices, and isolate sites rich for portfolio evaluation” (Stygall et al. 1994, 3).

Discussing their research method directly in the same collection, contributors Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon move from practice to theory to practice again:

We can describe a kind of research spiral; reader protocols turned up problems in readers’ behaviors; discussions followed about what measures might assure that readers would attend to more of the writing in each portfolio; these discussions led to changes that not only improved the quality of the assessment, but had a positive impact on the teaching/learning environment in the course as well; finally, changes in the purpose and structure of the portfolio reading groups produced the desired result, as the later protocols demonstrated. (Stygall et al. 1994, 283)

Hamp-Lyons and Condon are working from a reflective, practice-based understanding of how we know, not from the stage-model linear mode with show-and-tell followed by confirming empirical research. They articulate practice, analyze reflectively, change practice, and reflect anew in what they call *spiral-like* development. The articulation and the reflective analysis work together, the one informing the other.

On this basis, like Hamp-Lyons and Condon before us, we have grounds for changing practice, for describing it anew. In other words, the chapters here not only extend and differentiate earlier practice, but talk back to it, refine it, problematize it: help us understand it and ask other good questions of it. In Donald Schon’s terms, the writers about portfolios—all these reflective writers—are involved in what he calls “making” something, improvisationally. He compares such reflective practitioners—the makers—to jazz musicians:

. . . the participants are making something. Out of the musical materials or themes of talk, they make a piece of music or a conversation, an artifact with its own meaning and coherence. Their reflection-in-action is a conversation with the materials of a situation—"conversation," now, in a metaphorical sense. Each person carries out his own evolving role in the collective performance, listens to the surprises—or, as I shall say, "back talk"—that results from earlier moves, and responds through on-line production of new moves that give new meanings and directions to the development of the artifact. (Schon 1987, 31)

The writers in this volume thus take their places in the collective portfolio performance and through that joining contribute to the development of portfolio, knowing that the next generation of writers will take their turn talking back to the descriptions and insights in this volume.

Rather than our learning about portfolios proceeding as a spiral, then, we might instead think of it as developing in waves, with one wave of practice preparing the next wave of theorizing about that practice, with an intermediate wave extending new practice. By such reflective "wave action" is knowledge created. A knowledge that is responsive to and incorporates "felt sense," a knowledge that is grounded in reflective analysis, a knowledge that always returns to practice as a source for knowing.

And in particular, we see different kinds of research, all of which contribute to what we know about portfolios:

First, we see a kind of historical research in the work from Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow, both an account of what happened with this early version of portfolio and an interpretation of what it signifies and what questions are raised in such a history. It's axiomatic, of course, that without a sense of where we have been, we cannot know where we are heading. Pieces like this one help us do both.

Second, we are beginning to develop qualitative studies of reading portfolios, as we see in the Portnet chapter: how do we construct these texts, how do we value them, what is the role between general expectations and local norms? We see hints of this as well in texts like Katherine Fischer's; focused on practice, it nonetheless raises important issues about how we—students and teachers—are learning to read hypertext portfolios.

Third, we are beginning to understand, through portfolios, both curriculum and students. In Beth Burch's account, we see our own curriculum reflected back to us; its inadequacies can be catalogued and only then addressed. In Kathleen Yancey's account, we see the multiple curricula that always comprise a course, and we see how students' articulations fit, or

not, within what it is we have designed. And we are also, through including students' own words, beginning to understand what they have learned. Historically, of course, we have asked students not what they have learned, but *whether they have learned what it is that we expected them to learn*. As Frank Smith makes all too clear, however, students are learning all the time; with portfolios, we are finally beginning to hear from them *what it is they have learned*. This is good news on two fronts: 1) it means we can reward them for learning, and 2) it means we can create a curriculum that is more responsive to the students we actually teach.

Fourth, we have developed enough models now, and they have been used in sufficiently different enough contexts, that we can talk about what the portfolios can and cannot accomplish. Studies like Sandra Murphy's and Susan Callahan's show us that portfolios are no panacea, that they will function within a context in predictable ways, and that we must take such contexts into account before we can talk about their effects. Callahan, Murphy, and Gerilee Nicastro and Cheri Ause also show us the professionalism that portfolios can motivate, and they suggest the variables that assure such a benefit.

Fifth, theory is increasingly being brought into our accounts of practice, into our questions, into our "felt sense" of what happened. We see this in Tom Philion's discussion of flow, in Robert Leigh Davis's application of literary theory, in Brian Huot's and Michael Williamson's theory of writing assessment and its (always) political implications.

We share Lucas's concern about the need for research to validate practice, and we agree with her, as with the editors of *New Directions in Portfolio Assessment*, that the research we are thinking of is more qualitative, more reflective, based in a new methodology that includes multiple voices, that is more interpretive in nature (Moss 1994b). Moreover, unless we continue reporting in—telling our own histories, listening in on our students and interpreting with them what we hear, linking practice with theory, investigating the effects of larger cultural forces on portfolio and the ways those forces situate portfolios as well as students and teachers—our story, sooner or later, will be appropriated by others; it's too attractive to resist.

We're encouraged, therefore, by the accounts we have; we would wish for more, and we would wish for those, like the accounts here, to build on, contradict, even refute what has come before. Certainly, all the news will not be good (e.g., Murphy; Burch, both this volume). But it is in qualifying our claims about portfolios and in testing those claims against practice

that we bring understanding to what we do and create knowledge about portfolio. And it is that knowledge that enables us, in successive waves, to revisit our practice, to revise it, and to critique it anew.

Co-option by Large Scale Assessment

Catharine Lucas's final concern is that portfolios will become merely the newest vehicle to perform the old task, with the result that portfolios will become standardized—with “common assignments” and “clearly defined criteria” and restrictive conditions governing the writing of the texts in the portfolio. Should this happen, Lucas says, portfolios “will be just as likely as other standardized tests to limit learning by restricting curriculum to what is most easily and economically measured” (Lucas 1992, 9).

Unfortunately, what Lucas foresaw—that portfolios are a better measure of what students can do—has been seen by more than teachers and parents and students; it has been seen by those who exercise authority for large-scale assessment. The problem isn't that the portfolio isn't a better sampling device; it is. The problem is that once identified as a means of large-scale testing, the very features that made a portfolio a means of learning—the freedom to write multiple kinds of texts, to frame rhetorical situations that speak to different kinds of students, to include the context of the class in the portfolio, to allow in “messy data”—are the very features to be *excluded* from the portfolio test.

So we return to the assessment strand of portfolio assessment, with special reference to the K-12 context. Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, among the earliest advocates of portfolio use, offer several important cautions about the current wide interest in portfolios and about their uses for assessment particularly: that portfolios may be viewed as a cure-all for all assessment problems; that portfolio assessment may be driven by mandates rather than in response to specific local needs; and that portfolio systems, once in place, lose their vitality.

These cautions are also echoed and then extended and elaborated by the authors of the seven pieces which complete this section. Robert Leigh Davis argues that portfolio practice is not only consistent with current composition practices, but with literary theory as well, which also insists on the inseparability of language from context. Brian Huot and Michael Williamson, Susan Callahan, and Sandra Murphy take as their focus the portfolios of large-scale assessment programs. Huot and Williamson explain how the need to standardize assessment procedures

to achieve reliability, validity, or some common standard can also be seen merely as an exercise in power—the power to impose others' standards on large numbers of teachers and students. They argue that as portfolio systems are developed and implemented, teachers need to maintain as much power as possible over how these systems work if portfolios are to deliver on their potential to create important connections among teaching, learning, and assessing. Susan Callahan's year-long ethnographic study of a high school English department's response to a state-imposed portfolio system shows the effects of a statewide mandated portfolio assessment on the teachers who are charged not as teachers so much as agents of the state. Sandra Murphy delineates the conditions that must obtain if portfolios and large-scale assessment programs are to work together: including teachers as consultants, creating flexible criteria that are congruent with the aims of portfolio, and resisting the standardization characteristic of mass testing.

The last three chapters in this section focus more specifically on how individuals have used portfolios to exercise some control over evaluation procedures. Gerilee Nicastro and Cheri Evans Ause describe their work in developing "demonstration portfolios" that their junior high school students take with them to the high school and that serve as a writer's introduction for their new teachers. Like William Condon, Nicastro and Ause seek to close gaps between institutions; their portfolio is also a bridge. And at the same time their portfolio, like Mary Perry's, is based on the decisions about purpose and assessment which were part of the planning for this project. Charlotte O'Brien describes how portfolio concepts and methodology can be used to invigorate and then considerably alter a district-wide, holistically scored timed writing sample, how the messiness of classroom portfolios *can* be included in assessment activity, how a district can honor learning and still be accountable. Finally, Janice Heiges describes how she negotiated the substitution of a portfolio for the traditional doctoral candidacy examination at George Mason University, chronicling the path from the inception of the idea to translating its criteria into terms more conventionally understood to final recommendation for advancement to candidacy.

These victories, if victories they are, may be but small steps, but they are important ones. From its inception, the portfolio has assumed that its composer could exercise some agency, would have something to say worth hearing and an audience who wished to hear. And from its inception, the school portfolio has assumed a student's teacher who exercised the same

kind of agency, based in this case on a knowledge of writing and reading, a knowledge about students and about their development and about how to use formative assessment to help students learn, and a willingness, often an eagerness, to learn more. As Lucas tells us, and Murphy and Callahan repeat, and Heiges and Nicastro and Ause embody, the best form of resistance to efforts to undermine these assumptions of portfolios is the “increasingly aware” teacher.

It is with him and her, too, that we also place our hopes.

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At the 1996 American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) conference on Faculty Roles and Rewards, Lee Shulman gave a plenary, “Course Anatomy: The Dissection and Transformation of Knowledge,” whose purpose was to extend and elaborate Ernest Boyer’s scholarship of teaching, with particular reference to the course portfolio as a public document. Briefly, Shulman’s thesis is that one way of knowing, particularly when it is practice we examine, comes through a two-step reflective process: 1) we *stop* the activity in which we are engaged; and 2) we *explain* it to others, since what we know lies in that explanation, that making public.

We offer this volume in that spirit as well. Each contributor here has stopped the flow of work: teaching. Each contributor has sought to *explain* to others what they do, what it means, how it connects with other work, and why it matters. In the area of assessment, we see contributors who focus particularly on the power relationships that obtain in any rhetorical situation, but which in an assessment context seem particularly difficult, but perhaps not impossible, to change. In the area of the classroom, we see contributors who have moved away from only teaching through the portfolio toward learning with learners from their learners’ portfolios. In the teacher portfolio chapters, we see through portfolios opportunities for reflective analysis of both quantitative and qualitative varieties, and through that analysis a means of apprehending and then changing our curricula. In the technology section, we see what happens when two “technologies”—the portfolio and the computer—are brought together: how they complicate but also enrich how students learn, how teachers learn with students, how teachers learn with other teachers.

And across contexts, we see five themes we’d like to stress:

First, we see the kinds of collaborations that portfolios have invited: between students and students, as Mary Ann Smith shows us; among teachers and students, as Katherine Fischer explains; and across contexts,

as William Condon explains. To our knowledge, no other vehicle for assessment, nor technique for teaching and learning, has proven so powerful in its ability to showcase learning.

Second, we see how important portfolio models are as well as the relationship between them and the culture they operate in. Those who claim that portfolios can transform education are only partly correct: how much of a transformation portfolios can engender—and in fact whether or not there is any transformation at all—is largely a function of the design of the model and its place, its situation in a given culture.

Third, in all the portfolio models, and particularly in the bridging model, we recognize the opportunity that students may have for bringing disparate parts of their experiences together in the portfolio to compose a whole learning and to explain that to others—because what Lee Shulman says is true for teachers is, of course, also true for students. In portfolios, students, like teachers, *stop* and *explain* to others, and like teachers, these students have both something worth learning and something worth sharing.

Fourth, if students do have something worth sharing, then we should listen. They do exhibit a kind of expertise: they *know* how they write, how they read, how they understand, what is going on in their other classrooms and their other schools and their other lives. It's not too soon to start learning about those other experiences, to begin to take what they can share and use it to make what we do better—in our classrooms, in our curricula, in our schools, in our understanding.

Fifth, the portfolios we learn about within this volume have much to say about how literacy is changing before our eyes—partly as a function of how reflection in the portfolio asks students to describe and narrate and analyze their own learning, and partly as a function of the electronic media. It's a truism that literacy doesn't any longer mean just reading or just writing; what it is in the process of meaning is illustrated in the pages within.

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Together, the twenty-four essays collected in these pages are themselves a kind of portfolio; one prepared for others through interruption, a portfolio whose significance we understand ourselves only as we explain it to others. Like the portfolios written by single authors, these essays demonstrate a range—of voices, of perspectives, and of contexts, unified not by one author-subject, but by a common interest in exploring, extending, and critiquing our use of a rich and complex teaching and evaluation tool.

We hope that the ways portfolios have been situated in these essays will offer teachers at many levels and in a variety of institutional settings stimulus for their own reflection and practice and collaboration.