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Literacy portfolios: Considering issues of purpose, power, and potential

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LITERACY PORTFOLIOS:
CONSIDERING ISSUES OF
PURPOSE, POWER, AND POTENTIAL

BY

CAROL A. WILCOX

B. S., University of Colorado, 1981
M. A., University of Colorado at Denver, 1989

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Reading and Writing Instruction

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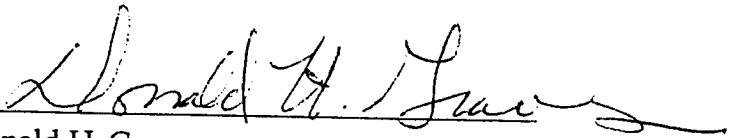
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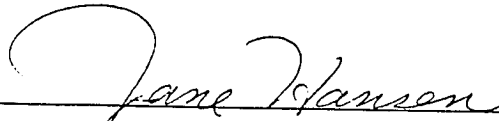
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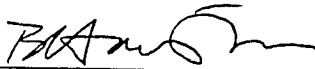
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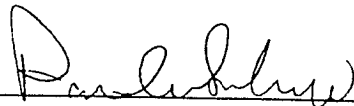
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DEDICATION

To my mom
a brave, strong woman

and in memory of my dad
who always believed his daughters could do anything

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Mikhail Bakhtin asserts, "All voices are abstracted from dialogues." Certainly that is true of this study. The work here is mine, but it has been hugely shaped by any number of people. Without them, there would be no dissertation. I am grateful for their participation in my work and my life.

First I thank Barb Wilson, who tolerated the constant disruptions of having a "house guest" in her classroom for an entire year with unfailing grace and good humor. Barb read reams of research notes, answered endless questions, and provided thoughtful and insightful feedback about my data. When the focus of my work changed from a cognitive study of children's language to an ethnographic study of the complexities of integrating literacy portfolios into an elementary classroom, Barb willingly allowed her questions and struggles with portfolios to be exposed to the world, a brave and honest act. I wish more teachers would make that kind of contribution to the field (Newkirk, 1992). I also want to thank Barb's students—Elizabeth, Karen, Maria, Patrick, Jonathon, Robbie, and fifteen others— who welcomed me (computer and tape recorder in tow) into their lives, were patient and honest, and did their best to provide thoughtful responses to a researcher whose questions never ended.

Linda Ross, reading specialist at Pennington, first brought me into Pennington as an educational consultant and then an adjunct professor. She allowed me to study the Pennington portfolios for several different University courses and arranged access into Barb's class for my dissertation

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research. Linda is a staff developer extraordinaire who applies her strong theoretical foundation to teaching both children and adults.

Lynn Johnson is the kind of principal I'd like to be someday. She creates an environment where teachers can be learners, so they can in turn create those same conditions for their students. The rest of the Pennington staff made me welcome and cared for me physically, intellectually, and emotionally. I could not have done this dissertation without the teachers and administrators at Pennington.

Next, I want to thank my doctoral committee— Tom Newkirk, Don Graves, Jane Hansen, Barbara Houston, and Paula Salvio. In an article which appeared in *Primary Voices*, Don wrote, "Children (or I would suggest learners) need to hang around a teacher who is asking bigger questions of herself than she is asking of them (p. 4)...Truth seekers have a way of helping others get at the truth, they question others just as they question themselves" (p. 6). The members of my committee have done all that and more. Because they ask such big questions of themselves, because they are such truth seekers, they have pushed my research and my thinking far beyond anything I might have hoped to do on my own. They have supported me unfailingly, allowed me find my own way, and to approximate without feeling like a failure. I hope I provide my students with the same kinds of support, challenge, and vision.

In *Composing a Culture*, Bonnie Sunstein relates the time Tom Newkirk climbed Mount Chocorua with his six-year-old son Andy, as well as adults from the summer writing program. One woman, concerned about Andy's ability to handle such a rigorous hike, asked, "Are you all right, Andy?" Newkirk took a different approach, saying, "You're doing fine, Andy." Later, the woman wondered, "Do we ask, intending to show concern

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but revealing insecurity, like I did? Or do we confirm, like Tom did— do we say, 'You're a hell of a human being, you don't need my concern?'" (Sunstein, 1994, p. 91). I hope this story becomes a "Newkirkism," just like the story he tells about his messy office (Newkirk, 1989), because it perfectly describes his stance toward his students. Despite numerous false starts and bad drafts, Tom always made me feel like I had important things to say, his trust has given me the courage to discover and say them. Tom's feedback and his ability to see through multiple lenses (history, psychology, literature, and popular culture, , for example), the rigorous standards he sets for himself and his students, and his never-ending sense of humor provide models for me as I return to the classroom.

Don Graves understands, better than anyone I know, that teaching is "first a caring kind of relationship in the lives of students" (Daloz, 1986, p. 14). He and Betty have met my physical, emotional, and spiritual needs again and again— they have housed me, fed me, and loved me endlessly. Don is also an amazing teacher. Since the very first Tuesday of the very first seminar, Don has taught me to ask, "WHAT'S IT FOR?" and reminded me "there is nothing so practical as a good theory," tenets I believe will forever guide my teaching and research career. Don gives constructive feedback better than anyone I know; he always affirms my strengths, yet never fails to challenge me to think again, he also provides a huge "safety net" when I fall. This pedagogy has powerfully molded my teaching. Don's expertise in research design and his nose for data enormously guided and shaped this study.

As she came into my dissertation defense, Jane Hansen asked, "Where do you want me? Shall I sit beside you?" Somehow those two questions seem a metaphor for Jane's role in my life. She has incredible respect for the learner, Jane truly believes her students are the people who best know what

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they need and how they might get there. At the same time, she is always "sitting beside," ready to offer a listening ear, a supportive comment, a new learning opportunity, or a great book recommendation. For two years, Jane has regularly asked, "So what are you writing this week?" thus providing me with numerous opportunities to orally rehearse this data, she also responded to many drafts. Jane carries her respect for the individual to her work in the field; I hope that I will always emulate her belief in the potential of each learner, her integrity at her research sites, and her use of classroom teachers as co-researchers.

Barbara Houston's course, Normative Inquiry, gave me a whole new lens for seeing portfolios. A year before I started this study, I shared some of my frustrations about people's "wrong" understandings and applications of portfolios. Barbara commented that perhaps portfolios could be used for any number of purposes and rather than assuming that people were wrong, I might want to begin by considering users' intentions. That comment, probably more than any other, has shaped my understanding of portfolios. Barbara never let me get away with sloppy thinking. She pushed me to clarify my terms, to tighten my thinking and writing. Her rigorous expectations have shaped my learning and consequently, my teaching.

Paula Salvio pushed my boundaries by filling my head with new names, theories, and titles, lenses which helped me to see the portfolios and my teaching in new ways. Paula filtered my work through her expertise as an artist and performer and left me with questions for future studies. I cannot stop thinking, for instance, about the role of portfolios in the lives of children who see and understand the world through art, music, and drama. Are written reflections truly the best medium for them to learn to self-evaluate? Might they develop and share their knowledge of themselves as learners in

other ways? Paula's influence on my thinking reminds me that a good teacher always leaves a learner with more questions than answers.

As facilitator of the Dissertation Support Group, Ann Diller was an island of serenity in a sea of hysteria. Each month, I came away from our meetings calmed and quieted, ready to face the data and write again. Her practical suggestions about the process of dissertation writing ("Just put together a tentative table of contents, Carol, you can always change it," "When you get stuck, do a fast write starting with the phrase, 'In conclusion,' that will help you know what your work is about"), as well as her monthly quotes, which I cut out and taped to my computer, were an invaluable support. I have also learned tremendous amounts from watching Ann shape and guide other doctoral students' research questions, design, and methodology.

Nancy Shanklin, the director of the Masters' in Reading and Writing at the University of Colorado at Denver, has been another important mentor. Early in my teaching career, Nancy helped me to develop a theoretical foundation for my practice. Since then, she has provided me with numerous opportunities to stretch and grow— she recommended me for my job as a staff developer, encouraged me to apply for the doctoral program, and has invited me to teach a university course next fall. I hope I can have as powerful an impact on my students as Nancy has had on me.

Next, I must thank the students in the doctoral program in Reading and Writing Instruction. Although I have always advocated the importance of collaboration and community for my students, until I came to UNH I'm not sure I ever truly experienced its power in my own life. Students in our program respect and acknowledge each other's expertise, passionately share books, writing, and ideas, challenge thinking, cheer successes, and empathize

with failures. I have grown hugely in this nurturing and supportive environment.

JoAnn Portalupi and I entered the doctoral program together, and I cannot think of a colleague or friend with whom I would rather have made this journey. JoAnn is a visionary, an educator with huge ideas. She knows how to listen, ask questions, and bring out the best in a struggling writer. She is also an extraordinary friend who reminds me every day, by the way she lives, to celebrate and savor life, and to respect the history and beliefs of others. JoAnn and her husband Ralph, along with their boys— Taylor, Adam, Robert, and Joseph— have been my New Hampshire family, my home away from home. They will forever hold a cherished place in my heart.

Lisa Lenz Bianchi lived with me through two very tumultuous years. As a roommate, she was unfailingly patient and tolerant. As a colleague, she has taught me much, first about the impact of oral performance on the development of student voices, then about presenting children with huge challenges and demanding excellence. She is an amazing writer and responded to my work in many late night sessions. Lisa and her husband Chip have always known how to make me laugh or when to drag me away from my work so I could see more clearly.

Cyrene Wells, a colleague who stands firmly grounded with one foot in the theory and one foot in the field, shares my passion for students and teaching, not to mention children's literature. Cyrene is an organizational goddess, someone I could forever count on for a reference or a detail. She (and her husband Jim) always seemed to know when to come through with a card or phone call, an Easter basket, dinner out, or a trip to the island. I will never forget their kindness in allowing me to live in their house one summer.

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For four years Judy Ferrara and Andrea Luna have responded to my writing and thinking and buoyed my flagging spirits. Their support has been especially helpful this year, as I have struggled to make sense of the data and push the ideas from my head onto paper. Donna Qualley's passion for rigor and excellence, her questions and insights, have always compelled me to think harder. She is an incredible teacher and has shaped my pedagogy immensely. Mary Peterson has responded to my writing with a keen and skillful editor's eye, and rescued me from a recalcitrant computer more times than I care to count. She reminds me, through her words and actions, that the best teachers constantly push their students toward proficient independence. Kathe Simons has been a spiritual companion and provided extensive assistance as I taught my first college courses. Elizabeth Lane, secretary and resident saint in the Writing Lab, has listened to my rantings and ravings, rescued me from perpetual disorganization, and tracked down details for two years. Other members of the doctoral community— Francisco Cavalcante, Cindy Cohen, Dan Ling Fu, Carol Hawkins, Doug Kaufman, Jerry Kelly, Cindy Matthews, Terri Moher, Kathy Staley, Bonnie Sunstein— have been the source of many big ideas and rich conversations, as well as support and encouragement.

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me much about teaching.

I would also like to thank my family. Last year, Danielle, a second grader at Maplewood Elementary School in Somersworth New Hampshire wrote, "A familey is anybody who belongs to you. or who loves you. Or someone who gives you hope. and joy." My family has done all of that and more through a very difficult four years. I am thankful for their love and support.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of The Graduate School for its scholarships, Summer Teaching Fellowship, and Dissertation Fellowship. The university's assistance has made this work much easier.

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ABSTRACT

PORTFOLIOS: CONSIDERING ISSUES OF PURPOSE, POWER, AND POTENTIAL

by

Carol A. Wilcox
University of New Hampshire, May, 1995

In this study, I examine the complexities of incorporating literacy portfolios into a elementary school classroom: the purposes for using portfolios, issues of ownership and audience, the nature of children's evaluative decisions, adults' responsibilities in children's development as evaluators, and the institutional pressures impacting adults' abilities to incorporate children's voices into existing evaluative practices.

The study was conducted in a third grade classroom where children read and wrote in a variety of genres for authentic purposes and audiences every day. Although the study cannot be described as an ethnography in the strictest sense, research methodology is drawn from that discipline. I gathered descriptive data during a year of participant observation; conducted formal and informal interviews with children and adults; documented and analyzed the oral and written reflections children made about the artifacts they placed in their portfolios; and also reflected on adult attempts to guide children's development as self-evaluators. Particularly interesting is my role not only as researcher, but also co-teacher.

As we attempted to use portfolios, we struggled first with issues related to purpose: adults' stated purposes for the portfolios were very different than

their operationalized purposes, also children's understandings of the purpose often differed hugely from adult understandings. Furthermore, adults' and children's purposes were often at odds with existing evaluative structures in the school. Next we struggled with issues of power and ownership: If children owned the portfolios, what kinds of adult interventions were appropriate? I document specific teaching interactions— efforts to help students to set goals and make plans, develop strategies, and evaluate their work by criteria.

Finally, I consider roles portfolios could assume, first as classroom assessment tools which might potentially replace report cards, and then as tools for developing learner independence and skillfulness. Since such roles will not be possible within existing institutional structures, I conclude by envisioning what new schools might look like.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION

Maria is a third grader at Pennington School in a rural town in southern New Hampshire. At Pennington, children have been assessing and documenting their growth as readers, writers, and learners in literacy portfolios for the past three years. This year, Maria's class began updating their portfolios in late September. The third graders created new covers for their white looseleaf binders and brought in objects from home— photographs and drawings, postcards and letters, soccer awards and scouting certificates. Students collected items representing their school learning— book covers and reading responses, stories and research reports, handwriting samples and math tests— in file folders ("save" files). From these, the children selected artifacts and wrote the reflections that documented their learning and growth throughout the year. The third graders also developed reading and writing goals, complete with plans for how they might achieve them. These goals, plans, and proof of their accomplishments are also represented in the third grade portfolios.

Maria's portfolio demonstrates tremendous growth and change, both personally and academically. She includes a picture of her mother's wedding with the reflection, "I want to put this in my portfolio because it is really special to me. This is my second father. He cares for me a lot. I was very happy when they were married. I feel happy for my mother. I love the wedding." The *Kristen* books, where Maria made the transition from picture books to

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chapter books, understood that reading is supposed to make sense, and consciously practiced self-monitoring for the first time in her reading history, are represented by xeroxed book covers, complete with summaries and personal reactions. Maria also includes an illustration from *Charlotte's Web*, which she couldn't begin to read in September but read easily in April, as well as the cover from *Little House in the Big Woods*, the book she is currently reading. To represent her writing, Maria includes "The Haunted House," a "fake" story that's her "first scary story in third grade," as well as a story about Pennington School— "the longest thing I've ever written." Her first research project, a report about koala bears, is also in the writing section of the portfolio. When I conferred with Maria about these artifacts, she showed me, beyond a doubt, that she has had a productive year.

Maria's teacher, Barb, is a caring professional whose classroom reflects current wisdom about effective literacy instruction. She teaches reading and writing not as isolated skills, but rather as functional tools for constructing meaning and communicating with others. Children read, write, and confer about individually chosen trade books and write on self-selected topics in genres including personal narratives, fiction, letters, newspapers, poetry, plays, and research reports. The eight-year-olds sit in groups of three or four and learn not only from Barb, but also from each other. They have ready access to two classroom computers and well-stocked class and school libraries.

Barb teaches weekly mini-lessons on portfolio-related topics— representing one's self as a reader, documenting growth in writing, or developing explicit reflections— often using her own portfolio as a model. She schedules time each Friday for her students to work on their portfolios, provides materials such as plastic sleeves, construction paper, and markers, and makes frequent trips to the xerox machine to copy book covers, stories,

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letters, and other artifacts. She confers with children about their portfolios and encourages them to share the portfolios with each other. Occasionally, she arranges a share session with another class. The children display their portfolios at Back to School night, parent/teacher conferences, and the spring academic fair.

Barb's philosophy and practice reflect the larger school context. In the past ten years, the Pennington staff has made a gradual change to a "Whole Language" approach to reading and writing. Most of the teachers have taken university courses in writing process, literature-based reading instruction, and alternative assessment; over half have advanced degrees in areas ranging from elementary education to educational technology, curriculum and administration to reading and creative arts. Pennington has on-site university classes, a good-sized professional library, and a highly regarded reading specialist whose primary responsibility is staff development. The school's administration is flexible and open to change and has supported and funded many innovative projects, including literacy portfolios and multi-aged classrooms.

This context would seem an ideal place for children's self-assessment to flourish, yet in reality, Barb and other Pennington teachers have been only partially successful at using the portfolios to accomplish their intended purposes, which they see as two-fold. First, the portfolios are supposed to serve as a tool for developing student self-assessment. To that end, Barb teaches mini-lessons and confers extensively with the third graders. The children become increasingly proficient at writing explicit reflections, setting goals and making plans. They do not, however, appear to understand how goal setting, planning, and self-evaluation fit into their development as learners and consequently often view the portfolios as scrapbooks, or

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mementos of their elementary years, rather than active documents of learning.

Pennington teachers also see the portfolios as tools for identifying what children value and also for including student voices in evaluation conversations. In fact, Pennington students have been extremely successful at using their portfolios to demonstrate what they value and how they learn. Unfortunately, this information has not been fully incorporated into existing evaluative structures. Maria's portfolio, her documentation of her learning, does not have an impact on formal evaluation measures. She has no say, for instance, in the grades that appear on quarterly report cards, nor do the artifacts or reflections in her portfolio appear to impact Barb's decisions in that area. Barb shows Maria's portfolio to her parents at conferences, but Maria isn't invited to participate in these conversations. And Maria's portfolio certainly doesn't affect the portrait (caricature?) created by statewide achievement tests given in May.

Barb, Maria's teacher, is not unlike hundreds of teachers attempting to use literacy portfolios to encourage student self-evaluation in their classrooms. Portfolios can be a powerful tool for developing students' self-evaluative voices, promoting learner independence, and enabling teachers to more effectively plan curriculum and instruction. Making student self-assessment a viable evaluative instrument in a classroom or school, however, is not nearly so simple as providing children with three-ring binders, and asking them to gather and reflect on artifacts, set goals, create plans, and assess their development as literate individuals. Portfolios represent a radical change from traditional adult-driven methods of assessment, and as with any change, new practices bring hard questions.

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What is self-assessment for? What are the teacher's roles and responsibilities? How can adults honor students' beliefs and choices about their learning, and still attain a balance with what they think students should read, write, learn, and know? How can children's voices be integrated into existing evaluative structures in less than amenable institutional, social, and political climates?

As an ardent portfolio advocate, my initial tendency is to brush these questions aside and share my latest success stories. Positive tales of portfolio successes are much better received than difficult questions, which tend to brand one as negative, critical, a non-believer. Field and Jardine (1994), however, present an alternative point of view. They believe difficulties or rough spots are a natural and expected outcome of the development of individuals, relationships, and systems. "The difficulties and tensions inherent...are not going to go away, even in good examples" (p. 262).

The health of the portfolio movement, then, will depend not upon our ability to deny or eradicate complex issues, or propose glib solutions, but rather upon efforts to continually refine our practice by acknowledging and discussing our difficulties and problems and by opening conversations with our critics. Such conversations do not "necessitate that we adopt a stance of 'pedagogical negativism' (McLaren, 1989, p. 233) always heralding the bad news" (Field & Jardine, 1994, p. 262). Instead, we might ask ourselves, "What have we learned so far? What's going well? What do we want to change? What do we want to do/ learn next?" thus assuming the same thoughtful, critical tone, the same self-reflective stance we are asking our students to adopt.

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is not to focus on the benefits of student self-assessment, although I believe there are many (Farr & Tone, 1994;

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Glazer & Brown, 1993; Graves & Sunstein (eds.), 1992; Hansen, 1991, 1992; Johnston, 1993; Milliken, 1991; Paulsen, Paulsen, & Meyer, 1991; Rief, 1991; Swain, 1993; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Rather I will examine the complexities and difficulties of incorporating literacy portfolios into an elementary classroom and school: the purposes for using literacy portfolios, issues of ownership and audience, the nature of children's evaluative decisions, the adult's responsibilities in children's development as evaluators, and the institutional and political pressures impacting teachers' ability to incorporate children's voices into the tangled web of assessment practices in their classrooms. I engage in this study not to criticize, but rather to promote the thoughtful, careful reflection and discussion that will lead to the continued health and development of the portfolio movement.

Historical and Theoretical Contexts for the Study

Changing Views of Literacy

Stedman and Kaestle (1987) trace American efforts to measure "functional literacy," which they define as "the reading and writing skills necessary to understand and use the printed material one normally encounters in work, leisure, and citizenship." In the 1930's, when the term "functional literacy" was first used by the Civilian Conservation Corps, a person was identified as having achieved this goal if they had three years of school. That standard has risen steadily since then. In 1947, the Census Bureau "applied the term 'functionally literate' to those with more than five years of schooling" (p. 23), in 1952, this standard was raised to sixth grade, and "by the late 1970's, some noted authorities were describing functional literacy in terms of high school completion" (p. 23).

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Daggett (as quoted in Graves, 1991) demonstrates how workplace definitions of literacy have changed over the past fifty years. He suggests that the literacy of today's workforce should consist not only basic reading and writing skills, but also "problem finding" abilities, which include "the superior literacy skills necessary to work with problems on a long-term basis, the suspension of judgment, data base know-how, the ability to know who knows, the ability to shift points of view, and the use of literacy with precision to achieve these ends."

At least partly because of the rapidly changing nature of a highly technological society, then, literacy can no longer be defined as mastery of a set of isolated subskills. Experts today emphasize not simply mechanics such as word recognition, literal recall, grammar, and spelling; but rather the meaning making aspects of literacy which enable people to use reading and writing to gain information, connect with, and influence others. Wells (1990) speaks for many educators when he says, "To be fully literate is to have the disposition to engage appropriately with texts of different types in order to empower action, feeling, and thinking in the context of purposeful social activity" (p. 14). Rexford Brown (1990) asserts that literacy provides the means for a group to consider itself within a historical context, "Literacy is first of all a process of making meaning and negotiating it with others. It is not just a set of skills useful for understanding the works and ideas of previous generations, it is a way of creating here and now, the meanings by which individuals and groups share their lives and plan their futures..." (p. 35).

Furthermore, this "new literacy" (Willensky, 1990) encourages the development of students' higher level thinking skills. Peter Johnston (1993) calls on educators to "begin by counting as basic both a critical literacy (an ability to see how one's life is framed and shaped by what she/he reads and

views) and a social imagination (an ability to explore how others might think and value multiple perspectives)" (pp. 428-429). The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) suggests that students prepared for the twenty-first century must have the "ability to reason and perform complex non-routine intellectual tasks," as well as a "cultivated creativity." Moreover, they will "know how to learn all the time and are imbued...with a set of values that enable them to use their skills in the service of the highest goals of a larger society."

Additionally, the sociocultural aspects of literacy, for so long ignored, are now recognized as central to the child's development as a reader, writer, and thinker. None demonstrate this so aptly as Shirley Brice Heath, in *Ways With Words*, an ethnographic study of life in an Appalachian factory town. Heath spent ten years chronicling the literacy of three cultures in the area: the townspeople, who practiced a "sophisticated" form of literacy which included language play, and extending beyond text to infer, analyze, and make connections; Roadville, a lower middle class white community whose members interacted with print in strictly literal ways; and Trackton, a poor black community in which people read and wrote mostly for functional reasons, but had an extensive oral storytelling tradition. Although all three groups of children functioned successfully within their own communities, only the children of townspeople were viewed by teachers as successfully literate within a school context. For the children of Roadville and Trackton, school notions of literacy, including the decontextualized nature of literacy instruction, and communicative techniques such as indirect directives ("Could we all sit down?" instead of "Please sit down") caused much confusion. Taylor (1988), Fishman (1988), and Lofty (1992) have documented

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similarly the powerful effects of culture on the definitions and development of literacy.

Changing Methods of Literacy Instruction

Radically altered definitions of literacy call for radically altered definitions of literacy instruction. Twenty years ago, most reading specialists believed that "reading comprehension was an end product of decoding" (Fries, 1962, as quoted by Cooper, 1992, p. 4). Reading instruction focused on "sounding-out" words and developing a sight vocabulary; comprehension was measured in terms of single right answers to questions posed by the teacher. If a student's experiences led him to a different understanding of a text, or left him feeling locked outside it, the teacher labeled his comprehension as less than adequate.

Although most students wrote in school, writing as a thinking or composing process was rarely taught. Writing topics were assigned, but there was little direction as to how to arrive at final products. Most writing instruction focused on mechanics such as grammar, handwriting, or spelling. Evaluation was the responsibility of the teacher, who red-penned student papers and carefully recorded grades in tiny boxes in a green-tinted gradebook. Beginning in the 1950's, students were also subjected to any number of standardized, norm-referenced tests, which "objectively" measured word attack skills and literal recall, as well as spelling, grammar, and mechanics.

In response to new definitions of literacy, many teachers have adopted a "constructivist approach to reading" (Pearson, 1993). They draw on Kenneth Goodman (1986) and Frank Smith (1986), who view reading as a "process in which the reader deals with information and constructs meaning continuously...The reading process involves readers in making predictions,

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confirming or disconfirming these predictions while reading, and integrating information from the text with their background knowledge to form solid, holistic interpretations" (Goodman, 1984, as quoted by Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993, p. 151). Teachers are further informed by literary theorist Louise Rosenblatt, who suggests "the reader brings to text all of her personal experiences along with the influence of her cultural milieu. The text is the black and white graphic display created by the author...the transaction (between reader and text) is the meaning (poem), but the transaction may not be the same for each reader (because of her individual life experiences)" (Rosenblatt, as quoted by Rhodes and Shanklin, 1993, pp. 151-152). The teacher's role is to help students activate and connect background knowledge and experience to text, and then to provide instruction in strategies which enable students to deal with the complexities of print before, during, and after reading. These strategies may be as global as predicting, summarizing, or extending beyond text, or as specific as dealing with unknown words or recalling details.

Writing instruction, too, has changed dramatically within the last twenty years. Pioneers such as Murray (1985), Graves (1986) , Elbow (1973), and Emig (1971), have helped teachers understand that children learn to write by writing and reading the work of other writers, that people write better when they select and care about their topics, that writers, no matter what age, undertake similar processes: they generate ideas, draft, confer with others and revise. Mechanical skills such as spelling, grammar, and handwriting are best taught within the context of purposeful writing. Students' errors are not random acts of carelessness, but rather represent logically constructed systems of belief (Shaughnessy, 1977). Teachers can view these student "errors" in terms of a developmental continuum, in which instruction is most

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appropriately provided in the "zone of proximal development," the area between the child's independent performance, and her performance with the help of a more accomplished peer or an adult (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

New Definitions of Assessment

Some people differentiate between the terms "assessment" and "evaluation." In their eyes, assessment refers to the gathering of data, for example, when a teacher listens to a child read aloud and takes a running record, or when she leafs through a child's writing folder, noting what she sees. Evaluation, in this case, refers to the analysis of this data. After the teacher takes the running record or looks through the writing folder, she reviews her notes for patterns of strengths and weaknesses, then uses this information as the basis for planning new instruction. If this is true, the words "assessment" and "evaluation" represent two discrete processes and are not interchangeable.

A second group, however, asserts that there is no point in gathering data (assessing), if one is not also going to also going to analyze (evaluate) and use what one has learned. At the same time, evaluation is impossible, if one hasn't first gathered some data to work with (assessed). This group believes then, that the terms "evaluate" and "assess" should be used interchangeably, signifying both the gathering and the analysis of data. I align myself with this second group.

Although definitions of literacy and instructional methodology changed enormously, literacy assessment remained remarkably unchanged for many years. The teacher was responsible for some assessment, e.g., spelling tests, or comprehension questions for a particular story or unit of study, but publisher-created standardized tests, developed when literacy was

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still defined as mastery of a set of isolated skills, commandeered far more authority. In these norm-referenced assessments, students decoded isolated words and read short, sparse texts of unknown origins, then answered multiple choice questions which focused primarily on literal recall. Vehicles for reviewing fluency in writing or oral language were rarely included (Glazer & Brown, 1993). Oftentimes, the information produced in these testing situations contradicted what teachers saw in their students' day-to-day performances, nevertheless, standardized tests possessed an objectivity, a godlike authority unquestioned by many.

Public outcry for educational "accountability" and "objectivity" led to a huge increase in the number of standardized tests and from 1955-1986, the volume of sales quadrupled until presently, 127 million tests, costing $900 million, are given annually (Willis, 1990). Newkirk (1991) suggests this increased interest in tests should be examined from a sociological point of view; he believes the American desire for certainty might be at least partially a knee-jerk response to the tumultuous economic conditions in American society. People are afraid, first, that their children are not going to be able to maintain the standard of living that they have set for themselves, and secondly, that they are spoiling their children by not making their lives rigorous enough. Thus, they call for increased rigor, measured by increased accountability, which must, of course, be objective.

Educators' objections to standardized tests are multitudinous (Au, 1992; Berger, 1991; Brandt, 1989; Costa, 1989; Diez & Moon, 1992; Farr & Carey, 1986; Farr & Tone, 1994; Fernie, 1992; Haney, 1991; Hiebert & Calfee, 1989; Johnston, 1993; Marzano & Costa, 1988; Zessoules & Gardner, 1991). Standardized tests don't define or measure literacy in terms of real world behaviors or performance. Standardized tests measure a child's performance on a discrete

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set of tasks on a specific day (which may be affected by fatigue, illness, or a fight on the playground) but are viewed as representative of the child's capabilities or potential. Standardized tests are unfairly biased against minority children and children of poverty. Standardized tests operate from the paradigm of school as a factory, intent on producing a number of like products, while contemporary educators are much more comfortable thinking of school as a community of learners, each with their own unique strengths, who come together to construct knowledge and become more skillful and independent. Furthermore, the underlying assumption that authorities outside of classrooms, e.g., test manufacturers, know more about students than do the teachers working with them is an insult to the professionalism of teachers.

With the last ten or fifteen years, teachers have rightfully begun reclaiming the authority that should accompany any professional career. They have assumed more responsibility for curriculum design, pedagogy, and also evaluation. They have begun acknowledging their evaluative expertise, creating their own instruments, relying on interviews, observations, and naturalistic instruments to create more accurate pictures of learner strengths and needs (Anthony, Johnson, Mickelsen & Preece, 1991; Barone, 1991; Bembridge, 1992; Campione & Brown, 1985; Crafton & Burke, 1994; Farr, 1992; Haney, 1991; Herman, 1992; Hermann, 1992; Hiebert & Calfee, 1992; Johnston, 1992; O'Neill, 1992; Paradis, Chatton, Boswell, Smith, & Yovich, 1991; Paris et al. 1992; Pils, 1991; Rhodes, 1992; Sheperd, 1989; Simmons & Resnick, 1993; Valencia, 1992).

These new forms of assessment, variously identified as "alternative" or "authentic" assessment," share several common features (Valencia, 1990). First, the assessment is, as its name suggests, authentic, in that it consists of

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real reading and writing, applied in real situations (Farr & Tone, 1994; Johnston & Harman, 1992; Meyer, 1992; O'Neill, 1992; Paris et al., 1992; Schnitzer, 1993; Valencia & Peters, 1992; Wiggins, 1992; Winograd, Paris, & Bridge, 1991). (Opponents of authentic assessment reasonably ask, "Authentic to whom?" and argue that unless the learner has her own real purposes for completing the task, authenticity is questionable at best.) Authentic assessment tasks reflect the goals of instruction in a particular setting, and classroom teachers, not the authors or publishers of standardized tests, are the experts most capable of evaluating progress toward those goals.

Secondly, the assessment is multi-dimensional (Valencia, 1990). Data comes from a variety of sources, employs any number of response modes, is qualitative as well as quantitative, and considers process as well as product. In assessing a student's writing, for example, a teacher might review several different pieces— a personal narrative, a letter, a research report, and a timed writing sample, analyzing the student's growth in communicative competence, as well as conventionality. She would evaluate the student's writing process by reviewing the progression of a piece from inception to completion. Looking at the research report, for example, she would review the student's initial questions, his notes, rough drafts, and finally the completed piece. She might expect him to display information in several different genre; in addition to the standard report format, the learner would create a pamphlet, poem, newspaper, or a poster. Thus she would have a much fuller picture of the student as a writer than the one traditionally gathered on standardized tests, where writing assessment often consists of a series of multiple choice questions about punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

Third, authentic assessment is ongoing, a continuous cycle of diagnosis, instruction, and evaluation (Valencia, 1990). In reviewing the

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above student's writing, for example, the teacher might notice he is an excellent communicator whose careless editing detracts from his intended message. She would then work with the child in this area, monitoring progress through anecdotal records and writing samples. This responsivity to individual student needs contrasts sharply with traditional standardized assessment tools, such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, SAT's, or GRE's in which the test, encompassing a sort of universal curriculum which all competent students have supposedly mastered, is taken on one day, in one response mode (multiple choice), and considered a valid measure of student performance until the learner is retested.

Finally, and probably most importantly, authentic assessment involves active, collaborative reflection between students and adults—teacher, and hopefully parents and administrators (Anthony et al., 1992; Farr & Tone, 1993; Glazer & Brown, 1993; Johnston, 1993; Paulsen, Paulsen & Meyers, 1991; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1990; Valencia, 1990). Valencia (1990) cites the benefits of this collaboration as threefold. First, collaboration encourages students to look critically at themselves as learners, better understand their own strengths and needs, and take increased responsibility for their learning. Secondly, collaboration provides teachers with new understandings of student goals, values, and learning behaviors, which hopefully lead to more effective curriculum planning, pedagogy, and evaluation. Third and maybe most importantly, students gain increased understanding of adults' evaluative criteria and perspectives, which enables them to assess their products and growth in new ways (pp. 338-339).

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New Emphasis on Learner Self-Assessment

A central goal of many alternative assessment tools is the development of learner self-assessment so necessary to skillfulness and independence. Costa (1991) reminds us that the "ultimate purpose of evaluation is to enable students to evaluate themselves." Farr (1992) asserts:

> Students need to become good self-assessors if they are to improve their literacy skills. They need to select, review, and think about the reading and writing they are doing. They need to be able to revise their own writing and to revise their comprehension as they read. If students understand their own needs, they will improve. Students should, in fact, be the primary assessors of their own literacy development (p. 30).

In *Portfolios in the Reading-Writing Classroom,* Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) emphasize self-assessment again and again:

> A reader's or writer's perspective of his or her achievements and meaning-making skills is at the heart of assessment and empowering students to be decision makers. Assessment should be directed at helping students engage in self-assessment and evaluation of their own abilities (p. 32).

> Self-assessment helps students to take steps toward becoming lifelong learners and assists students with taking responsibility for their learning processes and the work they produce...Assessment practices should involve the students if we want students to develop into independent thinkers and successful performers they must have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to evaluate their own processes and products (p. 35).

Peter Johnston (1992) states, "Central to both independence and literacy is the ability to monitor and evaluate one's own literate activity and to reflect on what that activity and changes in it mean" (p. 28).

Self-assessment, in this context, might be defined in terms of the learner, in collaboration with the teacher and perhaps others, who identifies a purpose or goal ("I want to read a *Boxcar Children* book"); develops a plan for achieving that goal ("It's too hard for me right now, so I'm going to

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practice reading some easier mysteries and chapter books, and I'm going to get my mom to read with me at home every night"); then gathers resources and implements the plan ("I'm going to ask my teacher to help me find some books I can read, then I'm going to ask my mom if she'll help me read them"). The learner constantly monitors progress in terms of where s/he has been ("At the beginning of the year, I could only read *Amelia Bedelia*, that's just a picture book, and now I'm reading *Cam Jansen* [an easy mystery], so I must be getting better), what is going well/badly ("When I tried to read a *Boxcar Children* book this week, it was still too hard, so I'm going to wait a little while"), what s/he still has to achieve, and how s/he will arrive at her final goal ("I'm going to try *Vampires Don't Wear Polka Dots* next, that's not as hard as the *Boxcar Children*, but it's harder than *Cam Jansen*). When the learner arrives at her/his goal, s/he is able to evaluate both processes and products, and also to apply her learning to set new goals.

Literacy Portfolios: A Vehicle for Student Self-Assessment

For the past seven years, literacy portfolios, "purposeful collection(s) of student work that exhibit the student's efforts, progress, and achievement in one or more areas and include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection" (Northwest Evaluation Association, as quoted by Paulsen, Paulsen & Meyers, 1991) have been probably the most widely recognized tool for the development of student self-assessment. Literacy portfolios, depending on how they are used, reflect current wisdom about assessment methodology— they contain authentic, multi-dimensional demonstrations of reading, writing, and learning, collected in an ongoing collaboration between student and teacher (Anthony et al., 1991; Farr, 1994; Graves, 1992;

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Hansen, 1991, 1992; Johnston, 1993; Glazer & Brown, 1993; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993; Tierney, Carter, and Desai, 1991). These portfolios provide students with a place to collect and more importantly, to reflect on artifacts which they see as representative of their growth as readers and writers. Over time, the portfolios document students' growth and development as readers, writers, and thinkers (Hansen, 1994).

Learner Self-Assessment as a Developing Skill

Rief (1992), and many others (Avery, 1992; Austin, 1994; Glazer & Brown, 1993; Graves & Sunstein (eds.), 1992; Hansen, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1994; Johnston, 1993; Milliken, 1991; Silvers, 1994; Swain, 1993; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Visovatti, 1994; Vizyak, 1994), have demonstrated that students can, in fact, accurately evaluate their own work, identifying both strengths and weaknesses. Rief (1992, p. 35) declares:

> I have discovered that students know themselves as learners better than anyone else. They set goals for themselves and judge how well they reach those goals. They thoughtfully and honestly evaluate their own learning with far more detail and introspection than I thought possible. Ultimately they tell me who they are as readers, writers, thinkers, and human beings. As teachers/learners we have to believe in the possibilities of our students, by trusting them to show us what they know and valuing what they are able to do with that knowledge.

However, students don't always evaluate as adults would. Tierney, Desai and Carter (1991) state,

> Students don't evaluate pieces based on adult standards. It's really very refreshing because they see things from a more personalized perspective. They make comments on a piece because it was a particularly meaningful event. That's why they want to remember it, and that's why they have included it in their portfolio (p. 17)...Students may place items in portfolios because of one aspect they have noticed or because of multiple reasons. Students may like a piece for personal and sentimental

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reasons; they may value the work for the quality of ideas or for their use of descriptive language; or writers may like their organization, mechanical skills, or their choice of topic. Likewise, readers may value their work for a wide variety of reasons. An item may be placed in the showcase portfolio because it is a topic the student is interested in, an author the student admires, a familiar and favorite genre, a piece of writing about a text that expresses an aspect that is significant to the reader, or for a host of other reasons (p. 103).

It seems naive, however, to expect students' self-evaluative efforts, in portfolios, for example, to commandeer any validity as an assessment tool, unless there is at least some semblance of adult criteria for judging merit, e.g., story line, or use of conventions such as spelling or mechanics. We must begin by looking at how students' self-evaluate, and how these evaluations change as a result of development and instruction.

Newkirk (1988) believes students move from a proto-critical to critical stance as evaluators. Proto-critical judgments are "reactions to the embedded text, to the written language, and to a variety of associated elements of the text: the picture that may accompany the writing, the handwriting, the spelling, the experience itself. The text is not viewed as separate" (p. 154). Asked to identify her best story, the child chooses a piece about a trip to an amusement park because "my sister and I really had lots of fun" or a piece about her grandfather's fish tank because "I put spaces between all the words." Part of the child's development as a writer, or as a reader of his own writing, then, involves being able to separate the writing from characteristics such as picture, affective understanding of the experience, spelling, and handwriting.

In a longitudinal study of four children from second to fourth grade, Hilgers (1986) discovered "clear changes in use of evaluation criteria over time, with a trend toward use of a greater number of criteria as children aged. Younger children evaluated text based on its affective characteristics, e.g., "I

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like getting presents," or "I would like going to Disneyland," or on surface features such as handwriting. Older children, while continuing to respond affectively to writing, also responded to, among other things, the writer's crafting of a piece, comprehensibility, and entertainment and moral values. Hilgers also found that young children generally would not evaluate on a certain criteria, e.g., length, unless they were utilizing that criteria in their own writing. Children were also likely to begin using a criteria to evaluate before they could verbalize its use.

My early work (Wilcox, 1992) indicates that children's reflections can be arranged along a rough developmental continuum. Students begin by simply labeling their artifacts, "This is a fiction story." Next, they indicate preferences, which are usually signaled by phrases such as, "I like..." or "This is my favorite..." or "This is special to me..." Because Pennington adults constantly ask, "Why did you put that in your portfolio?" students gradually begin to incorporate statements of causality into their reflections, "I put this in my portfolio because..." or "The reason why I put this in my portfolio is..." These early attempts at causality sometimes make little sense ("I want this in my portfolio because I want this in my portfolio") and are usually not very specific ("I want this in my portfolio because it means a lot to me"). With much modeling, coaching, and practice, however, students' understandings of causality and their specificity in discussing portfolio artifacts improves.

When learners begin describing their actions or their accomplishments in their statements of causality, "The reason I put this in my portfolio is because I like this book and it's the first chapter book I ever read," or "I put this in my portfolio because I know how to draw Garfield," it represents a huge step in their evaluative processes. After students begin assuming this kind of agency, their reflections quickly become more complex and more

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meaningful until finally, in one of the most sophisticated stages of self-evaluation, students draw on their histories to talk about how they have grown, "I used to have trouble with chapter books but now I can read the *Cam Jansen* mystery series just fine."

Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) notice changes in students' self-evaluations after direct instruction. They believe student comments not only increase in frequency and length, but also focus more on community expectations, and comparing pieces to discuss growth. It is important to note, however, that students do not allow these reflections to replace their previous more personal comments, instead, they include both types of remarks.

Dennie Wolf (1989) suggests that students' self-evaluations change because they begin incorporating adult criteria into their own evaluations,

> With time, experience, and conversation, students' ability to read their own portfolios with depth and understanding also develops. Early on, students appraised their work using only standard and flat-footed criteria: Neatness, length or the grade written at the top. As little as six months later, they notice and care about a wide range of characteristics: how effective a story is, how unusual the words in a poem are, whether the ideas and arguments in an essay are sharp...What emerges is not just insight about paragraphs or pieces...one finds they know their own histories as writers" (p. 38).

Wolf also notes, however, that children do not abandon their own criteria, instead they apply adult criteria in addition to their own.

A reasonable response to students' self-evaluative efforts might be to first honor the child's criteria, but then also to help her acquire competency or become socialized to participate in a different culture, that of the adult. Wertsch (1991) suggests, "The process of socialization is obviously not one of replacing one speech genre with another; instead it is one of differentiating and adding speech genres... socialization involves mastering the rules for

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using particular speech genres in particular sociocultural settings" (p. 130). In considering student self-evaluation, this notion of bicultural socialization would appear critical.

Plan for the Dissertation

Portfolios can provide teachers with a window for learning what students value and a vehicle for introducing student self-evaluation into assessment conversations, but incorporating them as a viable evaluative instrument calls for radical shifts in our beliefs about assessment. Portfolios move the spotlight away from the adult as evaluator and place the child at the center of the evaluation process. Granting the child this authority, however, challenges century-old beliefs and practices about evaluation. What is evaluation for? Why should learners self evaluate? What are teacher roles in helping children self-evaluate? How can children's self-evaluations be integrated into existing evaluative structures in a less than amenable institutional and social climate?

This dissertation, then, will explore the complexities of effectively implementing literacy portfolios as an evaluative and instructional tool in one elementary classroom. I'll begin my study by contextualizing the Pennington portfolios. I will describe the setting— the community, the school, the classroom, the teacher, and the students. In Chapter Three, I'll outline my methodology, concentrating particularly on the many roles I assumed during the year and how those might have affected the gathering and analysis of the data.

In Chapter Four, I will explore the purposes of portfolios at Pennington. I'll discuss the problematic issues of child and adult ownership, a leftover legacy of the earlier days of the writing process movement. Then, in

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an effort to help teachers better understand the nature of children's evaluative decisions, necessary information if the portfolios truly are to be collaborative, I'll devote the remainder of the chapter to examining the children's stated purposes for including artifacts in their portfolios. Portfolios at Pennington are also shaped by teachers and other adults, however, so in Chapter Five, I will explore some of the adult forces impacting the portfolios. I'll discuss the "portfolio culture" at Pennington and also district mandates affecting the portfolios. I'll detail instructional strategies Barb and I tried, critically analyzing our successes and failures in teaching children how to set goals, make plans, acquire strategies, and evaluate writing by criteria. In Chapter Six, I'll suggest how teachers might expand the uses of portfolios at Pennington. First, I will contrast adult views of portfolios as places for setting goals and moving forward with children's understandings of the portfolios as places for preserving history and looking back. I will describe current purposes and audiences for assessment at the school, then discuss how portfolios might fit into this picture. I'll also explore how teachers might use portfolios not only as an evaluative tool, but also as a tool for promoting learner skillfulness and independence.

The ultimate purpose of instructional portfolios is to help students internalize the attitudes and behaviors that enable them to become skillful, independent lifelong learners. Chapter Seven, then, is a case study of Maria, a child who made huge gains toward this goal in reading, but much less substantial gains in writing. I'll consider how adult interactions might have aided or hindered her growth.

Finally, in Chapter Eight, I will look at some of the institutional and societal constraints impacting the effective implementation of portfolios. Literacy portfolios duplicate, challenge, or conflict with institutional

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structures at a class, district, and state level. I discuss some of the existing conflicts and suggest that portfolios, which represent radical changes in evaluation practices, call for radical changes in schools. I end by envisioning what the New School might look like.

CHAPTER II

PENNINGTON: A GOOD PLACE TO TEACH AND LEARN

The Community

Mayfield is a rural town in southeastern New Hampshire, a bedroom community for the city of Boston. The population of the town, approximately 8000 people, is almost entirely Caucasian. Three grocery stores, a Wal-Mart, and any number of assorted strip malls serve Mayfield and other neighboring towns, as well as people from Massachusetts who cross the state line to avoid paying sales tax. Entering from the north, I pass two large R.V. dealerships, several garages, and Smitty's Drive-In (Closed Mondays and Tuesdays in the winter), then turn left at the first stoplight onto Main Street. I follow Main Street about a mile past the American Legion, a barber, an optometrist, a dentist, and the town hall. Opposite the town hall is the First Baptist Church, which shares a parking lot with Pennington School.

The School

From the outside, Pennington looks very ordinary. Home to 510 students and 25 classroom teachers, the structure is a motley combination of the original building and several mismatched additions. The first section of the school, a square, mustard-yellow, two-story, wooden structure is exactly one hundred years old. A 1950-ish addition, built of red brick, tripled the school's size. Sometime in the last 15 years, a one-story, beige, cinder block addition was built onto the far end of the brick building. A portable unit housing three additional classrooms attests to Pennington's continued

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growth. This spring, a bond issue which would have allowed another addition was defeated; the school will continue to use the portable for at least another year or two.

Pennington is surrounded by an enormous playground. On one side of the school, behind the church and the parking lot, a new play structure, complete with slides, jungle gym, crawling tubes, and hanging bars, has recently been erected by the Pennington parent organization. Older swingsets, several jungle gyms, and a sandbox surround the periphery of this area. Behind the school, on the blacktop, primary-aged children jump rope and play chase, dodging fourth and fifth graders intent on their four-square and basketball games. Other children play soccer and baseball on a huge grassy area several football fields long. The spacious playground with its abundance of equipment contrasts sharply with the glass-littered blacktop yards of inner-city schools where I have spent my last ten years; I am surprised to discover that this seemingly affluent school receives Chapter 1 funds, and that almost all of the third grade fathers work as truck drivers, telephone repairmen, and mechanics, while the mothers are nurses, beauticians, assembly line workers, and waitresses.

The environment at the school is positive and upbeat. Teachers greet each other in the hallways, inquire about upcoming weddings, share pictures of grandchildren, and exclaim over the latest soccer victory or softball tournament. The Pennington "family" is quick to celebrate; this year they have had at least five baby showers and retirement parties, and they respond to emergencies ranging from broken arms to family deaths with cards, flowers, fruit baskets, and meals. Teachers walk a three mile exercise loop in the mornings before school, participate in aerobics in the gym after school, and meet for breakfast at a local diner almost every Friday. They purchase

designer sweatshirts from a "crafty" instructional assistant and interrupt math or social studies lessons so that Bill, the night custodian and resident poet, a.k.a. "The Pennington Pen," can share his latest writing with their students.

The Pennington teachers are knowledgeable professionals. The school has incorporated many educationally sound practices: Literature-Based Reading, Writing Process, Alternative Assessment, and Multi-age Grouping. Principal Lynn Johnson and Assistant Principal Maureen Rogers are supportive of teachers' professionalism, and often go out of their way to provide funding or make special accommodations for teachers who want to try new things. Although some staff members argue that change has come too fast with too little staff development, teachers have access to many special training programs: day-long conferences and professional workshops, and after-school satellite courses from the University.

Much of the professional development at the school comes from reading specialist Linda Ross. Linda has been at the school for seven years and is responsible for helping teachers implement effective literacy assessment and instruction. To this end, she does demonstration teaching and peer coaching in people's classrooms, maintains a professional library, conducts lunchtime presentations and after-school support groups, and orders children's literature. She also develops language arts curriculum and assessment materials at the district level, and regularly hosts a local cable television program advertising the latest children's books.

The Classroom and the Teacher

September 7. First day of school. I teach at the University in the morning and arrive at Pennington just before noon. I stride up the ramp to

the portable, then stand in the hall for a minute, take a drink of water, straighten my skirt, smooth my hair. This is where I will spend the year doing research on the self-evaluative behaviors of third graders and I am a little nervous. When I open the door, I am immediately in the meeting area, surrounded by nineteen third graders, who are sitting on the floor listening to Barb read aloud. They face a chalkboard, which contains a list, "Things We Could Write About," generated earlier this morning, and a tall easel, which holds the first of many poems, "One and Only You." A few children pull threads from the worn orange and brown school-issue carpet, wrapping them around and around their fingers, as Barb reads.

The walls in Barb's room are filled with print— signs advertising the computer, language arts center, and library, a class list, job chart, and classroom rules. One bulletin board details the class writing procedures:

1. Select a topic.
2. Write a rough draft.
3. Have a content conference.
   - with a partner
   - with a group
   - with teacher
4. Revise your story.
5. Self-edit. Check spelling.
6. Have a mechanics conference.
   - with partners
   - with teacher
7. Do a final draft.
8. Final edit (with teacher before publishing story).

A manuscript alphabet on one wall, mirrored by a cursive alphabet on another, foreshadows the growth and change these eight-year-olds will experience.

Barb's wooden desk, slightly angled, takes up one corner of the room. A gray two-drawer file cabinet adds an extra foot to the crowded desktop and provides a place for the homework folders— red for math, green for

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handwriting, yellow for spelling, and blue for daily oral language— which quickly become part of the third graders' morning routine. Behind Barb's desk, a tall shelf is filled almost to overflowing with supplies: chalk, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, and professional books and notebooks for various curricular areas. A student desk, topped with crates for children's daily writing folders and "save" files, occupies the space between Barb's desk and an eight-foot chalkboard.

The children sit at five large tables on blue plastic chairs. Barb allows them to pick their seats that first day and then to change frequently throughout the year. The third graders often abandon these seats during the morning writing and reading blocks, as they work with each other, move to the computers, or to other tables on the room's periphery. Only occasionally does Barb intervene in the seating arrangement, and then only in response to a child's request or because of behavioral needs. Although the room is void of children's work that first day, the third graders quickly establish ownership. Seasonal art projects soon hang from strings over their heads. The children post their poems and stories around the room and cover Barb's gray metal cabinet with their art. Children's writing and posters and projects from the latest thematic unit are taped to windows that line two sides of the room.

On this first day, Barb, wearing a silky, navy blue print dress, reads aloud from *Teach Us, Amelia Bedelia*. She is beginning her twelfth year at Pennington, but started her teaching career in Canada, where she grew up, about 25 years ago. She left teaching to marry and raise a family, then returned to her career as her daughter and son approached adolescence. She taught fifth grade for several years but has been in third for about the last ten. Barb describes herself as a traditional teacher who has taken classes in writing process and literature-based reading and has gradually adopted more

wholistic methods of literacy instruction and assessment. She tells me repeatedly that she is "the most structured member of the third grade team" and believes that some parents request that their children be in her class for that reason. After watching her for a few days, I agree that she is structured, but also suspect that parents request her because she combines structure and firmness with a kind and nurturing manner, as well as a great sense of humor.

Barb's class of nineteen children would be described as "tough" by most teachers. Although the roster indicates that the class is equally split between boys and girls, the boys seem to far outnumber the girls. Many of the children have special needs: Russ, David, and Patrick spend most of the morning in the LD room; Robbie, although not coded for any special services, is an eccentric who demands far more time and energy than the average child; Luis and Tim both live with their fathers and seem to need all the extra mothering Barb can provide; and Jonathan's mom and dad divorce midway through the year. Several of the girls also have pressing emotional needs— Maria's father is hospitalized for treatment of substance abuse, Christine's mother spends a month in the hospital for unidentified reasons, Julie comes to school without breakfast, snack, or appropriate clothing most days.

During this first read aloud, the children, unaccustomed to sitting after a summer of biking and swimming, are a little restless, and several times Barb stops to check their understanding of the story by asking literal level questions; she also responds to their questions, e.g. "What does 'in tarnation' mean?" The eight-year-olds are delighted when Amelia Bedelia makes candy apples with her class and ask if they can make candy apples too. The first time Barb says, "Perhaps, someday." Later she says, "Not today, but maybe someday we can." When she gets to the end of the book, she conducts a brief

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discussion, then sends the third graders to "Pick something off the fiction shelf" for silent reading. Children at Pennington have been choosing their own books since first grade, so today's request is not unusual.

The library, located in the back corner of the room next to the math center, consists of a 4' x 4' metal book shelf, full of paperbacks. The chapter books on the top and bottom shelf are fairly difficult, probably accessible only to the better readers in the class, and today, the children barely look at them. Most head straight for the middle shelf, which is filled with picture books. Others linger at a low student desk next to the bookshelf. Plastic baskets on top of the desk hold some of the children's favorite series— the *Berenstain Bears*, the *American Girls*, and books Karen eventually labels *"The Don't Books"* because all of them— *Frankenstein Doesn't Plant Petunias, Vampires Don't Wear Polka Dots, Santa Claus Doesn't Mop Floors*— have some variation of "don't" in the title. A box labeled "Mysteries" contains books from series such as *Nate the Great, Cam Jansen,* and the ever-popular *Boxcar Children,* and another box contains twenty or twenty-five books, grouped together because they are all easy chapter books. Most of the third graders will move from picture books to chapter books in these first few months of school, and these short novels, ranging from 80-125 pages, are a nice bridge. Across from the fiction books, approximately four feet away, lies a smaller shelf, about 3' x 3', labeled "Nonfiction." This collection is not nearly as current or well-maintained; many of the books look a little dilapidated. A set of encyclopedias, dictionaries, and thesauruses comprise the reference section of the classroom library.

As the children select their books, Barb passes out their reading response journals, one-inch, plastic binders with name labels stuck on the front. The first page in each journal is a daily reading log, and Barb

demonstrates how to fill in the date, title, and pages read. She also passes out a worksheet on prediction, but later laments that decision, "Every year, I think, 'Why didn't I do such and such, like today, why didn't I just have them choose a book, and record it on their reading record?' That would have been enough for the first day, but I had to try to get them to do predictions also. It was too much for the first day." Barb's careful reflection about her practice is indicative of many to come throughout the course of the year.

The Children

Elizabeth

From French braid to pink lace-trimmed socks and white leather tennis shoes, jade green cableknit sweater to stone-washed ankle-zippered levis, Elizabeth is the quintessential All-American third grader, a red-haired Irish beauty just waiting to be discovered and made famous by Sears or Filene's advertising circulars. She is an avid reader, easily one of the best in the class, and on a typical day, removes her trademark thumb from mouth only long enough to dry it so she can turn the pages of her latest book. She especially likes series and is currently working her way through the *Little House* books, although they're "a little hard" and she has to "look up some of the words in the dictionary." Elizabeth has many other talents and interests: she plays the cello in the Pennington orchestra, and attends religious education, Brownies, dance, and swim lessons outside of school. She lives with her father, who "does something with computers in Boston," her mother, a seamstress and craftswoman, and two preschool sisters. The family is new to the Pennington neighborhood, and her mother expresses concerns about Elizabeth's social needs. "Last year," she says, "I could see the school playground from where we lived. Sometimes Elizabeth would be standing all

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alone and it was heartbreaking. I really want her to make some good friends this year." Elizabeth's talents as a reader and writer and her ability to think of interesting and creative activities soon elevate her social status in Barb's class.

Karen

Petite, dark-haired Karen leans against me as I confer with Tommy. "You're cute," she says, rubbing my back before drifting away to her own work. Although most of the third graders are not outwardly affectionate, Karen has not outgrown the need for a little loving, and throughout the year, I am the subject of many of her gentle ministrations: a hand slipped in mine as we walk across the playground, a head on my shoulder during an assembly, a quick hug on the way out the door. She is a sensitive child, and I am also the consoler and drier of tears when children make fun of her new coat, when she is worried that her hamster might die, when she doesn't pass the timed test in math. Karen lives with her mother, who is studying to be a nurse, a fifth grade brother, and two younger sisters, and claims to see her father on weekends, although school records indicate that his whereabouts are unknown. She plays the violin (she "pracktis" every night because she might want to be a "pefecenil"), and also attends Brownies and religious education at the local Catholic Church. Karen, who carefully orders her life and her desk, is offended when I suggest that she might have lost a piece of paper in her desk. "Oh no. I keep my stuff neat. I always keep my stuff neat," she declares as she pulls out her tote tray to show me books neatly stacked, pencils sharpened, crayons boxed. I think of the dissertation research currently strewn across my bedroom floor and wish for some of this nine-year-old's organizational expertise.

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Jonathan

Jonathan is a thinker. On the second day of school, Barb passes out the children's first hard-covered math books, to the excitement and delight of most of the third graders. Jonathan, however, has reservations, "When we do our math books, are you helping us cover them, or do we have to cover them at home?" "Have you ever had anyone have to buy a new math book (because they lost theirs)?" When Barb reads aloud from *Freckle Juice*, then asks the children if a dime is a large allowance, almost all immediately respond that it isn't. Jonathan thinks a little longer, "Unless it was back then [a long time ago]," he answers. Trying to explain prediction, Jon says, "We did it last year. Let's say you were in the middle of a book, and are getting ready to turn to the next page, you might say, 'I think he's going to lose a button.'"

Jonathan is a very busy child. He is surprised, then, when I read the lead to Jerry Spinelli's *Birdie and the Bathwater Gang*, "Birdie Kind was bored and it was only the second day of summer vacation..." "Wow," says Jon, "I would have had a million things planned." Somehow, "a million things planned, " seems a metaphor for Jon's life outside of school. "Mrs. Wilson, can I take home my computer disk?" he asks. "I have to write some stuff at home... I made a prayer to say for Thanksgiving, and I'm making my grandmother a story. I'm going to do it at my neighbor's house." This neighborhood computer seems one of his favorite pastimes and he regularly brings in notes, cards, letters, and signs he's made. He loves working with his hands— drawing, playing with Legos, building models, and repairing cars with Bill, his next door neighbor. "I can't wait for summer, " he tells me in January, "My grandfather's going to teach me to mow the lawn."

Unfortunately, Jonathan's interests and passions often do not extend into school kinds of literacy. Perhaps some of his disinterest can be attributed

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to other events in his life. Outward appearances, including extensive conversations about family activities, seem to indicate that his home life is happy and secure, but in November, Jon's mom tells Barb that she and his father are splitting up. The impending divorce and move preoccupy Jonathan, who appears to think about little else for three or four months. A friendly and outgoing child, he moves away from the group and sits at a desk by himself for several weeks. He writes a story about his upcoming move, then rewrites, revises, recopies, and retypes the story two or three more times. He draws and re-draws pictures of moving vans and maps of his old and new homes. One weekend, he decides he will make a new portfolio, all about moving. He creates a cover on the neighbor's computer, then adds his story about moving and a map of the state of New Hampshire. "I'm gonna make a little portfolio behind it...[this] map has my old town, but I colored in [where I'm going to live next]." On more than one occasion, I watch for fifteen or twenty minutes, as Jon rearranges the library corner, reorganizes his computer files, or straightens his desk during the reading and writing block. I wonder if he is not somehow rearranging, reorganizing, straightening the parameters of his life.

Patrick

Husky, ruddy-faced Patrick lives with his father (a mechanic), his mother (a beautician), and Michael, a three-year-old brother. He spent a year in readiness before going to first grade and is consequently one of the oldest children in Barb's class. Even so, school kinds of learning have proven extremely difficult for Patrick, and he has received LD services since early in second grade. He worries that "people might think [he] is not smart," and occasionally refuses to leave the room for his special classes. Although he is

well-behaved and exhibits a great deal of self-control, school is a frustrating place for Patrick, and his mother tells Barb that he often explodes in tantrums at home, announcing to his parents, "You better not make Michael as stupid as you made me."

Despite, or perhaps because of, his difficulties in school learning, Patrick is a deeply observant child, carefully "reading" the world around him (Freire, 1987). I am interviewing him in mid-October when Jacob comes over to use the computer. I don't know how to use the program Jacob wants and fumble a little. Patrick comments, "You have an Apple computer, you should know how to do it." When I tell him that I'm not sure whether the previous person saved their work, Patrick tells me that I can tell by checking whether they have pulled out their disc. He also notices that Jacob's shirt is wet, and asks about that. I'm completely oblivious to all of this, and am struck by how carefully Patrick processes the details in his world. Scholars who study the creative processes (e.g. Gardner, 1983; John-Steiner, 1985) have suggested that this close attention to detail is characteristic of artists and writers; Patrick, in fact, tells me that he wants to be a writer when he grows up.

Patrick is also extremely perceptive about his needs as a learner. "Sometime teachers think I can't do anything by myself. Mrs. Prince (his special education teacher), every time I try to write a story, she's like, 'Do you want me to write for you, do you want me to write for you?' I hate when people ask me that, because like when I'm doing a rough draft, I know what I want to write, and like she gets, I don't know, I'm trying to think of something to say, it pops up in my head, and then I start writing fast, because it pops in my head." Patrick tells me that adults "should listen to kids," and that he should be allowed to decide when he needs extra assistance from the Learning Disabilities teacher. He rails against leaving the room on a regular

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schedule, "When I usually go to Mrs. P., Mrs. Wilson has no idea what time she's going to do projects, like a lot of fun projects, I'm not here for it, cuz I have to go over there…We have to do work Monday through Thursday, and on Fridays, I always come back, cuz I'm not wasting my time having fun, when my class is doing something you really need to learn."

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPATING AS AN OBSERVER, OBSERVING AS A PARTICIPANT

You're Just Curious Wilcox

That first afternoon, I introduce myself to the children and explain my role in their classroom. "I used to be a first and second grade teacher, and then I was a reading teacher like Mrs. Ross. Now I'm going to school to learn more about how children learn because I think that will make me a better teacher. I am especially interested in what children know about themselves as readers and writers and how they show their reading and writing in their portfolios. I will be in the classroom three days each week for most of the year. During that time, I will talk to children about their reading and writing, just like Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Ross do. I'll be asking lots of questions and would like it if you would try to answer them the best you can, but you can always tell me if I'm bothering you or if you don't want to work with me. I hope you will come and tell me if you notice something interesting about yourself as a reader or writer. I also hope you will let me copy some of your reading and writing and some of the reflections from your portfolios. Remember, you can always tell me if you don't want to work with me." Later that week, per Institutional Review Board instructions, I distribute assent forms to the children, as well as informed consent forms to their parents. Sixteen children, along with their parents, agree to participate in the study. Three children's parents refuse permission, although one later relents.

I have no record of using the word "doctorate" those first few days but

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I must have, because the word enters the children's vocabulary and creates some confusion about my future career plans. At the end of the second week, Karen turns to me conversationally during art class, "So you want to be a nurse?" she asks. I try to explain the difference between a Ph.D. and a medical doctor, but I'm not sure she understands; I think she still expects me to whip a stethoscope out of my black computer bag.

During those first few days, I establish my spot. I put my "stuff"— computer case and bag filled with tape recorder, camera, and extra batteries at the reading center, a long table on one side of the room. From there, I can watch the third graders lining up behind the portables and also see the action on the playground. I can survey the classroom, hear conversations at all of the student tables, and keep a close watch on the computer center, where the children work busily on two Apple GS's. From this table I also have easy access to the children's portfolios, which are housed on a low wooden shelf along with their "Best Story" booklets (collections of finished drafts) and blue spelling test booklets. Occasionally, I am usurped by two or three children, usually boys, who strew their stuff messily across the table, stacking materials to make space for drawing. Sometimes, an errant child sits beside me at an individual desk.

By late October the children know that a researcher is someone who asks hard questions. In his reading journal, Luis writes, "Dear Mrs. Wilcox, Thank you for toking to me about my reading. You hav a lot of questins and it is hard for me to antser them." Shortly thereafter, I interview Jane and Melissa about the Halloween poems they have co-authored. Melissa tells me that "scary poems are better because they are more exciting and more fun." Jane concurs with Melissa, then says, " Now she's going to ask why are they are more fun."

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Melissa agrees, "Yep."

I laugh, "Why do you think that?"

Jane is quick with a response, "Because you always do." The girls think this is very funny and giggle hysterically. Mildly concerned about my image, I ask, "Is that bad?" Jane is quick to assure me that it is not.

Melissa makes a connection with literature. "You're just Curious Wilcox... you know, instead of Curious George."

I laugh again. "Instead of Curious George, Curious Wilcox? Do you think I should get a tee shirt that says 'Curious Wilcox?' Or maybe I should get a tee shirt that says, 'Beware, Curious Wilcox coming.'" The girls decide they will paint a t-shirt. I try not to take it personally when they tell me I will need an extra large.

Gathering Data

Although this study cannot be described as an ethnography in the strictest sense of the word, the research methodology — extensive time at the site, observational fieldnotes, formal and informal interviews, collection of documents and artifacts, and data analysis— are drawn from that discipline. Since "the ethnographer is interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural setting from an insider's point of view" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 11), I spent large amounts of time at Pennington. The first two weeks, I was in the classroom every day and the children accepted my presence with mild interest. After that, I was at the site three days per week until Christmas. From January until the end of April, I was in the classroom for reading, writing, and portfolio instruction four mornings each week, and the last six weeks, I was there two mornings per week. I guarded my time at the school jealously and missed only an occasional day. I also attended evening events such as

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open house and the spring academic fair.

The third graders especially loved my technological paraphernalia—laptop computer, camera, and tape recorder— and barraged me with questions. They delighted in "waking up" the computer by manipulating the track ball, then made car noises as they raced the cursor around the screen like drivers in the Indy 500. The pull-down menus at the top of the screen were also interesting and the children begged me to change type fonts, styles, and sizes. David and Jane used their schoolboxes to create their own laptop computers, complete with mice, and filled their free time by pretending to type. I worried about whether the computer would be a continual distraction or would serve as a wall between the children and me, but after an initial flurry of interest, the children adjusted to the clicking of the keys and its presence became commonplace. Occasionally I left the computer on a table; when it got in the way, the children carefully pushed it aside, asked me to move it, or closed the screen and lugged the eight pound intruder back to me.

The third graders were fascinated by my flying fingers and often told me that I was the best writer that they knew, because I "typed so fast" or because I "didn't even have to look at my fingers." I taught several of them how to type their names using the correct finger positions and then caught them busily inserting their names every time I turned away from the computer. When I conducted writing interviews in early October, over half the eight and nine-year-olds told me that I was the best writer they knew, because I "wrote so much" or produced "such long stories." Karen told me I was the "best fingerer in the whole world."

Fieldnotes

Until Christmas, I gathered data on everything that went on in the

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classroom: formal and informal instruction; share sessions and conferences for reading, writing, and portfolios; math, social studies, and science instruction; multi-age time, special activities such as art and assemblies, and the beginning and end of the day. I took especially detailed notes during the morning "Reading and Writing Workshop," a two hour block when the third graders worked on literacy-related activities, including portfolios, individually or in pairs or small groups.

Early in the year, I often had 30-40 pages of typed notes, but as I focused my inquiry more tightly, I became more selective about what I wrote down and usually came home with only fifteen or twenty pages. After the first day, I took all of my field notes on the laptop computer using the collaborative note-taking technique described by Newkirk and McLure in *Listening In* (1992). Newkirk taped small group reading discussions in McLure's first grade class, then transcribed the tapes using only the left-hand side of the page. He returned these fieldnotes to McLure, who recorded her observations, insights, and questions on the right-hand side of the page, then the two met to discuss the transcripts.

Like Pat McClure, Barb acted as a co-researcher in my study. She read all of my field notes and transcripts and occasionally wrote responses. More frequently, we discussed the data before or after school, at recess, or during lunch, or planning times. Barb knew the children much better than I— she planned instruction, graded their papers, conferred about their reading and writing, talked to their parents, and attended special education meetings— and I hugely valued her insights. I relied heavily on her opinions, I needed her to explain her intentionality, to confirm whether I was seeing clearly, and to provide fresh perspectives. Her comments were perhaps the most important triangulation of my data.

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The children also helped triangulate the data. The third graders knew I was writing about them and frequently leaned against me, reading over my shoulder as I typed. They were delighted to find their names or read their words on the screen and loved when I occasionally typed short letters into the body of my field notes (Dear Patrick, This test is hard! You are doing a good job! I'm proud of you). As I interviewed the children, I stopped frequently to verify information, "I want to make sure this is right? Is this what you said?" The third graders were quick to correct me when they felt I wasn't accurate. Often, these instances also served as times for them to revise or expand upon their thinking.

Formal and Informal Interviews

Fetterman identifies the interview as "the ethnographer's most important data gathering technique. Interviews explain and put into a larger context what the ethnographer sees and experiences" (1989, pp. 47-48). Formal interviews, "verbal approximations of a questionnaire with explicit research goals," generally "serve comparative and representative purposes—comparing responses and putting them in the context of common group beliefs and themes" (1989, p. 48). Although Fetterman advises against using formal interviews too early in the inquiry, "At the beginning stages of a study, structured interviews tend to shape responses to conform to the researcher's conception of how the world works," (1989, p. 48), I felt the need for some firsthand knowledge about the developmental patterns of third graders' evaluative language. For that reason, I conducted formal reading and writing interviews, as well as portfolio interviews, with all of the children within the first month of school. These early interviews consisted of prescribed sets of questions (See Figure 3-1, Figure 3-2), culled from several sources (Atwell,

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1986; Rief, 1992; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993). I also conducted formal interviews about writing samples (quarterly), report cards (January and June), and portfolios (quarterly) with selected students periodically throughout the year.

I interviewed students individually or occasionally in pairs. Sometimes, I took the children into a small room in the center of the portable, but more frequently, I conducted formal interviews in the back corner of the room during reading or writing workshop. I always asked children if they wanted their interviews to be private, but they generally did not see this as an issue. Often, two or three students listened in, offering an occasional suggestion or comment.

While these formal interviews yielded useful information, I collected most of my data during informal interviews. These sessions, "casual conversations...with a specific but implicit research agenda," are useful in "discovering what people think and how one person's perceptions compare with another's. Such comparisons help identify shared values in the community— values that inform behavior. Informal interviews are also useful in establishing and maintaining a healthy rapport" (Fetterman, 1989, pp. 48-49). Taamivara and Enright (1986) see these short but frequent conversations as especially effective in obtaining information from young children; I often talked to the third graders for 5-10 minutes two or three times per week.

Barb's reading and writing workshops lent themselves especially well to these conversations. Most mornings, the children spent approximately two hours on independent writing and reading. During that time, I could easily pull up a chair and chat with a child about her/his reading or writing, then move on to another student. Informal interviews were not unlike the reading and writing conferences the third graders, trained in a workshop

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setting since first grade, were accustomed to having, and usually students were more than willing to talk.

Taamivara and Enright (1986) believe that children respond especially well when the physical object under discussion, e.g., a book, a piece of writing, or a portfolio, is present at the interview (p. 232). This definitely proved true with the third graders. When I interviewed Maria about her writing, for instance, she told me she thought it was important for writers to include lots of details so readers could "get pictures in their minds." She couldn't, however, identify a place where she had included details in her own writing until she had her "Pennington School" piece on the desk in front of her and could physically point to a certain section of the text. The need for the physical presence of artifacts was especially apparent during growth conferences.

Barb and I had very few formally scheduled or identified interviews, but we discussed the field notes and talked informally on an almost daily basis. We talked about our histories as teachers, views about reading, writing, portfolios, evaluation, and school life in general, classes we had taken, our approach to specific students, and our interactions with parents and specialists. Many of these conversations occurred in five or ten minute snatches before or after school, during lunch, planning time, or on playground duty. Occasionally, especially as I began writing and needed specific information, Barb and I had more formal interviews. I audiotaped some of these conversations, but for the most part, I just took notes.

Figure 3-1: Reading Interview

* I rarely, if ever, used all of these questions. These provided a starting point.

1. Do you like to read? Why or why not?

2. Tell me about your favorite book.

3. What kind of things do you read?

4. What's the hardest book you can read?

5. If you had to give yourself a number between 1-10, and one was a person who was not a good reader at all, reading was really hard for them, and ten was a person who was a super good reader, and you could give yourself any number between one and ten, 1, 2, 3, 4... what number would you give yourself? Why?

6. Who's the best reader you know? Why?

7. What's easy for you about reading? What's hard for you about reading?

8. Anything else you want to tell me?

Figure 3-2: Writing Interview

1. Do you like to write? Why or why not?

2. Tell me about the best thing you've ever written.

3. What kind of things do you write?

4. What's the hardest thing you have written?

5. If you had to give yourself a number between 1-10, and one was a person who was not a good writer at all, writing was really hard for them, and ten was a person who was a super good writer, and you could give yourself any number between one and ten, 1, 2, 3, 4... what number would you give yourself? Why?

6. Who's the best writer you know? Why?

7. What's easy for you about writing? What's hard for you about writing?

8. Anything else you want to tell me?

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Audiotapes

Because I originally thought I would be looking at the development of children's evaluative language, I meticulously audiotaped all interviews and conferences and most large group instruction. I transcribed the audiotapes every week and used them to supplement my field notes. The quality of the tapes, made in a classroom with nineteen active and sometimes noisy eight and nine-year-olds, was not always terrific, but they did serve as an occasionally helpful backup for my fieldnotes.

The audiotapes also helped me monitor my interviewing techniques. Because of my own experiences, and having read the work of other researchers, I am very much aware of the interviewer's power to shape and guide her informant's words simply by her questions, comments, facial expressions, and body language. I used the audiotapes to monitor the kinds of questions I was asking, my tone of voice, and how much talking I was doing (Fine, 1989; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Taamivara & Enright, 1986). By paying careful attention to my interviewing techniques, I hoped to avoid using language to manipulate or unnaturally guide children's thinking.

Although I expected the tape recorder to be a common gadget in students' classrooms and homes, the children were also extremely interested in this bit of technology. They begged me to rewind my tapes so that they could listen to their voices and were thrilled to assist with such tasks as labeling the tapes and changing the batteries. Many scoped out the functions of all of the buttons and bossily took over, brandishing the recorder authoritatively when I sat down to interview them. In February, my tape recorder died and the third graders first offered repair advice, then brought in advertising circulars and shared their opinions on my impending purchase of a new machine.

Surprisingly, many of the children also discerned the pragmatics of life as a researcher and recognized when I would need to record. "Do you want me to go get your tape recorder?" asked Jon as I settled myself in the chair to do a mini-lesson. "You should have come over with your tape recorder," Patrick commented, returning from multi-age in the second grade classroom, "We did reading and writing stuff the whole time." "We're going out to recess," said Melissa, "so I turned your recorder off." I was amazed that the children so clearly understood the kinds of information I needed.

Documents and Artifacts

Throughout the year, I xeroxed entries from children's reading response journals and writing we discussed during interviews or conferences. I also photocopied artifacts the children put into their portfolios, along with the accompanying reflections. I copied other student work selectively, if it illustrated a particular point or seemed applicable to my research. Lynn Johnson, principal at Pennington, graciously allowed me to do much of my copying at the school, so I usually did it almost immediately after I interviewed children, at recess, planning time, or during the noon hour.

I also saved copies of some worksheet-type activities, as well as pertinent school announcements and newsletters. Occasionally I took photographs of student activities or performances. I noted all copies, worksheets, notices, and photographs in my fieldnotes and also dated and filed them according to student or activity.

Key Actors

After interviewing all eighteen students and observing for approximately eight weeks, I chose six students (Elizabeth, Karen, Maria,

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Jonathan, Patrick, and Robbie) to serve as "key actors." Fetterman (1989) identifies a key actor as one who "may not be an individual who is central, or even an indispensable community member" (p. 58), but who plays a "pivotal role [in the research], linking the fieldworker and the community" by providing a "wealth of information about the nuances of everyday life" (p. 58). Fetterman demonstrates the importance of this role, by differentiating between key actors and other members (respondents) in the study,

> A key actor generally answers questions in a comprehensive, albeit meandering, fashion. A respondent answers a question specifically, without explanations about the larger picture and conversational tangents, with all their richness and texture. Interviewing a respondent is usually a more efficient data collection strategy, but it is also less revealing and potentially less valid than discussions with a key actor (p. 58).

In selecting my key actors, I considered gender, ethnicity, academic ability, and learning style. Because the design of my study emphasized interviews and self-reports, I was careful to select children who talked readily about their learning.

Smudgy Lines, Blurred Roles

True to the tradition of most ethnographic research (Erickson, 1984; Fetterman, 1989; Jackson, 1987; Spindler, 1982; Van Maanen, 1988; Wolcott, 1988, 1994; Wolf, 1992), I originally intended my role to be that of participant observer, "a combination of participation in the lives of the people under study, with the maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 65). Children, however, are often less than willing to permit the presence of a detached observer in their classrooms. The third graders allowed me to watch from the sidelines for only a few days before they encircled and enveloped me in their

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culture.

My personal history also played an important part in the role I assumed in the classroom. This dissertation is not the work of an academic, a researcher who climbed down from her ivory tower to venture into a classroom for a year. Instead, this is the work of a passionate practitioner who loves children and loves her craft. I would find it extremely difficult, maybe even impossible, to be in a classroom and not teach, or to be with teachers and not talk about teaching. During my time in Barb's class, then, I was not only a researcher, at various times I also assumed the roles of teacher, reading specialist, librarian, friend, social worker, playground monitor, and secretary. The lines between these roles were smudgy, blurred, almost non-existent. Many of my role changes were not conscious choices but rather reactive responses to particular children or situations.

Some people would argue that I had compromised my research or damaged my ability to analyze the data by stepping out of the role of researcher. While I can understand their concerns, I also disagree. Fine (1993) suggests that my involvement in the classroom was not atypical, "Participant observation often becomes participant intervention: Finding a problem we wish to fix it...this human reality suggests that qualitative evaluation research, like all evaluation research, is always 'contaminated' by the perspective that the research brings to the question and by the emotions generated in the field" (p. 287). I believe the dual roles of teacher and researcher afforded me perspectives not available had I acted only as a researcher.

Too, my stance is consistent with my purpose for engaging in research. I am vehemently opposed to the "research as rape" model, in which a researcher goes into a setting, identifies problems (however accurate), leaves

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the setting often after only minimal interaction with her subjects, and then writes articles which advance her academic career but demean or inaccurately represent the teacher, students, or school.

Instead, my stance toward research might best be captured by Savage's (1988) article, "Can Ethnographic Narrative Ever Be a Neighborly Act?"

> Neighborliness is a kind of praxis, a practical activity having a complex intellectual dimension...As an interpretive or educational activity, neighborliness takes the form of describing, representing, or mirroring a group's understanding of its own circumstances and discussing these so that the group comes to consciousness about the problematic character of their circumstances in ways that assist them in becoming more able to transform these. Changes in consciousness take place, in part, because the difference of the neighborly educator and the abstracting possibilities of the representations assist people both in coming nearer to the circumstances of their lives and in gaining a critical distance in relation to them (p. 13).

The goal of neighborly ethnography is not "merely to push [the researcher's] career or add knowledge to the world," but is rather, "to produce educational change, to manipulate instructional procedures, and to improve conditions for learning" (Patai, 1992, p. 138). I wanted my inquiry to prompt teachers (as it does me) to "reflect on the complexity and promise of their lives, [and] gather energy and support for the task of envisioning liberating alternatives for their own practices" (Savage, 1988, p. 15). Throughout my research, I continually asked, "How can this research be used in ways that are constructive for me, this classroom teacher, and the larger educational world?" This question guided my collection and interpretation of data.

Participating as an Observer: Entering the World of Children
Choosing a Role

Typically, the participant observer attempts to place herself in a

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position of equality with her subjects. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) point out that in "traditional ethnographic settings, a common assumption is that one's research subjects are equal in status to oneself, or at least should be treated as such. For instance, ethnographers typically treat members of the underclass, criminals, the mentally ill, the sick, or the infirm with the same respect with which they treat their colleagues" (p. 13).

For the adult ethnographer entering the child's world, however, such equality is almost impossible:

> Like the white researcher in a black society, the male researcher studying women, or the ethnologist observing a distant tribal culture, the adult participant observer who attempts to understand a children's culture cannot pass unnoticed as a member of that group. The structure of age roles in American Society makes impossible the enactment of the complete participant role (Gold, 1958). Patterns of age segregation in American society (Conger, 1971) mean that it is unexpected for an adult to hang out with children's groups; legitimate adult-child interaction depends on adult authority (quoted in Fine & Sandstrom, 1988, p. 13).

Fine and Sandstrom, assert, then, that the adult can never fully participate in the child's culture. Given this impossibility, they identify several possible roles for the adult researching the lives of children. The most detached (and subsequently, some would argue, most "objective") possible role is that of "Non-Participant Observer":

> An adult without formal authority and affective relationship. Indeed such a role is not consistent with participant observation, but it may be used where a record of overt behavior is more important that the rhetorics that children give to explain their behavior. While children may not consciously behave so as to obtain approval, neither do they admit the observer into their confidences. Children have little or no motivation to allow the observer to learn the social contingencies by which their group operates. Because the observer is seen as an adult, they will hide those behaviors to which they think anonymous adults might object (p. 16).

While this role might allow the most "objectivity," Fine and Sandstrom

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believe it also provides the least authentic information about the naturally occurring events in the child's culture, "In such situations, the child will behave in one way while being observed (and under coercion) and a quite different way when removed from the gaze of authority" (p. 15).

At the other end of the spectrum, is Nancy Mandell's (1988) "Least-Adult" model. The "Least-Adult" takes on a responsive, interactive, fully involved participant observer role with the children in as "least an adult" manner as possible, she neither directs nor corrects children's actions. Mandell relates her own experiences as a least-adult researcher in a preschool setting, "While... size dictate[d] that I could never physically pass for a child, I endeavored to put aside ordinary forms of adult status and interaction— authority, verbal competency, cognitive and social mastery— in order to follow their [preschoolers'] ways closely" (p. 438). In attempts to become more "childlike," Mandell refused to assume any adult roles while the children were engaged in free play. She played house, dug in the sandbox, crawled under the porch, and climbed on the jungle gym with the children. In one somewhat disturbing instance, a child playing with Mandell hit another child over the head with a shovel, inflicting a wound that required stitches, and Mandell did not intervene. While this role might allow one to more fully enter the child's setting, it would appear to also justifiably be a source of much discord with adults in the setting.

Having taught for ten years, I knew elementary children would probably not tolerate a detached adult or non-participant observer in their classroom and given my fondness for children, I also doubted my ability to maintain such a role. I was uncomfortable, however, with the role of "least-adult," feeling that it would almost surely alienate the adults who I hoped to engage as co-researchers and informants. For much of the time, then,

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especially early in the year, I assumed the role of "Friend"— a "non-authoritative marginal role" midway between Non-Participant Observer and Least Adult (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988).

> The intent of the friend role is to interact with one's subjects in the most trusted way possible— without having any explicit authority role...to the extent that the researcher can transcend age and authority boundaries, children may provide access to their "hidden" culture... The key to the role of friend is the explicit expression of positive affect combined with both a lack of authority and a lack of sanctioning of the behavior of those being studied. In turn, adopting the friend role suggests that the participant observer treats his or her informants with respect and that he or she desire to acquire competency in their social worlds (p. 17).

At times when I was teaching, I assumed the slightly more authoritative role of "Leader," a role which is characterized by:

> The presence of positive contact with the child, though legitimate authority remains. Children have somewhat greater leeway for action in such relations, and even when they overstep the line of proper behavior, tolerance will frequently be shown by the adult leader. The normative frame of reference, however, remains that of the adult... (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988, p. 15).

Fine and Sandstrom (1988) suggest that this compromised role may negatively impact children's willingness to talk honestly and may also hinder the researcher's ability to later step away from the participatory role:

> [Children's] affection and regard for their leader may prevent them from revealing private feelings or behavior which may be contrary to the image they wish to portray. This respect may serve as a barrier for research. The adult, in turn, is expected by his or her charges to behave like an adult. As a leader, he or she can never simply remain in the background and watch how children's culture develops (pp. 15-16).

While this may have been true, the third graders never appeared to be less than honest with me. They willingly analyzed not only their own performances, but also mine. Perhaps they did not feel intimidated because I

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had little to do with discipline and nothing to do with formal evaluation in their classroom.

An Adult Friend

Since "actions are the central ways in which children learn the researcher's intentions" (Mandell, 1988, p. 441), perhaps my role as "Adult Friend" can best be defined in terms of what I did and did not do during my time in the classroom. Each morning, I hung my coat on a hook in the hall with the children's. I didn't have a teacher desk, instead, I sat at the side of the room, or more often, in a seat vacated by one of the children. I loaned and borrowed pencils and other supplies and shared my snack if anyone forgot theirs. Although I rarely did third grade assignments, the children soon identified my incessant notetaking as my "schoolwork." I manipulated the clay and pattern blocks during multi-age time and occasionally went to art, lunch, or recess with the eight-year-olds. I didn't give tests, assign grades, or fill out report cards.

For the most part, I also avoided assuming the role of controller or disciplinarian. When children asked if they could go to the bathroom, nurse, or school store, or explained why they hadn't done their homework, I generally referred them to Barb, "You'll have to talk to Mrs. Wilson, she's in charge." As long as no one was going to be physically harmed, I didn't rigidly enforce school or classroom rules. Enroute to specials, for example, I allowed the children to chat as we walked between the buildings, as long as they were quiet in the halls. When Karen seated herself next to me on the chair during a school assembly (usually a forbidden practice), I didn't force her to move. As non-adult, non-authority figure, I didn't have to be as firm with the children as Barb did. The third graders quickly recognized this, and sometimes

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attempted to place me in the role of go-between. When they thought Barb might refuse a request, they asked me instead, "Will you ask Mrs. W... if we can have an extra recess, if I can go to the library, if I can have white construction paper?" I almost always refused these requests, telling the children to ask for themselves.

I did, however, allow the children a few "special" privileges, such as typing on my laptop computer or pressing the buttons when we xeroxed. Occasionally I even aided or abetted a crime. During the week of the statewide assessment, for example, Ann pulled a small rubber ball out of her desk, and rolled it across the table to Tim, Tim rolled it to Melissa, and a lively game ensued. Barb, helping another child with the test, didn't notice, and I didn't intervene, although a "real adult" probably would have. Instead, when the ball rolled off the table, I picked it up and handed it wordlessly back to the children. When Ron came across the room to join the action, the game got a little raucous and Barb confiscated the contraband.

I knew that the children had accepted me as a member of their culture when Jonathan and Robbie started telling me their dirty jokes. "There was a German guy, an American, and a Chinese guy," explained Jon. "And they wanted to have a race to see if they made it across this bridge without their dogs going to the bathroom. And so the American guy didn't make it. And then the German guy didn't make it. And so the Chinese guy makes it across. And they go, 'How'd you do that?' The Chinese guy said, 'Me Chinese, Me no dumb, me stuck cork up doggie's bum' (sung to the tune of 'This Old Man,' a children's counting song). Then he couldn't go." In the next joke, the cork becomes a watermelon. The boys giggle uncontrollably and Robbie announces that he also has a joke to tell.

"An American, an Australian, and a Chinese guy are climbing over a

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wall. The American guy doesn't make it, he lands on his face. The Australian guy climbs on the wall and lands on his face. Then the Chinese guy goes and he makes it, but he has a little problem. 'Me Chinese, Me climb walls, Me this time, I lost my balls.' (Again sung to the tune of 'This Old Man'). Cuz he was climbing the walls, and he goes (Robbie stands on his chair and demonstrates a diving downward plunge that ends in a tuck which leaves him squatting when he reaches the floor) that's how he landed on his feet. He was going to land head first and that's how he got caught." Mark, a little nervous at his seatmates' lapses of discretion, looked to see what my reaction would be. As a teacher, I probably would have cautioned the boys about inappropriate language, the danger of standing on chairs, and also talked to them about cultural stereotypes. As a researcher, I just kept typing.

Other gestures also confirmed that I had been granted favor. Although Barb always referred to me as Miss Wilcox, the children experimented tentatively with my first name. They begged me to eat lunch with them, come more often, stay longer. They offered treats during snack time— Twinkies, Heath Bar cookies, and Gummy Dinosaurs. Robbie shared red-hot potato chips that made me gasp and run frantically for the drinking fountain. Delighted with my initial reaction, he replayed this scene again and again. "Take it Miss Wilcox, they're just barbecue." After the first mouth-burning fiasco, I always responded, "No way, you couldn't get me to touch one of those with a ten-foot pole." His classmates roared hip-hilariously each time we re-enacted this drama.

A Friendly Adult

While the children accepted me as a pseudo-member of their culture, they did not always allow me to abdicate my adult expertise or authority.

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Sometimes, then, I was more "Friendly Adult" than "Adult Friend." In November, for instance, the children had written "wish poems" and Barb was typing them on the class computer. Jonathan approached, "Miss Wilcox, are you busy?" I looked up from my laptop. "What do you need, Jon?"

"Mrs. Wilson is over there typing and I thought maybe if she was doing one computer, you could do the other," said Jonathan.

"Secretary" quickly became one of my most popular "adult" roles. The third graders saw my flying fingers as a viable alternative for their own limited typing skills and computer time, and it was an unusual night when I didn't have some "typing homework." Patrick, for example, was frequently discouraged by his handwriting and spelling, although he composed wonderful stories. At least twice a month, he approached, story in hand, "Miss Wilcox, will you type this? Mrs. P. (the special education teacher) and I have been working on it forever and we're never going to get done." Bob, the night custodian, was a prolific poet, who reinforced the children's perceptions of my role of typist by using my secretarial skills at least twice a week. During the course of the year I typed, among other things: twenty-five poems for Bob, three poetry anthologies for children, Maria's ten-page guide to Pennington School, numerous personal narratives, tall tales, mysteries, and four or five research reports.

Because I have always been an avid reader and became a teacher at least partly to share that obsession with children, it didn't take long before the eight-year-olds viewed me as one of the resident book experts. Elizabeth and I talked books at least twice a week, "Miss Wilcox, I know you don't like *Babysitter Club*, but you gotta listen to this, this part's so funny." Karen requested "really scary books," and Jonathan asked me to accompany him to the library to find books about porcupines for his research report. Some of the

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children who had a harder time selecting books also came to me, "Miss Wilcox, I can't find anything to read," "Miss Wilcox, all these books are too hard," "Miss Wilcox, this book is boring." I was usually good for two or three recommendations.

The third graders, especially girls, also shared their recommendations with me. Michelle suggested *Ann of Green Gables*, "Oh my gosh, it's the best book I've ever read, even better than *Babysitter Club*. You should read it." Elizabeth lent me *The Twits, Little House on Rocky Ridge* and other books from her personal library. Melissa, knowing I love Patricia Reilly Giff, read the newest book in the *Polk Street School* series and then brought it to me. Robbie, who claimed to be uninterested in reading, left *The Stinky Cheese Man* on my chair one Tuesday when I was at the university. For me, these book-related gestures represented the third grader's acceptance and desire to connect and I made a point of responding. I laughed with Robbie over Jon Sciezska's crazy fairy tale adaptations, told Elizabeth I hated the gross humor in *The Twits*, and tried to raise Laura's feminist consciousness by commenting that I wondered why Violet never got to do any of the fun things her brothers did in *The Boxcar Children*. As long as I cared enough to follow through on their suggestions, the children seemed unbothered by whether my reactions were positive or negative.

If I am honest, I have to admit that I sometimes wielded my status as a "Friendly Adult" to alter the social dynamics in the classroom. Robbie was an outcast, a child with few friends. Often I acted as go-between, pointing out his strengths and attempting to improve his social standing. I deferred to Robbie when his classmates needed help with the computer, made the children sit and listen to him during writing and portfolio shares, and expected them to offer supportive feedback afterwards. When he did unusual things with his

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snake report, I oohed and aahed, wanting children to see his differences as strengths rather than liabilities. I was thrilled the day Maria said to me, "I think Robbie's changing. He's going to be a scientist."

In another instance, I specifically engineered a friendship. Kate, the self-appointed leader of the girls in Barb's class, tended to jump from friend to friend and exclude other children. When the school year started, she and Karen were best friends and elected to sit together. Kate frequently abandoned Karen, however, to play with Ashley, or Jane and Melissa. Karen, who was much gentler and more sensitive, often ended up in tears. Throughout the fall, I helped her rehearse scenarios to solve disputes; I also soothed hurt feelings on any number of occasions. Finally, I had had enough. When Kate excluded her during a seating change, I told Karen that I didn't hang around with people who hurt my feelings or made me feel badly, and suggested that perhaps she might want to look around for some friends who would treat her a little more kindly. I pointed out Elizabeth, new to Pennington and still lingering on the outskirts of the social scene. Over the course of the next few months, the two became fast friends, and in April, they exchanged "best friend" necklaces. I was delighted.

Blinded By Adult Eyes

However close I came to being a member of the children's culture, I would be dishonest if I tried to pretend that I could ever truly see the world through a child's eyes. As adults, most of us are surrounded by children. We live with them, teach them, and watch them on playing fields, churches, grocery stores, and shopping malls. This proximity breeds a kind of false familiarity, a sense that we know what children are about, what they are thinking and feeling. Our own memories of childhood only strengthen those

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feelings of familiarity. We fail to acknowledge, however, that as past members of the culture of childhood, we probably cannot fully grasp its present reality. "When adults look at the worlds of children," says Ruth Hubbard (1989), "they are necessarily outsiders examining a land they cannot be a part of. And yet the terrain seems so familiar" (p. 7). Hubbard continues, "In interpreting the behaviors and motives of children, adults are liable to approach the task from their own world view and conceptions; they are often quite *adultcentric*" (p. 11). Often, in my "adultcentric-ness" I failed to recognize that children's experiences and understandings were very different from my own. Anytime I looked at the children's portfolios or listened to them talk, I saw and heard through an adult-clouded filter.

As adults, we tend to see children as being in a constant state of incompleteness, with the understood goal of growing ever more adult in body, thought, and emotion. Van Maanen (as quoted in Fine & Sandstrom, 1988) likens such an assumption to a kind of cultural exclusivity, "Such a conceit is not unlike one carried by cultural snobs everywhere who think of culture as something they have, but plenty of others lack" (p. 7). Taamivara and Enright (1986) suggest that such an attitude is dangerous to the would-be ethnographer:

> In many ways, any adult ethnographer who traipses through a child's world smug in the certainty that the adult world is the highest known form of civilization and a distant goal that young children have just begun to strive for is not unlike the stereotypical 'Ugly American' tourist invading the shores of exotic cultures only to find them quaint [in the case of children "cute"] but clearly inferior. Ethnographers who insist on visiting and studying children from the rigid perspective of adulthood will in the end understand the reality of childhood no better than tourists who visit another land and do their best to bring their 'home' along with them (pp. 95-96).

Third graders live in a separate reality, a peculiar world somewhere

between childhood and pre-adolescence. Elizabeth has finished all of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series and is currently reading *The Secret Garden,* but also sucks her thumb incessantly. Emulating a teenage brother, Tim wears the waist of his jeans at hip-level but cuddles Melissa's stuffed Grover as he listens to his peers share their animal reports. Luis loves to build with Legos but also plays the electric guitar in his uncle's rock and roll band. Most of the children no longer believe in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny, but a few are still hopeful. The non-believers assure the semi-believers that while there might not be a Santa Claus, Saint Nick is still a possibility. When they aren't speculating on these issues, the third graders fill spiral notebooks with love letters penned in psychedelic lavender, "Dear Tim, do you like me? Chek (sic) yes or no." On the playground, the eight-year-olds bounce between childhood worlds of the tire swing, baseball on the grassy field, imaginary games of "we're going on vacation— you be the dad, Patrick, and you're driving us to Florida, and I'll be the mom, you kids in the back seat shut up," and more adolescent activities such chasing members of the opposite sex, and shouting "Hubba, hubba," when a catch is made.

As incongruous or inconsistent as this child world may seem, the adult researcher, wishing an accurate view of childhood, must resist the temptation to view it as somehow inferior. Robert Kegan (1982) suggests,

> These quaint ways of seeing demonstrated by children are not random fancies, incomplete or dim perceptions of reality as we see it. Rather they are manifestations of a distinct but separate reality, with a logic, a consistency, an integrity all its own...we are seeing, all the same, a given meaning system, a given moment in the evolution of meaning, the manifestations of a given evolutionary truce which knows the world (p. 28).

My adult eyes often struggled to see this "distinct, but separate reality."

When Elizabeth shared her writing in September, for instance, Barb

and I asked the third graders whether they could picture any parts in their minds. At this point in the year, however, most of the children were still electing to read picture books and had only very limited experience with chapter books. They responded by saying that Elizabeth could/should get out her crayons and draw something so that her readers would have "pictures in their minds." This response was very different from what Barb and I, longtime readers of chapter books, had anticipated.

My understanding of children's experiences were also filtered through a screen of language. Early in the year, I asked the third graders to rate their finished writing by assigning a number from one through ten. After I had interviewed five or six children, I reviewed my data and discovered that almost all of the children were assigning themselves either number one or number ten. I thought this a little peculiar until I realized that the children probably didn't share my adult interpretations of the phrase, "One through ten," and thought I meant one or ten. When I rephrased the question, "If you could assign this story any number one through ten, and one was a not very good story, five was an o.k. story, and ten was a great story, the best you've written, and you could give yourself any number— one, two, three…ten, what number would you give?" the children's responses were substantially different. Eventually, many of them adopted this rating system for themselves, assigning numbers before I even asked for them.

Observing as a Participant: Entering the World of Adults

As a researcher in an elementary school, I had to enter not only the world of children, but also the world of adults. For my study, which explored adult roles in children's evaluative worlds, observing and participating in both cultures was particularly important. At least half the time, then, I also

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participated in the adult culture at Pennington.

I was not an entirely new face at the school. In January, 1992, Linda Ross, the reading teacher at Pennington, hired me as an educational consultant for the PALS project. I gave several after-school workshops, spent ten half-days doing demonstration lessons in primary classrooms, and met with Linda to brainstorm and problem solve various issues concerning the portfolios. I also provided occasional articles or books, and designed several requested letters and forms. PALS funding ran out in June, 1992, but because I was very interested in the project, I frequently talked with Linda and classroom teachers about the portfolios. In Spring, 1993, I interviewed 15 Pennington teachers for a paper about the PALS project as an example of successful staff development. That spring I also taught a semester-long course on alternative assessment at Pennington.

During my year as a researcher, I continued my professional involvement with teachers at the school. We frequently chatted about portfolios or shared interesting ideas or articles. I presented two workshops on evaluation and taught a repeat session of the alternative assessment course in the spring. I also developed social relationships with the Pennington staff. I walked with a morning exercise group, went to breakfast at the local diner every Friday, and ate lunch in the faculty lounge two or three times a week. These activities, as well as my previous history, allowed me to be viewed as an adult member of the Pennington "family." When my father died in December, I received the same basket of fruit as any other staff member.

Researcher as Long-Term House Guest

As a researcher, I spent 90% of my time in the third grade classroom.

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Throughout the year, Barb and I enjoyed a comfortable camaraderie. We shared stories from our lives, exclaimed over Maria's growth, worried about Tim's disinterest in reading, groaned at Robbie's latest behavioral digressions, and laughed hysterically at Jane's dead fish story. When people ask how we negotiated conflicts, I have to stop and think, because our relationship was remarkably trouble-free. In April, I asked Barb what it was like to have a researcher in her class all year. She told me that other than a few minor changes in her routine, such as starting portfolios earlier in the year or making sure she had concentrated reading and writing time the days I was in the classroom, she hadn't noticed much difference. She cited benefits of having a researcher, telling me that my field notes enabled her to know her children better and sooner, that it was nice to have an extra pair of listening ears in the classroom, and that my perspective allowed her to see several of the children, most notably Robbie, in a more favorable light.

Having a classroom researcher, however, was probably not unlike having a house guest for an entire year. Although I tried to be unobtrusive and take care of myself, I know that my presence probably created added stress and commotion. Barb used precious and scarce planning time to review field notes or talk to me, rather than working on lesson plans, organizing instructional materials, or filling out budget forms or report cards. Children lingered to chat, changed seats, or broke classroom rules to initiate conversations with me. If I was interviewing a child when Barb was ready to make a transition, I quickly terminated my conversation or moved to the back of the room, but I'm sure the constant hum of voices was distracting. Occasionally, Barb interrupted interviews to tell children they needed to finish an assignment or join the rest of the class.

Intent on gathering data, I also introduced special problems into the

classroom. When Elizabeth told me that she and her friends were publishing a neighborhood newspaper, *The Rainbow News*, I was eager to obtain a copy. She seemed doubtful. "Well, we're selling it," she said firmly. I inquired about the cost and quickly produced the requested dime. The next day, David appeared with a newspaper he had created by cutting articles, pictures, and advertisements out of the local paper. David's parents had refused permission for him to participate in my study; nevertheless, because I bought Elizabeth's paper, I felt I should also buy David's. He took my quarter, then solicited money from many of his peers, almost extorting it from classmates whose quarters were intended for a school bake sale. Finally, Barb intervened and told him he couldn't sell his paper anymore. I felt at least partially responsible for creating a bad situation.

Researcher as Mom

As a researcher, I didn't have the enormous responsibilities of a classroom teacher, so I helped ease Barb's burden as class "mother" or "nurturer." When Julie or Joe didn't have a snack, for instance, they counted on me to provide an apple or a bag of pretzels or cookies. When Maria needed her hair tied back, she brought me her barrette. When the string came out of Josh's hood, I found a safety pin and rethreaded it. These were all jobs Barb would have done if she had time, but she simply couldn't meet the needs of all nineteen children.

Listening was the most critical aspect of this nurturing. As a researcher, I was "all ears," and the children engulfed me with their stories. Often, they just wanted to share a book, movie, new pet, or weekend experience. Sometimes, they needed a little advice. They had had trouble on the playground, or a special friend was being "mean" and they needed an

outsider to help sort out their feelings. At those times I was a backboard, asking clarifying questions or offering an occasional suggestion. When the children's problems were more serious— an impending divorce or a parent in the hospital for substance abuse (two this year), I sometimes assumed the more adult role of counselor or psychologist, listening and reassuring children that those adult problems were neither their responsibilities nor their faults. Although some might argue that the counselor and researcher roles are incompatible, responding to children's emotional needs seemed a moral imperative for me.

Researcher as Child Advocate

As an adult, I sometimes assumed the role of Child Advocate. This self was most often present when I worked with children who were "underdogs," e.g., Patrick, because of his learning disabilities, or Tommy, because of his behavioral difficulties. Although I never consciously decided to do so, I frequently collected data that would help adults see these children in a more favorable light, and on several occasions, I intervened with the guidance counselor or learning disabilities teacher. Patrick, for instance, became angrier and angrier about having to leave the room for LD (Learning Disabilities). His reading improved dramatically and in late April, he decided he no longer needed LD help in reading, he just wanted help with his spelling and math. I advised him to talk to Mrs. Prince, the LD teacher, about this possibility, but Patrick, a compliant child, was afraid to approach her. I suggested he write a note or ask Barb to go with him to talk to her, but he rejected all of these ideas. Finally, he worked up enough courage to tell me that he wanted me to talk to Mrs. Prince for him. Because I knew it was important to him, I finally assented, but not before attempting to convince him to accompany me.

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Unfortunately, I was no more successful in talking to Mrs. Prince than Patrick would have been.

The Child-Advocate-Self was the most difficult to manage in May, when the third graders spent a week taking the New Hampshire State Assessment. I was outraged that the state had spent such enormous amounts of money on this test, yet continually defeated bills aimed at the improvement of education. Furthermore, the test was poorly written and developmentally inappropriate. I became more and more incensed as I watched the third graders sit for hours on end, cry in frustration, and in some cases, become so upset that they couldn't even eat lunch. I attempted to manage my subjectivity by taking extensive field notes and using my data to write a letter the State Board of Education, as well as all elected officials. My roommate, another doctoral student, also served as a sounding board.

Researcher as Teacher: Being Who I Am

From 1983-88, I was a first and second grade teacher at Boston Primary School in a low income, urban neighborhood in southeast Denver. I left that job to assume a position as Literacy Resource Teacher (reading consultant/staff developer) at McElwain Elementary School in an inner-city neighborhood in north Denver. For three years, I was responsible for helping classroom teachers, grades K-6, implement a "Whole Language" approach to reading and writing. I met with teachers to discuss their approach to literacy instruction, did demonstration teaching, team teaching, peer coaching, collaboratively planned literature and thematic units, and supplied books, articles, and other materials. I did inservices and presentations at faculty meetings and led discussion groups for teachers. I reported to the principal about the strengths and weaknesses of literacy instruction at McElwain and

monitored reading and language arts funds in the building. I served on district curriculum committees and was also involved in parent and community education.

Then I came to UNH. As a doctoral student, I supplemented the income from my assistantship by doing two or three days of educational consulting each month, assuming many of the same responsibilities I had as a staff developer. I presented inservices on reading, writing, and alternative assessment, particularly portfolios. I did demonstration teaching, team teaching, and peer coaching. I conferred with teachers and principals about strengths and concerns in their literacy curricula.

In Barb's classroom, I often found myself looking through those teacher/staff-developer/educational consultant eyes. I found it difficult to simply record what was occurring; instead, I constantly asked, "What is going well? What strategies do the children use? What other strategies would be helpful for them? How can I help this teacher work with her children more effectively?" My background as a reading specialist made it easy for me to recognize children's needs and once identified, I wanted to respond.

Early in the year, I hesitated, believing I would somehow compromise my position as researcher if I stepped into the role of teacher or staff developer. When I spoke to Tom Newkirk, he seemed surprised and indicated that he thought the interventionist role was consistent with my views of ethnography as neighborly activity. After this conversation, I took a more active co-teacher role in the classroom.

Talking with children about the descriptors on the report cards, for instance, led me to believe that many did not have the specific strategies to allow them to become proficient readers. Barb and I discussed the situation and I offered to teach a series of mini-lessons about "good reader" strategies.

Barb readily agreed, so for about a month, I taught the reading mini-lesson every day. During this time, Barb sat at the back of the group, acting as either a discussion participant, notetaker, or observer. I was responsible for student behavior— getting the children seated and focused, teaching the mini-lesson, and then dismissing the third graders to their seats.

In December, Barb and I spent several weeks teaching the children about the characteristics of good writing. I brought in picture books that might serve as examples of good writing and created a large chart after Barb and the children brainstormed possible characteristics. These were clearly teacher jobs. Afterwards, I quickly picked up my computer and resumed my job as researcher and Barb once again became teacher and disciplinarian.

In the teacher role, I also responded to students' reading journals each week. Writing in the third graders' journals allowed me to develop and maintain relationships with the children and see how they were responding to reading instruction. Unfortunately, responding to journals also sometimes placed me in an authoritarian role. If a child wasn't writing in her response log, or was performing in a substandard manner, I adopted a friendly approach, reminding the child to write with a teasing note, such as, "Roses are red, violets are blue, if you'd write to me, I'd write back too!" If that didn't work, I spoke directly with the child, or referred the matter to Barb.

I also frequently assumed a teacher role in one-on-one situations. When I interviewed a child, I often taught a skill or demonstrated a technique I thought might be helpful. The first time I spoke with Maria about her research report, for instance, she was copying full sentences directly from her book about koala bears, rather than simply writing down important details. During that conference, then, I taught her how to take notes. When Patrick told me he wanted to read a *Boxcar Children* mystery, I helped him

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create a plan for reading increasingly more difficult books. We selected books from the classroom library, looked through them, and made a list of possible titles. I reviewed these interactions with Barb so she could effectively confer with the child the next day or the next week. She, in turn, shared information from her reading and writing conferences with me.

Issues of Authority and Ethics

Bouncing between different roles and selves sometimes created confusion about who I was or was not. I was removing the plastic wrapper from a new tape when Ashley approached. "I don't have my math because I was sick on Friday," she said. I explained that she needed to tell Barb. A minute later, she addressed me again. "Since I don't have my math, I'll check Karen's." Again, I reminded her that Barb was in charge. On another occasion, Mark asked me for a plastic sleeve for his portfolio. I was listening to the large group share, typing frantically, and didn't want to be interrupted. I motioned Mark away and whispered that I would help him in a few minutes. As the share ended, he returned, clearly more than a little disillusioned by my unwillingness to fill the adult role of provider/supplier, "Never mind, Ms. Wilcox, I got it from somewhere else." In yet another instance, Rhonda, Barb's newest student, approached me. Barb and Linda Ross were conferring with students about their writing and Rhonda thought that I, as another adult, should also be available to confer. Sometimes I did, but at that time, I was listening to children talk with Linda and Barb. I told Rhonda my job was to take notes but I would be happy to confer with her later on.

The line between teacher and researcher became especially thin when Barb was absent. Although she was never sick, she had extended absences in October, when she dislocated her shoulder at Field Day, and then again in late

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January, when her father died and she had to travel to Canada for two weeks. During those times, the children came to me with their questions and concerns. I had no trouble understanding their choice of adults— they knew me better, they knew that I was familiar with class routines and rules, I had established a sense of rapport and trust— but I struggled to maintain the two roles. I wasn't aware, however, that children noticed the change until Kate remarked, "Today you're a teacher and a typer." I thought her description of the situation was accurate, but I found it difficult to assume both roles.

Physically, I struggled to take notes and teach at the same time. It was hard to gather data because instructional issues (locating the box of play money for math time) or behavioral situations (helping the children clean up the ink they had spilled when they disassembled ballpoint pens so they could dip Kevin's feathers to make quill pens) continually distracted me. Conversely, I had difficulty concentrating on teaching because I was continually thinking about writing fieldnotes.

Even more difficult than managing the physical responsibilities of the two jobs were issues of adult authority. As a researcher, I was not responsible for establishing or reinforcing class routines or rules. In those early days, when I was establishing my role as researcher, I never gave directions or initiated activities, and I rarely scolded anyone for inappropriate behavior. When I was a teacher, however, I had to take charge. In my journal after the first night of substituting, I commented, "It's a blurring of roles for me, going from being researcher, where everything the kids do and say is interesting to me, to having to be disciplinarian and crowd controller. I wonder how this will affect my research. Will kids be less willing to talk to me because they now see me as an adult— a controller?" In fact, most children, accustomed to functioning in any number of cultures (Gee, 1992) seemed to have little

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difficulty distinguishing between the roles.

In addition to issues of trust and rapport, I was frequently confronted with ethical decisions connected to my adult authority. Daphne Patai (1992) believes the researcher/subject relationship always involves the potential for exploitation:

> The existential or psychological dilemmas of the split between subject and object on which all research depends (even that of the most intense participant observer) imply that objectification, the utilization of others for one's own purposes (which may or may not coincide with their own ends), and the possibility of exploitation, are built into almost all research projects with living human beings (p. 139).

Patai believes the potential for exploitation increases when the researcher's subjects are less powerful than she, "Although exploitation and unethical behavior are always a possibility when research is conducted with living persons, this danger is increased when the researcher is interviewing down, that is, among groups less powerful (economically, politically, socially) than the researcher herself" (Patai, 1992, p. 137). Adults, by virtue of age, have an almost limitless power and authority over children; children are accustomed to following adult rules and expectations or answering adult questions. Thus, the possibility for exploitation is inherent.

I had to be especially conscious, then, of the potential for exploiting my adult authority. First, I had to respect the children's wishes with regard to time. I needed the children to confer with me, to share their reading, writing, and thinking. For the most part they were amazingly tolerant and open, but sometimes they were involved with their own projects, interests, or social interactions, and chose not to be interviewed. One day, in the middle of March, for example, the first hour was taken up by a visit from a dentist. I consoled myself with the thought that I would still have most of the morning

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to talk to children. Unfortunately, the dentist left puzzle books, so the rest of the morning the third graders busily colored, did word searches, and made finger puppets while I wandered aimlessly around the room. As an adult, I probably could have exercised my authority and forced children to work with me, but we had entered into a research agreement which stated that they could refuse to participate at any time. Ethically and legally, I was bound to abide by that agreement.

Although that situation was fairly innocuous, there were times when exploiting my authority as an adult could have been far more damaging. In early May, for example, the children took the New Hampshire State Assessments. The tests were long and grueling, especially for children like Patrick. When he returned to the classroom after spending three days testing in the resource room, I was anxious to hear his impressions of the test. He looked exhausted, however, and had been away from his peers for almost the entire week. He desperately needed time to reconnect and regain his social footing. Although Patrick was extremely compliant and probably would have talked to me if I had asked, removing him from his peers at this point would have been cruel and maybe even emotionally damaging. The well-being of the child needed to take priority over my research. I fought my urge to objectify a child by exerting my adult authority and settled for a lukewarm interview the following week.

In addition to violating children's time, the adult researcher could easily violate children's privacy. Daphne Patai (1992) describes this situation:

> We ask of people we interview the kind of revelation of their inner life that normally occurs in situations of great familiarity, and within the private realm, yet we invite these revelations to be made in the context of the public sphere, which is where in an obvious sense we situate ourselves when we appear with tape recorders and note pads eager to promote our 'projects,' projects for

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> which other people are to provide the living matter. The asymmetries of the interaction are marked, as well, but the different kinds of disclosure that our interviewees make (or that we hope they will make) and that we are willing or expected to make (p. 142).

The third graders shared their deepest secrets, their most intimate thoughts. When I asked Elizabeth to identify the most important artifact in her portfolio, for example, she showed me a plastic sleeve containing several math papers. Elizabeth was a wonderful reader and writer, and I was surprised that she did not share something from one of those areas. When I pressed her for more information, she was reluctant, but finally revealed a much more personal reason dealing with her weaknesses as a learner. I asked if she wouldn't like to include that important information in her reflection, but she adamantly refused to expose her weaknesses to the general public. I handled carefully the secret she had shared with me.

Too, as an adult respected and trusted by these eight-year-olds, I had to remember that the children were easily shaped by my opinions. The third graders could and often did read my field notes. I felt compelled, then, not to write anything that would damage their developing self-esteem. In April, for instance, Karen brought in "best friend necklaces" for Elizabeth and her. She was giddy with anticipation and proud of her efforts to save $6 for the purchase. I was touched by her joy, the delight with which she opened the brown velvet box and carefully withdrew the necklaces from their nest of tissues, the sweetness of sharing this special treasure with her best friend, but the necklaces, made of inexpensive carnival metal, were ugly. I started to type "cheap carnival metal" on the screen, then realized that Karen, or especially Elizabeth, might read my notes, they often watched as I typed. I did not want to spoil this treasure or destroy this precious moment. I quickly deleted the word "cheap," I would know later what carnival metal meant, and Karen's

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self-esteem was more important than any dissertation I might write.

Analyzing the Data

"In ethnographic research," suggests Fetterman (1989), "analysis and data collection begin simultaneously (p. 13)...ethnographic analysis is iterative, building on ideas throughout the study... Analysis tests hypotheses and perceptions to construct an accurate conceptual framework" (p. 88). Certainly that was true in this study. At least once a week, I reviewed my fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, wrote marginal notes, and filled in missing information. I used the computer to enlarge, darken, or italicize comments I found interesting or puzzling (See Figure 3-3). I looked for patterns or categories, "recurrent behaviors or actions, those theme-like features...that inspired confidence that the events interpreted and appraised [were] not aberrant or exceptional, but rather characteristic of the situation" (Eisner, 1991, p. 110), and labelled and sorted my notes accordingly, e.g., "adult evaluative criteria— mental visualization," "child evaluative criteria— length." The computer allowed me to manipulate the data, "to sort, compare, contrast, aggregate, and synthesize" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 96) unceasingly. My fieldnotes, then, were organized not only chronologically, but also by key actor and evaluative criteria. Information about Patrick, for instance, might be found in daily field notes, his key actor file, or a file labeled according to a particular behavior or characteristic, e.g., "Goal Setting." This manipulation allowed me to see the data in new ways and to discover different patterns and categories. A database enabled me to index these fieldnotes, readily access information, and also see different patterns and categories (See Figure 3-4). I triangulated my perceptions by comparing my daily observations of what Barb and the children said and did with formal and informal interviews, and artifacts such

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as writing and portfolio reflections. I also corroborated my data with Barb and with two members of my dissertation committee who visited the site.

Figure 3-3: Sample of Daily Fieldnotes

Kid criteria
· length (2)
· gd words (cook emotion)
· humor ·effort ·exciting

Gillian.

The best part of my story was when I said that her foot
is as big as my middle finger.
Compared with other stories I have written this one is
about the same.
Something I still need to work on my writing is I forget   *Mechanics*
·to   write periods.
I want more information than the form gives. I move
over to talk to her.
Why is your effort on this story good?
Gillian: Because I done better stories than this.
Gillian: How do you know a story is good?
CW: When it's long, and you put good words into it.
There is that length as a criteria thing again.
CW: What makes words good?
Gillian: Like words that make you laugh, or make you
sad.
What· kinds of words make you do that?

CW: You said best part was when I said that her foot
is as big as my middle finger. Why?
Gillian: Because it makes everybody laugh, and it
took me a lot of time to think about it.
Humor as a criteria
Amount of time put into a story
CW: How did you think of that?
Gillian: Well she came over the day before I was done
with the story, and I measured her foot and it was as
big as my middle finger.
CW: What's the best story you've written?
Gillian:The Magic Boat
CW: Why?
Gillian: Because it had five pages in it and it was
exciting
Length and (what does excitement count as?)
The boat kept doing stuff for the, like there was a flood
in their basement, and the flood went up into their
house, and the boat puffed up like a balloon.
CW: Anything else really good about that story?
Gillian: Lot of things
They went for a boat ride through the tunnel and a
whirlpool came, and the boat went to a different place
for them, so they didn't get in the whirlpool.
CW: How did you think of that story Gillian?
Gillian: I wrote it in second grade, and it was my last
story that I wrote in second grade.
CW: Who's the best writer you know?

· Kids criteria ·?

This matches the goal she's still working on in Dec

Kid criteria
- length
- good words
→ make you laugh or sad (etc.)

· Impact on audience
· Amt of effort

Kid criteria
· Length
· Exciting

Uses different words so often

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Figure 3-4: Sample of Categorized Data

Children	Incident	Date	Page
Chris	50 cents a little money back them	9/14	
SW, Gillian	"Nice" book- specificity in language	9/7	
Nicole	Add poems to topic list?	9/8	
Chris	Added more detail like Mrs W told me to	3/27	
SW	Adult Criteria for good writing	12/10	4
CW	Adult criteria for portfolios- look how much smarter you are now	10/1	
Chris	Adult criteria- action	12/3	16
Chris, CW	Adult criteria- Action (lots of)	12/1	6
Sue	Adult criteria- adequate explanation	12/10	
Sw	Adult criteria- adjustable depending on genre, purpose	12/3	28
Chris, CW	Adult criteria- affective	11/29	22
Sw	Adult criteria- BME	9/15	
SW	Adult criteria- BME	5/18	
SW	Adult criteria- BME	9/15	
SW	Adult criteria- characters (connect to)	12/3	12
SW/Lindsey	Adult criteria- connection to life	2/10	
SW	Adult criteria- Conventions- hdwriting- my way	12/10	23
Sw	Adult criteria- Conventions- know when to use capital letters	9/13	
SW	Adult criteria- demonstrates understanding	2/10	
SW	Adult criteria- Detail (lots of)	9/27	
SW	Adult criteria- details	9/29	
Nick, CW	Adult criteria- dialogue	11/29	9
Sw	Adult criteria- dialogue	12/3	25
SW	Adult criteria- dialogue	9/13	
SW	Adult criteria- dialogue	12/3	12
Nick, CW	Adult criteria- dialogue	11/29	6
SW	Adult criteria- elicit emotions	12/3	17
SW	Adult criteria- emotional impact on audience	12/3	20
SW	Adult criteria- characters (empathize with)	12/3	25
SW	Adult criteria- end	9/15	
Gillian, LB	Adult criteria- ending	12/3	14
Chris, CW	Adult criteria- Ending is happy	11/29	22
Sw	Adult criteria- exciting	12/3	25
SW	Adult criteria- feelings as good ending sentence	9/15	
SW	Adult criteria- Finished story has to go through all eight steps	9/14	
MK, CW	Adult criteria- humor	11/29	21
Nick, CW	Adult criteria- humor	11/29	6
Chris, CW	Adult criteria- humor	12/1	6
SW	Adult criteria- Humor (characteristics)	9/22	
SW	Adult criteria- Humor has different ways of using language.	9/22	
SW	Adult criteria- Humor has exaggeration	9/22	
SW	Adult criteria- humor has funny parts	9/22	
SW	Adult criteria- Humor has repetition	9/22	
SW	Adult criteria- humor has unexpected happenings	9/22	
SW, Jen P, \	Adult criteria- Characters (Identification with)	12/3	10

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Uncovering Researcher Subjectivity

Given my somewhat tangled participant-observer, teacher-researcher roles, some might question whether I was capable of viewing the site or interpreting the data with any objectivity or clarity. Researcher subjectivity is inherent in this study. Peshkin (1988), however, believes that such subjectivity is not to be avoided, but rather acknowledged:

> Subjectivity operates during the entire research process. The point I argue here is that researchers, notwithstanding their use of qualitative or quantitative methods, their research problem, or their reputation for personal integrity, should systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research. When researchers observe themselves in the focused way that I propose, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement. If researchers are informed about the qualities that have emerged during their research, they can at least disclose to their readers where self and subject became joined. They can at best be enabled to write unshackled from orientations that they did not realize were intervening in their research process (p. 116).

Peshkin believes the researcher should not seek objectivity, which he sees as unattainable, but should rather attempt to identify her subjectivity in terms of "discretely characterized (selves) that are in fact aspects of the whole that constitute (the individual)" (p. 117). Acknowledging these "I's" does not "exorcise subjectivity, but rather enables the researcher to manage it" (p. 119). My data analysis, then involved a careful awareness of several different selves, most notably teacher, researcher, staff developer, educational consultant, child advocate, and adult.

Following Where the Data Leads

The patterns and categories that emerged caused me to dramatically

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change the focus of my study. Originally, I identified my research question as, "What are the self-monitoring behaviors of elementary students?" I anticipated a cognitive study in which I would first explore children's naturally occurring evaluative criteria and behaviors, and would secondly consider the changes that occurred as children came into contact with adults' evaluative criteria. As I analyzed the data, however, I came to understand that this data was much more complicated than such a study would expose. My final research question, "What are the complexities of instituting self-assessment portfolios in an elementary classroom?" is not strictly cognitive, then, but is more an ethnographic study of a classroom in which a very good teacher in a very good school learned and grew as she attempted to incorporate literacy portfolios into her classroom.

CHAPTER IV

THE PORTFOLIOS UNFOLD: PART ONE

In the Beginning

About five years ago, Linda Ross, Pennington's reading specialist,

became interested in literacy portfolios as a tool for developing students' self-

evaluative abilities:

> At an assessment conference held by the state of New
> Hampshire, I heard a couple of people talk about
> portfolios. I attended a workshop that Linda Rief, a
> teacher from Durham, did on portfolios in the middle
> school and I was kind of interested. That following year, I
> experimented with the third grades. I said, "Let's just play
> around and see what we can do."

> The next fall [1991], I got a notice in the mail about
> writing for literacy grants. I thought, 'Here's my chance.'
> It was something that I thought was interesting to do.
> You could ask for anywhere between $2500 and $7500, I
> chose $5000 because that was the average amount. I
> wanted to tell people [teachers] what to do with these
> ideas but then also to have a day when they could
> actually make portfolios. I wanted to have money for
> training during the contract day, for outside consultants
> and for materials.

Drawing on the work of Paulsen, Paulsen, and Meyer (1989), Linda submitted

a proposal for PALS (Portfolio Assessment for Literacy Success) to the New

Hampshire Department of Education and in December, 1991, she was notified

that she had received a $5000 grant. Between January and June, 1992, Linda

worked with ten primary grade teachers to implement the PALS project.

Although the grant lasted only six months, Linda continued meeting with

PALS members in Fall, 1992, in hopes that these teachers would assist her in

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training their colleagues, so that each year more adults and children would be involved in the project until eventually it would involve the whole school. Linda was more than a little surprised, though, when all fifteen remaining classroom teachers and several specialists attended a meeting for people interested in starting portfolios that September. Currently, each of Pennington's 510 students and 25 classroom teachers, as well as the principal and assistant principal represents her/himself as a reader, writer, and learner in a literacy portfolio. The art and music teachers are also experimenting with portfolios in their subject areas.

The rhetoric of portfolios, however, is often better than the reality. Issues of purpose and ownership, leftover legacies of the writing process (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983) and "Whole Language" movements (Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991; Cazden, 1992; Goodman, 1986) shape the design and usefulness of the portfolios. With this new tool comes a long list of questions. What are the portfolios for? Do the portfolios belong to children or adults? Who decides what goes in them? Who sees them? What happens to them at the end of the year? In this chapter and the next I'll explore the intersections of child and adult evaluative worlds, including difficult issues such as purpose, ownership, and audience as they occurred in the Pennington portfolios.

Leftover Legacies: Issues of Ownership and Choice

Issues of ownership, independence, and choice have plagued progressive educators for at least 15 years. Early in the "Whole Language" movement, Kenneth Goodman (1986, as quoted in Dudley-Marling & Searle, 1994) advocated the importance of allowing students to take responsibility for their learning, "Language development is empowering: the learner 'owns'

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the process, makes the decisions about when to use it, what for and with what results. Literacy is empowering too, if the learner is in control of what's done with it" (v).

Writing process experts such as Graves (1983) and Calkins (1986, 1991) stressed the need for students to take control of selecting their topics and audiences. Murray (1973) described the changing role of teachers in writing process classrooms, saying that they should not be "judges" or "bearers of great truths," but rather simply "listeners." A decade later, he clarified this position by asserting that the writing teacher should "respond as a reader, a human being, not a teacher" (p. 24). Nancie Atwell (1986) described the shift away from classrooms which were controlled exclusively by adults, envisioning herself as coming out from behind the "big desk," in order to allow her students to assume more ownership or control of their learning.

The implication seemed to be that teachers had for too long exercised unfair amounts of authority over their students. For years, they had mandated what, when, and how students would read and write. Murray (1982, 1985); Atwell (1987); the Goodmans (1986); Graves (1983); Hansen (1987); and many, many others led the movement to give students independence and choice, which they defined as "ownership" in their reading, writing, and learning.

Certainly, few people would disagree that students should have some control over what and how they learn. Kurt Dudley-Marling (1994) speaks for many educators:

> Students who are not able to take responsibility for their learning will always find learning more difficult. What is more important, students who have no opportunities to control their lives in school may find it more difficult to do so outside of school. Ultimately, ownership is not about learning, but about living. Creating a more just and democratic society depends on

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citizens who are willing and able to examine and, if necessary, to challenge the conditions of their lives and those of their fellow citizens. In this sense ownership is not about individual responsibility, but a collective responsibility in which each of us works to ensure that all Americans and all Canadians are able to share in their countries' cultural and economic riches (p. ix).

Allowing and promoting student choice increases student engagement in learning. It develops the attitudes and habits necessary for success in later life.

Yet there are those who question the unconditional acceptance of student ownership. Newkirk (1989), one of the first to raise serious questions, asks, "What authority does the teacher possess? To what extent does the child choose his or her own path of development? To what degree are these paths directed by school and indirectly, community?" (p. 178). He cites the example of a first grade class in which children continually write space (or in 1995, Power Ranger) stories "that are imitations of TV cartoons," asking,

> Should teachers, at some point, try to promote kinds of writing that they feel are more challenging, less stereotyped? To what extent would this interfere with children's sense of 'ownership'? Would it be an infringement? And if teachers do try to redirect children's efforts, how can they explain (if only to themselves) that one type of writing is more valuable? What scales of values are we applying? (p. 179).

Similar questions of authority, choice, and ownership have followed teachers and students into the portfolio and student self-evaluation movement. If students own the portfolios, what are the implications for adults? Does it mean that teachers allow students to put anything they want in the portfolios? Should there ever be any adult instruction or intervention? Can teachers tell or even encourage students to include artifacts they see as especially significant? Can teachers help students write reflections or ask students to revise or expand upon sparse or incomplete reflections? What, exactly, does it mean for students to own the portfolios?

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Newkirk (1989) contends that applying a model in which either students or teachers own the writing (or I would suggest portfolios or learning in general) is inherently false. He draws on Weaver's notion of "god-terms", "expression[s] about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate...God terms are uncontested, that is they do not need to be justified or even defined carefully. Their simple evocation is often powerful enough to carry the day; they offer the possibility of persuading without arguing" (p. 179). Newkirk believes that "ownership," which he defines as "the rights of students to determine the topics and strategies used in writing...the autonomy of children, their right not to be dominated by the expectations or demands of teacher or schools" (p. 185) and "choice" have become god terms in the writing process movement.

"A god-term," asserts Newkirk, "will point to its opposite, which becomes an ultimate rebuke." In the case of ownership, "student ownership" or "child-centered learning" would be the enemy or opposite of "adult control" or "teacher-centered learning." In that case, "the intentions of the teacher or school are often viewed as opposing or suppressing the intentions of the students" (1989, p. 186). Newkirk warns against the "glorification of the self" in "child-centered educational schemes" and draws on the work of Dewey, cautioning that it is "a mistake to treat either the child or the society as a fixed point of attention" (p. 187). Ownership and choice, argues Newkirk, should not imply "an absolute valuation of the child's decisions— and an absolute rejection of institutional expectations" (p. 186).

The idea that a portfolio can be either child-centered or teacher-centered, that authority is held either by students or by teachers, seems to view the distribution of authority as a sort of zero-sum-game in which power exists in a fixed amount, held by one party or by another (Newkirk, personal

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communication, 1994). Ownership is based on a "sense of scarcity." This view, asserts Patrick Shannon, implies that ownership is directly related to conflict, "Individuals compete for ownership of particular things, once something is owned, it cannot be owned by others" (1994, p. 149). In such situations, one party can gain authority only if the other party loses some of theirs. In the case of portfolios, either students will have "the authority" to decide what goes in the portfolios or teachers will have "the authority." Evidently, there can be no middle ground.

In reality, authority does not exist in a fixed sum, but rather is generated as it is responsibly exercised. When the teacher uses her authority to establish routines (e.g., has a regular time to work on and share portfolios, makes materials accessible), provides instruction in skills that will make children more effective portfolio keepers and self-evaluators (e.g., writing reflections, judging work), makes children aware of their possibilities (e.g., shows children how to demonstrate growth, how to set up their portfolios, how they might be arranged, how to create a table of contents), gives positive and constructive feedback (supports children's efforts to represent themselves, encourages them to write detailed and explicit reflections), and provides vision for growth children may not see (suggests that children include certain artifacts in their portfolios) she enables her students to act more skillfully or independently, which increases their sense of authority.

Conversely, when a teacher abdicates her adult authority by failing to exercise her knowledge and expertise to guide her students toward skillfulness and autonomy, the amount of authority available to students also decreases. When she doesn't establish guidelines and routines, or allows children to remain mired in the few possibilities afforded by their limited eight or nine-year-old vision, when she shies away from providing

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instruction that would allow children to become more skilled or proficient self-evaluators, she diminishes, rather than expands, her students' ability to "own" their portfolios.

Portfolios: Issues of Purpose and Ownership

Although the word "portfolio" means something different in almost every different situation, educators working with students ranging from preschool through graduate level, in subjects from art to history to physics to home economics, are using portfolios in some form or another (Buschman, 1993; Collins, 1991; Ernst, 1994; Farr & Tone, 1994; Frazier & Paulsen, 1992; Graves & Sunstein, 1992; Hansen, 1995; Hebert, 1992; Kearns, 1995; Kieffer & Morrison, 1994; Knight, 1992; Porter & Cleland, 1995; Slater, 1994; Swain, 1994; Vizyak, 1994; Wolf, 1989). In situations such as the Manchester Literacy Portfolio Project, where the portfolios are intended as a tool for children to define themselves as readers, writers, and learners, and to develop their self-evaluative skills, students are almost entirely responsible for shaping the portfolios (Hansen, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1993, 1994, 1995; Kearns, 1995; Salvio, 1994; Wilcox, 1993). Children create and maintain their portfolios and engage in evaluations of their reading and writing through written reflections. Students share these portfolios with their teachers and peers, take the portfolios home whenever they choose, and keep them at the end of the year. These portfolios are extremely valuable— they help children define and share their literacy in and out of school, validate non-mainstream children's lives and ways of knowing the world, help children document accomplishments and track growth over time, enable teachers to see what their students value, and build community in the classroom. The emphasis on student choice, however, sometimes creates confusion about adult roles

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and responsibilities in the portfolios.

At the other end of the spectrum, in places like Vermont, portfolios are used as large-scale assessment tools (Hewitt, 1994). Because the portfolios must have the high degree of uniformity necessary for data aggregation, adults mandate what kinds of things should be included. Fourth grade portfolios, for instance, contain:

- a best piece, accompanied by a reflective letter
- a poem, story, play, or personal narrative
- a response to a cultural event, public exhibit, sports event, or to a book, current issue, math problem, or scientific phenomenon
- a piece from a curriculum area that is not Language Arts or English

In these portfolios, teacher and student collaboration is extremely limited. Adults organize and maintain the portfolios, specify which artifacts should be included, and evaluate the portfolios on state-mandated criteria. In this case, student ownership and voice are sacrificed at the expense of uniformity. Geoff Hewitt, state director of the Vermont portfolios, addresses this issue by saying, "The trouble with getting too definitive about the portfolio is that every portfolio should be designed by its keeper/creator, and this is where systems begin to interfere with individuality" (1994, p. 70). He advises teachers to have their students keep two portfolios, a "master portfolio...where the student has ongoing ownership and responsibility, and where the real learning occurs" (p. 71) and an "assessment portfolio... that contains materials specifically chosen for outside scrutiny... [and] satisfies program requirements" (p. 71). One questions the usefulness of these documents when even the person in charge does not view them as a tool for "real learning."

Portfolios at Pennington lie somewhere between these two extremes of

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the student-owned Manchester portfolios and the adult-owned Vermont portfolios. Since the inception of the PALS project, Pennington teachers have identified two purposes for the portfolios. First, Pennington teachers see portfolios as a way for children to represent themselves as readers, writers and learners, both in and out of school (Hansen, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1993, 1994). To that end, the portfolios belong to the children and they assemble collections of artifacts and write reflections about themselves as readers, writers, and learners. As is true in Manchester, students bring in mementos of family literacy— photographs, cards, letters, articles, book covers from favorite family read alouds, letterhead from family businesses— and artifacts of their own literacy— magazines or newspapers, scout troop phone lists, soccer rules, play bills, and sports trading cards. There are few restrictions on what children may place in their portfolios, although an exception would be made if a student attempted to include an artifact that was racist, sexist, or pornographic. Used in this way, the portfolios help teachers to appreciate children's richly diverse lives and literacies and better understand what children value and how they learn.

Pennington teachers also use the portfolios, however, to help students learn to better evaluate their literacy and their learning. In order to accomplish this purpose, teachers regularly designate times for showing children how to accurately represent themselves as readers and writers in their portfolios. One day, for instance, Barb might say, "Put something in your portfolio that shows who you are as a reader." Another day she might ask students to select their best piece of writing or compare pieces of writing from two different times during the year. Within these parameters, students are free to select any artifact they chose.

The teachers at Pennington also encourage students to showcase their

accomplishments in their portfolios. If a student does something notable, the teacher might encourage the child to place it in her portfolio, e.g., "That's the first poem you've ever written! Would you like to put that in your portfolio?" Adults teach children how to write reflections and constantly push students to make their reflections more detailed and more explicit. It might be argued, then, that while children at Pennington own the portfolios, the adults also have a strong influence in their shaping.

Sheila Valencia highlights the strengths of these collaborative portfolios:

> It is when students and teachers are collaboratively involved in assessment that the greatest benefit is achieved. Collaborative assessment strengthens the bond between student and teacher and establishes them as partners in learning. Collaboration precipitates meaningful dialogue about the criteria and process we use in evaluation and provides an important model for students as they become self-evaluators (1990, pp. 338-339).

Collaborative portfolios create an intersection between the evaluative worlds of children and the evaluative worlds of adults. They belong, then neither to the children nor to the adults, but are jointly owned by both. There are some dangers, however, in joint ownership. Adults, by nature of their age, inherently have more authority, or "louder voices" than children. One of our initial adult inclinations is simply to teach the children to assess their reading and writing by using our evaluative criteria and then to believe they are becoming more skilled evaluators as their voices sound increasingly like our own. Since we already have many tools that measure children's abilities to attain adult standards, one has to question whether we need to use portfolios at all, if that is how we are going to use them.

Instead, portfolios must be used as a way of inviting children's voices into evaluation conversations. Children, however, see through different eyes,

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value differently, know the world in different ways. In the last chapter, I quoted Kegan, who suggests that we must resist the tendency to see children's understandings of the world as "incomplete or dim perceptions of reality as [adults] see it" (1982, p. 28). Instead, we must view children's conceptualizations of the world as "manifestations of a distinctly separate reality, with a logic, a consistency, an integrity all its own" (Kegan, 1982, p. 28). We must begin, then, with an understanding and a huge respect for the reality of children's existing worlds.

If we are going to honor children's criteria, we need to first develop an understanding of the kinds of values and behaviors children exhibit when they are asked to evaluate themselves as readers, writers, and learners. Preschool Director Liz Waterland (1995) contends:

> We cannot ask small children to make sense of the world of school unless we have stepped into it with them. We need to bend our backs to their eye level and wonder what it is that we see. We need to listen to the voices and words that children hear as if they are a foreign language. We need to feel fears and joys that are long lost to us, or that we may never have known.

Unless we are willing to "bend our backs and wonder what it is that we see," portfolios can never be a truly collaborative effort. I will devote the remainder of this chapter, then, to attempting to view the portfolios through the third graders' eyes.

Portfolios: Child Shaping

On October 1, the day the children begin working on their third grade portfolios, Barb tells her students, "Portfolios are a book that should represent you as a person and a learner...Put something on the cover that shows about you as a person...If you like to read, you might want to draw books... if there is something you like to do at home, if you like to watch TV, draw that." The

third graders use the portfolios, then, as a kind of concrete declaration, "This is who I am." They represent themselves with words and images, define their preferences, and celebrate their accomplishments. They also record their histories and document their growth.

So People Will Know What I'm Like: Representing Self in the Portfolios

Self-evaluation logically begins with the definition of an autonomous self, a delineation of one's boundaries and edges. In the third graders' portfolios, the first and most obvious aspect of self-definition is self-representation, which assumes many forms. Some of the children's earliest renderings of self occur in the drawings they make for new portfolio covers that first Friday in October. Most children, especially those who have been at Pennington since the early days of the portfolio project, include photographs, sometimes posed school pictures but more frequently, snapshots from family albums— birthdays, holidays, special occasions like weddings, graduations, or vacations at the mountains or ocean. Luis has a picture of himself playing the electric guitar in his uncle's band, accompanied by the reflection, "This picture represents me as a rocking role (sic)."

Many of the children— Luis, Jane, Susan, Jonathan and Maria— among others— also compose autobiographies for their portfolios. Maria writes:

> My name is Maria and I'm here to talk about my life. I have a sister named Christina. She has black hair, brown eyes, and very curly hair. My mom's name is Luisa. She has black hair, brown eyes, and a perm. My real dad's name is Thomas, but I do not see him. I do not know anything about him. My other dad's name is Philipe. He has blonde hair, hazel eyes, and is French. My mom, my sister, and I are Spanish. Me, Maria, I have black hair, hazel eyes and long hair. I have two grandmas alive and two grandpas alive. I still have a lot of aunts, uncles, and cousins. My mom works at 3-P. She works at night. My dad works at Hurd. He works

in the morning. I go to Pennington School. I am in third grade. I love my life.

Jonathan draws on *Where in the World is Henry,* a book the children read during a map unit in social studies, to locate himself:

> My name is Jonathan. I live at 12 Howard Drive, Mayfield, NH 03831. I live in the county of Ashbury County. I live in the state of New Hampshire, in the country of the United States of America, continent of North America, and then in the world.

When asked why they've included their autobiographies in their portfolios, the third graders usually respond, "so people will know all about me" or "so people will know what I'm like."

So People Know What Some of My Favorite Stuff Is: Defining Preferences

Another part of representing one's boundaries might include defining one's likes and dislikes. When teachers at Pennington began the PALS project in 1992, many encouraged children to represent themselves through lists or collages of "favorites"— favorite people, favorite places, favorite foods, etc., and the third graders continue to identify their likes and dislikes in their portfolios. They represent their preferences with phrases such as, "Because I like (love) it," "It's my favorite," or "It's special to me." After one morning of busily inserting new artifacts into her portfolio, Julie declares, "I like to put in my favorite stuff because people will know what some of my favorite stuff is."

Many of the children include sports—swimming, skiing, gymnastics, snowmobiling, and soccer; organized activities like Cub Scouts and Brownies, ballet and karate lessons; and artifacts from popular culture— collector cards, videos such as "The Little Mermaid" or television stars like the Olson twins from "Full House." Well over half the boys— Jonathan, Patrick, Luis, David,

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Russ, Tim, and Billy—document their passion for drawing in their portfolios, either with cartoon figures from popular culture, pictures traced or copied from books, or stylized characters of their own creation. Billy crams a spiral notebook filled with his art into his portfolio, "This is my book of drawings. It shows what I like to do."

Children's preferences sometimes include discussions of their academic likes and dislikes. Although teachers at Pennington do not use extensive numbers of worksheets, most of the children include at least one or two worksheet type papers among academic activities they enjoyed. Patrick reflects on a science worksheet, "I'm putting this in my portfolio because I had fun doing it and solving it." Interestingly, avid readers and writers such as Kate, Elizabeth, and Ashley don't represent their passion for books or writing any differently, e.g., through a greater number of book covers or stories, than do their less interested peers. The reading and writing the girls do outside of school is almost never placed in their portfolios.

The Longest One in Third Grade So Far: Celebrating Accomplishments

The children see their portfolios as showcases for things they have done well. Some of their accomplishments are measured qualitatively— "the best poem I've ever written," or the "first chapter book I finished." Other accomplishments are measured quantitatively— "the longest story I've written" or "the fattest book I've ever read." The third graders also showcase topics they have studied, e.g., "We learned about Native Americans." Still other accomplishments are highlighted because they reflect the values of larger society, working hard or doing one's best.

The children often measure their accomplishments in terms of "firsts." Jonathan marks an important third grade milestone with *The Haunted*

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Schoolbus, "It was the first chapter book I ever read in third grade." Alison's "first" is not one book but rather an entire series, "I'm proud that I read all the series of *Horrible Harry,* I've read (She lists off three or four *Horrible Harry* books) I never read a whole series of books before." The children are also proud of their firsts in writing. Danny, for example, identifies the significance of one piece of writing as "the first story I wrote in third grade." Often these "firsts" focus on a specific genre, Kate puts her first play, as well as "Goosebumps," the first scary poem she wrote, in her portfolio. Melissa also includes poems, "Because they're my first poems that I really like, they're my first poems that made sense." Robbie put his snake report in his portfolio, with the reflection, "I am putting this in here because it is my first animal report I ever did." Learning to write in cursive is a major accomplishment for the third graders and many of the children place handwriting pages, rows of letters and words in their portfolios. Robbie, who rarely chooses to participate in practice activities demonstrates his proficiency at cursive through a thank you note to a puppeteer who visited the school, "This is my first note in cursive. It was neat. I like it, I really like it."

At other times, children measure their accomplishments in terms of "bests." "I'm putting this in my portfolio because these are the best poems I have wrote. I like to write poems," declares Jane. Kate cites her spelling performance that year as "the best I've ever done." Luis, who struggles with reading and writing, is proud of his ability in math, "This math page is one of the best math pages I've ever done, this is like the best. In times I wasn't that good in times, cuz times is kind of hard, most of these are easy and a lot of them were hard." Luis also places one of his favorite drawings in his portfolio, "Because it's like one of the best drawings and I love drawing and I like it."

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Sometimes, the third graders view information acquired during a particular unit in science or social studies as an accomplishment. Reflections about these artifacts are often brief, e.g., "We studied Mexico," that accompanies the Mexican flag in Kate's portfolio. Karen also has a terse reflection about a social studies unit, "I put this in there because I wanted people to see what I have learned about the Pilgrims." Later in the year, she writes a more detailed reflection for a unit in social studies, "This is my 'Too Much of Anything' book. It tells how you can get sick of eating or drinking too much of any kind of drink or food. I wanted people to know what a 'Too Much of Anything' book is supposed to be like, what it's about."

Often, the third graders measure their accomplishments quantitatively. In reading, the children gauge by length or "fatness" of a book, the number of books read, or the amount of time spent reading. Reflecting on *James and the Giant Peach*, Jane writes, "I'm putting this in my portfolio because it is long and funny. I learned to read real hard books." Julie includes a home reading log, "I'm putting this in my portfolio—my reading log because I read 12 times because I was bored so I read a lot more than I was supposed to." When asked to identify her most important accomplishment, Elizabeth responds, "My reading—because I read a lot. I read 11 chapter books." Sometimes, children mention speed in their discussions of quantity. Ashley, for instance, writes about the cover from an *American Girl* book, "Because I like 'em and I read 'em fast."

Length is the third graders' primary standard for evaluating their writing. Robbie, reflecting on "The Haunted House," writes, "I think it is the best one I've written in third grade because it is the longest one I've written in third grade so far." Jonathan writes about his mystery, "Missing Nick," "I put this in my portfolio because it is my best story because it's my longest and my

favorite." Luis' story, "All About Me and My Dad, "is important not only because it represents the connection between Luis and his dad, but also because of its length, "I wrote this "All About Me and My Dad" story, it used to be "All About Me…this is the longest piece of writing I've ever done in third grade. This was like in the beginning of the year too and this is pretty long."

Children's accomplishments sometimes reflect the values of the larger society. Hard work, for instance, is often mentioned in the third graders' reflections. Elizabeth includes her poem book, Julie her Native American pottery, Karen her xeroxed copy of *The Magic Coin,* and Patrick his Halloween story, all because they "did a lot of work," tried hard, or put forth a lot of effort. Closely related to the amount of effort is the amount of time invested. Elizabeth places her poetry book in her portfolio because she "spended a lot of work making these poems." Jonathan, reflecting on his home reading log writes, "I put this in my portfolio because it took a long time to do this. I read 1,640 minutes."

When I Had Long Hair: Documenting History

Defining self or developing autonomy might also mean coming to see one's self in a historical context and the third graders use their portfolios as places to record their histories as people and learners. Jonathan and Karen reach all the way back into their preschool years. Jonathan places the vacuum cleaner book his mother created when he was three in his portfolio because, "I liked vacuums, so I just have a vacuum book and then [in the back of the vacuum book] my numbers and letters from 1988." Karen uses a series of photographs to trace her physical development from preschool to first grade, "It tells how I'm grown up. I'm a baby right here and I'm in readiness, like

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kindergarten right here...These pictures are special to me. They show me growing up and when I had long hair..."

Other children document their school histories in their portfolios. Maria has a photograph from second grade, "She [her second grade teacher] took a picture of us on the first day of school, she took a picture of the whole school [class], I wanted to put this picture in because it was my first day of second grade, [and my first day] at Pennington." Alison shares the construction paper representation of the cover of a special book, "In first grade my favorite book was *The Very Quiet Cricket,* I kept reading it over and over. I was like, 'Oh, I like this one,' and I had another one...I was looking for that in the library, but I couldn't find it in the spot it was in last year." Robbie shows a strongly developed sense of history when he attaches a date to "Whales and Submarines," a book he brings from home, "I am putting this book in my portfolio because it is a book I wrote in 1992. I like it very much."

See How Much I've Changed: Demonstrating Growth

After children become more aware of themselves as historical beings, they can then begin looking at themselves in terms of growth. Over half of the third graders have kept portfolios for at least two years and they frequently leaf through their older artifacts, commenting on how badly they spelled in first grade, what easy books they used to read, or how much better they draw now. Alison shows me her second grade booklist and says, "The reason why I put this in is because I want to look back from when I was in first and second grade and see how I've changed." Susan talks about how much faster she can read, "It used to take me two weeks to finish one *Karen* book and now it takes me fifteen minutes to read one, it's 115 pages."

Portfolios are not only a place for children to consider their long term

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growth, but also a place for many of the eight-year-olds to document changes that occur during their year in third grade. Considering her growth in reading, Ashley comments, "Like at the beginning of the year, I wrote a thing [a reading reflection] that I was reading, like a *Berenstain Bears* one and now I'm going to write another one, like at the end of the year and it's going to be a chapter [book]." Elizabeth reflects on a cursive handwriting paper, "My first cursive paper, I'm going to put my last cursive paper in so people can see how much I've learned." Similarly, she places three math papers from September in her portfolio and makes plans to select three more at the end of the year, again, "To show you what I've learned."

Many of the children compare pieces of writing. In a share session, Kate pulls out one of her first grade stories, written in typical six-year-old temporary spelling. The children giggle as she reads the story aloud phonetically. "This is to tell how much of a writer I was in first grade and how good of a writer I am in third grade," she declares as she finishes. Her share prompts an outpouring of similar shares by other children. Luis shows me a whale story from second grade and a recently completed ghost story and critiques his earlier writing, "The whale story is shorter, there's no details in it. The whale didn't show, it didn't like (he starts to read) 'Once upon a time there was a whale and he lived in the sea, but that whale had no friends, so one day there was a little whale who came into his life.' I didn't think it was a good part, I should have changed it into, 'There was a little whale who saw the other whale and then went over to the whale and they swam and swam all along together,' it's too short, I should have made it longer, but in first grade, I didn't write that long..."

Sometimes the children appear almost annoyed or embarrassed by their previous ineptitude. In those cases, they often remove historical artifacts

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from their portfolios. Showing me her newly updated portfolio, Kate says, "I really changed it, I changed the cover...I took out some things I did in first grade, they were just book things, I traced them, they were stupid. And I put more stuff in... I have changed, I don't want to show how I used to be, I used to be a dork." Karen displays an even more passionate reaction when I ask her, innocently I think, why she has taken several first grade artifacts out of her portfolio, "You can't really read it," she says. "Why should I put this in my portfolio when no one can read it? I know how to read, write, times and when I grow up, I want to be a nurse because my mom is one. These are all in 1992... These are old, these have been in the back of my portfolio forever and I don't want them anymore."

The Portfolios as Tools for Social Work: Demonstrating Connections

In addition to using their portfolios to represent themselves, define their likes and dislikes, celebrate their accomplishments and trace their growth, the third graders use their portfolios to demonstrate their connections to other people. In "The Case of the Singing Scientist: A Performance Perspective on the 'Stages' of School Literacy," Ann Haas Dyson (1992b; see also Dyson, 1991, 1992a) asserts,

> Even for young children, the first step toward reconceptualizing children's composing (or I would suggest evaluative) processes— is the notion that an inherent urge of the individual is to be with others through shared symbols that capture some aspect of a communal world. It is fundamental to the whole of our intellectual and emotional lives, as it helps set in play the search for mutuality, for understanding and for being understood...(pp. 437-438).

Michelle Rosaldo (as quoted in Bruner, 1990) argues that "notions like 'self' grow not from 'inner' essence relatively independent of the social world, but from experience in a world of meanings, images, and social bonds in which

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all persons are inevitably involved" (p. 42).

Robert Kegan (1982) identifies the desire to be "independent or autonomous, to experience one's distinctness, the self-chosenness of one's directions, one's individual integrity," and the desire "to be included, to be part of, close to, joined with, to be held, admitted, accompanied" as "the two greatest yearnings in human existence" (p. 107). Kegan sees these two longings not as independent of one another, but rather as co-existing in a sort of "lifelong tension." Human development, then, consists of an ongoing struggle to achieve balance between the "yearning for inclusion and [the] yearning for distinctness" (p. 108), two themes which appear repeatedly in the third graders' portfolios. The children use portfolios not only to represent themselves but also to demonstrate connectedness to others and establish social acceptability. One cannot explore the evaluative worlds of children without considering the "social work" of the portfolios.

Me and My Mom Used to Read This: Demonstrating Connections to Family

The third graders' families— parents and siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—are predictably the first kind of relationship or social connection represented in the portfolios. Most children have crayoned drawings or photographs, but several demonstrate their connections to their families in other ways. Kate, for instance, displays a xeroxed cover of *Rikki Tikki Tembo*, "I like this book because me and my mom used to read this book." Jonathan shares a scribble design, "I drew this because my dad showed me once."

Frequently, the children's artifacts reflect the changing nature of families of the nineties. Jonathan, awaiting his parents' impending divorce, places his moving story in his portfolio, "I like this story because it shows that

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places his moving story in his portfolio, "I like this story because it shows that I want to move because I'm looking forward to living with my grandmother and grandfather [and his mother]." Luis, who lives with his father and teenage brother and sees his mother only on weekends, includes one of his earliest stories, "All About Me and My Dad," and reflects, "I'm putting this in my portfolio because it represents my dad and I," then uses three or four sports trading cards to represent his relationship with his mother, "I like the gladiator cards," he writes, "because my mom got them for me for Christmas."

The children also use their portfolios to document the losses in their lives. Whenever I ask Melissa to tell me about her most important artifact, she turns to a story about her grandmother, "The most important thing in here is about my mom's mom, because I like to tell about like my mom's mom when she died...She had to have cancer that she couldn't cure..." Her written reflection says, "I wanted to put this in, *The Magic Locket Book*, that I wrote a reflection, because my mom's mom, before she died, I got this book from her." The children also use their portfolios to commemorate the loss of pets— Jonathan's cat, Percy, who ran away; Melissa's rabbit, who "might be dying because he used to be fat, but now he's wicked skinny;" and Karen's hamster, because she "really loves him and doesn't want him to die."

Me and Her Wrote These Poems: Demonstrating Connections to Peers

Children also use the portfolios to demonstrate their connections to their peers. Melissa, for example, represents her relationships to others through a people scavenger hunt, a worksheet, from the first week of school, "Because it shows my friends' names and stuff," as well as a poetry book she co-authors with several friends, about which she reflects, "I'm putting these

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poems in because they rhyme and I like them. I think it is fun to write with Jane and Elizabeth." Her line design is accompanied by the reflection, "Something like Jane's. Because I think I did a good job on them."

The third graders also use shared or common artifacts to demonstrate connections in their portfolios. Elizabeth and Karen, who become best friends in third grade, have two matching items. Karen's brief reflection, "Me and her wrote these poems," captures the core essence of the girls' poetry book; In Eliabeth's portfolio, the poetry book is accompanied by the reflection, "I spent lots of time making these poems and the title, 'Portakelly Poems,' is me and Karen's [last] names put together." The girls also include a photograph of a fingerplay they do in the spring, giggling as they write the reflection, "Karen/Elizabeth and I did a puppet show. It was fun. We wrote it ourselves. It was about Spring (sic)."

The need to demonstrate connections is probably at least partially gender based (Belenky et al., 1986). Boys use their portfolios to demonstrate connections far less frequently than do the girls. From time to time, however, the boys do engage in these activities. Jonathan, for instance, includes a poem book similar to Melissa's. His reflection says, "I put this in my portfolio because I made poems with Jane, Melissa, and Kate. I like poems."

I Don't Want to be Different by Everybody: Demonstrating Social Acceptability

Besides demonstrating connections, the children use the portfolios as a forum for demonstrating their social acceptability. When I ask Kate why she has included family photographs in her portfolio she says, "I didn't have any pictures in it and everyone else did." Elizabeth, new to Pennington, brings in artifacts from home and carefully selects samples of her school reading and writing for her portfolio. Barb and I exclaim over her thoughtful

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documentation and reflections about her learning until February, when Elizabeth reveals that her intentions are very different from our adult interpretations of those intentions. "I'm putting all this stuff," she says, "because I don't want to be left behind. I don't want to be different by everybody because I have less stuff." By June, her purposes have become perhaps slightly more in line with our adult intentions for portfolios, yet she is still very much concerned with being found adequate by her peers, "I got more stuff than other people have in third grade, I got 21...I show people a lot of what I've learned."

This desire for social acceptability is not limited by gender nor by intellectual ability. "I'm a better reader than I was last year," declares Patrick, as he shows me the xeroxed cover of his first *Boxcar Children* book. "I read longer books and they're harder books...I've challenged myself. I read books that I hardly could understand. I just wanted to be able to read what everybody else in the class read last year. People might not want to be your friend if they think you're not smart." I am surprised by Patrick's concerns about being ostracized, he and Jonathan are fast friends, and he also has several other close friends, both in and out of class. None of his peers appear to make judgments about his abilities as a friend based on his scholastic difficulties.

Being found socially acceptable involves being recognized not only as equal to everyone else, but also as unique or at least especially good at one particular skill. In late March, Elizabeth, a budding poet, expands her writing repertoire to include finger plays. Karen, ever the obliging best friend, is more than willing to work with Elizabeth on this new genre. They produce one fingerplay which they present, complete with puppets, from underneath the end of a table, then work busily on a second one. Elizabeth announces that the

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girls will put their second fingerplay in their portfolios because it is going to be much better than their first attempt.

Unfortunately, their happy tranquility is disturbed when Kate announces that Melissa, Jane, and she are also going to produce a fingerplay. Karen becomes irate that her classmates are thinking about copying her (or actually Elizabeth's) good idea and nothing Barb or I says appeases her. Face red, jaw set, voice angry, she tosses her hair and sticks out her lower lip, "We just want to be like all the other special people," she declares hotly. Certainly this longing to "be like all the other special people," to be recognized as competent, unique, and proficient, enters into children's decisions to place artifacts in their portfolios.

The Best One Ms. Wilcox Likes: Demonstrating Connections to School Adults

Although most of the children focus on documenting their connections to peers, several also include artifacts that demonstrate their connections to adults at school. Karen places a story about the first week of school in her portfolio, which she uses to make a connection to her new teacher, "This is the story of my new class. It tells about lots of stuff. My teacher's name is Mrs. Wilson. She is nice."

Surprisingly, Robbie, the class rebel, also demonstrates connections to school adults. Although he often has trouble concentrating, in October, Robbie spends almost the entire morning in front of the computer composing a horror story, "The Haunted House." Impressed by his efforts, I leave a note for Barb, who is absent. After reading my note, she throws it away. Robbie fishes the paper out of the trash and puts the note, as well as the final draft of "The Haunted House," in his portfolio. I think perhaps he is trying to show a piece moving from beginning to final draft), and ask about the story, but

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Robbie responds, "The one you wrote. I wanted to keep that cuz I like you."
Another day he shows me the same artifact and says, "This is my haunted
house story. The best one that Mrs. Wilcox likes is, the best part that Mrs.
Wilcox likes is," he reads through it, searching out my favorite part,
"'Mayday,' the witch cried, 'mayday.'"

Robbie's connections to adults at school extend beyond the walls of his
own classroom. When a substitute asks him to create a list of rules for the
ideal school, Robbie responds with the following list (See Figure 4-1). The
substitute, amused by his ideas for school improvement, sends him to the
main building to read his rules to Lynn, the principal. Robbie decides that if
the piece is worthy of an office reading, it is also worthy of his portfolio and
writes a reflection, "I like this. I figure it's kind of funny so I gave it to Mrs.
Johnson."

Figure 4-1: Robbie's School Rules

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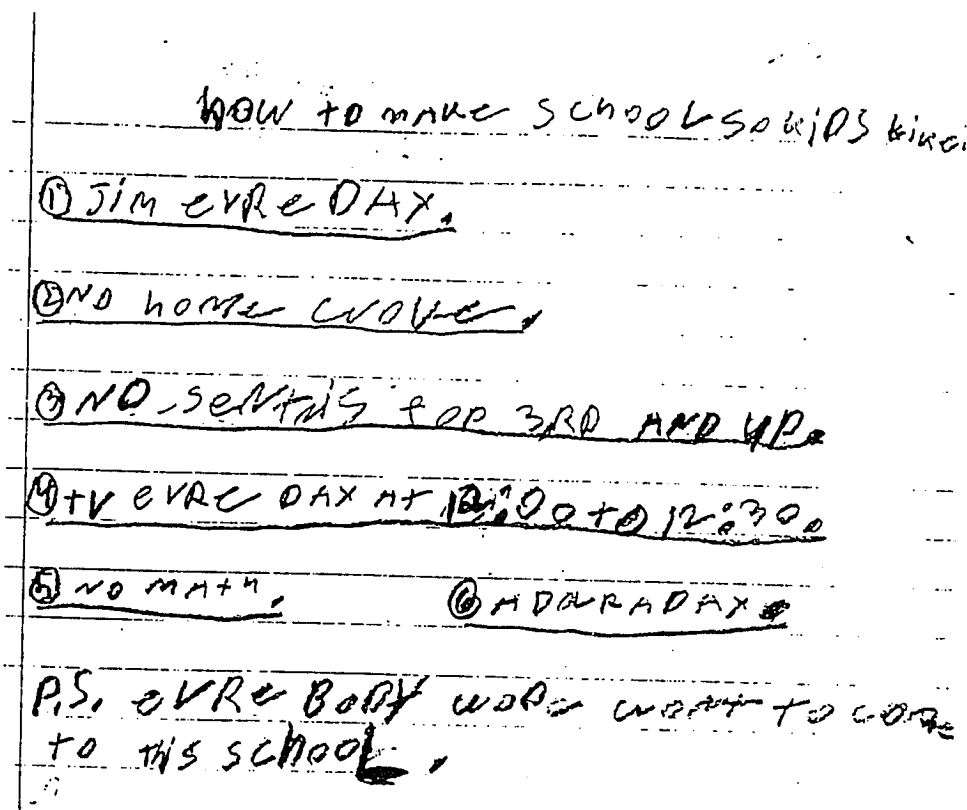
Child and Adult Shaping

Barb and I interact constantly with the children about their portfolios. We continually point out accomplishments, exclaim over growth, and suggest possible artifacts. When Robbie, who usually writes in a messy, half-lowercase, half-uppercase scrawl, writes his first note in cursive, I exclaim over its attractiveness, then say, "You should put that in your portfolio, Robbie, that's a milestone for you!" When Kate reads *Anne of Green Gables*, breaking a series of what seems like a hundred *Babysitter Club* books, I suggest that she should put the book in her portfolio to demonstrate her growth in reading. Robbie and Kate have the option of rejecting my suggestions but the children rarely do. One might argue, then, that these artifacts are not entirely student-selected, but rather occur as a result of our adult interactions with the third graders.

Barb and I also respond when we perceive that children don't have the skills or the words to adequately express themselves. Karen, for instance, places her Thanksgiving story in her portfolio because she is excited about using dialogue for the first time and also about receiving positive feedback from peers for her use of humor. In her reflection, however, she simply says, "This is my Thanksgiving story. I like it." Barb helps Karen to more accurately describe this accomplishment, suggesting that she might want to mention her use of dialogue and her peers' reaction.

Other times, Barb and I respond to student needs through the means of large group instruction. When Barb sees that several of the children's portfolios are stuffed to overflowing, she teaches the third graders how to sift through their artifacts and remove artifacts that are no longer relevant. When she notices that many of the children represent themselves as readers far more extensively than they do as writers, she teaches a mini-lesson on

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using a checklist to achieve balance in the portfolios.

Thus, adults' and children's worlds intersect or merge in ways that make it difficult to discern which is which. Although it would be difficult to demonstrate causality, one cannot help but believe our adult interactions, modeling, and instruction have some influence over the children, either in guiding or refining their self-evaluative behaviors and reflections. For the next few pages, I will explore some of these intersections.

Logistics and Aesthetics

Teaching children to logically and attractively organize their portfolios is an important skill. Barb is especially skilled in this area and many times throughout the year she does mini-lessons related to the aesthetics or logistics of portfolio keeping. Often these mini-lessons are quick and impromptu, done in response to a particular child or situation, e.g., how to use the three hole punch correctly, or how to write reflections on colored index cards so that they can be easily identified by portfolio viewers.

Other times, the logistical mini-lessons are more complex. In late April, for instance, Barb demonstrates how to use a "portfolio checklist" as a way of monitoring the balance between home and school, or between reading and writing artifacts in the portfolios (See Figure 4-2). Barb presents the checklist not as a mandate, but rather as an organizational tool which enables the third graders to see what kinds of things they have included in their portfolios and what areas might be missing. Many of the children then use this checklist as a starting point for creating their own tables of contents (See Figure 4-3).

Figure 4-2: Portfolio Checklist

Name   _ _ _ _

PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST

Introduction to Portfolio _

Reading Genre Chart ✓ ✓ _ _

Book Reflections ✓ ✓ _ _ _

List of Favorite Books ✓✓

Goals in Reading ✓
When met _ ✓ _ _Proof _ ✓ _ _

Spelling Test Performance Chart✓✓

Handwriting Sample ✓ _ _

Favorite Published Stories ✓ _ _

Rough Drafts ✓ ✓ _

Goals in Writing ✓
When met ✓ _ _ _ Proof ✓ _ _ _

Things from Home _ ✓ _ _

Math Progress ✓ ✓ _ _ _

Things That Show I'm
a Learner ✓ ✓ _ _ _

All About Me ✓✓

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Figure 4-3: Patrick's Table of Contents

ReaDing WRithing and Stof 123456
7 ...   paNoS 8 ....
CARFiLa.9.. ..
hS+P1 BRaS1i+ 10..,,..
Helleen 11...,,
MANNEERS MATTER 12...-
Small Silly StoRy 13.,,,,,
Mo+h 14.,,,,
Pi chiR 15.,,,,

Another week, Barb does a mini-lesson on Welcome Letters. She reads the letter from the front of her portfolio, explains that it helps people know why she keeps a portfolio and what kinds of things she includes, then encourages children to write their own letters. This activity, however, does not prove nearly so popular with the third graders. Although many elect to include "All About Me" pieces in the front of their portfolios, few write welcome letters, despite the fact that Barb and I both have them in our portfolios. Perhaps we do not provide enough explicit instruction.

Documenting Accomplishments: Part Two

In early March, we are concerned that the children's reflections indicate that they view their portfolios as scrapbooks of favorite things, rather than documents of learning. The third graders are much more likely to reflect, "This is my story, I like it, it's neat!" than to discuss the significance of the artifact in terms of more "writerly" characteristics, e.g., "This is the first mystery story I've written," or "I worked hard at including dialogue in this story."

In response to this concern, I teach a mini-lesson on portfolios as a place to record and discuss accomplishments. First, the third graders and I define accomplishments as "things that you started and you finished and you are proud of, that you feel really good about having done." Then I share some of the milestones from my portfolio. Recognizing that the children have a variety of interests, talents and values, I deliberately show accomplishments from several different aspects of my life— athletics, academics, art/technology and writing. I make sure, before I share these artifacts, that the reflections are detailed and explicit. I don't necessarily expect that the eight-year-olds will copy my reflections, but I do want them to move beyond, "It's special and I

like it."

Artifact #1- A race bib from the "Bolder Boulder" 10K Road Race
A few years I decided I wanted to start running and some friends asked me to run a six mile race with them. I said, 'I can't run six miles, that's way too far for me. And they said, 'Well if you keep practicing and you try your hardest, you probably can.'...(The children are impressed by this accomplishment until David asks if I won and I have to tell them that I was probably about 2/3 of the way back in the pack of 20,000 racers!)

Artifact #2- Acceptance letter from UNH
When I decided I wanted to come to school at the University of New Hampshire... lots and lots of people applied...so when I got in, I was really proud of myself... this is a letter from the dean, kind of like the principal of your school saying, 'Congratulations, we want you to come to school in New Hampshire.'

Artifact #3- Autobiographical Book Catalogue (Course Project for Autobiography) done on "Pagemaker"
A couple of years ago, I was trying to learn to use a new computer program... and it was very hard for me and it took me lots and lots of tries to learn how to do it. These are all the drafts of me learning to do that program and this is what it looks like when I finally learned it. I was really proud of myself, because the computer is not that easy for me.

Artifact #4: "Ryan: What Goes in a First Grade Portfolio?" Article published in *Reading Teacher* magazine.
A couple of years ago, I wrote a paper and people really liked the details I used and said you should send that to a magazine to be published...in September, just this fall, I got this published and that was my first thing that I got published in a magazine and I was really proud of myself that I had done that.

After sharing my accomplishments, I turn the conversation back to the third graders, "You've learned a lot of new things this year, so I thought that we would make a list of your accomplishments (I point to a piece of chart paper I've hung on the chalkboard), then you can decide which ones you want to represent in your portfolios." The children's list includes school learning—writing cursive, multiplying, reading a chapter book or series of books and

writing a poem or play, but also moves beyond school boundaries to include shooting a basket, driving a snowmobile, and skiing for the first time. I send the children back to their seats, encouraging them to select a personal accomplishment of which they are particularly proud, somehow represent that in their portfolios, then to write a reflection which truly explains why that accomplishment is important. An hour later, when we meet for a large group share, the children display reading responses and pieces of writing, xeroxed book covers, math tests and crayoned drawings of ski and snowmobile trips.

Demonstrating Growth: Part Two

Most of the third graders talk about their growth in fairly general terms. Again, Barb and I want the children to be more specific. In January, then, I conduct individual growth conferences with several students. We sit on the floor in the class library, first and second quarter writing samples spread out in front of us. Jonathan has a piece about his parents from November and a January story about backing a golf cart over his younger brother. As he looks over the two stories I ask, "When you look at this story... what do you notice that you know now that you didn't know in your first writing sample?"

Referring to his January piece, Jonathan says, "That I didn't make as many, I didn't make any mistakes, like I did on this (the story from November) I just put capitals and periods and I put in other words, because it didn't sound right, but I didn't really forget periods... so I think I learned more...I know how to spell more words."

Hoping for more, I ask, "Like what words, what do you know how to spell now, that you didn't spell right in that (first) story?"

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Jonathan grins slyly. For about a month, I have been teasing him that every time he misspells "they," that I am going to make him prick his finger and write the word five times in blood. Today, he says, "Well, like I spelled they t-h-a-y (in November), but in this one, I wrote 't-h-e-y' and I got it right."

I ask, "Is there anything else that you know about writing that you didn't know when you wrote this one?" and Jonathan indicates that there isn't. After several more futile attempts, I decide to model the process. I read a sentence or two aloud, stopping every time I notice that Jonathan has used a convention correctly. (A year later, I wonder why I also didn't point out places where his writing was especially skillful). By the time we have reached the end of his story, the list is quite lengthy:

Things Jonathan know about writing
- Puts a title on a story
- Puts the capitals
- Puts periods, "I used to forget periods"
- Puts in a lot of action
- Capitalizes letter "I"
- Knows how to spell they
- Knows how to use an apostrophe to show belonging
- Knows how to spell more words
- Knows how to drop the "e," when he adds "ing"
- Knows names start with capitals
- Knows how to use "ed" to show something that happened before now

We repeat the process with Jonathan's November writing, this time he does most of the work.

Things Jonathan knew in November
- How to spell "Leftie" and "Rightie"
- Uses a title
- Uses commas in a list

Then I ask him to look forward. "What are some things you still want to learn? What's hard for you about writing?"

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Jonathan says, "Not knowing when to put exclamation points and stuff like that...periods, question marks, talking marks. I think that's it." Jonathan places the lists from our conference in his portfolio but doesn't choose to include the writing samples. In my adult mind this somewhat defeats the purpose of a growth conference, but Jonathan is satisfied and nothing I say changes his mind.

In early June, Barb tries a whole class growth conference. She passes out the children's "Finished Story" booklets and asks the third graders to lay their most current pieces of writing next to the first stories in their booklets. Using Ashley's work as an example, Barb says, "One of the things I really noticed was the fact that Ashley's first story (a personal narrative about a family outing to an amusement park) and the story she is working on now (a mystery about the Olson twins) are very different. A lot of changes have taken place in Ashley's writing over the course of the year." Barb has Ashley read the stories aloud, then asks the children what changes they notice. Jonathan thinks Ashley is using more interesting characters, Alison thinks she has better description, Maria says there is more information, Julie comments on sentence length. Melissa says, "She doesn't always say I, I, I..." and Barb expands on this, "She changes the language, she has different sentence beginnings, it's not the same word over and over and over again beginning each sentence. Her sentences are longer and more complex."

Barb reads Ashley's second story aloud again, particularly emphasizing some of the more unusual words and phrases, e.g.,, "the door *slammed,*" "*bursting out* with tears," "*trapped* in our cabin," then asks the third graders, "What do you notice about the words?" The children suggest that Ashley's newest story uses harder or more challenging words.

Then Barb asks the children to look at their own work, "I would like

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you to see what changes you notice between first story you wrote and the story you are working on now. Look at the kinds of words you use, the length of your stories. What I would like you to do is make a list of differences you see between the two pieces of writing."

Maria compares one of her first stories, "Mrs. French Fry Face," with her autobiography, "My Life." Her list of improvements includes:

- Tells more about my life
- Compleyated (complicated) sentences
- Grab etention (attention)
- Longer and better stories
- Better sentences

Looking at his two stories, Patrick says the major differences are that his stories are longer, he can spell better, he writes mysteries now and he uses more challenging words. Karen believes that her most recent piece, "The Haunted House" is more imaginative, has good description, has longer sentences and is more interesting. Elizabeth's newest piece has more dialogue, it's longer, she doesn't stop, she can use quotation marks, and she has more details. Barb suggests that the children put their two stories, along with their reflections about their growth, in their portfolios. Most, however, leave the lists in their writing folders, where they become just another completed rough draft.

Why Are Self-Representation and Connection Important?

As adults, we are sometimes tempted to dismiss or minimize children's self-representations or social work as less important than the more "academic" artifacts that also appear in the portfolios. I would argue, however, that these representations of self and demonstrations of connection are far more important than adults generally realize. Children who have not

developed boundaries of self, including an awareness of their likes and dislikes, and an understanding of themselves as growing and changing historical beings, cannot be expected to self-evaluate. Evaluation involves asserting a certain amount of confidence, the ability to assume agency, or exercise control over one's life. Evaluation also means being able to disconnect one's self from one's experience or product (Newkirk, 1988), a task which is much more easily accomplished if a person has a clear sense of self. Additionally, evaluation is almost always a social negotiation between two parties. It involves assuming another's point of view, stepping outside one's self to see through another's eyes, applying another's set of standards to our product or performance. This would seem almost impossible if one had not established relationships or some awareness of the expectations, feelings, and needs of others.

Predictably, children who had the most trouble developing portfolios and evaluating their reading and writing were those who appeared to have the weakest sense of self or the most difficulty establishing connections with others. Julie, for instance, lived with her father, a teenage brother and sister, and a younger brother. Sometimes her mother lived with the family, at other times, she lived in a neighboring town. By all appearances, life at Julie's house was chaotic— she rarely brought a snack, didn't have warm clothes, often complained of fatigue, and occasionally spoke of going to visit her teenage siblings at a youth detention facility. She relied heavily on Maria to provide security and direction, and on the days Maria was gone, Julie floated waif-like from task to task, accomplishing little. Julie had few items from home in her portfolio and rarely, if ever, included a new artifact of her own initiative. On the days when Barb asked children to place a particular artifact in their portfolios, e.g., "Put in something that shows you as a reader," Julie

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generally copied Maria. When we conferred about her portfolio, Julie stared blankly or gave answers that made little sense. Her diminished sense of self appeared to strongly detract from her ability to evaluate her reading and writing.

We might also consider how we could capitalize on children's evaluative standards. Knowing, for instance, that the third graders evaluated their writing according to criteria such as "first," "best," length, and conventionality, perhaps we could evaluate by many of these same qualities. Some of the children's criteria might have to be modified slightly; length, for instance, does not always contribute to good writing. We might amend that criteria then, to ask, "Did you tell everything you needed to tell?" "Did you leave out details that were not important?" Additionally, we might introduce a few of our own adult criteria, e.g., words create pictures in readers' head, ideas are logically organized. We could then work with the children to create a tool, such as Figure 4-4.

We also need to capitalize on the third graders' desire for connection and social acceptability to help them improve as evaluators. Maybe we could initiate a new kind of portfolio conference, an oral rehearsal which would occur prior to children writing reflections. The child could meet with one or two peers to share her artifact and consider its significance. Her peers could ask any questions or make any comments they wanted. These interactions might help the child more clearly see the artifact through the eyes of an audience, which would hopefully lead to more detailed, explicit reflections. Too, if other children were more skillful self-evaluators, such conversations might provide the child with a model for writing better reflections.

Perhaps we could also more actively incorporate peer assessment into the evaluation process. After a child completed a finished draft and evaluated

it according to the guide sheet described above, she might ask two or three of her peers to evaluate the story. (Children would have to be carefully trained to effectively participate in this activity). If their evaluations of the piece differed by more than a point from the author's evaluations, the two would get together to negotiate. The author would submit the piece, along with the evaluations, to the teacher. The teacher would do an additional evaluation. If the child desired, the entire document could be included in her portfolio.

Figure 4-4: Sample Writing Evaluation Guide Sheet

Name _____

Date _____

Title of piece _____

Rate your piece according to the following criteria. (1- I didn't do this well, 5- I did a great job of this).

	You	Teacher
1. Completeness Did you tell everything you needed to tell? Did you leave out things that weren't important?	____	_____
2. Conventionality Did you do use capitals, periods, etc. correctly?	____	_____
3. Visualization Did you use details that created pictures in the readers' head?	____	_____
4. Organization Did you organize this piece logically?	____	_____
5. Effort Did you try your hardest?	____	_____
6. Risk taking Did you try something new on this piece? Tell what you tried _____	____	_____

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In Conclusion

The third graders' portfolios, then, were a place where they acted upon developmental issues (Kegan, 1982). They delineated their boundaries through self-representation— defining preferences, and documenting history, growth, and accomplishments. They also demonstrated their connectedness to other people, their social acceptability, and their unique talents. Sometimes their artifacts were self-initiated, other times children placed artifacts in the portfolios as a result of interactions or suggestions with their peers, us, or other adults. Barb and I attempted to support the children's efforts by teaching strategies or vocabulary the children appeared to need. The evaluative world of children, then, often meshed messily with our adult world. Other times, Barb and I initiated activities based on our desires or purposes for the portfolios. In Chapter Five, I will delineate our specific teaching interactions.

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CHAPTER V

THE PORTFOLIOS UNFOLD: PART TWO

Pennington teachers want students to use their portfolios not only to represent themselves as readers, writers, and learners, but also to become increasingly proficient evaluators of their literacy. These teachers recognize that self-evaluation, like most skills, must be demonstrated, taught, and practiced. To that end, adults use their own portfolios as models, provide explicit instruction about evaluation, push children to write increasingly detailed reflections, and confer extensively with children about their portfolios. In this chapter, then, I will detail adult attempts to help the children use their portfolios to develop the behaviors and habits of mind so critical to independent, skillful learning. I will also discuss how adult efforts are impacted and molded by cultural and institutional forces.

Outside Influences

One cannot consider the adult shaping of the portfolios, without first considering how adults are being impacted by the context in which they work. The third graders' portfolios are shaped not only by Barb (and I), but also by the more indirect expectations placed on us as adults working in an institutional setting. First, Barb is impacted by the "portfolio culture" at the school (Gee, 1992). Pennington teachers have collectively agreed, both explicitly and implicitly, upon a vision for the portfolios. This collective vision includes certain understandings, e.g., that all portfolios will be in

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white, three-ring binders, that the portfolios will focus on literacy development (as opposed to the development of math, science, or art), that all artifacts will have written reflections, etc. These common expectations enable the portfolios to continue from year to year with a minimum of confusion or disruption. Within the Pennington guidelines, teachers have room for their individual teaching styles. Certain teachers, for instance, are very directive, others are more laidback, some focus heavily on the aesthetics of portfolio keeping, others see the physical appearance of the portfolios as less important. The collegial atmosphere at Pennington promotes much talk about pedagogy and teachers frequently share successful ideas over lunch in the teacher's lounge and then see those mini-lessons, perhaps with modifications, taught in class after class after class. Staff developer Linda Ross also teaches mini-lessons throughout the school, passes out articles, and recommends workshops which shape teachers' visions of the portfolios.

Teachers are also being forced to respond to district mandates. Although the PALS project started at Pennington, where it was understood that the portfolios would belong to the children, officials at the district level are becoming increasingly interested in using portfolios as a large-scale evaluation tool in the not-too-distant future. As a preliminary measure, the district requires students to have a list of books read, as well as a response to at least one book and an audiotape of their oral reading in their portfolios. They also require children to have a minimum of four writing samples. Within these parameters, there is some room for choice, e.g., while children have to include book responses and writing in their portfolios, no particular formats, authors, or genres are mandated. These district and school requirements impact Barb as she makes decisions about the shaping of the portfolios.

Instruction Toward Skillfulness

Vygotsky (1986) suggests that children's growth and development occur as a result of intentionality on the part of the adult. "Instruction," declares Vygotsky, "is one of the principal sources of the school child's concepts and is also a powerful force in directing their evolution, it determines the fate of the total mental development" (p. 157). He continues,

> Instruction usually precedes development. The child acquires certain habits and skills in a given area before she learns to apply them consciously....in the child's development, imitation and instruction play a major role. They bring out the specifically human qualities of the mind and lead the child to new developmental levels...What the child can do in cooperation today, she can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it, it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening functions (p. 188).

Diaz, Neal, and Amaya-Williams (1990) argue that adults must take an active role in the development of children's skillfulness and independence, saying, "Self-regulation, the [individual's] capacity to plan, guide, and monitor his or her own behavior from within and flexibly adjust according to changing circumstances" (p. 130) does not automatically occur, rather instruction plays an important role in the developmental process, "The process from other to self-regulation, from joint to independent problem solving does not simply happen automatically or by chance but rather involves very specific teaching interactions on the part of the adult" (1991, p. 138).

While most "portfolio teachers" would probably agree that instruction is necessary to effective portfolios and self-evaluation, few know precisely what these teaching interactions should look like. Indeed, only in the last two or three years have teachers truly begun writing about exactly how they help

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children self-evaluate (Berger, 1991; Coughlin, 1993a, 1993b; Glazer & Brown, 1993; Hansen, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1994; Harris, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d; Porter & Cleland, 1995; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993; Silvers, 1994; Simons, 1993; Sunstein & Graves (Eds.), 1992; Swain, 1994; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Vizyak, 1994; Visovatti; 1994; Wilcox, 1993). Before we began this project, Barb had used literacy portfolios for two years. I had worked with portfolios as a staff developer and educational consultant for a little over three. Both of us recognized the need for direct instruction and adult intervention in helping students learn to self-evaluate, and had experimented with mini-lessons such as selecting artifacts and writing reflections.

Barb and I also knew we wanted the third graders to use their portfolios to set goals, make plans, become strategic, and evaluate their writing by outside criteria, although I'm not sure either of us could articulate why (I know I couldn't, my own understanding, or at least my ability to discuss the difference between evaluative and instructional portfolios did not come until almost a year after I left the research site). These weren't necessarily behaviors the children were displaying on their own, nor were they things children expressed an interest in learning. Rather, they were skills that we saw as critical to our vision of one of the portfolio's primary purposes, that of creating skillful, independent, lifelong learners. We knew that these behaviors would probably not develop without direct intervention from adults.

The instruction Barb and I provided was the best we knew how to do at the time. We did what made sense, what we thought would work. A year later, I know what we did was a rough approximation of what we would do now. In recent phone conversations, Barb has detailed changes she has made as a result of what we learned during this project. I constantly see the imprint

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of what we learned on my current work in Manchester. I offer these explanations not as apology, but rather as a way of suggestion that good teaching is a matter of making one's best approximation, reflecting on what's working and what needs to change, and continually improving one's practice. During this year, Barb and I engaged in the same thoughtful, critical self-evaluation we are seeking from our students.

Written Reflections

Jane Hansen (1992b, 1992c, 1994; see also Wilcox, 1993b) identifies five specific steps in assembling portfolios. First, children must collect possible artifacts, then they select which items will comprise their portfolios. After selecting artifacts, children engage in what Pennington teachers would probably identify as the most critical step in assembling portfolios, they reflect on the significance of artifacts. As children reflect, they develop the deep thoughtfulness, the habits of mind, that are a central focus of portfolios at Pennington. Reflecting on the significance of past work also provides a foundation from which children can project forward and think about how their learning might affect them in the future. This enables them to begin setting goals and making plans for later achievements. Thus learning becomes a continually regenerating cycle of goal setting, planning, doing, evaluating, goal setting, etc.

In the Pennington portfolios, self-evaluation occurs in the form of dated written reflections that accompany each artifact. The youngest children sometimes dictate their reflections to a teacher, instructional assistant, or parent, but by third grade children write, revise, and edit their own. In each reflection, the child is expected to first identify the artifact, then state why it is included in the portfolio, e.g., "I'm putting *Vampires Don't Wear Polka Dots*

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in my portfolio because this is the first chapter book I ever read. I really like this series. I want to read some more of them." These reflections are often written on colored index cards, although children write lengthier reflections, such as reading responses, on white penmanship paper or type them on the computer (See Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1: Sample Written Reflections

This is my first Handwriteing paper. at the end of the year I am going to put in my last Handwriting paper to show you what I Learned.

Elizabeth

Nov. 12, 1993

I Put This InheR Because, ITs like a minn SiRos To me

Patrick
"I put this in here
because it's like a
mini-series to me."

JUne 17 1994

I Proved this By Getting more interesting Books. these are my favorite Books. They have longer chapters and longer Words. next year I plan to read the little house books.

Karen

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Anytime Barb or I confer with a child about an artifact or anytime a child shares, she is expected to first identify the significance of the artifact by reading her reflection aloud. Barb and I continually, constantly, repeatedly push children to be more explicit or to expand or extend their reflections (Hansen, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1994), asking questions such as:

- Why is this in your portfolio?
- What does this show about you as a reader, writer or learner?
- Is there anything else you think will be important for people to know?
- What was especially easy/difficult about this learning for you?
- What do you want to do next?

Very often, children revise their reflections as a result of these conferences (Vygotsky, 1986). Talking to Karen about her *Magic Coin* reflection, for instance, Barb might say, "Do you remember when you told me that you didn't used to understand that chapter books were different than story collections, so you didn't know that you had to read the chapters in order? I think that's something people might find helpful to know about how you are growing as a reader." Barb would encourage Karen to include this information in her reflection. If she had done anything else especially notable, e.g., used summarizing strategies for the first time, written really good reading responses, or made interesting connections to other books, Barb might also push her to discuss those behaviors in her reflection.

Most of the third graders' reflections do become more explicit with time and much adult interaction and prompting. Talking about her "Magic Boots" story in October, for instance, Elizabeth says, "I like this story. I put it in my portfolio because I like the Cloud Man (sic) and the Devil Man (sic) and when the magic boots fly." Later in the year, perhaps demonstrating her

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growing understanding of literary techniques and the need for more detailed reflections, she revises the "Magic Boots" reflection, "I like this story. I put it in my portfolio because I like the Cloud Man and the Devil Man and I like when the boots fly. I like to write fiction stories."

In June, Elizabeth, writing a reflection about her animal report, demonstrates that her self-evaluative abilities have progressed further when she discusses not only product, but also specific aspects of her learning, "I put this in my portfolio because I wanted to show people that I learned how to do reports and I learned about a certain kind of animal. When I learned how to do reports I learned how to set them up! I learned how to do all this in third grade." My next step would be to ask her what particular things she learned about how to write reports and how she thought she might use that learning in the future.

Our adult voices, then, are ever-present in the children's reflections. In this way, more than any other, adults shape and mold the children's portfolios, and probably their thinking (Vygotsky, 1986).

Documenting Reading and Writing

In response to school and district requirements, certain Fridays are devoted to selecting or developing specific reading or writing artifacts for the portfolios. In early October, for instance, Barb asks the third graders to choose a favorite book and write a two paragraph response. She models the activity by reading aloud a book response from her own portfolio:

> As a child I loved fairy tales, especially the ones where the handsome prince ends up marrying the maiden. My affinity for romantic stories has grown over the years and Laverle Spencer has gained the status of being one of my favorite authors. I have read all of her books and especially enjoy the comfortable feeling of not having to ponder or analyze any elements of the story...

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Forgiving is Laverle Spencer's most recently published paperback novel. It is the story of Sarah Merritt, a young woman who comes to a rugged Western town in the 1870's...I find Spencer's characters to be believable, the events exciting and I enjoy the vivid, realistic description of the setting. For the few hours that it takes me to read these stories, I am transported to different times and places and of course, like the fairy tales I so loved as a child, *Forgiving* comes with the traditional conclusion that they live happily ever after.

Barb then asks the children to select their favorite third grade books and write two paragraph reflections. The first paragraph should create a picture of the child as a reader: what kinds of books she/he reads, what she/he likes/dislikes about reading, what she/he finds especially easy or difficult. The second paragraph should be a summary and reaction to the book. Barb also invites the children to create some sort of artistic response, perhaps a drawing or construction paper collage of the cover or a favorite part. The third graders share their writing and art in a large group meeting at the end of the morning and for several days thereafter.

The next Friday Barb is absent so I do the mini-lesson. I ask children to go through their writing folders and select pieces that show their capabilities as writers. I list the steps on the board:

1. Go through your writing folder. Pick a piece of writing that shows you as a writer.

2. Write a reflection.

3. Put the piece in your portfolio.

I remind children that the reflections should tell people why the artifacts are including in their portfolios. Unfortunately, or maybe stupidly, I do not use my own portfolio to model this activity, although it contains many writing samples, complete with reflections, that would have been appropriate. I also

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do not give any more explicit directions about what might go in the reflections.

Several of the third graders, all boys, have a hard time selecting writing. Jonathan and Luis choose stories that aren't yet finished; David, Patrick, and Robbie don't select anything at all. I am not sure whether their difficulties are related to my lack of modeling, or whether having only been in school a month, they simply don't have enough pieces to choose from. Later in the year, the children place many different kinds of writing— personal narratives, research reports, plays, poems, and letters— in their portfolios, but not in response to this mini-lesson.

In early November, at the end of the first quarter, Barb teaches the third graders how to create lists of books read and how to classify and graph their reading according to genre; they also graph the percentage scores from their weekly spelling tests. The children repeat these activities every nine weeks and the completed lists and graphs then became part of the learning documented in their portfolios.

Learning to Judge by Criteria

Educators who write about helping children learn to self-evaluate frequently suggest that evaluation should be primarily for the learner. Linda Rief, for example, argues,

> Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are the tools students work with to create meaning for their own purposes. I value students who are able to think, create, communicate, and reflect with those tools...That reflection on where they've been where they are now, and how they got there is what real learning is all about...This is the kind of evaluation that matters because it is for (students). Who else is evaluation for? (1992, p. 145, 147).

While I hugely respect Rief's work, and while I believe the overarching goal of evaluation should always be to help the learner move toward skillful independence, I also believe evaluation must serve audiences beyond the learner. Evaluation is not simply for the learner, instead, evaluation is most often a social interaction or negotiation between two or more people. One party creates and presents a product, the other reviews and judges it by his/her criteria. In the case of schools, evaluation generally involves adults looking at children's work and assessing signs of increased proficiency or movement toward conventionality.

Evaluation, then, is not only for students. Evaluation must also provide a way of demonstrating and communicating student progress to the world outside the classroom— other teachers, administrators, and probably most importantly, parents and the community. These outside audiences are long schooled in a tradition of competition and production. They live in uncertain economic times in which it is harder and harder to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. They want the best for their children. They want children who can survive, compete, have a better life than they have (Newkirk, 1991). It is unrealistic and probably irresponsible to expect that they would be satisfied by a child's simplistic evaluation of less than proficient reading or writing. If teachers expect students' self-evaluative efforts, then, to commandeer any respect, there must be some evidence that the child is moving toward adult/real world standards of conventionality or proficiency.

One of the skills we must teach our students, then is the ability to judge their work by criteria, both those created by themselves and those created by outside viewers. Although teachers constantly apply criteria to judge student work and would probably agree that proficient learners are skilled at deciding what an audience needs/wants and then fulfilling those

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requirements, little has been done in the area of teaching children to judge their work either by their own criteria or that of others. For Barb and I, this was a new endeavor, and one where we engaged in several cycles of approximating , failing, reflecting, and trying again.

Good Writing Criteria

Early October. I have been watching children evaluate themselves as writers for about a month. I had expected that these third graders, immersed in high quality children's literature and writing workshops since the beginning of their school careers (if not sooner), would evaluate their writing on any number of literary criteria. I am more than a little surprised, then, at my initial findings. The third graders, it seems, evaluate not on qualities that Barb and I as adults consider literary or even important, e.g., development of characters, setting or plot, strong leads and conclusions, specificity, interesting language— but rather on a number of qualities most adults (myself included) would probably consider relatively insignificant. First, the children evaluate on the basis of what I identify as physical features, qualities that make a story "look" good. Clearly their most important criteria for judging a piece is length; when I ask the third graders to evaluate their writing, again and again they tell me how long or how "big" their stories are, how many pages they've filled, how the length of the stories compares to the length of their previous stories, or better yet, the length of their peers' stories. The eight-year-olds also think their writing (and even that of published authors) is especially good if it has been typed on the computer or if the handwriting and spelling are especially well done. Sometimes, the children evaluate on the basis of affective criteria— a story is good if it's about a fun topic, e.g., a birthday party or a trip to the amusement park (Hilgers, 1984, 1986; Newkirk, 1988); funny

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and scary stories also rate high in their estimation. Social and "moral" criteria occasionally enter in— writing is good, for example, if it includes a friend or family member or if the author tells "what really happened and doesn't lie" or good prevails in the end.

When I share my early results with Barb, she writes me a note, "To be truthful, if asked to outline a series of steps to climb on the path to good writing or reading, I would frantically pore over my teacher training textbooks for some expert's handy-dandy chart! I think I can <u>recognize</u> the products of quality but as to what had to be achieved to get there???..."

The week I share my preliminary findings with Barb, I face a very similar dilemma in the undergraduate reading methods course I am teaching for the first time. My students are completing their first major paper, a personal narrative about a reading memory. The Thursday before the papers are due, they confront me almost angrily. "What do you want for this paper?" they say, "What will you be grading on?" I'm taken aback. I have never been in the position of evaluating an adult's work, and I realize I am not sure how I will grade their papers. "Well, you know...," my voice trails off and I stand before the class confused. My students don't know and all of a sudden, I recognize that I don't know either. What do I want? Although I write reasonably well, I'm not sure I can identify the five or ten characteristics of good writing for my students. I know I don't want to simply attach letter grades to their work. Instead, I want to evaluate my undergraduates in ways that are constructive. I want to help them identify strengths in their writing, to know what they do well so that they can fall back on those techniques again. I want them to become more competent, more confident, more independent, more self- aware. At the same time, I want their writing to be

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acceptable to me and to the outside world. What kind of criteria encompass all of those desires?

I buy time, tell my students I will bring a list of criteria to the next class, then spend my weekend poring over books about writing, and over assignments I have had, trying to create acceptable criteria for grading. My finished criteria sheet (see Figure 5-2) feels good, but not great. I am not entirely satisfied that I have chosen criteria that are important or that will help my students improve as writers. I am also not sure that I feel good about imposing my criteria on my students and wonder how I might have brought their voices into the evaluation process.

Figure 5- 2: Criteria Sheet- Carol's University Reading Methods Course

Personal Narrative- Reading/Writing History
3-5 pages double spaced final copy, all previous drafts of paper, Dear Carol letter, this criteria sheet attached to front.
Due: Thursday, September 23, 1993
No late papers unless you make arrangements by 9/21/93.

Select an experience or series of experiences from your reading and writing history. Tell the story of that/those experience(s). What happened? Why was it significant? How did it affect who you are now or who you will be as a teacher?

Pieces will be evaluated on the following criteria. One column of this evaluation sheet is for self-evaluation. Please fill it out, and attach this sheet to the front of your paper. I will fill out the other column. If my scores differ by more than one point from yours, I will ask you to meet with me.

		You	CW

1. Ideas   (5) ____ ____
- Have you chosen experience(s) from your life?
- Have you dealt in specifics rather than generalities?
- Have you told the story clearly?

2. Focus/Organization   (5) ____ ____
- Does your piece have a focus?
- Does your piece follow a logical sequence?

3. Wording/language
- Do you have a strong lead?   (5) ____ ____
- Do you use language that creates pictures?
- Do you use language that's fresh, avoid stale cliches?

4. Voice   (5) ____ ____
- Can I hear you in this piece?
- Does your piece have energy?

5. Mechanics   (5) ____ ____
- Usage
- Punctuation
- Spelling

*****

Your piece should be accompanied by a one page "Dear Carol" letter. In this letter, please answer the following questions.

- Tell me about the process you went through in writing this piece.
- What/who helped you in writing this piece?
- What was hard about writing this piece?
- How does this piece compare to other things you have written?
- Did you learn anything in this piece that will help you in future writing? What?

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Over the next six or eight weeks, Barb and I return to the topic of teaching children to evaluate their work again and again. What constitutes good writing? How can we use evaluative criteria to help children develop as writers? In early December, we decide that despite our confusion, we will begin addressing the issue of good writing criteria more explicitly. One Friday, Barb asks the third graders to think of books they consider examples of good writing.

The children's responses vary widely. Kate selects *Boy Crazy Stacey*, "Because I'm boy crazy myself." Ron chooses *The Fastest Thing on Earth* because he loves motorcycles and motocross racing. Grant picks out *The Cat in the Hat* because he likes the rhyme. Alison rattles off a plot summary of *Just Tell Me When We're Dead* and finally concludes by saying that the book has a lot of action. Her story prompts Rhonda to say that she likes scary books, then Elizabeth says she likes scary books too, but she likes funny books even better. The third graders (who always like a good dirty joke) laugh hysterically as she recounts the story of Ellen Tebbits, a Beverly Cleary character that changes into her ballet leotard in a broom closet so that other members of her dance class won't see that her mother makes her wear long underwear. Barb translates their mirth into "Makes you feel an emotion," which she adds to the list on the board. Jonathan reads aloud from his book for several pages, then finally says, "I just like how his sister says, 'Hitta, hitta, hitta,' and then he always strikes out because she says that." Barb again translates into a more literary language, "You mean you like how the author uses dialogue?"

"Yeah," Jon says, "I guess."

By the time the children are finished, their list of good writing criteria includes:

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- Interesting topics
- Surprising parts
- Author creates a setting
- Good dialogue
- Good ending
- Good description
- Characters are animals who act like people
- Readers can connect to characters in story
- Good use of language
- Lots of action
- Exciting
- Makes you feel an emotion
- Different ways of telling the story (e.g., written in letter format)

When they go to art, Barb and I create a large chart with the children's criteria listed across the top and spaces for the names of books down the side.

Figure 5-3: Good Writing Criteria, Wall Chart

	Interesting Topics	Surprising Parts	Setting	Good Dialogue	Good Ending	Good Description
Mrs. Katz & Tush	✓	✓		✓		✓
Playing Sardines		✓	✓		✓	✓
Calvin's Christmas Wish	✓	✓			✓	
Lemon Drop Jar		✓			✓	✓

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The next Monday, Barb calls the third graders together in front of the chart and reviews the criteria they have selected:

> Last Friday, we talked about books that were good books. We tried to decide what the author had done in those books that had made those books such good books. And some of the things that you came up with that a good book might be a good book for you because it's an interesting topic, it might be about cars, or it might be about drawing or it might be about dogs, a topic that you particularly find interesting, and for that reason it might be a good book.
>
> It also might have a surprising part that you enjoy, if you're reading along and all of a sudden you're in for a surprise and that might make it a good book.
>
> Sometimes you might think a book is good because of the talking in the book that the people do, they may say some funny things, or they may help you understand the story a little better, or whatever.
>
> Another thing that might make a book a good book is the fact that you can connect, you might be able to really connect to the character. For example, I'm thinking about the book that Jonathan was talking about, *The Pizza Pie Slugger*, now he said it was a good book for a number of reasons but maybe he could really connect with that baseball player, the kid who was playing baseball. If you are a hockey player, and you read a story in which a boy is a hockey player, or a girl is a hockey player, you can sort of understand what that character is going through, you can connect with that character.
>
> Sometimes it might be the use of language that you really like in a book, the way someone says something, either a character or the author who makes the character say something.
>
> It may be that there's lots of action in the story, and that's what makes you like the book.
>
> It may be that it has a good ending, that works out just the way you would have wanted it to work out, and that is what makes it a good book.

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It may be that you can feel what the character feels and because you can feel what the character's feeling, that makes it a good book. Have you thought of any others since Friday, any other books that you really like and another reason why you think that was a good book?

The children don't have any new criteria, so Barb explains how we plan to use the chart to evaluate several different books.

This week what I'm going to try and do is read you some short stories that are good stories. And what we're going to be looking for is what makes them good stories. Now it might be some of the things that we've already listed up here, or it might be something completely different. You'll need to be listening and thinking and looking at the list. When I finish the story, we're going to check off the things that apply to this particular story.

Barb then reads aloud Patricia Polacco's *Mrs. Katz and Tush,* a book we both believe to be particularly well-written. When she finishes the story, she goes through the criteria one by one, and asks the third graders to vote on whether they think that quality is present in Polacco's writing. In the days that follow, she repeats this activity with other well-written picture books— *Playing Sardines, Calvin's Christmas Wish, The Ring and The Window Seat, Arthur's Christmas Wish* , and *The Lemon Drop Jar.* Each time, she reads the book aloud and then asks the children to evaluate it according to the good writing criteria they have selected.

Barb and I bring the children back to the writing criteria innumerable times throughout the year. We leave the chart on the wall in the meeting area and every two or three weeks, we review the qualities of good writing during read aloud time, sharing books we think might expose the children to criteria they hadn't thought about before, we use *Dear Peter Rabbit,* for example to demonstrate a story written in a different genre— notes and letters. We ask the children to use the criteria to evaluate their writing and

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that of professional authors during daily reading and writing conferences. One week we instruct the third graders to practice reading aloud a paragraph or episode from a book they think is particularly well-written, and then share it with the class. The rest of the children listen and respond on individual versions of the criteria chart. We make more copies of the individual charts and ask the third graders to judge their own writing and the writing they find in the books they are reading by these same criteria. For the most part, our efforts appear to be in vain.

Criteria Unused

Mid January. Elizabeth greets me in the morning with a well-worn copy of *Superfudge,* cover dirty and bent. "I got it for Christmas," she says, "but my sister threw it in the trash, that's why it's so wrinkled... I read it before but I'm going to read it again." She leafs through the book, pointing out different parts, chattering enthusiastically, giggling occasionally. "I like Fudge because he's always repeating what Peter says and he talks in his sleep, he goes, 'M-I-A-N-E spells Maine. P-E-T-R spells Peter,' and he puts stamps all over the babies and says, 'I want to trade the baby in for a bicycle like Peter's' because the stamps are all over the baby.'"

I try to turn her attention to the criteria for good writing. "If you had to look at those things up there (I point to the chart in my best Vanna White fashion) which ones would you choose?"

Elizabeth suddenly falls silent. "I don't know," she says dully.

I press a little, "What do you think?"

After a long uncomfortable pause, Elizabeth finally responds, "There's a lot of dialogue."

"Mmm-hmm," I say, hoping my minimal response will elicit a more extensive response. After another long pause, she finally says, "There's a good ending."

"Uh-huh," I say. Elizabeth, reading my cues, says, "I can't think of any others." I am struck by the excitement with which she discusses this book when she's just talking, as opposed to the flatness of the conversation when she's evaluating by the criteria I ask her to use. Elizabeth's silences and lack of enthusiasm are typical of most of her classmates. Although the chart is large, bold, and posted in a conspicuous place, the third graders basically ignore it. When I ask them to evaluate writing in this way, our conversations become strained, forced, halting. My questions about the criteria are followed by long, uncomfortable pauses after which the children respond with answers in questioning voices that clearly reflect their desire to please me or meet my adult mandates, rather than their own interests or evaluative standards.

Criteria Misinterpreted?

On those rare occasions when the third graders do use the criteria (usually under extreme coercion from Barb and I), their definitions of specific qualities of good writing differ greatly from our adult interpretations. This becomes apparent even on the very first day we attempt to evaluate books. That day, when Barb asks the children to analyze *Mrs. Katz and Tush*, several of the criteria, most noticeably, "Surprising Parts," bring some especially unexpected evaluations. Barb and I understand that criteria to mean, "Did the plot unfold predictably, or did the author send the story off in unexpected ways?" The third graders, however, latch onto "surprise," and interpret the word (maybe because of the upcoming Christmas holiday) in a more literal sense. Drawing, perhaps, on their own experiences, they say they are

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"surprised" when Mrs. Katz presents Jesse with a sweater she has knitted and when Jesse's cat has kittens. Another book, *Sardines*, is "surprising" because the children "surprise" each other in a game similar to hide and seek, and the book *Calvin's Christmas Wish* is also "surprising" because Calvin, the main character, receives a hoped for, but unexpected bicycle as a Christmas present. The children's understanding of "Surprising Parts," then, is much more literal than our adult interpretation of this criteria.

The children also interpret the criteria, "Good Ending" very differently. As adults, Barb and I interpret this to mean, "Did the author bring closure?" or "Did the ending satisfy us as readers?" The third graders, however, tend to think in terms of "Good Ending" as an ending in which good things happen. Although the children love *Mrs. Katz and Tush,* they waste no time in saying that the story has a bad ending. When we asked why, the eight-year-olds quickly point out that Mrs. Katz died at the end of the story. As far as the children are concerned, a story can't have a good ending if something bad (or sad), a death, for example, occurs.

Another startling example of the children's interpretation of criteria occurs as the children evaluate Eric Carle's retelling of the folk tale, *The Hole in the Dike,* for "Good Use of Language." This is a sophisticated criteria, yet it is one of the first qualities the children identify. I expect, then, that they have a fairly clear idea of what it means. As an adult, I understand "Good Use of Language" to mean, among other things, that the author crafts language in ways that are especially pleasing to the ear, unusual, or descriptive, or perhaps playful. When Shel Silverstein, for example, talks about "Cellophane from green bologna and rubbery, blubbery macaroni," I am delighted by the sound of the words and my tongue turns them again and again. When poet Emily Hearn writes:

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My friend is
like bark
rounding a tree

he warms
like sun
on a winter day

he cools
like water
in the hot noon..."

I am heartened by the image of the warm sun dancing across my living room floor on a cold January day, startled by the unusual comparison of tree bark and friendship, pleased by the sound and rhythm of the words. In my adult mind, then, "Good Use of Language" is an aesthetic quality.

The third graders, however, interpret "Good Use of Language" very differently. When asked if Eric Carle uses language in interesting ways, they immediately respond affirmatively. "Oh yeah," says Maria assuredly, "He puts Dutch in the book." Many of her classmates nod in happy agreement. As far as the third graders are concerned, Carle's insertion of a few Dutch phrases, constitutes "Good Use of Language." As an adult, I guess I would have to concur that Dutch is not a language often heard in rural New Hampshire (or urban Colorado, for that matter), but I don't necessarily consider it a "Good Use of Language."

Learning from Teaching

Neither Barb nor I would classify our efforts to introduce the children to the idea of good writing criteria a rousing, or maybe even a marginal success. Although the third graders generated the criteria, they didn't appear to own or internalize them. They used them to evaluate writing, other people's

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and their own, only under extreme duress. The use of good writing criteria didn't, in any way, appear to make the children more skillful or more independent writers.

Still, I believe we learned important things. In rethinking our initial work with the good writing criteria, I wonder if we would have been more successful if we had generated the initial list with the third graders, just as we did, but then spent the next several weeks working through the criteria one at a time, helping the children to arrive shared definitions and find examples, both in the writing of published authors and in their own work. Barb or I might have begun a lesson on "Good Leads," for instance, by sharing several examples of what we considered good leads (from both student and published authors) with the children. We might have then worked with children to define the term, something like, "Author begins the story in a way that grabs the reader's attention or makes her want to keep reading." Next, we could have asked the children to gather examples of good leads, share them aloud, and then select the four or five best examples, (again including the writing of both published authors and children) to put on a poster or place in a notebook, easily accessible to all. In those ways, we could have established shared definitions, reinforced the definitions with examples, and also provided children with a vision for what might be possible in their own writing.

After we had worked our way through all of the qualities of good writing, we might have then begun evaluating books on these criteria, just as we did in the beginning. Originally, we asked the children to evaluate simply on the basis of "Yes, that criteria exists in this book," or "No, that criteria doesn't exist in this book." Occasionally, if there was dissension among the children (or if their opinions differed hugely from our own, as in the case of Dutch being a "Good Use of Language") we allowed the children to put in a

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third level, "somewhat" or "possibly." If I were to use this evaluation activity again, I would definitely enlarge the rating scale, maybe even including as many as five different levels. I believe that more differentiation would encourage the children to be more thoughtful and reflective about their answers.

This evaluation of professional writing could have also been accompanied evaluation of the student writing Children, however, could not be expected to assess their own work by a particular criteria, or to be able to use it, unless they had first been taught how. If I wanted children to use a certain criteria, perhaps "Good Description," I would first need to teach children how to write good description. In the past, I think I have confined my examples of teaching a specific quality of good writing primarily to showing examples of those qualities, usually those of professional authors. Now I believe I would show the children how to actually write good description. I might show them some examples in my own work, and then model how I close my eyes, picture the object, person, or scenario I am trying to write about, then try to write so that another person can also see it. I might also interview children who are doing a particularly good example of using description, asking them to explain to their peers how they do this. These examples would need to be accompanied by discussions of when it is appropriate to use good description or how it can be used to move a story forward. I might also present two or three questions the children could ask themselves, to monitor or self-regulate their use of description, e.g., "Did I describe important things?" "Did I use description in ways that made pictures for people?" "Does the description help the story move forward?" Then I would ask the children to attempt to write description, not using the criteria to evaluate until children had practiced, shared their results, and gotten feedback.

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Having taught the children how to use a specific criteria, I could then expect children to not only use the criteria, but also to assess themselves on their effectiveness. Possibly this assessment might come in the form of a rating sheet or a questionnaire (See Figure 4-4) which children could use to evaluate each piece of writing as they finished it. Barb could also assess the work according to these criteria. Then, teacher and children could meet to compare results. Perhaps these collaborations might also have resulted in some goal setting for the next piece of writing, e.g., Barb might say to Jonathan, "I can see that you are really trying to use description. It's great how you described the submarine sandwich, it really makes me feel hungry when I read this. I'm not sure though, that the sub sandwich is something your reader really needs to see. Next time, I want you to pick out what you think are the two or three most important things in your story, things you really want your reader to picture, and I want you to work hard at describing those."

Criteria and Grading

Almost any teacher can think of children who try their hardest, put forth their absolute best effort, and still do not measure up to evaluative criteria, no matter how much they might have learned or grown. In the past, teachers or school officials have used criteria in ways that are were harmful to such children, e.g., as tools for labeling children's deficiencies or problems. This is not at all the intent I see in introducing children to evaluative criteria. Evaluative criteria should be about helping learners improve or grow. For some children, like Elizabeth, success in school kinds of learning comes easily and quickly. For other children, like Patrick, school learning is much more difficult. For him to read a paragraph aloud, for instance, requires extensive practice and probably huge amounts of courage. Patrick should be allowed to

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approximate or rehearse as many times as he needs, each time evaluating his performance, then receiving feedback from a helpful and supportive audience of children and adults. When, and only when, he has achieved a level of performance he considers satisfactory, should a final evaluation take place.

Setting Goals, Making Plans

Portfolios are a tool for making children independent learners. Independent learners self-initiate, set goals, make plans, gather resources, and monitor progress; if a person cannot do these things, s/he will always be dependent on others to initiate and monitor for them. In traditional classrooms, teachers have set all the goals, gathered the resources, and monitored progress. Recently, Hansen (1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1994), Harris, (1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d), Simons (1993), Coughlin (1993a, 1993b) and others have demonstrated that children are perfectly capable of assuming these responsibilities for themselves. Barb and I devoted a great deal of time to helping the third graders become proficient in this area.

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Early December. The children have spent two months choosing artifacts and reflecting on their out-of-school selves as well as their third grade reading and writing, and Barb decides it is time for them to set goals in these areas. She begins the goal-setting mini-lesson by drawing a picture of a football field on the board and asking the children to define the word "goal." Several respond with definitions from the world of sports— when you make a touchdown, when you kick the ball in the net, when you score points— and then Kate says that a goal is something a person wants to achieve.

Barb affirms the children's early suggestions, "In football, you want to score points by crossing the goal line. In basketball, you want to score points by putting the ball in the basketball hoop. In hockey, you want your team to win by putting as many pucks in the net as you possibly can." Then she turns the conversation to school, "What do you suppose the goal is in writing? Why do we spend so much time on writing? We spend time in first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, all the way through. Why? What is the goal in writing?" Several children respond that the goal in writing is to become "good writers" and Barb repeats the children's words, "OK. The goal in writing is for each of us to become really good writers."

She then writes the words "first grade" and "twelfth grade" on the board, and draws an arch between the two. Referring to her drawing, she says, "Can you make the jump? Do you make one jump from here, when you come in first grade, and when you leave school in twelfth grade, in high school? Do you make one jump, do you come in and you don't know how to write, and then all of a sudden you graduate from high school and you're a wonderful writer? Does that happen in just one giant step?"

The children answer with a chorus of "no's."

Barb continues, "There are little [steps], we have to make those bounces, until we finally get to the point where we can say, 'Hey, I'm a pretty good writer.' We need to do some of the things along the way in order to become a pretty good writer. Now...what are some of the things we need to do along the way? For example, in basketball you have to dribble, and dribble without losing the ball or having the ball taken away, you have to learn to pass, because you have to be able to get the ball from you to somebody else, you have to learn how to guard a player so he won't be able to get baskets, there are a whole lot of things you need to learn to do in order to win the

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game. There are a whole lot of things we need to learn to do as writers, in order to become good writers. And I'm not talking about learning how to spell, or learning to write in cursive, those are part of being good writers, but we're talking about becoming good writers so that someone wants to read the stuff we've written, and say, 'Ooh, is that person a good writer!' It may be in your job when you get grown up you might need to be able to write something to tell someone how to do something. It may be that you want to write a letter describing something you've seen or done. No matter what kind of job you have, no matter what you do, it is important to be a good writer... what we're trying to do now is to come up with a list of things ...we need to do in our writing in order to get the goal of being a good writer... "

Barb then reviews the list of good writing criteria that the children compiled the week before (see page 134), saying, "We have been listening to stories all week and talking about what writers do in stories to make good stories, and we've come up with a list of different things that writers do to make a book a good book...." Next, she acknowledges that not only published writers, but also many of the third graders employ these qualities in their writing, "And we've also talked about some of the things, like Elizabeth's story 'Santa's Boot' had a surprising part. Patrick's story about the lost puppies had lots of dialogue in it to make it a good story. Maria's story about sports, she told a lot about herself, you learned about the author from the story. You had a chance to think about some of the things you do well. Today I would like you to think about what you would like to work on now, what's your next step...We're not talking about handwriting right now, we're not talking about spelling right now, we're talking about...what do you need to work on next, in order to become a better writer...Spend a few minutes, looking through your writing folders, look at things you already do in your writing,

and think about what your next step, your goal, is going to be in becoming a better writer..."

Many of the children's goals demonstrate some understanding of qualities of good writing. Michael hopes he can "write more fasctanateing (fascinating) stories," Ricky wants to include "more action," Jennifer wants to use "more dialogue." Robbie decides to write with more "expression," which he defines as "telling more about the characters," (I think he actually means description). Elizabeth wants to "put in better language."

At least as many children focus on the physical features of writing. Length, as always, is important to the third graders, and over a fourth of the class (6/20) says they want to write longer stories or poems, or "add more to [their] stories." Despite Barb's admonitions, "we're not talking about handwriting, we're not talking about spelling," almost half (9/20) of the third graders identify goals which focus at least partially on the conventions of written language— spelling, capitalization, and punctuation (I am surprised that no one mentions handwriting, especially since the children are very excited about their newly developing skills in cursive). Jonathan, for instance, wants to "learn how to spell words that I don't know how to spell," and Maria wants "to write long words like 'dictionary' without asking the teacher and remember commas." Several of the children who identify conventions as a goal connect it with another goal that focuses more on the writer's craft; Melissa, for example, wants to "remember to use capitals, periods, and commas," but she also wants to write stories that "have exciting parts."

Having worked with children on goal setting for several years, Barb recognizes that the third graders need to do more than simply identify their goals, instead they must also develop plans for achieving them, as well as concrete proof of their accomplishments. After the children have worked for

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15-20 minutes, Barb pulls them back together to discuss this next step in the morning's activities. "Here's the next thing I'm going to ask you to consider. I want you to look at your goal, and...write down what you plan to do in order to accomplish that goal. You need to write down your plan." Finally, Barb asks the children to indicate how they will demonstrate their mastery of their writing goals, "How are you going to prove that you have accomplished that goal in your portfolio?... So your third thing that you will write, 'I will prove that I have met this goal by...'"

A few weeks later, Barb asks the children to set goals for themselves as readers. The format of this mini-lesson is very similar to the goal setting session in writing. First, the children brainstorm things good readers do, as Barb lists them on the board:

- Read more challenging books
- Read quickly
- Choose books carefully
- Show reading skills in their reading
- Share feelings about books
- Read with lots of expression
- Help other people read
- Get ideas from books
- Can retell the story
- Read every day
- Read magazines
- Read all different genre
- Write for magazines
- Respond to other authors

Barb asks the children to use this list to decide what they would like to do to become better readers. After setting their goals, the third graders once again develop plans and decide how they will prove they have accomplished their goals, much like they had done in writing.

The third graders' reading goals reflect few of the good reader behaviors from the list they compiled, nor do many of the children mention a specific

book or author. Kate wants to read more mysteries and Alison says that she would like to read fifth grade books, like the *Hardy Boys*. Maria and Julie (who sit right next to each other), say they would like to read chapter books. The rest of the children write very general goals— they want to read harder books, better books, longer books, or more challenging books. Interestingly, almost half the children include their parents, teachers, or other adults in their plans. Russ and Jonathan want to read more at night with their mothers. Karen plans to ask her mother to take her to the store to "buy more interesting books, because all of [her] *Babysitter Club* books are boring." Nick wants Barb to help him find books he would like to read. Elizabeth will ask an unspecified adult to help her find "better books that are funny and sometimes gross."

Barb and I follow up on the third graders' goals in several ways. First, Barb asks the children to keep their goals not only in their portfolios, but also on index cards stapled to the front inside covers of their reading and writing logs. The index cards serve a dual purpose; they remind the children of their goals and they give Barb and me a focus during daily reading and writing conferences. When we talk with the third graders, Barb and I ask how the goals are going, we also point out improvement that we see, and offer suggestions about possible actions the children might take. Almost every Friday during portfolio time, Barb asks the children to think about how they might represent progress or achievement of their goals in their portfolios. Barb and I also try to help children recognize accomplishments they might not see on their own. When Elizabeth, for instance, crafts language in ways that are surprising or fresh or unusual in her daily writing, Barb and I point it out, suggest that she might want to put it in her portfolio, offer to make copies, and provide a yellow marker so she can highlight her accomplishment.

For the most part, though, our work on goal-setting is only marginally successful. Although the eight-year-olds regularly set realistic, achievable goals in their day-to-day lives, they don't, for the most part, consciously recognize or identify them as such. The goals they set in our formally identified goal-setting sessions are broad and abstract. Given the fuzziness of their goals, and also probably their lack of experience in structured planning, they struggle to develop concrete plans or timelines. Newkirk (personal communication) suggests that probably third graders have not yet developed the sense of time, or maybe urgency (or hysteria?) that we as adults have. Fletcher (1993) poignantly reminds me,

> Timelessness is an intrinsic part of childhood. Most kids I see don't keep track of time. They don't measure it the way adults do, don't parcel it, don't save it. A boy sorts and resorts his baseball cards, first by team, then by position, then by batting average. Hours pass: by adult standards a colossal waste of time. But children are not adults. The river of time that runs through them is deep, strong, unbroken. When I encourage my own children to make the transition from timelessness to time planfulness, I am aware that I am asking these children to begin moving out of their childhood (p. 123).

The third graders' plans, then, are not specific enough to allow them to actually track or document their progress. They also are unable to recognize when they have accomplished their broad and fuzzy goals. Our work in this area, then, does little in the way of helping the children become more independent or proficient.

Nevertheless, the ability to set goals and make plans appears to be a critical trait for the skillful, independent learner. It seems important, then, to ask ourselves what we learned from our attempts to teach the children to set goals. What would we do next time? How can we help children be more effective goal setters and planners?

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Setting Goals: Capitalizing on Already Occurring Behaviors

Setting goals and developing realistic plans are some of the most critical, and also some of the most difficult things for children to do well. It might be fair to suggest, then, that goal setting, above all, is an area where children require extensive interaction with adults. Children need mentors to sit beside them, to help them look at where they have been, where they might go, and how they might get there. They need to collaborate with more experienced learners, guides who can show them the way.

Unfortunately, the teacher-student ratio on formal goal-setting days makes one-on-one child/adult collaboration extremely difficult. Although Barb provides guidance from the front of the room and has brief conferences with many of the third graders, sheer numbers prevent her from talking extensively to any of the children about their goals or plans. A large-group setting where the teacher is trying to support 25 learners, then, is probably not the best context for goal setting to occur, and yet having extensive one-on-one goal setting conferences with children seems almost impossible, given the myriad of other demands on a teacher's time.

Maybe though, goal setting doesn't always have occur in such carefully planned contexts. In reality, many of the third graders were already working toward goals, even though they hadn't formally labeled or identified them as such. Patrick, for instance, had set goals in both reading and writing very early in the school year. The first week of school, he told me he really wanted to read one of *The Boxcar Children* mysteries, a series popular with many of his friends. When we talked, he identified the books as way too difficult, but planned to keep working until he could read the series all of his friends were reading. This goal was far more sensible, concrete, measurable, and achievable

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than the goal, "to read longer books, easier books, exciting books, books to help you learn, books to help you take care of stuff," he wrote on the day the third graders set goals in reading.

Patrick also set a fairly specific writing goal early in the year. In October, he wrote a fictional Halloween story which featured two children, Jon and Sally. He loved this story and decided to create a series of holiday stories about these two characters. Although some teachers might wince at a child whose writing repertoire consisted mainly of holiday stories, for Patrick, who found spelling and left-to-right directionality almost impossible, and struggled hugely with fine motor activities like handwriting, his willingness to even attempt such a task was an enormous step forward. Again, this goal, though never formally labeled as such, was much more specific than the goal, "to make stare (stories) funy (funny) and exsiding (exciting)," he selected when the children decided on their goals in writing.

Maybe what we need to do, then, is not to emphasize formal goal setting sessions, or attempt to squeeze more one-on-one conferences into already packed days, but rather to get better at recognizing and labeling the goals children set in everyday, real-life contexts. As I look through my field notes, I find innumerable examples of these. "All my poems rhyme," says Karen, "but they don't make that much sense. I want to write a poem that makes sense." "*Junie B. Jones* is great," exclaims Jonathan, "It's really funny. I want to find another book by Barbara Parks." "I always pick books that are too hard," says Luis, "I need to pick easier books so I can finish 'em." Those are goals. Concrete, specific, achievable. They sound very different than the vague, unmeasurable goals set on days identified as goal setting days. Maybe, then, the first step in helping children set goals is for us as adults to get better at recognizing and verbally labeling children's real life goals. When Patrick

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says, "I love my 'Awesomest Halloween' story. It's my first fiction story, and I want to write a story about these characters for every holiday," I need to name it for him, "That's a great goal, Patrick, what holiday will you write about next?" Then, I need to have thoughtful, careful procedures for planning and followup. I also need to hold up children like Patrick, who are reflective, real-life goal setters, as models for other children.

Another way of incorporating goal setting more naturally into our day-to-day activities might be to make a more conscious and deliberate effort to encourage children to capitalize on already existing interests. Elizabeth, for instance, began writing poetry very early in the school year. Although some of her poems were quite clever, she often got so tangled in trying to create rhymes that her poems had very little meaning or message. Because we knew she loved poetry, we might have pushed her to delve into that genre, shared some of our own favorite non-rhyming poets, encouraged her to immerse herself in reading and maybe even reciting or performing poetry, helped her to create an anthology of her favorite poems, suggested she listen for/collect language that sounded like poetry, and finally pushed her to write some of her own non-rhyming poetry. Interest in a particular topic or person— space, horses, slavery, a current event, Shaquille O'Neal— could also be easily be translated into a goal, where the child could learn valuable skills in research, reading, and writing.

<u>Setting Better Goals</u>

Even if we are going to capitalize on the goal setting that naturally occurs in children's lives, there would still seem to be some things we could do to help children set better goals. First, we need to adopt a more collaborative approach to goal setting. "Yours, Mine, and Ours" might be a

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legitimate approach to goal setting. In such an approach, both (all) parties would come to the conference with goals in mind. Elizabeth might, for instance, say, "I want to read more funny books." I might counter with, "You've read a lot of humor this year. It's great that you've found a genre that you love, but I'd also like you to experience another genre." Together, we might agree that Elizabeth would alternate funny books with other genre, such as mystery, biography, or science fiction. In that way, the goal setting sessions would be not only supporting Elizabeth's existing interests, but also helping her to develop some new interests. Such negotiation would also ensure that teachers were having some say in making sure that goals were actually helping children move forward.

Secondly, we want to teach children to set goals that are worthwhile. We need to help students think hard about the purposes of their goals. We have to teach children to ask themselves, "What's it for? How will this goal make me a better reader, writer, or thinker?" We have to be careful, though, not to dismiss students' purposes or goals too quickly. When a child selects a goal that seems questionable, we need to first explore her thinking. Maria, for instance, decides that she wants to write longer words because that will help her write longer sentences. To me, this goal seems doubtful at best; long sentences do not necessarily mean better quality writing. In conferences with Maria, though, I discover that she does, in fact, have a specific purpose for wanting to write longer sentences; she thinks that such sentences will include more "information," (details) so that her readers can make better pictures in their heads. In reality, then, her goal is not to write longer sentences so much as it is to include more specificity of detail. She just doesn't have the words to say that. As a teacher, it's my job to supply her with the vocabulary she needs.

Third, we want to help children set reasonable goals— goals that are concrete, specific, and achievable. The goals the third graders set on the days identified as goal setting days tend to be abstract, difficult to achieve, and even more difficult to measure or document. Words like "more," "better," and "longer," and "harder" figure prominently. While it's true that those words sometimes signal growth or progress, they are not easy to document or measure. We need to work with children, then, on setting specific, documentable, measurable goals, ("I want to read three books by Louis Sachar," or "I want to read 10 pages a day," "I want to write a poem," or "I want to write a mystery story"). Breaking large goals into smaller, more reachable increments is probably desirable. If Elizabeth's long term goal is to write non-rhyming poetry, we break that into a series of smaller goals. First, she will spend a week, during reading time, just reading poetry. Each day, she will find one or more non-rhyming poems that she likes. Next, she will begin compiling these poems in an anthology of poems she loves. She might also select one poem to practice and read aloud to a small group, or to the class. Finally, she will try writing her own non-rhyming poems.

We also need to acknowledge that there are many different kinds of goals. In writing, about half of the third graders said that they wanted to improve at conventions— spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. As a "process-oriented adult," my initial tendency is to dismiss this as being less important than other craft-related goals. This is probably wrong, almost like comparing apples and oranges. While I don't want children to focus so exclusively on conventions that their communicative competence— their ability to inform, entertain, persuade, etc.—doesn't improve, gaining increased control over the conventions of written language, making one's work more acceptable or accessible to the outside world should also be

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considered a worthwhile goal. Therefore, maybe it's time we begin asking children to have different kinds of goals— communication goals dealing with coherently and skillfully conveying writers' intended messages, and conventionality goals, which focus on how messages are presented to outside audiences. In reviewing the children's goals, it seems that many of them instinctively recognize the need for this. Jane, for instance, identifies her goal, which is really two goals, as remembering to use capitals and periods, and to have good endings. In reading, children might set book, author, or genre goals, dealing with something they specifically want to learn to read, ("I want to read two books by Barbara Parks") but might also be asked to set a reading behaviors goal ("I want to get better at summarizing," or "I want to get better at remembering the information I read in non-fiction books").

Finally, we need to realize that goals can change to meet the shifting needs, desires, and interests of the learner. Maybe several months down the road, Patrick will discover that his friends are no longer reading *The Boxcar Children* and he will want to alter his plans to read something more in line with the rest of his peers. An entirely different situation occurs with Kate. On goal setting day, she decides that she wants to write "better mysteries that are scary" and "longer poems." Two days later, she looks up from her writing. "Can I change my goal?" she asks. When Barb asks why, Kate responds, "I've always wanted to write a play. I've been working on this play (she touches the writing in front of her) for a couple of weeks. I really want to finish it, so that I can get some kids to help me perform it. That's really my goal." In this case, her request seems legitimate and also points to the need to set goals in real-life contexts rather than artificial goal setting sessions.

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Developing Plans

Every bit as important as setting good goals is developing plans to achieve those goals. While some of the eight-year-olds are able to make plans on their own, it would appear that far more, even the most avid readers and writers, might benefit from adult input in the planning process. When the children set reading goals, for example, Elizabeth, probably the best reader in the class, says that she wants to find "better books." When Barb asks her what she means by better books, she replies that she wants to find "books that are funny and sometimes gross." Barb asks how she will find better books but Elizabeth is unsure, "Maybe I'll go to the library," she says. Certainly that's a reasonable answer, yet it still is probably not specific enough. Elizabeth already goes to the library all the time. She needs to begin building on her present skills and knowledge of books to expand her reading world. One way Barb might help her do this by reminding her of her history, "You seemed to really enjoy *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*. Maybe when you go to the library, you might want to look for other books by Louis Sachar."

Another aspect of planning might involve making children more aware of available resources. "Elizabeth," says Barb, "maybe you want to ask some people about books they have read. A lot of kids in this class like funny books, and you might want to ask during group time if anyone has any recommendations. You also might want to ask some of the adults at Pennington. I know a lot of funny books and authors that kids have read. Ms. Wilcox also knows a lot of great books, and so do Ms. Harper (the school librarian) and Mrs. Ross (the reading teacher). Maybe, before you go to the library, you might want to ask some people for recommendations. Then you could go over there with a list of books and authors to look for."

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Part of helping children plan probably includes helping them set develop concrete steps toward their goals. Patrick's goal of reading a *Boxcar Children* book is concrete and probably achievable. Patrick, however, may not know how to get from Point A *(Amelia Bedelia)* to Point B *(The Boxcar Children)*, so I need to act as a guide to help him see the little steps along the way. I know, for instance, several series of mystery books in escalating degrees of difficulty. I can say to Patrick, "You know, Patrick, one of the ways people get better at reading is to read books that are a little harder and a little harder. Right now, you are reading *Amelia Bedelia.* Maybe you should work really hard on reading that series for about a month, or until those books feel comfortable, or maybe a little easy, and then you can move to a series that's a little harder, and a little longer. *Cam Jansen* would be a good mystery series to try next. After that one felt too easy, then you could move into that series that Karen calls *The Don'ts.* Those are a little harder. By then I bet you'll be ready to read *The Boxcar Children.* "

These plans might also need to contain some concrete things Patrick can do on a day to day basis, for example, "Patrick, one of the things I know about good readers is that they practice a lot. Do you think you can commit to reading twenty minutes every night at home, before you go to bed? Could you ask your mom if she would help you record that on this home reading log?" Another concrete steps might be to help children set up systems for measuring, road markers to chart progress along the way. With Patrick, I might says, "Why don't you try reading three *Amelia Bedelia* books. I'll make a copy of the list of books in that series, then you can cross them off as your read. When you've read three, or as many as you think you need to read, come and talk to me, and we'll see how you are feeling about moving to a new series." Reading three books is easier to measure and acknowledge than

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reading "some" books. Reading ten pages a day is easier to chart than reading "more." Spelling "x" percentage of words right is easier to measure than "spelling better."

As I plan with children, we make a step by step list of all of the things they are going to do. Possibly, I even have some kind of a goal planning sheet, where we specify goal, steps, possible resources, maybe even tentative completion date. Then, the children place this list in their reading or writing folders, or in their portfolios, and refer to it as needed. When they come back to confer with me, we use the list to measure progress toward the goal. This list also allows children a concrete method for internalization of the goal setting process. I make the first list as Patrick and I talk. Maybe the next time, Patrick makes the list as we talk. The third or fourth time, he makes the list before we confer and we adapt it as necessary. With each goal, Patrick becomes more independent and more skilled at setting his own goals and creating realistic plans (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

Figure 5-4: Sample Goal Setting Sheet

My goal is <u>to read a Boxcar children book</u>

This goal will make me a better reader/writer/learner because <u>good readers read long chapter books.</u>

Step	Possible resources	Tentative Date	Date achieved
① Amelia Bedelia	① Class library	10/30/93	10/27/93
② Cam Jansen	② Class library	12/15/93	1/8/94
③ The Don'ts	③ Class library	2/1/94	5/94
④ Boxcar!	④ Class library		

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The level of adult involvement or direction will be different with different children. Elizabeth is an extremely competent reader. She can talk knowledgeably about her favorite genre and authors, readily chooses appropriate books, confidently abandons books she doesn't like, and easily makes connections between different books or between books and her own life. When I discuss reading goals with her, it's much more like two friends talking about books. My main job with Elizabeth is to make sure I'm current enough in my children's literature reading that I can recommend titles that she might enjoy, and that I'm making her aware of all the resources available to her. Patrick, on the other hand, is not an accomplished reader. He has never read a chapter book and doesn't have a lot of strategies for self-monitoring or making sense of his reading. He is much less likely to make comparisons between books or to draw on books to make sense of life. He needs a lot of support, then, to reach his goal of reading a *Boxcar Children* book.

Setting goals and creating plans also implies a need for responsiveness and responsibility on the part of adults. When I help Patrick create plans to read a *Boxcar Children* book, I have to then hold up my adult end of the deal. That may mean altering some of my current plans or adapting curriculum. I might, for instance, abandon plans to read aloud *Peppermints in the Parlor* in favor of a *Boxcar Children* book, because I know that prior knowledge of the author or series would make the book easier for Patrick to read. I might adjust my reading mini-lessons to ensure that they would give Patrick, and probably many of his classmates, skills or strategies they appear to need.

Patrick must know, too, that I am for him, that I really want him to get better at reading. He must know that I'm not going to do anything to embarrass him in front of his peers, e.g., I'm not going to choose picture books

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when all of his peers are reading chapter books. I'm not going to publicly announce that *The Boxcar Children* is too hard, nor am I going to ridicule him for his lack of comprehension. My attitude toward Patrick must be, "I know how much you want to read that book and I really want you to succeed. We're going to do all that we can to get you to that point."

Becoming Strategic: Good Reader Strategies

In addition to setting goals and making plans, proficient learners are strategic. They know how to set themselves up for success. Good readers, for instance, draw on knowledge of author and genre, and previous chapters, as well as their own knowledge of how the world works before they read. They know how to check themselves for understanding by summarizing after they read. Good writers also have strategies for drafting, revising, and editing. They know how to get themselves started, how to write good leads, how to reread and add text, how to ask for help from an audience. Skillful readers and writers also have fix-up strategies. They know that problems with reading and writing are not obstacles or roadblocks, but are simply problems to work through. The good reader, then, knows what to do when she comes to a word she doesn't know, or when she realizes she has been reading for five or ten minutes and has not understood anything she's read. The good writer also operates flexibly. She knows when to abandon a draft, what to do if she can't think of a topic to write about, and how to move words, sentences, or even paragraphs. These strategies enable skillful learners to continuously adapt to the demands of a variety of tasks.

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Early February. Because I want to know whether/how closely the children's evaluations of themselves as readers and writers match our adult

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perceptions, I interview each of the children individually, asking them to evaluate themselves using the Pennington report card. I explain the marking system to the children, then read through the descriptors, asking the third graders to assess themselves in each area. I am surprised at their careful, thoughtful evaluations, and their knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. I'm equally surprised at some of the things I expect the children to know, then find out that they don't.

One of the reading descriptors, for example, asks whether the children use strategies for figuring out unknown words. I predict the third graders, having spent three years in a wholistic reading program that emphasizes making sense of print rather than simple decoding, will talk about strategies that focus on meaning. I am surprised, then, and a little concerned when almost all of the children immediately respond that they sound out unknown words. Only a few tell me they skip words and go on, or try to make sense of words from surrounding context. Having taught reading for ten years I worry, because I know that as the third graders move into progressively more difficult chapter books, this lack of strategies could greatly hinder their progress as readers.

During my years as a reading specialist, I often worked with children on strategies for dealing with unknown words. The classroom teacher and I taught a series of mini-lessons, (e.g., skip the word and go on, think about what would make sense, look hard at the picture clues, look for little words in big words, ask a friend, make a reasonable substitution) and then posted them on the wall so that children could refer back to them. After I had been doing this for several years, it occurred to me that students most in need of the strategies were probably the children that couldn't read the posted lists. I began seeking other methods of helping less fluent readers remember and

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access the unknown word strategies. Gradually I incorporated a visual cue with each of the mini-lessons. "Skip the word and go on," entitled, "Leap Frog," was accompanied by a picture of a jumping frog. "Make a reasonable substitution" was the "Viola Swamp" strategy, named after the unforgettable substitute in Harry Allard and James Marshall's *Miss Nelson* books. "Look hard for clues" was "Nate the Great," after the peerless detective in the Marjorie Sharmat books. These were posted, not on a large list, but on individual cards, with pictures providing additional images to help children remember the strategies.

My conferences with the third graders remind me of these strategies, and I ask Barb if I might teach them to her students. She readily agrees and we embark on a series of mini-lessons focusing on "Good Reader Strategies." I introduce the concept of reading strategies to the third graders saying:

> The last couple of weeks I've been talking to a lot of kids...I've been asking what you do when they come to a word you don't know... some kids could tell me, had some good ideas, but a lot of kids didn't quite know or they'd tell me, 'You sound it out and then I don't know what you do after that.' One of the things that I know is true about kids who are good readers, and I go around to a lot of different schools and talk to a lot of different kids about their reading is that they have lots and lots of different strategies, they have lots and lots of tools they know how to use. If they come to a word they don't know, they say, 'I could try this, or if that doesn't work I could try this, or if that doesn't work I could try this.' They have lots of tools. Kind of like if you're trying to build something sometimes you need a hammer, and sometimes you need a screwdriver, and sometimes you need nails, you need lots of different kinds of tools. I'm going to work with you for the next few weeks on some tools that good readers use, and this week the tools we're going to work on are what do you do when you come to a word you don't know. A lot of you are starting to read chapter books, and you're going to be needing these tools because you're going to come to harder words, and you're going to have less and less pictures to help you figure them out...

I then launch into the first strategy:

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The first tool that I tell kids to use is called 'Running Start.' You know how when you're outside playing, and there's a great big gigantic puddle, or if you come to a stream and you want to get to the other side. First you say, 'I don't know that's pretty big, I don't know if I can do it,' so you go back and you run as fast as you can, and you make a big jump over it. Your momentum, your speed, just kind of carries you right over the puddle. Do you ever do that?

Drawing on the bit of actress I think exists in most teachers, I take a few steps back, charge forward, and pretend to jump over an enormous puddle. I continue:

Do you ever do that? One of the things that good readers do, is when they come to a word they don't know, good readers go back to the beginning of the sentence, and read as fast as they can, and when they get to the word they don't know, they get ready to skip right over it, but they get their mouth ready to make the beginning sound of that word, and what happens is your mind sort of kicks in and the word just pops out of your mouth. I'm going to show you what I mean. I have a book, and this book is called *Wonder Kids Meets the Lunchsnatchers*.

I read from the first page of the book, thinking aloud to demonstrate the strategy for the third graders:

'This particular day started out wrong at...' OK, I don't know the next word, I'm going to step back, reread as fast as I can, and get my mouth ready to make that sound, this word starts with a b. 'This particular day started out wrong at buh... oh, breakfast,' if you read it fast and make the beginning sound, the word just sort of pops into your mouth, because you know what happens at the start of a day, and your mind kicks in and you just know.

I demonstrate the strategy a few more times, then send the third graders back to their seats, saying, "Today, when you are reading and you come to a word you don't know, I want you to try 'Running Start.' Back away from the word, read as fast as you can and get your mouth ready to make the beginning sound." As Barb and I confer with children, we ask them to show us places

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where they have used the strategy. Each afternoon, Barb hangs the latest strategy on the "Good Reader Wall" next to the meeting area.

I am pleased at the success of these lessons. Many of the children begin using the strategies almost immediately. The first week, for instance, Luis, a child who receives Chapter 1 support for his reading, tells me that The Hit Away Kid is a challenging book for him. "I have to use a lot of those strategies. Like the shoe one," he says, without prompting from me. I am surprised that he's begun using the strategies so soon, often it takes several weeks of adult coaching before children begin using the strategies on their own.

I give a more formal label to his words, "The 'Running Start,' uh-huh, and what else do you do?"

He continues with another strategy, "And the Leapfrog...and the Puzzle one."

I affirm Luis' efforts, "Good for you. I'm glad that you're enjoying that book, and I'm glad that you are using those strategies because that's what good readers do."

When we finish the mini-lessons on strategies for dealing with unknown words, Barb and I decide to teach some other "Good Reader" strategies. We go through a series of lessons including such strategies as selecting books, predicting, using prior knowledge, summarizing, checking for understanding, connecting books and life, and reading nonfiction texts, again following the format of presenting the strategy, showing a visual image, then modeling how the strategy is appropriately used. Sometimes, as in the case of the summarizing strategies, we require the children to respond by writing in their reading journals. Most of the time, however, we present the strategy and encourage the children to try it, then

follow up as needed during individual conferences, pointing out effective use of strategies, or modeling and reteaching for greater student efficacy.

The third graders talk about the good reader strategies again and again over the next few months. Sometimes children mention the strategies by name or visual image ("the shoe one" or "the puzzle") like Luis did. Other times children talk about the strategy, indicating that they are thinking about or internalizing the behaviors, without actually giving it a name. Maria, for instance tells me that she likes a book because it gives lots of "information" and helps her get pictures in her mind. I ask her why that's important and she says, "'Cuz if you get pictures in your mind, you know what you're doing." Patrick, referring to the same strategy, says that his book is "a little hard, I can't always picture it in my head...Sometimes when I'm reading, I go, 'Wait, what is that?' so I read back, and I'm like, 'Oh yeah, and it made a picture in my head.'" At the end of the year, when I interview the third graders about their reading, almost half mention the strategies in one form or another.

Letting Children Own the Strategies

Early in the series of "Good Reader" lessons, typical to true teacher fashion, I do everything. I name the strategies, draw and color the pictures, teach the lessons, etc. One indoor recess, a few days into these mini-lessons, I am joined at the side table by David, the most talented artist in the class, who stands at my shoulder offering advice and sucking in his breath in worried gasps as I try to draw a frog. My efforts are less than satisfactory and David takes the pencil and tongue protruding from teeth, carefully erases and redraws the back legs. Suddenly, it occurs to me that many of these eight-year-olds are much more talented artists than I am, and I wonder why I am spending an hour each day drawing pictures many of the children could draw

in ten minutes. When I ask David if he thinks the third graders would like to draw the pictures, he responds with overwhelming enthusiasm. The next day, I present the strategy without a visual image, and ask for a volunteer to draw and color the picture before we mount the lesson on the Good Reader Wall. At first, I specify, "Draw a shoe," "Draw a frog," "Draw a camera," but later, I realize that the children can probably think of their own visual images. I present the strategy and ask the students to think of a picture that will help them remember it. Our only rules are that the picture has to be large, easily recognizable, and easy to remember.

Figure 5-5: Good Reader Strategy- Good Readers Make Sense, Illustrated by Tim

Good readers expect that their reading will
MAKE SENSE
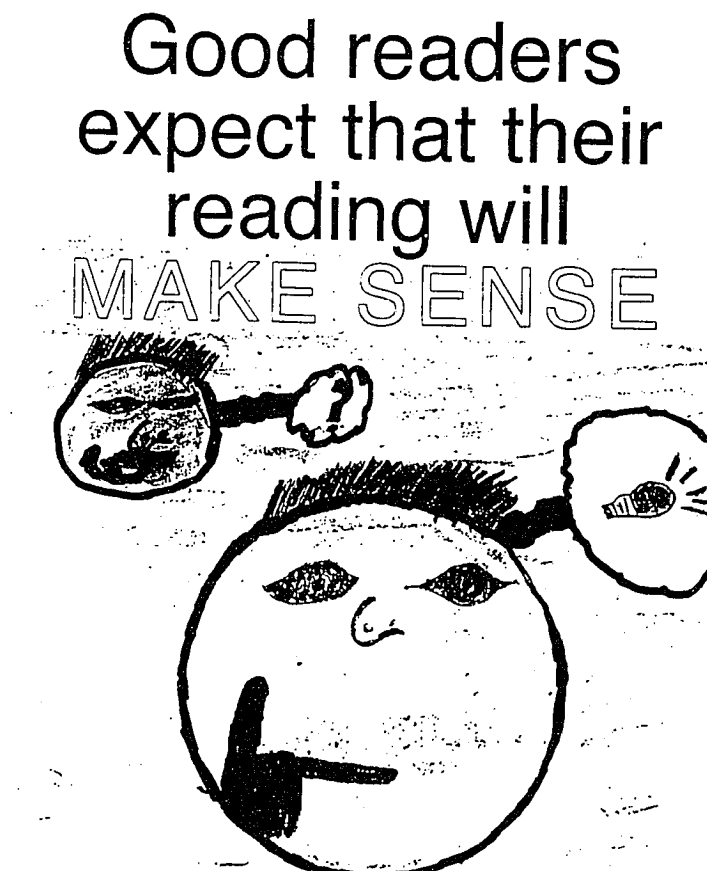
Analyzing Our Success

Why were the Good Reader mini-lessons so successful with the third graders? First, the reading mini-lessons were presented one at a time. They focused not on a product, e.g., good reading, but on a process, a series of identifiable behaviors that good readers use. The implication was that if the children engaged in these behaviors, they too, would/could become good readers. The behaviors were things the children could do, and could monitor for themselves. They could ask themselves for instance, "Am I making pictures in my head?" If the answer was no, the children knew they probably weren't understanding what they were reading. These self monitoring strategies were accompanied by fix-up strategies. If children realized, for example, that they weren't understanding what they were reading, they knew they could go back and reread, they could talk to someone else who had read the book, or they could ask an adult for help. These specific behaviors were easy for the children to remember and manage.

In addition to telling the children how to use the strategies, we told them when to use the strategies. Each strategy card was mounted on colored construction paper. The mounting was systematically chosen— strategies backed with green were used before reading, orange during reading, strategies on red were to be used after reading, blue were strategies for dealing with unknown words, and black were for use when reading information books. This color coding gave children yet another visual cue to hang on to.

The students' willingness to use the reading strategies probably also had to do with their ownership. Because the third graders got to draw the pictures, brainstorm, and participate fully in the creation of these classroom visual aides, they were more willing to use the strategies. I believe it's critical that the strategies were presented not only auditorily, and with written

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reminders, but also with pictures, for children who see and know the world through visual images. This was especially important in Barb's class, where at least five or six children, all boys, were extremely talented artists, but not especially good readers.

One thing we didn't do, that I will do when I teach the strategies again, is to include a written self-monitoring component. Asking children to check themselves, to self-monitor their use of strategies periodically would hopefully lead to more self regulation. Figure 5-6 might provide a model for one strategy, dealing with unknown words. These evaluations could be scored in any number of ways— smiley faces, arrows, Likert scales— depending on the age of the children.

Certainly, such self-reporting is not always accurate. It does however, bring strategy usage to a conscious level and make children aware of the need for the strategies. Teachers become more aware of children's perceptions of their metacognitive strategies, which hopefully leads to more effective instruction. If they were stored in the portfolio, these checklists could provide an excellent record of student growth and change over time.

Figure 5-6: Written Self-Monitoring of Good Reader Strategies

What Do You Do When You Come to a Word You Don't Know?

- I skip the word and go on.
- I go back and reread as fast as I can.
- I think about what would make sense.
- I put in a substitute
- I look for little words I know.
- I think about what other words this word looks like.
- I ask a friend.

- I think I'm doing a great job at _____
- A strategy that's hard for me is _____
- I want to get better at _____
- I could get better at _____ by _____

Possible Scoring Systems:

Smiley faces:

Draw an arrow:

| Numeric: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| Descriptor: | Not like me at all | | Kind of like me | | A lot like me |

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Learning from our Approximations

Late April. Barb receives a box of audiotapes from the district office, with directions that the children are to tape their oral reading. She decides that rather than have this be an arbitrary adult-imposed project, she will involve the students in a self-evaluation of their oral reading. She reads aloud to the children one day, then asks them to brainstorm a list of qualities of good reading aloud. From their list, she creates a checklist:

- Did I speak clearly?
- Did I stumble over any words?
- Did I read loudly enough?
- Did I pick an appropriate book— one that wasn't too hard or too easy?
- Did I read enough for the selection to make sense or did I read too much?
- Did read with expression?
- Did I read too slowly because of difficulty with the words?
- Did I read too quickly?
- Did I stop at the right places?
- Did I explain enough about what I chose to read?
- If I made a mistake, did I go back and correct my mistake?
- Did I choose a good part to read?

It seems critical that the items on the list no longer appear in the form of statements, e.g., "speaks clearly." Instead, they have evolved into a series of questions that children can ask themselves and use to self-evaluate. The children rehearse their selections aloud, first individually and then in front of the group. As one child reads, the rest of the class uses the checklist to provide feedback. The third graders use these suggestions to engage in

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additional rehearsals, and finally, tape themselves, then listen to the tape and evaluate their reading. The tapes, accompanied by the children's self-evaluation go in the portfolios.

Some Final Thoughts on Adult and Child Shaping

Portfolios at Pennington are shaped neither by children, nor by adults, but rather by interactions between the two. Children used their portfolios to represent themselves, identify their likes and dislikes, document history, growth, and accomplishments. The third graders also use the portfolios as a means of social interaction, demonstrating their connections to their families, peers, and to adults at school. Additionally, children saw the portfolios as a tool for documenting social acceptability and uniqueness.

Barb and I implicitly and explicitly shaped and molded the children's portfolios. We focused constantly, continually, repeatedly on helping children write good reflections. We watched the third graders carefully and responded to their needs; when we noticed, for instance, that children were attempting to use their portfolios to showcase accomplishments or demonstrate growth, we provided specific instruction on how to do that effectively. Barb also taught mini-lessons on the logistical and aesthetic aspects of portfolio keeping, thus enabling her students to have attractive, well-organized portfolios. Additionally, we provided extensive instruction in behaviors we thought would make the children more skillful and independent— goal setting, planning, being strategic, and evaluating work by criteria.

Our adult understandings of the portfolios, however, were often very different from the children's understandings. Despite the fact that the third graders clearly use their portfolios to document history, accomplishments and growth, despite our extensive instruction, and despite our repeated

declarations to the contrary, the third graders often described their portfolios as if they were scrapbooks. Perhaps this occurred because the scrapbook (or photo album), which appears in many homes, is a genre more familiar to children; unless they have a parent who is an architect or artist, they are much less likely to see a portfolio (Newkirk, personal communication). Nevertheless, we wanted students to represent themselves, document their history and accomplishments, and discuss growth, not primarily for the purpose of looking back, but rather so that they could set goals, make plans, and forge ahead. The third graders, however, often described their portfolios as places for looking back, nice mementos of times gone by, pleasant to look at, but more a static place for freezing history than a dynamic place for moving ahead. In the next chapter, I'll consider why that might be true, then suggest alternative uses for the portfolios.

CHAPTER VI

PORTFOLIOS: LOOKING BACK OR FORGING AHEAD

Since their introduction to the world of education, portfolios have been viewed primarily as evaluative tools. As such, portfolios offer many possibilities— they provide a platform for teachers to learn what students value and introduce these voices into assessment conversations, they allow students to learn to evaluate their work, document growth over time, monitor process as well as product, and display multi-dimensional representations of learning.

Donald Graves (1992), however, cautions educators about the danger of viewing portfolios only for evaluative purposes:

> As young as this notion [of using portfolios] is, there are already signs that [it] is becoming a rigid process. In a few short years, state and school systems have moved from reading about portfolios to mandating them as evaluation instruments for large scale populations. Some small pilot studies were conducted to get some 'minor' bugs removed, but sustained, long-term learning about the possibilities of portfolios as a learning/evaluating medium may be lost to us in the rush to mandate their use. Portfolios are simply too good an idea to be limited to an evaluation instrument.

Graves believes educators should move beyond using portfolios simply for evaluation and explore their use as an instructional tool. "The portfolio movement," he declares, "holds one of the best opportunities for students to learn how to examine their own work and participate in the entire literacy/learning process..." (p. 4). In Chapter Five, I demonstrated how

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portfolios could be used as an instructional tool to help children learn to set goals, make plans, and monitor progress, all habits of successful learners. Quite possibly, other attitudes, skills, and behaviors for lifelong learning could be taught through the vehicle of portfolios.

In fact, teachers at Pennington are exploring both the evaluative and instructional aspects of the portfolios. First, these adults see portfolios as a tool for better understanding what children value and how they learn. Portfolios, they suggest, provide them with a way of seeing literacy and learning through the eyes of the children. Portfolios are a way of inviting children's voices and insights about their learning into evaluation conversations.

Secondly, Pennington teachers use the portfolios to teach children to more effectively evaluate their literacy and their learning. This self-evaluation includes goal setting, planning, and documenting accomplishments and growth, all the behaviors of skillful, lifelong learners. There is an implied suggestion, I believe, that children will use the portfolios to push themselves forward, that learning begets more learning, that the children's portfolios will allow them to engage in continual cycles of regeneration.

Unfortunately, as is true in many instances, the rhetoric and the reality of portfolios are somewhat disparate. The Pennington third graders do not view their portfolios as a tool for helping them forge ahead. Although the children set goals, plan, and document their accomplishments and growth, when they talk about their portfolios, they don't refer to them in the sense of moving forward, but rather as a kind of nostalgic trip down Memory Lane, a pleasant reminder of their elementary school years. In this chapter, I will discuss the differences between children's and adults' perceptions and propose

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possible uses for the portfolios. I will demonstrate how the portfolios might meld evaluation and instruction, and consider what might be the end result of such a marriage.

Doing and Saying: The Rhetoric and The Reality

The day the third graders begin working on their portfolios, I wander around the room, asking the children why students at Pennington keep portfolios. A few tell me that portfolios are places for self-representation. Kate, for example, says portfolios are for "representing people, like what they are about and stuff, they tell you about people." Melissa makes a similar comment, "Because people could know what I like to put in my portfolio and it shows stuff about me, like special stuff about me."

Some of the children speak about their portfolios as storage receptacles, places "for stuff you save," almost like adults would describe safety deposit boxes. Patrick tells me the portfolios are, "To save it and it won't get ruined. We put it in if we really like it and we just put it in." Jonathan defines his portfolio as a collection of his favorite things, "They're kind of like you take papers you really like and you put it in your portfolio and you keep it and you add on to it and then you have like a little book of your favorite things." To illustrate his point, he pulls a large, crayoned picture of a plane from the back pocket of his portfolio, unfolds it, smoothes the rumpled edges and says, "See, I made this in first grade and I don't want it to get lost."

More of the children, however, seem to view their portfolios as scrapbooks of pleasant memories that they will review at some point in the very distant future. Ashley says, "Portfolios are to put all your special stuff in...like your old things, so you can look back and remember them." Ron thinks the purpose of portfolios is to "remember what you did when you're

out of school." Karen also believes the portfolios should be used to preserve memories, "They're for putting all your stuff, all your stuff from first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, all of it... all your stuff you wrote [when you were] littler, then you get bigger, then bigger, then bigger, then you remember all kinds of stuff." Maria expresses a similar point of view, "Portfolios are for when you write, like you write a story, you can put it in a portfolio and so you can...look back and see how many stories like you've wrote and stuff in second grade and third grade and remember all the old days and stuff when you were little."

The third graders believe these historical documents might also be of interest to others. Danny tells me portfolios are used to "store your memory so you can share to other people" and volunteers to take his to the first grade, to teach his younger sister's class what portfolios are all about. Melissa sees her parents as a potential audience, "Like if you want to save stuff, you put them in your portfolio and then when you go to the middle school, you have to take them with you and then when you graduate from college, you have to take them home and show your mom and dad the stuff you did." Ron envisions himself as a parent, "You put your stuff in there to show how you did it when you were growing up, to show your kids that you have." Both Ron and Danny think the portfolios might be especially helpful if they were to become teachers, because then they could show them to their students.

These views change little throughout the year. Although Barb reminds the children repeatedly that the portfolios are documents of learning, the third graders still discuss their portfolios as if they were scrapbooks. In November, David says, "They're for like I was in first grade and I would do it and in second grade and when you come back and you miss first grade and you go out of school, when you're out of this grade, you could see

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what you did back those years." In January, Karen declares, "Portfolios are to bring back memories on all kinds of stuff. When you grow up, well, you'll look back at them and you'll say, 'This is funny.'" Patrick tells me, "Portfolios are to keep stuff that we really like in it and pass it on to generations and generations, when we get to college, the end of the year of college, we get them back."

Actions Speak Louder than Words

Why do the children continue to see their portfolios as scrapbooks when neither Barb nor I describe them that way? Perhaps the adage, "Actions speak louder than words," might apply to this situation. Although Barb and I believe our adult intentions are to have the children document learning, evidently our adult actions somehow indicate to the children that these documents are nice to take out and look at, but not particularly important otherwise. They are a place for looking back, but they do not cause the children to look forward or consider future growth and development.

I suspect that the third graders look back rather than project forward for several reasons. First, although Barb and I assume that the portfolios will help students to develop into skillful, lifelong learners, we only rarely explicitly announce this to the children. We don't emphasize to the third graders why it is important for them to set goals, make plans, document progress, and evaluate their final products. Our efforts, then, might be likened to a Sunday afternoon drive, pleasant and enjoyable, maybe even educational, but with no particular destination in mind. The outcome might have been very different if we had repeatedly explained to the third graders that we wanted the portfolios to help students develop the attitudes and behaviors that would enable them to become skillful, lifelong learners, then presented a

portrait of what such learners might look like, and asked children to use their portfolios as a showcase for documenting their development toward this goal.

Secondly, I believe the children don't see their portfolios as a tool for forging ahead because we don't truly use the evaluative information children are giving us. If children assemble documents that teach us who they are as readers, writers, and learners and show us the kinds of things they value, we must act upon what they tell us. Thus far in the portfolio movement, many of us have asked children to teach us about themselves, but then we have not fully acted upon the data they have provided. The third graders, for instance, use their portfolios to demonstrate their love of art, science, and nonfiction, but their interests and passions don't hugely alter curriculum. Similarly, although the children document their learning, their insights have virtually no effect on quarterly report cards. Thus, although we say we value the children's insights, our actions indicate otherwise. If their opinions are not truly valued, eventually, children will be less interested or less willing to share.

Perhaps, then, we need to consider using the children's self-evaluations more extensively. We might, for instance, consider different audiences for the portfolios. No one would argue that the third graders have many opportunities to share their portfolios. They love to look at each other's photographs and artifacts, and reading and writing workshops often become portfolio/storytelling sessions about special friends, lost/dead pets, class trips, etc. Barb and her students also engage in more formal, large group shares two or three times a month after their Friday morning portfolio work-sessions. During whole group shares, the children sit in a large circle in the meeting area, portfolios on the floor in front of them. Sometimes the time is centered around the morning's mini-lesson, for example, on the day Barb asks the

children to write reading reflections, those reflections are then what they share. Other times, the children are free to select anything they desire. Barb asks the third graders to be sure they are prepared to share ahead of time and when it's their turn, children are supposed to identify their artifacts, e.g., "This is my mystery story," then read the reflection which tells the audience why they placed the artifact in the portfolio, "I'm putting my mystery story in my portfolio because it's the first mystery I've written. I like this story because it's one of my longest ones." Finally they take questions or comments from the audience.

Occasionally the children share their portfolios with the second grade class next door. Each third grader is teamed with a second grader, the pair meets for ten or fifteen minutes, then, when they have finished, they switch partners and begin all over again. Usually children change partners two or three times before the end of the session. Teachers roam the room, observing, listening, offering a comment or two, or occasionally helping out with a partner switch. The third graders appear to love these times. They are focused, attentive, and encouraging to the younger children. Even Robbie, often loud and disorderly, gently puts his arm around his partner, pats him on the back, tells him he is doing a good job, then leads him over to share with Luis, before withdrawing to what he considers more pressing work at the computer.

Sharing portfolios in these ways is certainly valuable. These informal and formal shares help the children to know each other better, provide a forum for storytelling, and thus build community. The children learn from each other and revise or expand their portfolios accordingly. Sharing with students in other classes builds the larger school community and allows the third graders to develop and exercise leadership skills. Barb sees what the

children value and hears how they talk about their learning.

Still, I cannot help but wonder whether the portfolios could not do more. Certainly the children enjoy sharing their portfolios, but little occurs as a result of these shares. I wonder, then, are "share" sessions the only way the portfolios could be used? If the portfolios truly are a place to "document" learning, if they are a place to set goals, make plans, and push forward, as Barb and I believe they are, then maybe the assembled "documents" should be displayed in a more rigorous setting or for more formal audiences. "Share," the word first familiarized in the writing process, then adopted for portfolios, is a nice, friendly, front porch kind of word that implies a verbal giving of one's self to another. People share a bag of peanuts, a cold drink, an idea. Right now, the third graders "share" their portfolios— they tell about themselves, then answer questions or respond to comments, but maybe Barb's students, who have carefully documented and represented their accomplishments and growth, are ready to move beyond the point of "sharing." Maybe the children are ready to present/display/exhibit their portfolios, much like a salesperson presents/displays/exhibits a product. Such rigor, however, might sensibly imply a more rigorous audience. Maybe it's time, then, that we move the portfolio audiences beyond those of peers and teachers and into the larger world. Maybe we need to ask again, "What are/could these portfolios be for? Where do they fit into assessment structures in our classrooms?"

Portfolios as an Assessment Tool

Roger Farr (1993) likens classroom assessment to a puzzle with any number of pieces fitting together to form the whole. To date, children's voices, as expressed in their portfolios, have not fit into this puzzle. Instead,

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they remain an extra piece that has somehow made its way into the box, but doesn't contribute to the total picture. If we are going to be truly effective at using portfolios to bring children's voices into evaluative conversations, we need to think about where the portfolios might fit and what purposes they might serve.

Perhaps before we can think about the purposes of portfolios, we need to begin by thinking about assessment in general. Literacy experts commonly identify a number of different purposes for evaluation (Anthony, Johnson, Mickelsen, & Preece, 1992; Baskwill & Whitman, 1987; Brandt, 1989; Campione & Brown, 1985; Costa, 1991; Farr, 1992; Glazer & Brown, 1993; Haney, 1991; Herman, 1992; Johnston, 1992; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1992; Shepherd, 1989; Tierney, 1992; Woodward, 1994; Zessoules & Gardner, 1991). Among the most frequently mentioned are:

- evaluating student strengths and needs and planning instruction
- assessing the efficacy of instruction on an individual, class, school, district, or state level
- communicating with others

In schools, each of these purposes is carried out by several different tools. In deciding where portfolios fit, then, it might be helpful to first look at what tools are already in place at Pennington.

Evaluation as a Tool for Assessing Student Strengths and Needs

Evaluating student strengths and needs to gather information for planning instruction, probably the most common purpose of assessment, is carried out on a daily basis by classroom teachers and sometimes specialists. Barb's day-to-day assessment tools include the anecdotal records she gathers

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during reading and writing conferences, reading response logs, daily editing exercises, weekly spelling tests, finished story booklets, and quarterly writing samples. These instruments enable Barb to evaluate student strengths and needs, plan instruction, and also document student growth. In conferring with Patrick about his writing, she might, for instance, discover that he is attempting to incorporate dialogue, but doesn't know how to use quotation marks; his stories, therefore, are extremely difficult to read. Based on this information, Barb begins working with Patrick on the conventions of written conversation. His drafts and finished pieces demonstrate his growing proficiency— in October, he uses no quotation marks at all; by February, he not only uses quotation marks but is also attempting to insert commas in the proper places in his written dialogue.

Day-to-day classroom assessments also guide Barb as she plans whole group instruction. In November, Barb and I are surprised when we discover that several of the third graders equate chapter books with story anthologies and subsequently believe it doesn't matter whether they start reading at chapter one or chapter six. In order to correct this misconception, Barb does several mini-lessons on chapter books— how to read from beginning to end, how to use a bookmark, and how to use information from one chapter to predict what will happen in the next. These mini-lessons help children to become more skillful and capable readers.

Occasionally teachers find large-scale assessment instruments such as criterion or norm-referenced tests helpful in evaluating student strengths and needs and also in comparing their students' performance against state or national standards or expectations. At Pennington, large-scale evaluation instruments include the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Assessment, administered in the fall and again in the spring, and yearly writing samples.

Like the classroom level instruments, both of these tools document student growth from the beginning to the end of the year. The results from the September test enable Barb to identify students who might need extra support in reading or writing. After reviewing the results of the initial testing, for instance, Barb makes plans for the Chapter One teacher to work with Luis several times a week during reading. She also arranges for Cathy, her instructional assistant, to work with a few of the boys each day during writing time.

In May, the Gates-McGinnitie post-test helps Barb to measure her students' growth. This information is useful as she makes recommendations for the following year, e.g., in talking to Patrick's fourth grade teacher, she might comment, "Patrick has some trouble with left-right directionality. This year, his comprehension improved tremendously, but according to the Gates, his decoding skills didn't improve at all. He gets very frustrated when he has to deal with words in isolation so you might want to focus more on contextual strategies with him." She might also suggest to the special education team that Patrick's reading has improved to the point that he might derive greater benefit from receiving occasional in-class support in content area work rather than being pulled out for daily supplemental reading instruction.

Evaluation as a Tool for Assessing the Efficacy of Instruction

In addition to evaluating individual students and informing classroom instruction, results from large-scale assessment are also useful to teachers, specialists, and administrators as they consider the efficacy of teacher/grade level/school performance. In reviewing results of the writing sample, for example, Barb might conclude, "My students did really well on the mechanics

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portion of their writing sample. I think the daily editing practice makes a difference. I want to be sure to do that again next year."

Reading Specialist Linda Ross also reviews the results of the Gates-McGinnitie Reading Test and the writing samples. These results might cause her to look closely at instruction in a particular class or grade. If one teacher or grade level was especially effective year after year, Linda would probably try to identify techniques that might be helpful to others. On the other hand, if she noticed that the most advanced students at Pennington consistently made huge gains, but the less skilled readers and writers grew very little, she might consider how teachers at Pennington could alter instruction to help less proficient students experience more growth. Lisa shares these results with principal Lynn Johnson and sometimes with district officials.

The community outside of the school also relies on large-scale assessment instruments. The public, suggests Farr, "has a vested interest in the future of children and in their effective and cost-efficient instruction. It is recognized as vital to Americans and their nation's future that schools produce educated students" (1992, p. 29). As of 1994, student progress and school and district efficacy in the state of New Hampshire are evaluated through the New Hampshire Achievement Test, administered to every third grader the first week in May. This norm-referenced test evaluates student performance in reading, writing, and math. Tests are manually scored at the headquarters of a regional testing company, where student performance is categorized as novice, basic, proficient, or advanced in each area. Parents receive summary sheets of individual student performance; scores for classes, schools, and districts are reported in local and state newspapers the following November.

Evaluation as a Tool for Communication

Evaluation tools also provide a common language for those inside a school or district — classroom teachers, specialists, school administrators, and others— to talk about particular students or programs, which is considered especially helpful when people are trying to make decisions about appropriate programs or placements. Unfortunately, this common language often serves as a tool for labeling children in negative ways or including or excluding children from special programs. When Barb says, for example, that Patrick scored a 2.1 (second grade, first month) on the Gates-McGinnitie, people assume right away that he is a third grader who is reading at least a year below grade level. When they hear that Elizabeth scored in the advanced range on the writing portion of the New Hampshire Assessment, they are sure she is a very good writer. These results then become labels which accompany children through their school careers.

Maybe more importantly, evaluation tools provide teachers with a language for communicating with people outside the school walls. Certainly one of the most important out-of-school audiences is parents, who want to know what their children are learning and how they compare to other students in the class, school, and larger world. The Pennington parents currently receive at least five kinds of information about their children. First, they see their children's daily work in the Pennington Express envelopes that go home on Fridays. With a few of the children, such as Robbie, Barb uses a homework notebook to communicate on a daily basis. Parents also receive quarterly report cards and have parent-teacher conferences in November and then again in March, if they so desire. Furthermore, they are given feedback from the state on their children's performance on the New Hampshire State Assessment.

Where Might Portfolios Fit into This Picture?

When portfolios first became popular, they were touted as the be-all and end-all of evaluation tools. Many people, myself included, wondered whether portfolios might not be capable of replacing almost every other assessment tool. Now, not even a decade later, portfolios have proven a less-than-adequate all purpose assessment tool and people are becoming disillusioned and abandoning them altogether. I would suggest that perhaps a large part of this disillusionment has occurred as a result of trying to make portfolios what they are not. We need to look hard at which of these purposes— evaluating student strengths and needs and planning instruction, assessing the efficacy of instruction, or communicating with the outside world—portfolios might most effectively serve.

Portfolios as Large-Scale Assessment Tool

First, I would argue that portfolios are not a particularly viable tool for assessing the efficacy of instruction on a school, district, or state level. Advocates of large-scale portfolios (Farr, 1993; Hewitt, 1994; Simmons, 1991a, 1991b; 1992) believe these portfolios provide a fuller picture of the student, demonstrate growth over time, include process as well as product, and contain multi-dimensional views of learning. While all of these things may be true, large-scale portfolios also have many drawbacks. Assembling and organizing such portfolios is time-consuming for teachers and students. Because contents must be uniform, students often have little say in what is included. Thus, student opportunities to self-evaluate or to collaborate with more experienced mentors are greatly diminished.

Furthermore, large-scale portfolios are very expensive. If the portfolios

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are to be done well, teachers must have a wide knowledge base about literacy instruction and assessment, which may necessitate additional staff development for many teachers. While that would definitely be desirable, in an age of shrinking budgets, money for such training is rarely available. Too, scoring large-scale portfolios, which usually contain at least five different samples of writing, takes a great deal of time. Many states or districts rely on testing companies or trained groups of teachers, a costly proposition. If money for these groups is not available, the scoring burden is often placed on teachers, who are rarely compensated. And once again, adequate teacher training is an issue because strong interrater reliability, critical to large-scale assessment, cannot be achieved without extensive training.

Finally, when large-scale portfolio data is aggregated, student scores are often reported with a single number (1-4, with 4 being the most proficient) or word (Novice, Basic, Proficient, Advanced). These terse labels flatten the portfolios and strip them of the complexity and richness portfolios supposedly represent. Simmons (1991a, 1991b, 1992) demonstrates a high correlation between students' scores on writing portfolios and their scores on one-shot writing samples. Hewitt (1994) cites these studies as evidence in favor of the reliability of portfolios but one might view this data very differently. I concur with Peter Elbow (1994), who asks, "Is it really useful to spend such extraordinary amounts of time and money [on portfolios]?...Are there not quicker and easier ways to identify those students [excelling/having problems]?" (p. 51).

Portfolios as a Classroom Level Assessment Tool

While portfolios are not a viable large-scale assessment tool, they hold exciting possibilities for classroom level assessment. The data contained in

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the portfolios— list of books read, reading responses, writing samples, spelling graphs, and learner accomplishments— could provide parents with a far more detailed picture of their children than the one presented on the report cards. Perhaps these portfolios, carefully and thoughtfully compiled, could even supplant quarterly report cards, which actually provide parents with only minimal information. Literacy assessment on the Pennington report card, for instance, includes the following:

READING
Above
At   Grade Level
Below

___ Initiates own reading
___ Chooses books at appropriate level
___ Uses appropriate strategies to develop meaning
___ Demonstrates reading comprehension through written
     responses
___ Actively participates in group discussions
___ Is able to question, locate, and interpret information in
     print
___ Reads a variety of genre
___ Uses reading time wisely

WRITING
Above
At   Grade Level
Below

___ Initiates own writing
___ Produces meaningful writing
___ Shows originality in writing
___ Actively participates in conferences
___ Revises ideas and edits
___ Demonstrates an understanding of mechanics skills
___ Demonstrates an understanding of grammar skills
___ Is able to write a written response to a specific activity
___ Shows pride in what is written and is willing to share
___ Uses writing time wisely

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HANDWRITING
___ Forms letters correctly in cursive
___ Produces neat and legible handwriting
___ Applies handwriting skills in written work
___ Assumes responsibility for practice

SPELLING
Above
At   Grade Level
Below

___ Demonstrates mastery on weekly spelling tests
___ Is able to recognize misspelled words when self-editing
___ Applies spelling skills in written work

NA= Not evaluated at this time
√ = Satisfactory Progress

I suspect these report cards provide most parents with little more information than whether their children are above, at, or below grade level. Many of the descriptors on the report card are coded in educational jargon that is meaningless and maybe even misleading to parents. Under reading, for instance, teachers evaluate whether children can choose books at an appropriate level. As a reading specialist, I know this descriptor is designed to communicate whether a child knows how to choose a book that's at her reading level, as opposed to one that is too easy or too hard for her. For Patrick, an appropriate choice might be a book at the second grade level, while for Kate, it might be at fifth. Parents however, may understand "appropriate level" to read "third grade level." They may be confused, then, when the descriptor on the top of the report card indicates that a child like Patrick is reading below grade level when the descriptor below says he chooses books at the appropriate level; he does, but for the most part, early in the year, they are second grade level books. Conversely, Kate, an excellent reader, almost always chooses *Babysitter Club* books, which are a third grade reading level; in

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actuality, at some point she needs to challenge herself by reading something harder. I suspect many of the descriptors under writing are similarly confusing.

Looking at the report card, I cannot help but wonder whether some descriptors might even be confusing for teachers. "Revises ideas and edits," for instance, might be difficult to assess because revising and editing are actually two very different skills. Many of the third graders are skillful editors of their own work, but only a few are very good at revising. Conversely, "demonstrates an understanding of mechanics skills" and "demonstrates an understanding of grammar skills" would appear to have enough overlap that they might be difficult to evaluate separately. The two categories would also appear to overlap with the "edits" portion of "revises ideas and edits."

Furthermore, the evaluative symbols chosen for the report card provide little information. Descriptors are marked by a check, which indicates "satisfactory progress" or "NA" not applicable at this time. Five or ten years ago, there would have been at least two more gradations— one indicating excellent progress or achievement and another indicating unsatisfactory progress or achievement. In recent years, as report cards have been amended to focus on student strengths, these gradations have been eliminated. I'm not sure, however, that failing to acknowledge excellence or weakness is a healthy trend. Instead, the lack of choices would appear to detract from teachers' abilities to truly describe student performance; the report cards neither emphasize the strengths of a skillful reader or writer, nor reveal weaknesses or areas of concern for a child experiencing difficulties. In some cases, these report cards might even prevent parents who should be concerned about their children's progress from being aware of problems. Even in the best case scenarios, these report cards provide almost no in-depth information as to a

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child's strengths, interests, or performance, other than comments the teacher might or might not choose to write.

Literacy portfolios containing lists of books read, reading responses, writing samples, and learner accomplishments, have the potential for providing a much richer, more complete picture of the learner. In the portfolios, parents can see students' strengths, and can also work with their child and the teacher to set goals and monitor progress. My experiences with Robbie, one of Barb's most challenging students, convince me that portfolios have potential as a classroom assessment tool for even our most complex students.

Robbie: What Report Cards Can't Measure

"I'm a real disgrace," Robbie announces the first week of school. The sandy-haired rebel, clad in black Harley Davidson t-shirts, begins establishing his image as class eccentric almost immediately. During a cooperative math activity in September, he announces, "Karen, guess what I'm going to do this weekend? I'm going to get a tattoo." Gentle Karen eyes him with disbelief as he continues, "I might get a heart or an anchor. But I don't know if I can take the needle."

By the end of the first quarter, Robbie's position in the class is well-established. No one will lend him a pencil, because he eats the erasers. No one wants to sit with him, because he makes rude noises. His classmates groan in disgust when he crawls around the floor eating broken potato chips and cookie crumbs during snack time. In December, my stomach rolls when Robbie tells me that the gum he has been chewing all day came from the wastebasket in the music room. Robbie seems determined to maintain this image. "I don't want anybody to know I'm smart," he says to me.

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Robbie is not particularly fond of school. In a note explaining one of his many behavioral digressions, he writes, "I hATe The schooL RooLes Becuaes theY eAR StoPeD" (I hate the school because they are stupid). He puts "a kid's worst horror— teachers" in the bottom of a pit in a story he writes in October. Robbie's priorities rarely match those of Barb or his classmates. Telling me he is "only going to do the important stuff, " he completes about half the class assignments. He rails against the segmented structure of the typical school day, and chooses to stay in from recess or skip whole-group activities to work on his own projects. "This is my working day. Once I start writing a story, I never stop, unless it's important work." To Robbie, even the simplest class routines seem made to be defied.

Robbie is Evaluated

Robbie's January report card is bleak. Although he reads at grade level, his performance in over half of the subcategories in reading is unsatisfactory. Barb comments, "Robbie spends a lot of his reading time working with non-fiction. He has been encouraged to read some 'easy' chapter books, but he doesn't follow through with recommended books." The evaluation of Robbie's writing is similarly dismal. Robbie is below grade level, does not "write responses to specific activities," and "initiates his own writing only when he is able to use the computer." Handwriting and spelling "need work!" He has "accomplished very little in class time for several weeks."

Robbie, however, views the situation somewhat differently. Before Barb distributes the report cards, I explain each descriptor and ask Robbie to evaluate himself. He tells me that he is at grade level in reading, but rarely "initiates his own reading" or "uses strategies to develop meaning." When I ask if he "demonstrates reading comprehension through written responses,"

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he indicates that he does not, "I never write about it," he declares adamantly. He believes he does, however, "choose books at an appropriate level" ("I choose books like the encyclopedia"), "participate in group discussions," "read a variety of genre," and "use reading time wisely."

Evaluating his writing, he tells me he is above grade level, "Why do you think I have so much stories in my files?" he declares. When asked if he "initiates his own writing," he says, "All the time, I choose to draw for my stories to see if I can get better stories." He also rates himself high on originality, "That's why I have stories no one else has." He especially enjoys sharing his writing with me, and tells me that he "revises and edits his work," but "the teacher checks it sometimes too." He thinks that he demonstrates an understanding of mechanical skills and also grammar. He also believes that he "uses his writing time wisely." Again, Robbie's evaluation is very different from Barb's.

Robbie's assessment of his work habits and social attitudes also reveals discrepancies. When I ask about following directions, Robbie says, "Almost always, except when I misunderstand." Asked if he "works independently," he says, "In math, I have Russ help me, and I help him." He tells me that he always "organizes his time and materials," "requests help when needed" and "practices self control." He "respects the rights and property of others," "except my sister's." He is usually attentive. Only when asked about whether he is courteous and considerate does he hesitate. Finally he responds, "We'll talk about that later."

But Robbie is a Learner...

Robbie has strengths that cannot be documented on the typical report card. He is an avid researcher and spends reading time under a table

examining old *National Geographics*. When I ask if he can read them, he says, "I can't but I look at the pictures and they tell me a lot...I like them because they tell me lots of information." When he's not reading *National Geographics*, he's often in the back of the room, "picking up a few facts" from the pictures and charts in the encyclopedias. He mulls over these facts, analyzing and synthesizing. "Miss Wilcox, you know how people are usually called airheads?...I think they should be called waterheads, it says in this book that our brains are made up of 80% water...Your brain is 80% water, that gives you twenty percent dry. I usually use the right side. You use the right side when you play music, draw a picture, or invent things. The whole paragraph says your brain is divided into two halves, you use the left side of your brain when you speak or solve problems in mathematics."

Robbie rarely reveals such depth in his written work, which is often messy and incomplete. Most of Robbie's writing is done with specific audiences in mind. He writes letters to his grandparents and to a dentist and puppeteer who visit the school. When I inadvertently crack my knuckles, Robbie, who wants to be a doctor or scientist, decides a little medical advice is in order, "You shouldn't crack your knuckles purposely," he says. I am conferring with Jill, and don't respond, so he repeats himself. When I still don't respond, Robbie decides the issue is serious enough to warrant a written reminder and tears the corner from a piece of paper sticking out of his desk.

"YoU ShoD NoT CRAK yoUR NuKLS PRPiLY (you should not crack your knuckles purposely)," he writes.

"Why not?" I write back.

"it cooD BRAk yOuR NucLS "(It could break your knuckles), Robbie responds.

I write again, "You think so? Who told you that?"

Robbie decides to draw on a higher authority, "The in ENCyCLoPeDiA DiD."

I write again, "Oh yeah? I don't believe it!"

Robbie is insistent, "LooK foR yoURSeLf."

I write again, "Is it under 'K' for knuckles or 'H' for hand?"

"K," Robbie writes, but then he runs out of paper, so he turns to me and says, "Actually it would be under 'B' for 'Break knuckles.'"

Robbie gets the "B" encyclopedia, but can't find body. "How come it's not in here anymore?" he asks. I suggest he try the "H" volume. He carefully peruses information on the human body, identifying which bones would be part of the hand and specifically which would be the knuckles. I push him a little and together we look up "hand." Unfortunately, knuckle cracking is not mentioned. Robbie, undaunted, launches into a diatribe on the evils of this vice. Then, unsure that I am convinced, he draws an elaborate diagram.

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Figure 6-1: Robbie's Written Warnings and Knuckle Cracking Diagram

You shoD Not CRAK youR NuKLS
PRPiLY.
Why not?   it cooD BRAk youR
                              NuLLS

You think so? Who told you that?

the iN ENCYCLOPEDIA DiD
Oh yeah? I don't believe it' Look for
     your self Moyle? ... Tsiturday

Bone AND hAnD

Bores   CAPS

bkne   LegAmiNs
       BROKiN
       CAP AnD LiguniNs
             LiViTSh you

                                  mARch 16,94

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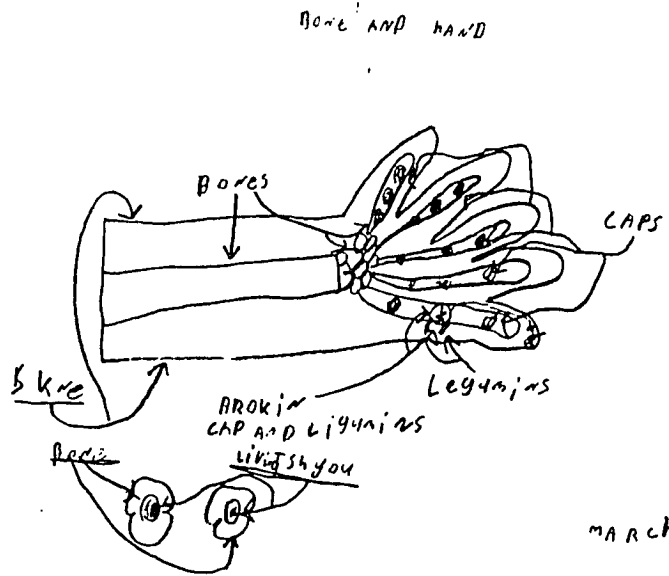
Surprisingly, Robbie's interest in writing extends into poetry. In mid-November, he announces that he is going to write a poem and sits at the computer through writers' workshop, story, snack time, and recess. Finally, almost two hours later, he is finished. Having watched Robbie play with language for three months, I expect a masterpiece, but I am disappointed. "Dieing," by Robbie L., is better known as "Don't Ever Smile When a Hearse Goes By," a song Robbie copied from Alvin Schwartz's book, *Scary Stories*.

In March, Robbie writes a "real" poem, almost by accident. As part of a multi-age unit on weather, Barb, the second grade teacher, asks the children to imagine what would happen if there were no clouds. Robbie writes, "If there were no clouds, There wouldn't be any water. And no water, no trees, Then there will be no air, no life on earth. It would be just another lonely planet in the solar system." When Barb shares the writing with me, I am stunned by the beauty of the language, and tell him it sounds like a poem. That night, I type his poem.

> "If there were no clouds,
> There wouldn't be any water.
> And no water,
> No trees,
> Then there will be no air ,
> No life on earth.
> It would be just
> another
> lonely planet
> in the solar system."

Delighted with his newfound talents, Robbie writes two more poems the next day and proudly glues all three into his booklet of finished writing, then roams the building passing out copies to all available audiences. His favorite audience is Bill, the school custodian, who also writes "in poet style."

Robbie draws on his love of science to write in his favorite genre— the research report. His special interests— space, the human body, and the

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ocean— are not topics in the third grade curriculum and the third graders do not study report writing until fourth quarter, so Robbie's early reports are self-initiated. His first report, composed on the computer, consists of one sentence, "Erth has a poling forc coled gravity." (Earth has a pulling force called gravity). Turning to me, grins mischievously and says, "This story is true but they have changed the names to protect the innocent." Then he returns to the computer, deletes his words, and types a new fact, "Mars was discovered in 1966."

In March, Robbie writes a report about the human body (See Figure 6-2). I admire his descriptive language and his use of paragraphs and encourage him to expand his report. For days, he's been barraging me with facts about the human skeleton— the number of bones in the body, which are the biggest and smallest, how bones are connected— and I suggest that he might want to include some of that information in his report. I tell him that he could do research on the heart, stomach, bladder, and skin, and have separate paragraphs on each organ. I show him diagrams of those organs and ask if he'd like to draw some of his own. I bring pamphlets other third graders have created and type Robbie's report on the computer, so he can see what it would look like. Robbie, ever the rebel, resists all of my suggestions.

Figure 6-2: Robbie's Human Body Report

Body Facts

Blood and Skin
When you cut yourself, blood rushes to the cut or injured area. When the blood gets there, the blood gets sticky, and when it is done, there is something that is called a scab there.

Bones
 Bones are made up by living tissue. Bones keep you from being clay. Bones protect your body.

Organs
I am going to tell you about your organs— heart, stomach, bladder, flesh, lungs, and living tissue.

BODY fACS.

BOLDING / Skine

WEN yoU cUt yoUR SeLf BOULD RUshis to to the cut, oR iNeUrd AREAc, weN tne BOULD gers rheR the BOULD gets Stiky ANd weN it IS DoNe tReR iS SomethiNg that iscoLDA SKAB theR.

BONES

BoNeis Are mAD uP Ey tiriNg TiShyog. BoceeP S yoU frEN BjNd CLeAe ANd it PReKS youR BoDy.

ORGIN

I Am ABcut to teL you your ogiNs. hARt, Stomik, BLADeRp FLeSh J LUOUGSf Livir J tShxoy).

Robbie Evaluates

Unlike his third quarter report card, Robbie's literacy portfolio provides a picture of his strengths and interests. When he shares it with me in late March, the portfolio contains approximately ten different artifacts, most with reflections. These include:

- "Terror in the Woods" a fiction story
"I think it is the best one in third grade. Because it is the longest one I've written."

- Earlier draft of "Terror in the Woods"
"This is in here," says Robbie, "because you wrote on this and I like you."

- Diagram of the hand: "I think it's neat how I drew this."

- School rules: "I like this. It says how to make school so kids like it... I figure it's kind of funny, I gave it to the principal."

- "If There Were No Water" poem
"One day we were in multi-age. We had to make a story called 'If There Were No Water' so I wrote this story."

- Spelling scores: "I got my spelling scores...It might tell people how good I am at this." (Because Robbie struggles continually with spelling, I am surprised at this comment. He, however, resists all of my efforts to pursue this discussion.)

- Reading genre chart: "My first one in reading is realistic. I got one for that, so I'm not very much realistic reader. But fantasy I'm real big on fantasy, so I've got three on fantasy, those are the ones I finished, four of 'em. One goes to realistic, three go to fantasy. Nothing for mystery, folktale, humor, adventure, historical fiction, science fiction, realistic fiction, oh no, no, not realistic fiction, and he pauses, p-p-p-pot-tree (poetry)."

- A booklist from third grade: "And these are the books I've read, *Camp Big Paw, In a Dark Dark Room, Clues in the Woods, The Scary Book*."

- Book reflection
"*Bony Legs* is a book. It is about a girl who goes to borrow a needle and thread, but she got captured and she gets out. I like the book

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because it is the best one I've read in third grade, cuz it is very good, one that I've read. I like the beginning of this story and I am now finished.'"

- Diagram of the light shoes
"'Things we are proud of.' My invention that I invented. It is light shoes, they are neat."

Reviewing these artifacts, I see a child who reads and writes in a variety of genre, loves science and technology, demonstrates his knowledge through diagrams rather than words, uses rich and descriptive language, can retell a story, has a good sense of humor, and has strong connections to at least one literate mentor.

Given that Robbie's portfolio does provide such a detailed picture of his strengths and possibilities, I wonder whether it might not be a useful tool for communicating Robbie's progress to his parents. Not only does it provide extensive information about Robbie's learning, it also emphasizes his strengths. Conventional evaluation systems, which view the child as a "finished product" who "shows reading comprehension through written responses," "demonstrates mastery on weekly spelling tests," "is attentive," and "works independently," emphasize Robbie's weaknesses. Perhaps, then, we should think about how portfolios might be used as a tool for communicating with parents.

Portfolios as a Tool for Communicating with Parents

Terri Austin, a teacher-researcher from Fairbanks, Alaska, uses portfolios as a tool for communicating with parents (1994). Austin's sixth graders place all of their work in "save files." At the end of each quarter, they review the work in these files, select two artifacts from each subject area and use these as the basis for writing a reflection about the quarter's learning.

Students are also required to solicit feedback from other adults at the school and from their parents. Austin writes a short narrative about each child, then collaborates with students to fill out their report cards, which are mandated by the district. All of these artifacts are assembled in a conference portfolio. Children rehearse their portfolios with peers and with university education students, then on a designated night, they share them with their parents. Austin is in the room but does not participate directly in the conferences. If parents desire more feedback from her, additional conferences, usually with children present, are scheduled.

Davies, Cameron, et al. (1992) describe a "three way conference" system which poses interesting possibilities for Barb and her third graders (Also see Marvuglio, 1994). These teacher-researchers discuss the three-way conferences as follows:

> When students, their parents, and teachers meet to discuss children's learning, everyone has a role to play. The children demonstrate what they know as they share their accomplishments and set new learning goals. The parents find out about their children's learning, have the opportunity to ask questions and express their ideas, and help make plans to support their children's learning at home. Teachers facilitate the three-way conversations. They support the learners *and* the parents by clarifying, elaborating, and responding to specific questions and concerns (1992, p. 25).

Teachers and students prepare for the three-way conferences in several ways. First, the teacher establishes an environment conducive to such conferences by building rapport with students and parents continually throughout the year. She helps parents prepare for the conferences by sending home letters that outline the purpose and format (See Figure 6-3). The teacher also devotes extensive time to helping children accurately and thoroughly document their learning in their portfolios and provides ample time for rehearsal prior to the actual three-way conferences. She facilitates the conferences, offers her input,

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and acts as a scribe.

Figure 6-3: Sample Parent Letters

Davies, A. et al. (1992) *Together is Better: Collaborative Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting.*

MY INFORMAL REPORT TO MY PARENT(S)

Date _____   Name _____

1. The most important thing in our classroom that I am trying to do well is _____

_____

_____

2. This is important to me because _____

_____

_____

3. Two things that I have done well this term are _____

_____

_____

Dear Parent(s):

4. One thing that I need to work harder at is _____

This is what you can expect when you attend the three-way parent(s)/teacher/child conference on _____ at _____.

_____

- You and your child will have time to look over his or her collection of work and the classroom displays and learning centers.

_____

5. Something that I am proud about this term is _

- You and your child will then meet with me to discuss your child's strengths, any concerns, and set new learning goals for the upcoming term.

_____

_____

6. My goal(s) for next term is (are) _____

- Your child is prepared to take an active part. There will be opportunities for you to ask questions, make comments, or express concerns.

_____

_____

7. Attached are some samples of my work. Please

- The parents' group has arranged to have tea and coffee available in the library for your enjoyment following the conference.

_____

- If you have any issues you wish to discuss privately with me following the three-way conference, a sign-up sheet is available on the table to the left of the door.

_____

- The grade 7 Buddy Program is providing a child-minding service in Mrs. Jones's room (117).

We believe that a three-way conference is one important way to support student learning. We look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

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Portfolio Conferences at Pennington: Envisioning Possibilities

Robbie's portfolio might serve as the basis of similar three way conferences. Before each conference, Robbie could organize his portfolio to accurately chronicle his learning for the quarter, making sure to include a welcome letter which summarizes and points out highlights, as well as careful, explicit reflections for artifacts in all subject areas. Perhaps Barb could also write a short narrative, no more than 5-8 sentences describing Robbie's growth as she sees it. For the third quarter, she might write:

> Robbie continues to display his love of science and reads almost exclusively non-fiction. This quarter he's been especially interested in books about the human body. In the past nine weeks, he has published a research report about the human body, labeled diagrams of the hand and the tooth, and a poem about water. He's also written and edited two thank you letters. Robbie is excited about the animal reports we have just started and has big plans for drawing lots of diagrams to show what he's learning about snakes. I would like to see him try to read some fiction. Given his love of science, I suspect science fiction or fantasy might be a good match, so I'm going to ask him to try one of Bruce Coville's *Alien* series. We also continue to work on spelling and handwriting, which are concerns for me.

Composing this eight sentence narrative would probably not take any longer than the comments she typically writes on Robbie's report card. Prior to the conference, Robbie and Barb could review the portfolio, consider possible goals, and rehearse the actual session. Robbie could also practice displaying his portfolio for his peers and maybe older elementary students or middle or high schoolers.

At the conference, Robbie, his parents, and Barb might begin by reviewing the goals from the previous quarter. Robbie would share his portfolio, concentrating especially on artifacts which indicate progress toward his goals, and could then display other artifacts of which he is especially proud. Robbie's parents could make comments, ask questions, and express

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concerns.

Following Robbie's portfolio share, the three parties could discuss goals for the following nine weeks. A format in which student, parent, and teacher each choose a goal might be especially effective, or perhaps there would be some times when the three would have shared goals.

Robbie, for instance, might say, "I really want to learn about snakes."

"What questions do you have?" asks Barb.

"I want to know about different kinds of snakes, which ones are poisonous," says Robbie.

"Anything else?" Barb asks as she scribes Robbie's questions, "What are some different kinds of snakes?" and "What snakes are poisonous?"

"Yeah, I want to know how you take care of a pet snake," says Robbie, looking hopefully at his father as his stepmother frantically shakes her head no.

"OK," says Barb, and writes, "How do you take care of a pet snake?"

"Like what they eat, and where they live, do they live in the house?" says Robbie, as his stepmother shakes her head again.

"Where are you going to find the answer to those questions?" Barb asks Robbie.

Robbie responds, "I could get some books about snakes." He gestures to the school library, "Do we have any in here?" Barb says she doesn't think there are any books in the class library but believes the school library probably has a few.

"We could take him to the public library, too," says Robbie's father.

"Great," responds Barb, and writes, "Robbie will go with his parents to the public library." Then she asks, "What other resources could you use? Do you know anyone who has a snake?"

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Robbie says that he doesn't and Barb turns to his parents. "A guy came to Cub Scouts a few weeks ago," says Robbie's dad, "He brought all kinds of reptiles. He had three or four snakes. Maybe we could find out from the scoutmaster how to get in touch with him."

"That's a great idea," says Barb and writes, "Robbie and his dad will talk to the scoutmaster."

"Then maybe you could write to him or give him a call," suggests Barb. "Maybe he'd let Robbie come for a visit. How does that sound Robbie?"

Robbie nods happily. Barb asks if there is anything else he wants to add to his goal or plan, he can't think of anyone else so Barb says, "Well, that's a good start. You'll probably uncover other questions and resources as you go along. What kind of finished product do you want to create to demonstrate what you've learned?"

Robbie doesn't know and Barb offers several suggestions— a simple research report, a poster, a newspaper, a play, or a picture book illustrated with diagrams. Robbie's fascination with graphic representation is clearly shown in his portfolio in diagrams of knuckle cracking, as well as the tooth and brain, and he decides that he will pursue this interest by publishing a "scientific picture book" for his classmates. Barb notes this goal, then asks, "When do you think you will have it done?" Robbie thinks the project will take him a month or maybe a little longer. Barb makes a note of this.

Next, Barb turns to his Robbie's parents. "OK, now it's your turn," she says, "What goal do you have for Robbie this quarter?"

"His spelling is atrocious," says Robbie's stepmother, "we want to make sure there's some improvement in that area this quarter."

Robbie rolls his eyes as Barb says, "I think that's reasonable. How could Robbie demonstrate that for you?"

"He could do better on spelling tests," say Robbie's parents, flipping through his spelling booklet.

"But spelling is hard for me," Robbie protests.

"How could we help you?" says Barb.

First Robbie just shrugs, but Barb waits, and finally he says, "I want to do the easier list that some of the kids do."

Sue turns to Robbie's parents, "We have an easier list that some students who struggle with spelling find more manageable. Would it be all right with you if Robbie tried that list?"

Robbie's parents indicate that the change in lists would be acceptable.

Sue turns back to Robbie, "You know, Robbie, you would also do better if you practiced every night. The weeks that you practice, you do much better. Can you schedule ten minutes a night to practice your spelling words?"

Robbie shrugs and his parents step in. "Our lives are kind of crazy," says his dad, "Sometimes he's with us and sometimes he's with his mom. That makes it hard to get routines down."

"Hmm," says Barb, "I know the weeks that Robbie practices he does much better." She asks Robbie to open his portfolio to his spelling graph, which displays scores ranging from 25-100%.

"I might be able to do them on the way to day care every morning," says Robbie's dad.

"Will that work Robbie?" asks Barb. Robbie does not look especially pleased but nods affirmatively. Barb records this goal, "Robbie will start doing the easier spelling list. He will practice ten minutes every morning in the car."

Barb says, "Robbie, we can work on the spelling at school too. Tomorrow, I'm going to give you a list of words to put in your writing folder.

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I'm also going to teach you how to use spell check when you write on the computer because I think you'd really like that." She adds to the goal sheet, "Mrs. W. will give Robbie a list of words," and "Mrs. W. will teach Robbie to use spell check."

Finally Barb says, "OK, now it's my turn. I know you love non-fiction, but I'd really like to see you finish at least one fiction book each month. I think you might like some of these Bruce Coville books, there's a whole series, starting with *My Teacher is an Alien*. They're about space and I know you like that. They're also funny and you usually like funny books. You can choose one of these, or we can find you something else in the library, but I want you to read a few chapter books this year. Do you think you'd like this one or do you want a different book?" Robbie picks up the book, leafs through it, then indicates that he will try *My Teacher is an Alien*.

Sue continues, "Robbie, you know that most of the kids read a half hour every night and record their minutes on home reading logs, but you haven't brought any of those back. I'd really like to see those start coming in more regularly. Do you think you could start bringing those in?"

Robbie says, "Sometimes I forget."

"How could you remember?" says Barb.

"I could help him," says Robbie's stepmom. "We fill out his sister's every night."

"But that's a long time," protests Robbie. "A half hour is a long time. As long as a whole T.V. show."

Barb responds, "It doesn't have to be in one block, it could be in two shorter ones."

Robbie's parents look doubtfully at each other. Barb says, "How long do you think you could read, Robbie?"

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"Fifteen minutes?" says Robbie hopefully.

"I'm not sure that's long enough," says Barb. "How about if we agree to twenty? That would be two ten-minute blocks every day. Then maybe next quarter you can go for two 15-minute sessions." Robbie agrees to this compromise and

Barb writes, "Robbie will read one chapter book a month. He'll start with Bruce Coville." She also notes, "He will read ten minutes twice a day. He will prove this by bringing in his reading log every Monday."

The conference closes with Robbie, his parents, and Barb signing this goal planning sheet. That night, Barb makes a copy for Robbie, one for his parents, and one for herself.

Used this way, the portfolios would assume new rigor. Robbie would know that he needed to use his portfolio document his growth and progress. The portfolio would also enable Robbie's parents to see his strengths, talents, and interests. Maybe most importantly, these portfolios would encourage the melding of evaluation and instruction.

Portfolios as an Instructional Tool

After the three-way conference, Robbie, his parents, and Barb would be responsible for following through on the goals. Robbie's progress, processes, and products would be documented in the portfolio. Documentation of Robbie's goal of writing a picture book about snakes, for instance, might consist of several different artifacts, including:

- Robbie's initial questions and any others generated during his research
- Robbie's research notes
- Bibliography of books used during Robbie's study

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- A copy of the rough and final drafts of Robbie's letter to the snake keeper
- The snake keeper's response to Robbie
- Xeroxed copies of several different diagrams, e.g., venom pockets and internal organs
- Rough draft of the text for Robbie's picture book
- Finished draft of Robbie's picture book

To document his progress in spelling, Robbie might include copies of weekly spelling tests, his spelling graph, and an unedited computer draft, as well as the final draft, on which he had done a spell check. His efforts in reading could be displayed through his daily reading log, home reading records, and maybe a reading response or two. These artifacts would demonstrate Robbie's growing proficiency as a reader, writer, and learner. They would display some of Robbie's developing skills, e.g., notetaking, using reference books, paragraphing, spelling, editing, and producing polished final drafts on the computer, skills Robbie could use throughout his entire life.

Self Evaluation: A Means or an End?

Used in this way, Robbie's portfolio would become not only a tool for assessment, but also an important tool for instruction. This emphasis would be very different from typical "portfolio classrooms" in which the portfolios are viewed almost exclusively as a tool for promoting learner self-evaluation. Although self-evaluation is important, we seem to have forgotten to ask ourselves the very important question, "What is this self-evaluation for?"

Far too often, learner self-evaluation becomes an end in and of itself. Children self-evaluate simply for the purpose of self-evaluating. In actuality, we should ask children to self-evaluate because we want them to develop the

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habits and attitudes that will make them independent, lifelong learners. Perhaps our focus should not be self-evaluation, then, but rather the learner independence and skillfulness. If that is our goal, then maybe our question should not be, "How can we help students become effective self-evaluators?" but rather, "How can we help our students become more skillful, independent, lifelong learners? What role does self-evaluation play in this skillful independence?"

<u>A Portrait of the Skillful Learner</u>

We need to look, then, at the bigger picture of the skillful learner and at how self-evaluation fits into that picture. What does the skillful learner do? What distinguishes this learner from her less skilled counterpart? What attitudes of mind, behaviors, and strategies does she bring to a learning situation? It might be helpful to develop a profile of the prototypical skillful learner. Certainly, no one person possesses all of these characteristics in equal amounts, yet this profile can serve as a model to work toward.

• **The skillful learner can set realistic goals.**

Skillful learners can set realistic goals for their learning. Such goals are concrete, they are specific, they are achievable. Karen does not say, "I want to read harder books," she says, "I want to read *The BFG*. That's the book all my friends are reading. I want to be able to read it too." When asked to write a report, Robbie can identify a topic. He thinks, "Last week I caught a garter snake in the woods behind my house. Now Mrs. Wilson says we have to write animal reports, so I'm going to write about my snake."

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• **The skillful learner can make plans for achieving goals.**

Skillful learners not only set goals, but also make plans for achieving those goals. Karen, for example, declares, "Right now, *The BFG* is too hard for me. I think I can read *James and the Giant Peach* because last year my teacher read that out loud, so I already know what it's about. I'm going to try that, then I'm going to ask my teacher or the school librarian for a list of other books by Roald Dahl. Every time I finish a Roald Dahl book, I'm going to try the first chapter of *The BFG* to see if I can read it yet." Robbie plans, "The first thing I'm going to do is make a list of things I already know about snakes. Then I'm going to make a list of questions I want to know. I'm going to use the table of contents in these books to find the answers to those questions. Then I'm going to draw some pictures to go with my writing. I'm going to make those into posters and use them when I share the report with my class."

• **The skillful learner draws on her history as a learner. She knows how she learns and what she already knows.**

As the skillful learner sets goals and makes plans, she considers her personal history. What does she already know? What skills does she already have? How can she use her existing knowledge, strengths, and capabilities to help her reach new goals? Karen, for example, recognizes that she already knows something about Roald Dahl. She has heard *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* read aloud. She knows Dahl's books are humorous fantasy. This knowledge assists her as she prepares to read *The BFG*. Robbie says, "I've never written a report before, but I know lots about snakes from our reptile unit last year. I also know how to use information books. I love to draw and make charts and graphs and so I want to include some pictures and diagrams in my report." These learners use this

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knowledge of themselves— what they know and how they learn to assist them in their present tasks.

• **The skillful learner uses a variety of resources— print, people, and technology. He also recognizes his responsibility to act as a resource to the larger community.**

Skillful learners are aware of available resources. They know how to use not only books, but other printed materials— magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, letters, etc. In today's world, skillful learners must also be able to access information through technological tools like the computer, electronic mail, and CD-ROMs.

Skillful learners recognize people as valuable resources and seek out mentors, both in their immediate world and those who are more distant (John-Steiner, 1985). Karen, for example, knows that reading is easiest and most meaningful for her when she can talk with a friend about what she's read, so she enlists the support of Elizabeth, who has already read most of the Roald Dahl books. Robbie, remembering that a snake handler did a presentation at a Boy Scout meeting a few months before, tracks down his name and address and writes a letter requesting additional information. Skillful learners also recognize community organizations such as historical societies, museums, and philanthropic societies as valuable sources of information.

Conversely, skillful learners recognize their need for/responsibility to the larger community. These learners understand their interconnectedness with other people. They see themselves as resources for others. When Kate tells Karen that she wants to read *James and the Giant Peach,* but can't locate the book in the school or class library, Karen volunteers to bring in her

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personal copy of the book. When Patrick struggles to organize the information he has collected about koalas, Robbie is quick to step in and share the organizational techniques he is using in his snake report.

• The skillful learner has systems for data collection and organization.

Skillful learners know how to collect and organize their data. They recognize that different organizational systems are appropriate in different situations. Karen wants to demonstrate for others that she is making her way through the Dahl books. Each time she finishes one, she asks Barb to copy the cover, which she then places in her portfolio. Robbie assembles a file folder for his snake report. Stapled to the inside cover is a list of all of the steps for writing a research report. The folder also contains a list of questions he is trying to answer, as well as a separate page for taking notes on each question. Stapled to the back of the folder is a bibliography of the books he is using. He uses the folder to organize himself, keep track of materials, and record progress toward his final goal.

• The skillful learner relies on a variety of strategies.

Skillful learners are strategic. They call on a variety of tools, some proactive, (e.g., predicting before starting to read or deciding to write for ten minutes before erasing or changing anything) and some reactive, in response to problematic situations (e.g., "When I come to a word I don't know I ..." or "When I can't think of anything to write about I...") to set themselves up for success in learning. These tools allow them to maintain feelings of control and success even in difficult learning situations.

The skillful reader, for example, employs the following strategies, (and probably others):

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- Activates prior knowledge before reading
- Predicts based on knowledge of genre, author, topic, and prior chapters
- Uses textual tools such as the table of contents, index, chapter headings, diagrams, etc.
- Adjusts speed based on purpose and difficulty of reading
- "Talks" to the text through tools such as marginal notes or double entry diaries
- Deals strategically with unknown words
- Monitors understanding, rereading as necessary
- Summarizes
- Connects reading to life experiences and other texts
- Extends understanding of texts through talk, visual arts, drama, etc.

Skillful writers also employ a variety of strategies. These include (but are not limited to) daily journalling or freewriting, drafting, using published authors, or more skilled peers as models, considering audience needs, conferring with other writers, revising, editing for conventionality, and exploring possibilities for effective, polished final presentations.

- **The skillful learner continually self-monitors and self-regulates.**

Skillful learners consistently self-monitor and self-regulate. They ask themselves, "How is it going? Where have I been? What have I learned or accomplished so far? Where do I want to go? How will I get there?" These questions are followed by continuation toward goals or adjustments in course. Karen plans to read three Roald Dahl books before attempting *The BFG.* After she's read two, she checks herself and finds that *The BFG* is no longer too hard, so she alters her plan to allow her to reach her goal more

quickly.

Skillful learners have concrete systems for keeping track of their progress. Karen, for example, carefully records the date she completes each Roald Dahl book. Robbie uses the criteria sheet his teacher created for the research reports, carefully checking to make sure he has included all required aspects. He discovers that although he knows a great deal about what snakes look like, where they live, and what they eat, he has gathered no information about how snakes care for their young, which is a requirement of the report. He spends a day, then, focusing on this topic, so that he will have the information for his final report. These systems allow the skillful learner to monitor and adjust course as needed.

• **The skillful learner can recognize signs of growth.**

Skillful learners know how to recognize signs of growth. Karen says, "When I started third grade, I couldn't read *Matilda* and now it's just right for me. That means I'm getting better at reading. Pretty soon I'll be able to read *The BFG*. Robbie reflects on his growth in handwriting, "At the beginning of the year, I was a really messy writer. My second grade teacher tried to get me to write neat, but I didn't care, I just kept doing it my same old way. Now we're writing in cursive. I like that a lot better. When I write my final draft of my snake report, I'm gonna write it in cursive so that it will look good. Or maybe I'll even type it on the computer. I learned how to do that this year too."

• **The skillful learner is not afraid to take risks or fail.**

Skillful learners are risk takers. They are willing to try new things. They understand that learning sometimes involves failure. They are not

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decimated by their failures, but rather see them as learning experiences. When Karen discovers she cannot yet read *The BFG*, she doesn't engage in self-defeating behaviors, e.g., telling herself that she will never be able to read the book. Instead, she puts *The BFG* aside, selects an easier book, and keeps working toward the day when she will reach her goal. Robbie does not become overly frustrated when he draws a snake that doesn't turn out exactly as he had hoped. Instead, he asks Luis, the class artist, for some advice, then turns his paper over and tries again.

* **The skillful learner is aware of her purposes and audiences and can evaluate her work based on criteria set by herself or by an audience.**

The skillful learner asks himself, "Why am I doing this? Who will see it? What will they already know? What do I want them to know? Are there structures or guidelines I have to follow? How can I present my information/learning most effectively?" In Karen's case, no outside criteria have been set and her main purpose is to gain social acceptability with her peers ("All my friends can read that book. People might think you're dumb if you can't read the same things as everyone else is reading"). In that situation, audience demands will be very informal, perhaps Karen might talk about a favorite part or read a scene aloud for friends.

Other times, audience demands are more formal and structured. Robbie knows that a good researcher presents information in an interesting and readable way, organizes logically, often relies not only words but also visual images, edits his work for correct spelling and punctuation, and has a neat and accurate final product. He also must comply with the criteria set forth by his teacher to present a final product which matches specific demands or guidelines.

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• **The skillful learner recognizes the cyclical nature of learning.**

Perhaps the most marked characteristic of an skillful learner is a huge curiosity about the world around her. The skillful learner constantly questions:

- What's it for?
- Why does it work that way?
- Does it have to work that way?
- Can I do it better?
- What shall I do next?

She recognizes that the ending of one project as the opportunity for new questions and new beginnings.

Portfolios as a Tool for Developing Independent, Skillful Learners

Teachers are only beginning to understand the portfolio's potential as a tool for developing and recording many of the habits used by proficient, independent lifelong learners— e.g., setting goals, identifying strengths, seeing one's self as a historical being, becoming aware of available strategies, documenting processes and growth, evaluating and displaying final products for an audience. Portfolios will not, however, in and of themselves, promote these habits of minds or behaviors. Instead, teachers are going to have to take an active role in using the portfolios as an instructional tool.

Obviously, one of the first things teachers can do is to explicitly identify for our students why we think portfolios help develop skillful, independent learners. We might being by presenting them with the list of the characteristics and saying, "One of the reasons we use portfolios is to help you develop the attitudes and the habits that will help you be learners for the rest

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of your lives. Here are some of the habits and behaviors that I think those learners have. Can you think of any others? This year, I want you to put things in your portfolio that show how you are developing these qualities."

As teachers, we bring these qualities to a conscious level, demonstrate, ask children to identify them in their own work, and to discuss them not just because we want them to appear in the portfolios, however. We ask children to do these things because we want children to internalize these attitudes and behaviors, to truly become independent, skillful, lifelong learners. In the next chapter, I'll look at Maria, a child who grew toward independence and skillfulness in her reading, but was not nearly so successful as a writer.

CHAPTER VII

MARIA: BRINGING THE OUTSIDE VOICES IN

The Development of the Self-Regulative Voice

Bakhtin (1984, as quoted in Wertsch, 1991) sees the development of self-regulation as a process of internalizing what were originally external voices. He suggests that the conversations or interactions with another eventually lead to the development of "an inner voice" or the ability to self-regulate. He describes the conversant nature of the self-regulatory state as a time of "hidden dialogicality," in which the learner repeats and acts upon the words of previous conversations almost as if another person were present. Explaining the movement from outer conversation to inner control, he says:

> Imagine a dialogue of two persons in which the statements of the second speaker are omitted, but in such a way that the general sense is not violated at all. The second speaker is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker. We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person (p. 86).

Luria (as quoted in Diaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1991) also emphasizes the importance of the adult role in children's development as self-regulators. He claims,

> At the beginning, children are not capable of voluntary action, rather they are at the mercy of environmental contingencies and reflexive patterns of action. Caregivers gradually gain power over the child's behavior by instructing, guiding and directing the

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child's actions with the help of speech. At the beginning, the voluntary act is a shared event because the action begins with the adult command and is completed by the child's motor action in response to such a command. At a later point in time, the child learns to speak and begins to give spoken commands to himself or herself. At this point, the child takes over the caregiver's role by repeating to himself the caregiver's commands and directives with his external speech. Finally the external speech is internalized to constitute inner speech, the main regulating tool of human behavior. Through the use of first external and then internal speech, the child carries out the voluntary functions that were once shared by two people (p. 137).

Claire Kopp (1982, as quoted in Diaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990, pp. 131-132) proposes a more detailed model of self-regulation which begins with the total dependency of the infant and extends to self-regulation, "the flexible guiding of behavior according to contingency rules," of the fully mature human being. Such a continuum might also provide a model for the adults' role in developing students' skillfulness and independence as readers and writers. In the first stage, "Neurophysical Modulation,"

The infant attempts to modulate arousal states through reflex behaviors such as thumb sucking. The behaviors are considered self-regulatory because the baby is attempting to protect an immature nervous system from over-stimulation. The caregivers' behaviors, e.g., placing a thumb, or pacifier in the baby's mouth, or removing a crying baby from a noisy room, are crucial to helping infant achieve such control (p. 131).

The next stage, "Sensorimotor Modulation," differs from "Neurophysical Modulation" because the infant develops the ability to coordinate nonreflexive responses to specific environmental events, e.g., reaching for a rattle held by a caregiver, or holding a bottle placed in her hands. Still, "behavioral sequences are totally dependent on environmental effects, there is no conscious awareness, or cognitive intent" (p. 131). For the school-aged child, a comparable experience might occur when the teacher says, "Be sure you put a capital 'M' on the word 'Mother,'" and the child

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responds to the adult directive, but has no cognitive understanding as to why she is supposed to capitalize the word.

In the third stage, "Control," the child develops a more conscious awareness of his ability to control his behaviors. During this phase, "children show the capacity to initiate, maintain, or cease actions in response to the caregiver's verbalized signals...but the modulation of the behavior is still entirely dependent on the immediate presence of external signals" (pp. 131-132). The preschooler, for instance, moves away from a hot stove when the adult says, "No, no, that's hot." The first or second grader puts a capital letter at the beginning of someone's name when the teacher says, "Did everybody capitalize the first letter of 'George?' Remember we capitalize the first letters when we write people's names."

In "Self-Control," Kopp's next stage, the learner can comply with the caregiver's (or teacher's) commands and directives, even when that person is not physically present. The preschooler looks at the electrical outlet and says to himself, "No, no, that's hot," even though his mother is in the next room. The seven-year-old writes 'My best friend is elizabeth,' notices that she has not capitalized the first letter of 'Elizabeth,' and corrects her error without prompting from the teacher.

In the most sophisticated stage of Kopp's continuum, the learner develops the ability to "Self-Regulate." Self-regulation differs from self-control mostly in its "flexible adjustment of behavior to changing situations, and in the active use of reflective and metacognitive strategies" (p. 132). The preschooler understands that the stove is hot only when it is turned on. The third grader learns to differentiate between proper and common nouns. She may acquire language, spoken at first, then internalized, to help her monitor her new understandings, e.g., "'I went with my mother to the store.' Should I

capitalize 'mother?' If I can put in my mother's name, then I capitalize. 'I went with my Janet to the store.' No, that doesn't sound right. I guess I don't capitalize it." This self-regulation, the internalization of skillful, proficient voices, which can be flexibly adjusted to meet the demands of different texts or situations, should be the teacher's goal for her students.

Since adult interaction is clearly a vital part of the child's self-regulatory development, adult leadership, carefully exercised, is not a right or a choice, but rather a necessary responsibility. Early efforts at student self-evaluation should be done with much adult guidance. Later, as these conversations become internalized, the adult steps back, allowing the child to take more responsibility (Pearson and Gallagher, 1983). Maria, one of Barb's third graders, demonstrated for me both the successes of taking on the adult role of "teacher" and the negative consequences of failing to assume this role.

Maria: Bringing the Outside Voices In

Maria is a tall slender girl with curly dark hair and enormous hazel eyes. A year in parochial school has left its mark, and Maria is obedient and anxious to please. Her best friend, Julie, is a child whose chaotic home life often leaves her rattled, unfocused, and disorganized; and Maria firmly nurtures, guides, and redirects. "Julie," she says in a rough, husky voice that gives away her factory town beginnings, "You gotta put your name on your paper. Right here, look, see how I did it?" or "Julie, you're gonna get in trouble if you do your book list that way. You're sposed to write the authors' whole names, " or "Julie, didja bring your Pennington Express envelope? You have to bring that back every week!" At the same time, Maria is a gentle, caring little girl and each morning just before recess, she produces duplicate snacks— two fruit roll-ups or two bags of pretzels, two bottles of juice or a

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bottle with two cups or straws— so that Julie, who rarely eats breakfast and almost never brings her own snack, won't go hungry. On the days when "there isn't much stuff at home," because her mom "hasn't got enough money so she can't go to the store," Maria carefully divides her own morning snack in half.

A natural athlete, Maria takes dance lessons (Her favorite type is "jas") and plays softball in a summer league. Although she is oblivious to members of the opposite sex, they are crazy about her and pursue her relentlessly. Ron, the class tough guy, who wants to be a drag racer when he grows up, is particularly smitten, and one day when he is absent, Maria comes to me with a complaint, "Tell Danny he can't chase after me and say, 'Hubba hubba!' just cuz Ron's not here." Maria lives with her mother, who is 24, her stepfather, and a two-year old stepsister. Because both parents work rotating shifts at local manufacturing plants, she also spends many evenings with her grandmothers, whose native languages are Spanish and French.

When I listen to Maria, I often think that if the producers of "Laverne and Shirley" ever considered a remake, Maria should audition. She has the same airy earnestness that made Laverne famous. In November, for example, Barb reads aloud *But No Candy*, a book about World War II, and then tells the third graders, "Tomorrow, Veteran's Day, the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month, is the time when we say a quiet thank you to all the soldiers and sailors and marines that have helped defend our country." Maria is a little worried about the possibility of celebrating this holiday. "I hope it's 11 a.m.," she says, "because I can't stay up until 11 p.m."

Maria: Becoming an Independent Reader

When school begins, Maria is a reader of picture books. She reads 31 books during the first nine weeks of school, 28 of these are what Maria calls "regular" (picture) books. Of the three chapter books listed, Maria has only actually read one. When Barb confers with Maria about that book, *Meet Kristen,* in early November, she discovers Maria may have read the words, but she made little sense of the ideas. Maria isn't sure whether Kristen and Marta, the two main characters, are friends or sisters, has no idea why much of the story is set on a boat (Kristen and Marta's families are immigrating from Sweden to the United States), thinks the story happened in the 1980's, even though all the textual clues indicate otherwise (not to mention that 1854 appears in bold black letters on the front cover), and can't summarize the plot with any coherency. Telling Barb about the main character, Maria says, "Kristen is a girl from the olden days, like in the 1980's." When Barb asks if Kristen can speak English, Maria responds, "I don't know because all of the words in the books were English, so I think she did." Maria seems oblivious to her lack of understanding, and Barb and I are both worried. Afterwards we consider several different possibilities— asking Maria to reread or select an easier book, reading the book aloud, asking a better reader to read the book with/to Maria before she reads it herself, or possibly even seeking some extra support from the Chapter 1 teacher, who is in the classroom several days a week during reading workshop.

Despite our concerns, Barb and I see a number of changes in Maria's reading as the year progresses. Maria pursues the *American Girl* collection and her comprehension improves in a steady stream of talk, reading, and writing. Some of Maria's understanding appears to come from casual conversations or more formal reading conferences with Barb, her peers, or

with me. Sometimes Maria makes sense of her reading through written conversations in her reading log. Maria also faithfully applies the reading strategies we teach in mini-lessons, and uses the self-monitoring systems we share with the class. Eventually, she internalizes these methods enough to create her own monitoring system. Finally, Maria uses her portfolio to record her progress.

Making Sense: Talking About Books

Conversations with Barb and me appear to play a huge role in Maria's development as a reader (Newkirk with McClure, 1993; Barnes, 1995). Many of these are casual discussions, squeezed into snippets of time during transitions between subjects, on the way out the door, or when attendance is being taken. These conversations are often completely decontextualized, almost as if we were members of a secret club, sharing a private language. "Miss Wilcox," says Maria, turning to me as the third graders prepare for lunch, "I think I know what the surprise is. The girls are going to make a surprise for their family, and they don't even know it's going to happen." While someone who hadn't been privy to our previous conversations might think Maria was talking about any number of things— a gift for the Christmas holiday or a special video after lunch— I know that she is talking about *Kristen's Surprise,* her current chapter book. "You think so?" I say. "I think it's going to be something the parents do for their kids, since it's Christmas time." A day or two later, Maria returns to finish the conversation, "See...on this it says Kristen's surprise was she was planning a party for her family. All the people. Not just her family but the kids. They were planning a party for them. And both of our products (she means predictions) were wrong. Mine was almost, I thought she was getting a surprise from her

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mother." These conversations are one of the first indications that Maria is making any sense of the chapter books she is learning to read.

Sometimes these conversations occur in the more formalized context of reading conferences such as those described by Atwell (1986) or Hornsby and Sukarna (1988). Often, Barb begins with a fairly generic question, such as "How's it going?" or "How's your book?"

Maria usually responds with a summary, "The first chapter is about her teacher, and about the Indian girl that came to the door, before she even lived there...so that's what it was about, two things."

Sue asks, "Before who lived there? Before the teacher lived there, or before Kristen lived there?"

Maria responds, "Before Kristen lived there. The second chapter was about an Indian girl that Kristen found in the woods..."

Sue is a little confused, "Where were the Indian girl's parents?"

"The Indian girl's parents were in the village," says Maria. "And Chapter Three is about an Indian girl she found, and because her teacher is going to live at their house... [Chapter] Four is when she went to the Indian girl's village, and had to practice her poem."

This is the first Barb has heard of a poem, "What poem?"

Maria brings in what seems an entirely new plot, "Her poem that she had to do, she had to do a poem at school. And [Chapter] Five is she did her poem right, her teacher came to live, she said no to the Indian girl and went back home, the Indian girl wanted her to go get food with her, cuz the Indian girl had no food anymore, and she said, 'No, I can't go.'"

"So the Indian girl came and wanted her to get food...And she said, 'No, I can't go.' And that's how the book ended?"

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"She couldn't go. And then, and then she went back to school, and she found something on her book, and she's starting learning English again... I don't know how she stopped learning English. It didn't say that in the book so I don't know. So that's how the book ended."

"So what happened to the Indian girl, do you think?"

"The Indian girl? I think, she said if she got food, she would come back, but if she didn't she would have to move away. And I don't know if she moved away. Probably, maybe I'll find that out in *Happy Birthday Kristen*, my third book I'm reading."

"The name of this book was *Kristen Learns a Lesson*. What do you think the lesson was that she learned?"

Maria is quick to answer, "The poem. And that she has to stay home and she can't leave from her house. Cuz the Indian girl wanted her to leave, until they found food. So that's what I think she learned a lesson about. About an Indian girl she learned a lesson...I think she learned about Indians are not bad, they're good."

Maria's understanding of this book seems sketchy at best. Evidently, there are two simultaneous plots, Kristen befriending an Indian girl, and Kristen's experiences at school, but Maria still doesn't seem to be shaping them into one consistent, ongoing story line. After observing this conference, I comment in my fieldnotes, "I'm not sure she understands this book as well as the one about Santa Lucia. I wonder why. I feel like we talked to her a lot more about *Kristen's Surprise*, maybe that made a difference." Our conversations appear to be one way for Maria to shape her thinking about books. Barb and I haven't read all of the *American Girl* books, so we can't "check" Maria's comprehension. The questions we ask are real questions, for the purpose of familiarizing ourselves with the story, to know what Maria is

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thinking, or sometimes to help her explore her understanding or clarify her ideas. Maybe the oral rehearsal of the plot helps her to create a story grammar or build a coherent summary in her mind. Maybe it helps her to focus on the parts of the story that are unclear to her. At any rate, it seems the more Barb and I talk with Maria about her books, the better she understands.

Written Conversations: Reading Response Logs

Reading response logs are an important part of Barb's reading program, and some of Maria's growth appears to come from ongoing written conversations in her reading log. Maria is careful to summarize the story, but by mid-February, she is also offering her own opinions.

> 2-14-94
> Kristens father was very brave to go get the honey from the bee tree with Lars. I'm glad that Kristen followed her fathers rool to stay behind the line when her father was at the bee tree where they were getting the honey because if she went closer the bees would sting her. I learned that bees can be comed. I learned that from where they went to the bee tree and comed the bees. Kirsten, her father and Lars brouht the bees home with them and kepted them in the farm and every spring he got more honey from the bees and they will make more for next year. I think I learned a lot about bees and bears because like when the mother bear was in the bushes and you can not see her and the dog was chaceing the little bear and the mother bear came out to pertect her. I learned about bees is that you should bring bees to a farm.

Either Barb or I respond to Maria's reading log. Typically we attempt to do several things in our responses. First, we affirm all that Maria has accomplished or learned, e.g., "Wow, it sounds like you're learning a lot about how to behave around bees." Then we make connections to our own lives. In this instance, I might write, "Historical fiction is one of my favorite genre, mostly because I love learning about different times and places." I might also make a connection to my adult reading, "A year or so ago, I read

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an autobiography of a woman who raised bees for a living." Next we try to clarify concepts that seem confusing. In this chapter, for instance, Maria reads the word "comb," referring to honeycomb, but pictures a hair comb. Barb might comment, then, "I don't think the author meant that people combed the bees' hair. Honeycomb is the waxy structure the bees build inside the beehive so they have a place to put their honey. Let's see if we can find a picture of honeycomb somewhere." Although some of the children don't respond to our comments and questions, Maria always scrawls a brief answer in the margins. Later, we check back with her to find out whether our comments are helping her understand the text any better.

Strategy Lessons

Our oral and written conversations help Maria build her understanding in implicit ways. Reading instruction in the form of mini-lessons at the beginning of the daily reading time provides more explicit techniques for becoming a better reader. During the first month of school, for example, Barb reads aloud *Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume. Most of the third graders are just starting to read chapter books, or if they are not, Barb is encouraging them to do so, so she emphasizes how readers use details given by authors to create pictures or visualize events in their minds. After Barb reads aloud, the children list the events, and draw pictures, which they then arrange sequentially. Barb also does several activities in which she asks children to draw pictures based on particularly vivid word images in poetry. Concurrently, during writing time, Barb emphasizes the need to give readers enough details so they can visualize the writing. I reinforce this strategy several months later, when I do a mini-lesson I call "Camera" during our series of Good Reader Strategy Lessons. For Maria, then, the ability to

performance in reading. She tells me several times that the *Kristen* books are just right for her because she can make pictures in her mind while she's reading. When she's having trouble understanding a story, she tells me that she's not doing "that good" because she can't picture the story. She also uses this criteria to evaluate professional writers, telling me that a particular story is good because the author gives lots of "information" (specific details) or she can visualize it in her mind. These same criteria also become part of Maria's evaluation of her own writing.

External Monitoring Systems

Maria enjoys monitoring not only her reading behaviors, but also her reading journey. A reading record, kept in the front cover of her response log, helps her keep track of her day-to-day progress. A quarterly list, "Books Completed," enables her to document long-term achievement. Sometimes, she uses this list in other ways. In January, for example, Maria takes a break from chapter books, and for three or four weeks, she reads nothing but picture books. At the end of the month, when the third graders fill out their list of "Books Completed," Maria notices that she hasn't read a chapter books for several weeks. "I'm not reading enough chapter books," she tells me.

"Yeah?" I say, "Who told you that?"

"I told me that," replies Maria firmly. "I gotta get back to reading chapter books." Thus, the reading log provides her with a way of looking at her progress and effort.

Maria also enjoys the reading graph that the third graders fill out every quarter, and becomes extremely agitated when she discovers that she has not read in each of the listed genre (this is not a requirement, and would, in fact, be almost an impossibility in one nine week period). When Barb offers a

be almost an impossibility in one nine week period). When Barb offers a sample table of contents for the portfolios, Maria pores over it, checking and rechecking, ordering and reordering, adding to her portfolio until she has something in every category. Then she creates her own handwritten table of contents (See Figure 7-1).

Sue and I offer other systems as needed by individual children. When Maria says she wants to read all of the Kristen books, for example, I show her the list of books inside the front cover of *Meet Kristen* and offer to make a copy. I tell her that she can use it to keep track of the books she is reading by checking the book off the list every time she finishes one. She places her xeroxed list inside her reading log and uses it faithfully.

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Figure 7-1: Maria's Table of Contents

Maria: Creating a System for Self Monitoring

For three months, Barb and I take much of the responsibility for helping Maria monitor her reading. In mid-December, Maria demonstrates that she is internalizing some of our conversations and is beginning to self-monitor. She has finished *Meet Kristen* and moved on to *Kristen's Surprise.* When I ask what the book is about, she drags a ragged, crumpled piece of paper out of her desk. On one side, there is a picture of something that resembles a troll doll with a fuzzy ponytail on top of its head, done in markers that have definitely seen better days, I later discover this is Maria's rendition of Kristen as Santa Lucia. On the other side is a messily scrawled numbered list:

> 1- Missing her doll
>
> 2- She has a surprise for her family
>
> 3- They get the trunk

I'm not sure what the list means until I see Maria refer to it, then say, "Well the first chapter is about missing her doll." I am more than a little surprised to realize that Maria, who appeared to have only minimal comprehension of *Meet Kristen*, has created a list of the main ideas in each chapter of her next book, *Kristen's Surprise.* I ask, "What made you decide to write it down like that?"

Maria answers, "So I can remember...so if Mrs. Wilson tells [asks] me what the first chapter is about, I can say, she's missing her doll, just in case I forget, like."

I am absolutely stunned that Maria has developed such a sophisticated monitoring device, completely of her own volition, "How'd you get that idea?" I ask.

Maria says, "Because, when I read it, it's just about one thing and then

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it's about another thing in the same story. You know how she [Barb] told us about that thing with the screen." At first I have no idea what she is talking about, then I remember that approximately six weeks before, Barb had done a mini-lesson on paragraphing. Displaying a series of paragraphs about Halloween safety on an overhead projector, she asked the children to read them and identify the main idea. At the time, Barb was disappointed in the lesson. The children focused excessively on conventions of print, and didn't seem to understand the difference between a sentence and a paragraph, so Barb had little luck conveying the concept of paragraphing, which had been her original intent. Evidently Maria took away more than we thought and applied her learning to construct a strategy for monitoring her reading. She uses her list to summarize the story for me. Amazed, I ask, "Now, did you just think of writing this all by yourself or did Mrs. Wilson tell you that you should make a list of things?"

Maria says, "I made it. I did it by myself."

"That was a good idea," I say, "What made you think of that?"

Maria refers to that earlier reading conference where Barb and I thought she didn't have any idea what was going on, and furthermore didn't seem to recognize that she didn't know. "Because like last time she asked me, I didn't know anything, cuz I forgot everything, like, so what I did, I wrote it down, what the first one is, the second, third, fourth, and the fifth is two things, they got home and they got surprised." When she finishes her lengthy summary, Maria pauses and looks at me, "See, it's better, you learn how to remember, if you put this like on, you know how to remember."

I agree with her, but tell her that most children wouldn't think of creating such a list on their own. Maria dismisses her efforts lightly, "Yeah. And now I'm on the second page on *Kristen Learns a Lesson*. It's her first day

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of school in the first chapter. "

Over the next few weeks, Maria doggedly pursues her goal of reading all of the *Kristen* books. She reads intently, often out loud, pencil in hand, a reader ready to talk to her texts. When I ask her about her reading, she pulls out her most recent list (See Figure 7-2) of main ideas and summarizes the plot, frequently offering an editorial comment or two, e.g., "It's sad, Miss Wilcox, it's really sad because Kristen really loves this horse, and Jiggy Nye, he's the rich people's horse trainer, he's really mean to it. That's really sad." She tells me the words in these books are easy, and that there is lots of information (specificity of detail) that helps her make pictures. She likes them too, "Because it makes me find out about the old days, how it, what it was like." By the fourth Kristen book, Maria's self-monitoring lists appear to have been internalized, and although she still summarizes chapter by chapter when she talks about books, her lists no longer appear on paper.

Figure 7-2: Maria's Second Self-Monitoring List

Kristen learns a lesson

① about her teacher
and about a indian that
came to are door,

② about a Indian girl

③ about a Indian girl
She foun and because
her teacher is gowing to
live at there house

④ When she went to the
Indian girls vileg and had to
practice her poem

⑤ she did her poem right and
her teacher came to live and
she said no to the indian girl
and went back home the indian
girl wanted her to go get
food with her.

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Maria: Learning With and From Her Peers

Maria also relies on her peers to help her make sense of the *American Girl* books. She and Julie sit side by side, Maria ensconced in *Kristen*, and Julie wrapped up in *Felicity*, another *American Girl* series. They compare books frequently, noticing that both series have the same titles: *Meet Kristen* has a companion volume, *Meet Felicity; Happy Birthday Kristen* can be paired with *Happy Birthday Felicity; Kristen Learns a Lesson*, so does Felicity. The girls decide that since the books are so similar, they must have the same authors, and then are surprised to discover that the *Kristen* books are written by Valerie Tripp, while the *Felicity* series is authored by Janet Shaw. For several weeks, they talk about writing to the two authors to find out about their collaborative processes. The girls share illustrations, using the pictures as a basis for relating particular episodes or summarizing chapters. They pore over the appendixes, which describe the books' historical settings and are especially interested in photographs showing the clothing and transportation of different eras.

In February, another one of her peers nudges Maria to move beyond the *American Girl* books. Rhonda joins Barb's class in December. She has moved often, is unhappy about her parents' divorce and subsequent remarriages, and has trouble establishing herself socially. Barb seats her with Maria and Julie mostly because the two girls are fairly accepting and don't seem to engage in the petty meanness or exclusionary behavior shown by some of other third grade girls. Rhonda is an excellent reader, much better than Maria, and convinces her to try reading *Julian, Secret Agent.* The book is almost twice as long and much more difficult than Maria's *Kristen* books, but Maria consents and the two girls sit under the table on the side of the room, reading the book aloud to each other. When I confer with them about the

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book, Maria does most of the talking. First, she summarizes the plot, "So what happened is the dog fainted, and the owner was 'The Mighty One,' and he didn't think it was true, but when the dog fainted, he said, 'Uh-oh,' like that...The manager of the store got some water and put the dog's head in the water, and then put some in his mouth, and the dog blinked. The second one [chapter] I told you about, he was in the water fountain. And now we're going to read another one."

Next, she evaluates the book, telling me it's good "because the chapters are all together. It's like when, like the chapters together because they're all like, in every single chapter, I think, they find something, that's what I think, and they find something and that's a detective like, it's like all together, you find something in one day, you go home, you find something in the other day, like that."

Finally, she offers a "moral" judgment about author Ann Cameron, "Well, I think what she does good is something like she doesn't put in a lot of crinimals (sic), I don't think she will put in a lot of crinimals, cuz she, like want to tell kids about crinimals, she might like, put in crinimals, like how to catch them, or something like that, but not like, what a crinimal's doing, cuz they can show a kid what a crinimal's doing, and if you don't catch it, then like a kid can do that, and say, 'Hey you can't catch me, because I saw it in a book.' So it's like, that's why I don't want to do that, and I don't think she did, either, I think she just put safety. Just safety."

Perhaps her success with *Julian, Secret Agent* leads Maria to try *Charlotte's Web* in March. Maria tells me she has heard this book read aloud, has seen the video, and wants to read it for herself. I think the book might be way too hard, but also understand the role of prior knowledge (Smith, 1986) and know that children are often capable of far more than I give them credit

for, therefore, I say nothing. I am surprised, though, when Maria reads the book with little or no difficulty. Frequently, she comes to me to chat about the characters. She thinks Charlotte would be a good friend, but she is baffled by Templeton the Rat, who's "sort of funny in the movie," but also "pretty mean to all the other animals who do nice stuff for him." He does not fit Maria's framework for how the world should work.

When she finishes *Charlotte's Web*, Maria prepares to return to the *American Girl* series, telling me she is going to "start again cuz I haven't been there for a long time." I warn her that *Charlotte's Web* is much more difficult, so the *American Girl* series may be too easy for her present reading ability. Knowing how she's enjoyed historical fiction, I suggest one of my favorite series, the *Little House* books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Maria and I pull four or five books from the series off the shelf in the classroom library and take the stash back to her seat. When Julie asks Maria what she is doing, she displays the new series and says, "I think the *Kristen* books are getting too easy...I want to read *Felicity* still...I made it up to here the third chapter, and then I stopped, and then I said, these, they got too easy... if they get too easy I don't really like reading them, because then I won't learn any more words, so I gotta put *Meet Felicity* back and let someone else try to read it. "

I comment on Maria's growth, "Remember Maria, when these were just right, even a little hard for you? And now they're too easy? That means you are getting to be a better reader because you can read harder stuff. Good for you." Knowing how Maria enjoyed checking off the *Kristen* books as she read them, I offer to copy the book list from the front of the *Little House* series so she can put it in her portfolio. This time, however, Maria seems hesitant. When I tell her that she doesn't have to do that, she is relieved, "I'd rather

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wait for awhile," she says, "to see if I like them all." Maria owns her reading, and is not about to let me take charge.

Maria's Portfolio: A Place to Document Her Learning

When I ask Maria what portfolios are for, she answers, "To put stuff to prove that you did hard work in reading and math, to save things so that when you grow up you can show your kids and show them how hard you had to work to get your goals." In January, she tells me that goals are important so "you can show teacher you're good at something." Maria uses her portfolio to show that she is good at reading.

In late October, when Barb asks the children to write a reading reflection, Maria writes about *Meet Kristen* (See Figure 7-3) :

> 10-93
> I like books. I like *Meet Kristen* because she was a nice girl and she was in the old days. There are a lot of details. There were some sad parts like when her friend was sick and died. There were happy parts like when she found her father because she was lost. They sailed out in the ocean. There were five chapters. She moves to a new home in America. They were trying to get to Minnesota. They finally get there. She was happy when she was there because she had two friends. She lived with her friends. She lived happily.

This first Kristen reflection is a series of brief, general statements, ("They sailed out on the ocean," "She moves to a new home in America"). There are few transitional phrases ("finally"), that indicate she is starting to make connections between ideas or to construct a cohesive retelling. Basically, she appears to be seeing or remembering the story as a series of isolated incidents.

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Figure 7-3: Maria's First Reading Reflection

There were some sad parts
like when her friend was
sick and died. There were
happy parts like when she
found her father because
she was lost. They sailed
out in the ocean. There
were five chapters. She
moves to a new home in
America. They were trying
to get to Minnesota. They
finally get there. She was
happy when she was there
because she had two friend
She lived with her friends.
She lived happily

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Maria glues her reflection underneath the xeroxed book cover, making a kind of small book that opens from the top, then glues the entire thing crookedly to a piece of construction paper. Her finished result is a little like Maria, overglued and a little bumpy and messy, but with an altogether serious intent. She is pleased with her results and says, "And then like I'll do the other stories I read, like each story, I keep on reading, I'll put a copy...so they know I'm a good reader, and I keep track of everything."

Maria adopts this format, writing a reflection each time she finishes a *Kristen* book. As she works her way through these reflections, Barb and I can see her changing. A month later, for instance, Maria's reflection about *Kristen Learns a Lesson* shows some signs that she is beginning to make more sense of her reading.

> 11-93
> I think I am a good reader because I get a lot books done. I usely get the words right and I pick good books. I think I am good picking out books because every time I read a book it is a good book to me. I like Kristen learns a lesson because it is fun...and you learn about the old days a little bit. In this book it is about Kristen going to school. In the first chapter is about her going to her new school she has to tell her name to the teacher in English and she does not know English and she had to learn it. In the second chapter she ment a friend named Singing Bird and she is an idain girl. In chapter three she goes to the indain girls villige. I forget about chapter five because it was a long time ago, but I bet it was good.

She talks about the book sequentially, uses transition phrases ("In the first chapter," "in the second chapter") and also includes a few more details about the characters (the Indian's name is Singing Bird) and the setting (an Indian village). She also seems to be developing a sense of what good readers do ("I usely get the words right and I pick good books"). She shows us that she is beginning to understand that she can take charge of her reading, ("I think I

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am a good reader because…I pick good books").

In March, Maria writes a reflection for her final *American Girl* book. Although this reflection is not markedly better than her December reflection, one can definitely see Maria's aesthetic development as a reader (Rosenblatt, 1978).

> 3-8-94
> I love to read American Girl books a lot because they can teach you a lot about the old days…even when it is not a real story but it could of happen…I like books because you get to go on a lot of anventures in the book or you can beatend you are the person in the book… I am reading Kristen Saves the Day.
>
> I like this book very much. It's about a bee tree on the first chapter that's what it's called the bee tree. Kristen and her brother went to get some fish for super with there dog named Caro. When they got there the dog got stinged from a bee. and they found the bee tree from the buzzing sounds. Kristen said this is my tree even if she saw bear marks. In the second chapter she goes to pick berrys but she goes to see the bee but her friend I don't know her name found her an said there might be bears her you better stay out of here. I don't want to tell you the other chapters but I know their good to read.

Clearly, Maria is developing a knowledge of genre. She acknowledges that while the Kristen books aren't true, they could have happened. She likes to read because "you get to go on a lot of adventure in books or beatend (pretend) you are the person in the book." In her retelling, she elects to focus on one particular incident, the discovery of the bee tree. She includes exact quotes ("This is my tree," "There might be bears, you better stay out of here").

While her book covers and reflections satisfy Maria, I also want her to somehow demonstrate that she's learned to self-monitor in her portfolio. I ask her whether she might want to show that, saying, "I think that's a pretty important thing that you are keeping track of your own reading, like whether you're understanding…" Maria agrees with me, but when I suggest that maybe

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she wants to put one of her self-monitoring lists in her portfolio, she refuses. She also doesn't want to put the well-worn list of Kristen books from her reading log into her portfolio, "I can't take the copy that I have in here, cuz it's all a mess right now...but I can take it in the book."

I am confused, "You mean you want another copy to check off?"

Maria responds to my adult stupidity, "No, not to check off, but to put in my portfolio, to show how I keep track of my books." Clearly, she sees the portfolio as a place not for demonstrating her messy rough draft, works-in-progress kind of thinking, but rather as a place for displaying her finished, polished end products. When I xerox a fresh copy of the book list, Maria carefully places it in her portfolio.

In early June, I again voice my opinion about the artifacts in Maria's portfolio. She and I are looking through her portfolio one last time, and I notice that Maria hasn't included any of the *Little House* books. For her, those have been a huge milestone. She couldn't have begun to read or understand them in September, and now she is hungrily devouring the series, reading them fluently, talking about them, writing good responses, and wondering whether they will be available at the school she will attend after a summer move.

"Maria," I say, "You know what I noticed this morning looking through your portfolio...you don't have any of the *Little House* stuff. You've worked really hard on those books, and I'm wondering if you might not want to put something in there that shows that— either a book cover, or the list of books like you did with the Kristen books, or something else you've drawn, just something to show that you've done that."

"Oh yeah," says Maria.

"You don't have to, but if you want to, I think that would be a good

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thing to show people...Do you think you might want to do that?"

Maria readily agrees and I ask her what she wants to use to represent her accomplishment. She decides she would like the book cover from *Little House in the Big Woods* and gets it off the shelf for me to xerox.

I push her a little farther, "Maria, you know something else you could put in? I noticed you don't have any of your book responses and you've changed a whole lot on those this year. I'm wondering if you want to put one of those in also."

Maria says she might. I get her reading log and together we leaf through some of her more recent entries. I point out one of my favorites, a *Little House* entry, in which Maria has not only summarized, but also given a reaction. Both Barb and I have responded to this one, telling Maria how pleased we are at her growth. She considers a couple of her other *Charlotte's Web* entries, but then decides she will use the one I selected.

> 5-9-94
> I read the chapter "Sunday" in the book *Little House in the Big Woods!*" "Sunday" was all about on every Sunday they cannot do any thing just sit and here (sic) the Bible and go to church! One Sunday Laura got mad because she got sick and tierd of do nothing on Sundays so she screemed, she kicked and everything. Her father said, "Come here." Laura came to see him and he told her a story. I like this chapter because it tells a lot of information.

"I won't even have to write a reflection," she says, "cuz people can just read that to know why it's here." She gestures at our letters.

> Dear Maria,
> Wow! What a book response! You did a fantastic job summarizing! How would you feel about Sundays like this? Would you be more like Laura or like Mary? I love to go to church but I don't think I could stand to sit around and do nothing all day long! ICK! Could you?
> Ms. Wilcox

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Dear Maria,

I agree with Miss Wilcox about this book response. You've done a great job of telling the most important ideas in this chapter and then you also give your opinion. Remember when you had trouble telling what happened in your first *American Girl* book? Boy! Have you ever become a reader!

Mrs. Wilson

In these ways, Maria uses her portfolio to demonstrate her growth in reading. The viewer of Maria's portfolio would have little difficulty seeing that she had made tremendous progress toward becoming a skillful, independent reader.

Maria's Writing

While Maria's reading improves significantly, her growth in writing is not nearly so dramatic. She is a prolific writer, and by the end of the first quarter, the nine stories in her "Finished Story Book," stand in sharp contrast to the three or four contained in the booklets of most of her classmates. Maria continues at this rapid pace throughout the year, turning out piece after piece after piece. Her writing folder is fat with drafts in her favorite genre, the "All About" story (Sowers, 1985)— "Sports," Pets," "Hobbies," "Jazz" and a series about holidays, "Chapter 1- New Year's Day, Chapter 2- Valentine's Day, Chapter 3- Easter, etc. Maria also writes many personal narratives such as "When I Was Sick," "When I Went to New Jersey," "When I Got My Computer." Occasionally, she experiments with fiction, a favorite genre of many of her peers, but she appears to find this somewhat uncomfortable, possibly because she cannot quite reconcile her steadfast commitment to telling the truth with the need to "make up stuff" in "fake stories."

Despite the enormous quantity Maria produces, the pieces she writes toward the end of the year are not markedly different from those she wrote in

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September. The first week of school, for example, she writes, "My Hobbies," a one page "All About" story (Sowers, 1985). The story contains a series of short, redundant sentences all loosely connected to a central theme.

<div align="center">My Hobbies 9/9/93</div>

I have a lot of hobbies. I like my hobbies. My first hobbie is dancing, the rest, is singing, jas, and waching my sister. My best hobbie is danceing. My hobbies are very fun. I do my hobbies every day when I am boerd. hobbies are a lot of fun. I do my hobbies with the radio. I have four hobbies dasing, singing, jas, and waching my sister. I do my hobbies inside. I have one more hobbie that is my dest hobbie doing my homework right. I like this hobbie. I love hobbies.

In April, Maria spends about two weeks writing "Pennington School," a thousand word piece, which she identifies as her best of the year.

<div align="center">"Pennington School"</div>

I like Pennington School. I am in third grade. It is a lot of fun. I especially like lunch and recess. I like the whole school. I have a few friends. Their names are Jane, Julie, Melissa, Justin, Karen, Ron, Luis and David. I don't usually play with the boys. I have a few more. I like all my friends and they like me. I play with the girls, it's a lot of fun. My best friends are Julie, Jane, Melissa, and Ron because they are the nicest.

I have all kinds of stuff to do. We go to gym, music, and art. They are a lot of fun. Music is you learn a lot of music stuff and learn to do instruments. I have music on Tuesday, the time is 9:45. I do exercises in gym. Gym is when you exercise and play games at the same time. I go to gym on Thursdays, the time is 10:30. Art is when you create stuff. I go there on Fridays, the time is 11:00. I like them all...

There are eight girls and nine boys. There are more boys than girls. We have a lot of toys. We have games like "Go to the Head of the Class," we have blocks like building blocks, we have legos and a lot more.

I love this school. NOT!

Maria is thrilled with the length of this piece (much more so than her classmates who protest having to sit through a 10 minute reading with huge sighs at the turn of each page) and tells me it is her best story because she "tells more information." She appears to be spelling somewhat better, and has

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gained additional control over conventions, especially commas. She also experiments with a surprise ending ("I love this school. NOT!") a sentence structure she and her classmates have taken from popular culture. In reality though, the quality of "Pennington School" is not markedly different from pieces like, "My Hobbies" which she wrote in September. The piece is not tightly focused and Maria's "information" sends the reader wandering down a variety of sidepaths with no discernible destination. Once her draft is finished, she is unwilling to revise.

But perhaps even more disturbing than Maria's lack of growth in the skillfulness of her writing is her lack of independence. Maria is insistent upon receiving adult help with her drafts. "I need a conference," she says to Barb, or if Barb is unavailable, she'll talk to me, "I can't go any further, I need a conference." She views these conferences as having several purposes. First, "the teacher can read it and see if it sounds o.k." Much more important, to Maria, though, is what she describes as the "medical" (mechanical) aspect of the conference, when Barb or I check her work for spelling and correctness and tell her if she "got much wrong." In a typical writing conference, then, Maria asks us to read her draft, Barb reads it and comments about something she likes or asks a question or two about parts that are unclear. Maria might, on a good day, add a sentence or two, but what she really wants us to do is to correct her spelling, punctuation, and grammar, so that she can recopy her rough draft. This task accomplished, she glues the story into her finished story book and races onto the next draft.

The pattern of these conferences changes little throughout the year. Even in June, Maria refuses to make any changes in her writing. Her "All About" stories are longer, but no more tightly focused or carefully crafted. She circles her misspelled words but doesn't take steps to correct them on her

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own. She hasn't developed the confidence or autonomy to evaluate her own work or to self-correct. In those ways, even though she believes she's reached her goal of writing longer sentences and using commas better, she hasn't really become more proficient or more skillful.

Growth in Reading/Growth in Writing: What Was the Difference?

Why did Maria show such drastic improvement in reading, when her writing, where she seemed to work every bit as hard, progressed much more slowly? I believe, in Maria's case, her lack of growth in writing, or at least lack of growth toward skillful independence is due at least in part to the kinds of conversations, both oral and written, we did or didn't have. In reading, our feedback continually pushed Maria back to her own work. She read and reread, wrote and rewrote, thought and rethought her understandings of texts. She recorded her growth through several different systems. She acquired strategies that helped her learn to self-monitor and self-regulate. Thus, she became increasingly skillful. Our conversations in writing were very different.

Before You Can Evaluate, You Gotta Learn to Do: Teaching the Writer

First, I'm not sure that we provided enough explicit instruction, or at least not enough of the right kind of explicit instruction in writing. Despite the fact that we talked a lot about the characteristics of good writing, presented many examples, and encouraged children to use those techniques in their own work, we rarely taught the third graders <u>how</u> to write well. When Barb taught a lesson on leads, for instance, she selected three or four excellent examples to read aloud, and explained how each of those authors had grabbed her attention in their first sentence and made her want to read on (I've taught

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similar mini-lessons a hundred times in my teaching career, all the way from first grade to college graduate level courses). She encouraged the children to try doing the same thing in their writing. She never said, though, "This is how you write a good lead," and worked with the children on writing their own leads. She never, for example, had them write three or four leads, share them with an audience, and ask for feedback as to which one most quickly grabbed the readers' attention. Thus, even though we defined for the children again and again what we wanted their finished products to look like, we didn't give them many of the tools or strategies that would enable them to produce such products.

We could have provided this explicit instruction not only in mini-lessons but also in one-on-one conferences. If I had, for instance, decided to show Maria how to focus on one particular scene, rather than her typical bed-to-bed narrative, I might have said, "Maria, sometimes people do what you did in your story about being sick, where they tell everything that's gone on. Sometimes, however, they just choose one really important part. I notice when you drew this picture of your mom's wedding (which already appears in her portfolio) you showed you and your mom walking down the aisle. Is that the most important part to you? Can you close your eyes and remember that? Tell me everything you remember, all the things you could see, all the smells, all the noises you heard. I'm going to make a list of those and then you can include them as details in your story. Those are the things that your readers will need to make pictures in their minds." Then I could have demonstrated to her how I might write a draft using that list of details.

Perhaps Barb and I didn't do as much of this in writing because of our own backgrounds or histories. We are both avid readers and devour books hungrily. We could talk enthusiastically about ourselves as readers— book

choices, reactions, behaviors, etc. I'm a much less willing writer, however, and would venture to say Barb feels similarly. When I'm not engaged in my own, day-to-day writing, where I'm truly crafting and experimenting (or fighting) with language, writing for real purposes and real audiences, I can't authentically talk to children about their writing. I can show them examples in books, and show them models from their peers, but unless I can actually say, "This is my writing, and this is how I got a good lead for this piece," I won't be as effective in teaching writing to my students.

It also occurs to me that perhaps we did not present the children with enough reachable models. One day, I ask Patrick, "Do you ever think, 'That author did a good thing, and maybe I'll try that in my writing?'" Patrick pauses thoughtfully and finally says, "Not when I'm writing, sometimes though, I do that when I'm drawing... When I was trying to draw Mickey Mouse, I kept going over the bumps... " A few days later I observe as he copies a picture of Garfield off the cover of a notebook. He draws and redraws, erases, and redraws all the while looking at a model in front of him.

Patrick's response makes me think. I wonder if he attempts to draw the cartoon characters because achievement of this task seems possible to him (Gardner, 1980). The lines are clean and pure, the picture is not complicated by extensive detail or shading. The examples of writing we share in mini-lessons are mostly finished, polished pieces, done by adults who have been writing for years. Maybe those seem so unreachable that children believe they are hardly worth attempting. (When I am honest, I have to admit that even for me, a fairly skilled adult writer, *Mrs. Katz and Tush* or *The Lemon Jar* are huge reaches, far beyond the realm of anything I can ever imagine being able to imitate!) A few of the more skilled writers in the class do draw on the work of published authors to write their own pieces. In January, Elizabeth tells me

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that she is trying to write a piece as silly as Louis Sachar's series, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*. Kate's stories have the unmistakable stamp of Ann Martin's *Babysitter Club* books until early spring, when she begins reading *Ann of Green Gables*, then her writing takes on the antiquated language and themes of Victorian writer L. L. Montgomery. Karen attempts to use repeating phrases in her poetry after Don Graves models this technique in one of his poems.

My suspicions about the children's desire to use reachable models are confirmed as I watch them copy each other's techniques. While most of the children are not conscious imitators of published authors, they are careful mimics of their peers. Elizabeth is quickly identified by the third graders as one of the best, if not the best, writer in the class. She is a voracious reader who dwells in a world of words, and traces of other authors' voices wash across her writing like watercolor on a page. When Barb compliments her on her authorial craft, Elizabeth's techniques quickly appear in other children's writing. In November, for example, Elizabeth uses a date "In 1842..."as a way of establishing setting. During a writing share, Barb mentions that this specificity really helps her as a reader and compliments Elizabeth profusely. Over the next several months, at least eight of her peers attempt to mimic Elizabeth's style:

> Luis- 11/19/93
> In 1992, this little girl named Laura and her mother lived in this small house in Maine...
>
> Mark 11/19
> In 1984, in California, there was a family approximately the time was 10:45 a.m. ...
>
> Ashley 3/2
> Once long ago there was the biggest rain storm in 1672...

Kate 3/2
In the early 1900s the Miller family sat on the back porch.

Karen 3/2
One day in a lonesome area they had a baby girl named Stinky
Pinky, she was always stinky and they never changed her
diaper...On August 27th, 1993, she made so much noise that the
whole entire world heard her...She landed in fifty years. It was
1921. Everybody looked so different.

When I ask the children where they learned this technique, some can't tell
me. Others however, are quick to respond that they learned it from Elizabeth.

We also didn't provide Maria with strategies that would push her away
from us and teach her to depend upon herself. We allowed her, for instance,
to continue coming to us time after time for "medical" conferences, rather
than working toward the day when she could "fix" her own writing. Maria's
helplessness in correcting her spelling provides a perfect example of this
dependency. Maria was an average speller, whose high frequency spelling
vocabulary improved steadily throughout the year. By midyear, she wasn't
making a great many spelling mistakes, probably one every ten or fifteen
words, and she could usually recognize her errors or at least identify words
that had been difficult for her. It would have made sense, then, for us to teach
her to use a dictionary or the spell check on the computer to begin correcting
her misspellings. Many of Maria's mechanical errors were also easily
recognizable and correctable— capital letters at the beginning of sentences, etc.
We needed, then, to start teaching her strategies that would help her to begin
monitoring and correcting more of those errors on her own.

We might, for instance, have worked with the children to design a
revision or editing checklist, which Maria could have used to review her own
writing before she came to Barb or me. If we had accompanied the checklists
with a system for peer editing, Maria could have used her classmates as a

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resource, much like she did with Julie and Rhonda in reading. As it was, Maria frequently shared her stories with Julie, who sometimes helped her make minor content revisions, but the two didn't truly support and improve each other's writing. The specific format of a checklist might have pushed Julie to be more helpful and Maria to more actively use the feedback provided by Julie or by other peers. Such interactions could have served as an additional scaffold for Maria to move toward independence and skillfulness.

The instruction we provided, then, while certainly well-intended, did not promote the kinds of conversations which would help Maria move toward becoming more independent. Our instruction did not provide Maria with the tools and strategies that would allow her to help herself, nor did it teach her to use other resources— print (the dictionary or an editing checklist), technology (spellcheck on the computer), or other people. Instead, it encouraged an unhealthy dependence on adults as authorities.

Talking About Writing

Barb used a workshop approach in both reading and writing, so she or I talked to each of the children at least once a week in each of these subjects. Maria, therefore, did not suffer from a lack of adult interaction about her writing, nor did we have many more conversations about her reading than writing. I'm not sure, however, that our conversations in writing were as productive as those in reading.

First, I don't know that we were directive enough in conferring with Maria about her writing. In reading, we really pushed Maria. When it was obvious that her understanding of a book was muddy, Barb asked questions, made suggestions, and helped her use text to clarify her thinking. When I thought she needed a challenge, e.g., when she prepared to return to the

American *Girl* series after reading the much more difficult *Charlotte's Web*, I told her I thought the books were too easy, then pushed her toward the *Little House* books. In writing, neither Barb nor I provided that much direction or vision for Maria. When she continued writing story after story after story, "Hobbies," "Jazz," "Sports," and "Pets," Barb or I should have intervened and suggested, or maybe even mandated, that Maria write something different. We could have taught her techniques like focusing on one important scene, showing rather than telling, or including dialogue to help her write more effective personal narratives. We could have used a technique like story mapping to help Maria write better fiction, or encouraged her to use what she was learning about history in her reading to write a play or a research report. Drawing on those or other questions and strategies, maybe we could have helped Maria to create a carefully crafted piece that communicated a clear message and helped her develop as a writer.

Secondly, the pace of the reading conferences was very different from those we did in writing. In reading, Maria circled back to her ideas again and again, thought and rethought, read, talked, thought, talked, and read some more. Writing conferences, on the other hand, were much quicker, much less recursive. Maria was a fast writer who produced story after story after story and probably didn't sustain interest in a draft longer than a day or two until almost mid-year. As she finished each draft, she insisted on a conference. Unlike reading, however, where Maria appeared to view her ideas as malleable, and where she often shaped and changed her thinking after we had talked, then came back to talk again, Maria saw her drafts in writing as finished pieces. Occasionally she could be cajoled into adding a sentence or two, but for the most part, by the time she asked for adult input, she considered her drafts finished.

During most of her conferences, then, she was primarily interested not in discussing the content or structure of her pieces, but rather in receiving help on the mechanical aspects of the writing. She wanted to know if she had "gotten a lot wrong." In other words, she wanted her spelling and grammar corrected, and the writing cleaned up so that she could recopy it and glue it into her finished story book. Almost always, Barb and I succumbed (albeit unknowingly) to Maria's desires. She read the piece aloud, we talked briefly about content, and then rushed right into mechanics and editing. Maybe if we had said to Maria (and these are thoughts that occur to me now, as I sit in the quiet of my apartment, staring out at the Great Bay, not things that occurred to me in the busy-ness and excitement of last year's daily writers' workshop), "You know, Maria, sometimes, I'm able to do a better job revising if I step away from a piece for a day or two, then come back to it with fresh eyes. Today, instead of editing your piece, I'm going to ask you to put this draft away for a couple of days. Then, I'm going to ask you to come back and see if there are any changes you'd like to make." Maybe by slowing down the pace, we could have forced Maria to revisit her work, or at least made the conditions more favorable for doing so.

Thinking on Paper

In reading, response logs provided us with a tool to give the children feedback. Barb and I responded to Maria's reflections by first affirming what she was doing well, (e.g., summarizing), then helping her to recognize her own growth (Remember when you had trouble telling what went on in your first *American Girl* books?), and finally, trying to help her move forward. In the case of the *Little House* books, for example, I wanted Maria to begin making more connections between her own life and what she was reading, so

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I asked her to put herself in the place of the main characters, Laura and Mary. I modeled the process by making connections with my own life (I love to go to church but I don't think I could stand to sit around all day and do nothing. ICK!). Thus, Maria had concrete evidence as to her strengths and written reminders of things she needed to work on.

For most of the year, there was no tool for reflecting about writing. Early in the year, Barb did experiment with a form that children completed and then submitted to her as they finished a piece of writing. The form consisted of five comments for the writer to fill out:

- The amount of effort I put into this story was (circle one):

    poor　　　okay　　　good　　　excellent

- The best part of my story is …

- Compared with other stories I've written, this one is (circle one):

    not as good　　　about the same　　　better　　　fantastic

- Something I want to work on in my next piece of writing is …

The form also contained a place for Barb to write positive comments and make suggestions for improvement.

Barb stopped using these forms after approximately six weeks. At the time, the children seemed confused about terminology. The word "effort," for instance, seemed particularly difficult for the third graders to understand. They also didn't seem to know how to answer the questions and wrote things that made little or no sense to Barb and me, e.g., "The best part of my story is the whole story" or "The best part of my story is how I wrote my story." Even when they did answer the questions more "sensibly," their answers weren't very explicit. Asked what she needed to work on, for example, Maria wrote, "laern (sic) to spell more words."

Despite this confusion, Maria appeared to take the adult feedback she

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received on these forms very seriously. In early October, for instance, about a story entitled My Puppy," Barb wrote, "I like the way you added more information about the puppy you saw in the box." On suggestions, she cautioned, "Be very careful that your final draft is very neat and is all correct." On another story, Barb wrote, "Try to remember to add enough details to describe something so that the reader can picture it." These comments seemed to have a marked influence on Maria. Throughout the year she evaluated stories, both her own and those of professional writers, on the basis of specificity of detail, which she identified as "information." She worked hard at helping readers make pictures in their minds. She talked extensively about correctness and neatness. Even if all of the children were not affected in this way, perhaps the positive effect on even a few children would have merited continued use of the forms.

Maybe, then, instead of abandoning the writing evaluation forms altogether, we should have taken a step back and tried again. We might, for instance, have started with an evaluative questionnaire that had only one or two questions and worked with the children on those, perhaps first as a large group and then in individual writing conferences, until they had learned to give explicit responses. After that we could have expanded the questionnaire. We might have also gotten better answers if we had altered the questions slightly so that they forced children to think more metacognitively. Instead of simply saying, "The best part of my story is ...,"we might have added a second part to the question, "I know this because... " Thinking more about their processes as writers may have brought positive behaviors to a more conscious level. If a child was aware that he was doing something well, e.g., if he said, "The best part of my story is the lead, I know this because I worked really hard at grabbing the readers' attention right away," then two things could happen.

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First, having used this technique once, he could add it to his writing repertoire, and use it again. Secondly, even if he had not been very successful, Barb would have at least known he was aware of the need for good leads, and could plan instruction which helped him become more proficient.

Keeping a writing response log, or writing about writing, seems somewhat redundant, like a dog spinning after its tail until it finally collapses in a dizzy heap, yet at the same time, the reading response log truly seemed a tool which helped Maria improve as a reader. Perhaps, then, we needed to have some kind of similar feedback in writing, where we acknowledged the strengths of drafts and finished pieces, talked about growth, and made suggestions for improvement. These written conversations might have given Maria one more tool to use as she developed the internal voice of a skillful and independent writer.

Writing in the Portfolio

Maria used her portfolio very differently in reading than she did in writing. In reading, Maria's portfolio was a place to document growth, and she was thorough and thoughtful. She included her *Kristen* reflections, a xeroxed page from *Charlotte's Web* and the cover of *Little House in the Big Woods.* These artifacts were arranged chronologically and Maria could and often did leaf through them, almost reverently, tracing her growth over the course of the year. Additionally, Maria placed her completed book list and also her reading genre chart in her portfolio as ways of reviewing her accomplishments in reading.

The writing in Maria's portfolio, on the other hand, appeared much less thoughtfully selected or organized. By the end of the year, Maria had five pieces she identified as writing in her portfolio. Three were fiction pieces,

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"The Haunted House," "Mrs. French Fry Face," and "My Puppy," from the beginning of the year. The last two pieces were both non-fiction writing, the Pennington School story she wrote in April, and an autobiography, "My Life," written the first week in June. Her reflections on these stories were relatively brief, on "The Haunted House," for example she wrote, "I'm putting this in my portfolio because I like my scary story. My story is a fake story. It is my first scary story in third grade. I love my scary story." About her autobiography she reflected, "I want to put this in my portfolio because its a rugh dragh (rough draft) and it tells how I write now." Maria didn't however, expand on this statement to include any details about the improvement she saw in her writing.

Maria's writing was scattered throughout her portfolio, so it didn't serve as a chronological record of growth. Too, the children did very little long-term review of their writing— while they did chart their spelling percentages from weekly tests, they didn't keep logs of pieces completed, nor did they keep genre charts. There weren't the opportunities, then, or at least not the structured or adult-initiated opportunities to look at growth in writing. Perhaps if the third graders had kept some kind of log, Maria could have looked at her writing and said, "It looks like I write mostly 'all about' stories, I'd like to try some new genre," or at least we could have guided her into a conversation like this.

Maybe as adults, then, we need to exercise enough authority to say to children, "You need to decide on an organizational system that will show your growth and development. You might want to divide your portfolio into sections and put all of your writing in the same place. That way, when you add to your writing, you can look back and see how you are changing." Maybe we need to tell children that they need to have "x" number of pieces a quarter,

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and physically set aside a time every three or four weeks, when each child would select a finished piece of writing to include in the portfolio. Maybe we also need to begin devising systems to help children keep better track of all of the different kinds of writing they are doing. Typically, although children in writing classrooms explore many different genres, the genres that receive the most recognition, or are counted as having the most worth are personal narratives and fiction, so if children do keep a log of finished work, that's the kind of writing they record. In reality, personal narratives and fiction are only two of many kinds of writing children do at school. In March, for instance, Maria finished several stories, but she also filled out an entry blank for the Invention Convention and wrote several thank you letters to people who had visited Pennington. Those pieces of writing are legitimate, drafted, revised and edited for real purposes, and should also go on a log of Maria's finished pieces of writing.

Written Reflections

We also didn't provide Maria with the same kinds of opportunities to reflect on writing that she had to reflect on her reading. Maria's reflections about the *Kristen* books were rambling and not always entirely focused. Nevertheless, they gave Maria a place to think about her reading. She learned to set forth a more cohesive plot summary by using transitions to make connections between different episodes. She began talking about herself as a reader, first telling us that she was a good reader because she usually chose good books, and secondly, talking about her aesthetic experiences, that she liked to "beatend." Putting the words on paper, making them concrete, appeared important to Maria. Almost every time she opened her portfolio, she went back to these reflections, reading and rereading them. Whenever

she was asked what was the most important thing in her portfolio, she said, "My *Kristen* stories."

Maria didn't do the same kinds of reflecting about her writing. I attribute this directly to my teaching. The day Barb taught the third graders to write reading reflections, she modeled by using a reflection from her own portfolio. She read the reflection aloud, then explained to the third graders exactly what should be included (See pages 129-131). The next week, when we were scheduled to do reflections about writing, Barb was absent and I did the mini-lesson. My mini-lesson, for whatever reason, was substantially less explicit. I probably have twenty samples of writing in my portfolio. I could have showed the children the first one pager I wrote after I came to New Hampshire and compared it with one of my more recent one pagers. I could have shared "Cuz It's Importanting To Me," the most difficult research project I have undertaken in my years at UNH, or some of my published work— the one page literacy vignette that appeared in *The Reading Teacher*, the drafts of "On Running and Reading," the chapter that appeared in Rhodes and Shanklin's *Windows into Literacy*, the dog-eared rough draft of *Finding Our Focus*, which eventually was published as a *UNH Working Paper*. All of these artifacts, and at least ten or twelve more, represent me as a writer. Each has a substantial reflection, at least a paragraph that identifies the artifact and tells why I have included it in my portfolio. I could have shared a few of these artifacts, briefly described what they were, and then read aloud the reflections, or possibly even have put them on the overhead. As a reading specialist and educational consultant I had done similar mini-lessons many times.

Unfortunately, on this particular day, for whatever reason, I didn't do any of those things. Instead, I simply reminded the third graders that the purpose of the portfolios was to show people who we were as readers, writers,

and learners, and asked them to go through their writing folders and choose a piece that was representative of their writing. I reminded the children, too, that the purpose of reflections was to tell people why particular artifact were included in the portfolios and asked them to write reflections about the pieces they selected. Given my lack of modeling, the reflections the third graders, including Maria, wrote on that particular day weren't especially detailed or explicit. Then, because we did no further modeling on writing good reflections for these artifacts, they didn't improve substantially as the year went on.

Issues of Ownership

Our conferences about Maria's writing artifacts also sounded very different than those we had in reading. When I conferred with Maria about the reading artifacts in her portfolio, I tended to be much more directive. I asked her, for instance, if she wouldn't like to include something that represented her self-monitoring process and presented several options. At the end of the year, I encouraged her to include an artifact that demonstrated her ability to read the *Little House* books. I also asked her to consider choosing a reading response to include in her portfolio and even went so far as to select one that I thought was representative of her abilities.

In these instances, I clearly did not allow Maria total independence in her portfolio. I believe that it is not only the adult's right, but also her responsibility, to exercise her adult authority and expertise to provide children with enlarged vision, to help them see the possibilities beyond the limited horizons of their own eight-year-old worlds. When I suggested that Maria include specific artifacts in her portfolio, I wasn't, I don't believe, stepping on her authority. Instead, I was pointing out her growth, helping her

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to see how much she had changed. I was a guide, standing next to Maria, looking back, pointing out markers in the countryside so she could see how far she had come.

Barb and I also took a directive role when we taught mini-lessons or required certain artifacts, such as reading reflections or completed book logs. Again, I see this not as a violation of child ownership, but rather as a necessary assumption of adult responsibility. Maria wrote her first reading reflection because Barb demonstrated and then mandated the task. Left to her own devices, I doubt that she would have ever considered representing her reading in this way. Nevertheless, once demonstrated, she adopted the format, made it her own, and used it to aid and represent her growth as a reader. A similar situation occurred with the completed book list. Maria probably wouldn't have made such a list on her own, but once introduced, Maria found it a valuable tool for monitoring the kinds of things she was reading, even using it to "correct" or alter her path at the end of the second quarter ("I told me I wasn't" [reading enough chapter books]). Maria also wouldn't have started using the list of *Kristen* books to document her progress through this series. When she expressed an interest in reading these books, Barb and I supported her desires by showing her a tool she wouldn't have found on her own. We used our adult knowledge and expertise, then, to help Maria expand her knowledge and expertise. We helped her to see what might lie over the next hill.

Too, by suggesting that she include specific artifacts, I was, in many respects, acting as a liaison between the evaluative worlds of children and those of adults. I knew that adults— parents, teachers, and administrators— would recognize and value the self-monitoring list (although, to be honest, when I suggested that she include a self-monitoring list I was thinking more

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in terms of one of her lists of main ideas from a *Kristen* book). I knew that many adults, particularly those in schools, are familiar with the *American Girl* series, as well as the *Little House* books and would, seeing the two, recognize the huge strides Maria had made as a reader. I knew that anyone who read one of Maria's rambling, unfocused *Kristen* reflections and then read her summary of the "Sundays," the chapter in *Little House in the Big Woods*, would see growth in Maria's reading skills. Although Maria knew she had grown and could even talk about her growth with comments like, "I'm doing better at my reading log, cuz I know what to say now," I don't think she realized the significance of any of these individual artifacts. I helped her, then, to make her portfolio a tool more acceptable and more meaningful to the strange and foreign world of adult evaluators. Such interventions are not only helpful, but necessary, if we hope to ever have portfolios recognized as a viable evaluative tool.

In writing, I tended to be much less assertive. Although I knew that Maria tended to write in three different genre, and I knew that for much of the year, only one of those, fiction, was represented in Maria's portfolio, I didn't push her to include the other two. I also didn't push Maria to include what I considered her most substantial piece of writing, a report on koala bears, in her portfolio. I asked her, but she refused, telling me, instead, that she wanted to take it home. I am sure her refusal was at least partly the reaction to the poor final grade she received because she hadn't done a home project. I wish now that I had provided her with a written response to that piece of writing, that I had pointed out the strengths of this report— all the interesting information she had included, how well she had paragraphed, and how carefully she had recopied her final product. Perhaps if I had written

such a note, Maria would have felt better about including this artifact in her portfolio.

So What is the Teacher's Role in the Portfolios?

Clearly, Maria's growth in reading seems to have come at least in part as a result of structures and interventions by Barb and I. Although we took more ownership in these "child-centered" portfolios than might be advised Maria clearly became more proficient and more independent in reading, where we intervened, than she did in writing, where we allowed her to find her own way. Maria, then, illustrates for me that the adult can and must take a more aggressive role in students' growth toward skillful independence. The child's internal self-regulatory voice does not develop without the influence of external conversations of more proficient learners, in this case, adults and peers.

Laurent Daloz, author of *Effective Teaching and Mentoring Realizing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning Experiences* suggests the teacher might fulfill these responsibilities by assuming the role of mentor in her students' lives. Mentors provide:

> A talisman to protect us from evil spells, a gem of wise advice, a map, and sometimes simply courage. But always the mentor appears near the outset of the journey as a helper, equipping us in some way for what is to come, a midwife to our dreams...The mentor 'appears in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, and planning, are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own,' often arriving in the nick of time to help the traveler along the journey. Mentors 'embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way' (Jung, 1958, p. 71, as quoted in Daloz, 1986, p. 17).

Daloz believes the mentor has three different roles in the life of the learner. She should first of all provide support, which Daloz defines as:

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the activity of holding, of providing a place where the student can contact her need for fundamental trust, the basis of growth. It means moving to confirm the student's sense of worth and helping her to see that she is both OK where she is and capable of moving ahead when she chooses (p. 215).

For the elementary teacher, providing support might include such responsibilities as creating a safe and nurturing environment where children know that they are respected and cared for, where risk-taking, approximation, and mistake-making are valued as signs of growth, where no one is allowed to intentionally hurt anyone else, either physically or emotionally. Support might also mean affirming a child's strengths, ("You're a really good listener, Maria, I notice that whenever we share a new strategy, you always do your very best to try it out"), or helping a child become aware of strengths she didn't know she had ("Whenever directions are given, Maria, you're really careful to make a list so that you don't forget anything. List making is something not very many third graders know how to do. Would you be willing to teach this to some of the other children?"). Support also includes making sure children have the materials and resources they need ("Many of you are interested in reading autobiographies, and we don't have very many in our classroom library. Of course you can always go to the library and get what you need. I'm also ordering several new autobiographies off of this month's book order, so we'll have more in the room all the time"), and teaching children the strategies that makes them more capable of handling different learning tasks ("Yesterday, when we started our research reports, most of you wrote down everything you read in your notes. That's one way of taking notes, but there are other ways that would be faster, and would work just as well. Today I'm going to teach you a better way of taking notes...").

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If growth is to occur, however, the learner must not only feel safe and affirmed but must also be challenged to grow, to move forward. About challenge, Daloz says:

> Just as support calls the mentor to conform his boundaries to those of the student, challenge peels them apart. It means opening a distance in the relationship, drawing the student outward to fill the gap, straining him to move, to accommodate his inner structures to the new environment created by his mentor's distance. In social science language, it means creating a cognitive dissonance, a gap between one's perceptions and expectation, 'I think I should be there but I see myself here' (p. 223).

In the elementary classroom, challenge might include such qualities as having high expectations and not allowing children to produce less than their best ("Your poster is absolutely beautiful. As soon as we correct the misspelled words, you can hang it on the wall..."), pushing learners to try new things, ("Those books are getting too easy for you now, and I'd like you to try an author who might challenge you a little more. Here are three possible books, you can choose one of them, or I'll help you choose something from the library"), helping learners take on big tasks ("Look, Maria, there are eight books in the *Little House* series. I know there were only six in each of the *American Girl* sets, and they were much shorter than these, but I think you're ready to try reading this whole series now"), or making learners aware of unproductive behaviors and skills and helping them to replace them with those that might be more effective ("Every time you come to a word you don't know, you try to sound it out. That's one strategy you can use, but it's not always very effective. You and I are going to begin working on some other strategies that might work more effectively").

Daloz combines support and challenge in the following diagram (See Figure 7-3). He contends:

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When both support and challenge are low, little is likely to happen. Things stay pretty much as they are. When support is enhanced, however, the potential for some sort of growth increases, but it is likely to emerge from the inner needs of the learner rather than from any stress imposed by the environment. The learner is 'confirmed' and may feel good about himself but may also lack the capacity to engage productively with the outside world as well as he might if he were encouraged to communicate more actively with it. The risk that some highly 'student-centered' programs run is that in encouraging primarily 'self-expression,' they fail to help their students to acknowledge the legitimacy of a world different from their own and thus miss the crucial leap into contextualism.

Too much challenge in the absence of appropriate support, on the other hand, can drive the insecure student into 'retreat,' forcing a rigid epistemology to replace the promise of a more fluid and complex worldview...Finally in the appropriate mix, development can occur (p. 215).

Figure 7.2: Daloz' Model for Mentoring

High Challenge

	Retreat	Growth
Low Support		High Support
	Stasis	Confirmation
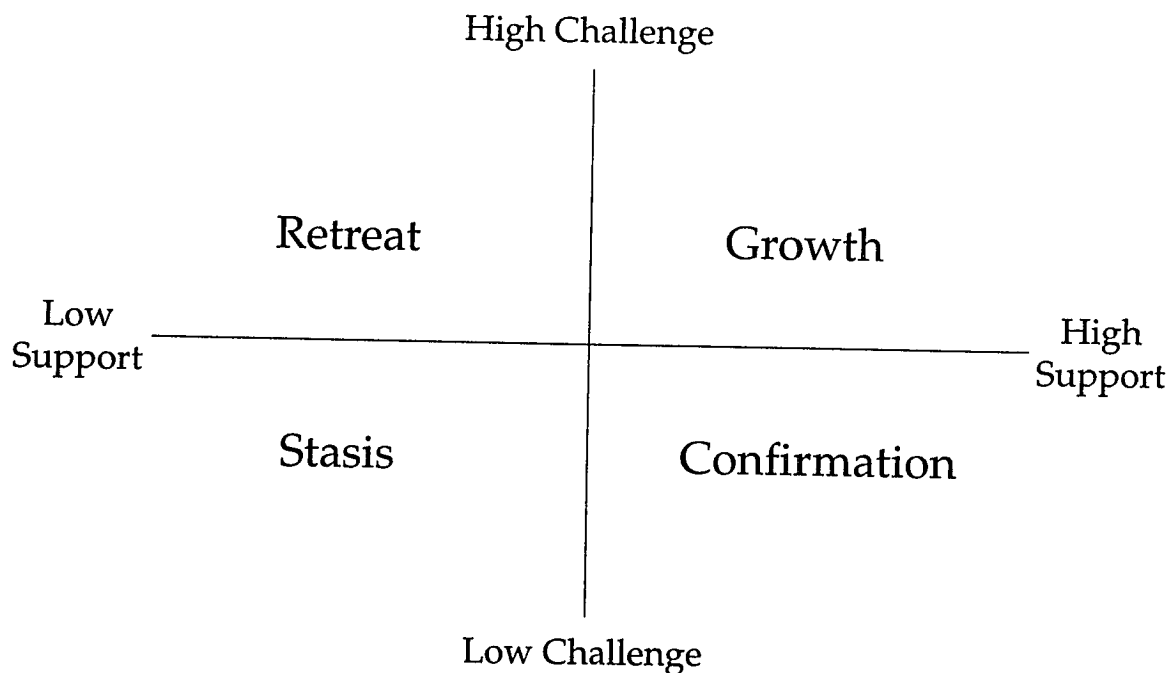
Low Challenge

Finally, the mentor must also provide vision or direction for the road ahead. Daloz says, "Simply to provide support and challenge leaves unanswered the question, 'Towards what?' Although ultimately the leap must be made into the dark, the mentor is there to offer a kind of light" (p. 213). In the elementary classroom, providing vision might include introducing a new author or book, teaching children to write in a new genre, or showing children models of excellence so they know what to work toward.

In Conclusion

In Maria's case, the external voices of adults and peers enabled her to acquire the internal voice of a reader. Our talk helped Maria to construct meaning and make sense of her reading, or compare or apply what went on in books to her own life. Eventually, those conversations became internalized and Maria began self-monitoring. First, she did it with the use of outside aids, e.g., her list, then she moved away from the lists, to where her reading conversations were ongoing, but only inside her head. In writing, Maria never moved beyond the phase of asking for external monitoring. Perhaps this was because we never provided the tools that would enable her to do that. Adult intervention, then, is not a possibility, but rather a necessary responsibility in the portfolio classroom.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW WINE IN OLD WINESKINS

Early in Jesus' public ministry, followers of John the Baptist ask Jesus why he and his disciples do not adhere to the rules and traditions long practiced by the Jews and other religious sects. "Why do we and the Pharisees fast," they ask, "but you and your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answers with illustrations which seem applicable to the current state of the portfolio movement. "No one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch pulls away from the garment and a worse tear results. Nor do men put new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins and both are preserved" (Matthew 9: 14, 16, 17, NASB).

Portfolios are new wine, a new lens for seeing children, for inviting their voices into conversations about evaluation, and for helping them to become skillful, independent, lifelong learners. They have the potential to give us fresh visions for education. New insights about our practice. New expertise as teachers and learners. Unfortunately, for the most part we have tried to pour this new wine into old wineskins, to squeeze this new tool into traditional institutional structures. Portfolios challenge, conflict, and overlap with many currently existing evaluative instruments and beliefs. Before we can think about creating new wineskins, perhaps we should first look at the conflicts with some of the old.

<u>Old Wineskins</u>

Even at the classroom level, where the teacher is responsible for the majority of assessment tools, the portfolios overlap with existing tools, creating feelings of discomfort and confusion. In Barb's room, for instance, children place final drafts of their writing in "Finished Story" booklets. These booklets document children's writing from the beginning of the year to the end. The portfolios, however, are also supposed to be a place for children to document their growth and development as writers. Barb justifies having both "Finished Story" booklets and portfolios because the booklets go home at the end of the year, providing children with a memento of third grade, while the portfolios stay at school. When children write pieces they want to include in both places, Barb is more than willing to make copies. Still I cannot help but wonder, given the overlap between these two tools, whether both are truly necessary. I also wonder what message the children receive about the importance of their portfolios when the original pieces are generally placed in the "Finished Story" booklets while portfolios house the copies.

Portfolios also challenge existing building or district level evaluative tools, most notably report cards. Advocates of portfolios, myself included, would argue that portfolios provide a much richer, fuller, picture of the child. As can be clearly seen in Robbie's case, they move the spotlight from children's weaknesses and problems and challenge us to focus on strengths and possibilities. This would seem the kind of information we want to communicate to parents. It might be logical, then, to abandon report cards in favor of portfolios, which provide a more positive and more detailed picture of the child.

Unfortunately, in many schools, Pennington included, portfolios are being used in addition to report cards, not replacing or even supplementing

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them. The disparate messages of these two widely varied tools affect at least three different parties. First, an overwhelming burden is placed on teachers. Each quarter, teachers spend tremendous amounts of time on report cards; they gather and analyze data, record grades, talk to specialists, and agonize over comments. In recent years, increasing numbers of teachers also discuss the report cards with their students, either asking for their input or at least sharing the results.

Portfolios, done well, also take a great deal of teacher time. If the portfolios are being used as an instructional tool, children have to be taught to set goals, make plans, use resources, monitor progress, and create and assess their processes and products. When portfolios are used as an evaluative tool, children also have to learn how to accurately represent themselves— how to select artifacts, write reflections, share their accomplishments and growth, and evaluate by criteria of several different audiences. Much of this is done through large group instruction, but individual conferences, coaching, and feedback are also critical to the success of the portfolios. It seems unfair, if not impossible, to expect teachers to do both report cards and portfolios.

Furthermore, parents are confused by the conflicting reports. When Robbie's parents are presented with a report card that indicates that he is deficient in many areas, but also see a portfolio which reflects their child's strengths and possibilities, they are justified in questioning why their child is being described in two such very different ways, and probably have good reason to doubt the competency of people and institutions responsible for these tools. Because report cards are more familiar, Robbie's parents might attach more credence to this tool, thereby discrediting the portfolios or negating their potential benefits or impact. Seeking some kind of certainty,

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they might also attach greater importance to standardized tests, which at least provide the solid surety of numbers and comparisons. In that case, the portfolios would have even more credibility problems.

Finally, using both portfolios and report cards sends a conflicting message to children. Barb's third graders spend a great deal of time assembling portfolios that document their growth as readers, writers, and learners. They draft, revise, and edit their reflections. They create tables of contents and organize and reorganize their artifacts. The documents they compile, however, have little or no effect on the quarterly report cards. Barb doesn't hold end-of-quarter conferences with the children about their portfolios or report cards, nor does she ask children to draw on the documentation in their portfolios to do self-evaluative report cards. (At spring parent conferences, she did, however, ask each child to select one artifact which she showed to parents). Her actions, then, probably communicate to children that portfolios are nice, but really not that important.

The disparity between the children's self-evaluations and the grades Barb puts on the report cards might also be confusing to the third graders. Looking at his writing grade, for instance, Robbie might think, "Hmm. In my portfolio, I have my haunted house story, my report about the battery, my poem about water, my letter to the puppet guy, and the Invention Convention application. On the report card, though, Mrs. W. says I have 'accomplished very little in writing.' I wonder how much stuff you were supposed to do?" This mixed message might cause children to either doubt their own abilities to evaluate or discredit the teacher's assessments, or simply be less open or excited about sharing their insights.

In Patrick's case, the discrepancy between how he perceives and represents his growth in reading and writing and how adults perceive that

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growth causes him to become very angry. In October, he tells me he just wants to be able to read and write as well as his peers, because "if people think you are dumb, they might not want to be your friend." Throughout the year, he uses his portfolio to set goals, make plans, keep track of strategies, self-monitor and document progress, and by May, he is reading *The Boxcar Children* and writing two or three page fiction stories and research reports, "just like all of his friends." Given his progress, Patrick first tells his LD teacher, then Barb and me that he no longer wants to leave the room for reading, he feels he just needs an easier spelling list and extra help in math. Patrick's LD teacher, however, sees the situation very differently. Citing the results of a recent reading assessment, which indicate that Patrick has made no growth in decoding (this is predictable, given his difficulties with directionality), she insists that he still needs assistance in reading and refuses to discontinue services. Patrick cries, becomes angry, and learns that his self-evaluations are not nearly as important as more strident adult voices.

Portfolios also conflict with evaluative tools at the state and maybe even national level. In early May, Barb's third graders take the recently developed New Hampshire Assessment. I observe, aware of my own dislike of standardized tests, but also trying to be open-minded. The test is touted as comprehensive and state of the art. Maybe it really is different. Maybe it truly can teach us something we can use to better inform our curriculum or our pedagogy. Instead, I come away heartsick and disgusted.

Maria, who regularly mothers and guides her best friend, sets goals, makes plans, assesses her progress, monitors her understanding, and solves problems becomes completely dependent and summons Barb and me again and again to ask questions about what she is supposed to do. By the end of the second day, this child, an "average" third grader of huge heart and never-

ending effort, is reduced to tears by the test's inappropriate length, difficulty, and poor formatting.

The test is even more damaging to children like Patrick, who come into third grade with enormous doubts about themselves as readers, writers, and learners. The week of the test, Patrick is banished to the LD room with the rest of the "coded" children. After the second morning of testing, he pointedly asks me whether Barb read the test questions aloud to his classmates. I lie a little and say she read some. "Mrs. P. must think we're dumb people," Patrick says, "She read them [the questions] all aloud to us, and we could read them for ourselves."

Both Maria and Patrick enter testing week believing they are proficient readers and writers, capable of monitoring and controlling their own destiny as learners. All year, we have used portfolios to push the third graders toward skillful independence, toward beliefs in their own agency and proficiency as learners. Now in one week, we negate or at least seriously challenge these children's images of themselves as competent, capable learners. As teachers, we can no longer ignore the discrepancies between the messages we communicate to children and those communicated by tools such as the New Hampshire Assessment Test or other standardized instruments.

In fact, portfolios defy the underlying philosophical foundations of school evaluative structures. Many of the beliefs about evaluation, as well as time, space, and money in schools were developed in the early 1900's (Callahan, 1962). At this time, "the strongest force shaping America was industrialism, the application of mechanical power to the production of goods" (p. 1). Rapidly increasing industrialization led to rapid population growth in cities and a huge number of immigrants (one million in 1900, as compared to 14 million in the preceding 35 years) only exacerbated these

problems. Schools, faced with thousands of new students, many not even literate in their own languages, needed more classrooms and more teachers (Callahan, 1962, pp. 14-15). This need for additional funds was then, as it is now, displeasing to the American public.

At the same time, Frederick Taylor's scientific management system, which had been tested on industrial tasks such as moving pig iron and laying bricks, was becoming increasingly popular. The scientific management system asserted that there was always one best way of doing anything, and that this one best way could be determined only by scientific study. Efficiency experts identified workers who were most effective or productive, analyzed their movements, and then broke these into small, learnable tasks, which could be easily taught and carefully monitored by a foreman. Soon, the American public was applying scientific management to everything from the military to law, to clergy, to the home, where efficiency could be determined by the speed of one's biscuit making (pp. 19-41).

Educators, following the public's lead, attempted to apply these business and industrial methods to the schools. Walter Hamilton expressed the sentiments shared by many teachers and administrators, "If it is worthwhile in the business world to devote careful painstaking study to the number of motions necessary to laying bricks, handling pig iron, or painting a structure, is it not worth far more to conserve a human endeavor in developing the human product?" (as quoted in Callahan, 1962, p. 59). Emerson identified the efficient organization as one who has clear and definite aims, an organizational system capable of achieving such aims, equipment adequate for achieving the aims (labor saving devices such as seating charts and plan books), and a strong executive who is able to carry them out. (Callahan, 1962, p 56).

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Franklin Bobbitt also had a lasting impact on current schools. Applying the principles of scientific management, he suggested that definite qualitative and quantitative standards must be determined both for educational processes and products. Such standards should be set not by teachers or people who worked in the schools, but rather by the public, who better knew what they needed as a finished product. Bobbitt cited several benefits for the creation of standards: teachers would know when students were failing, principals would know when teachers were inefficient and see how their schools compared to others, and superintendents could determine the performance of teachers and principals in each building. Standards would also enhance community relations since the results could be presented as scientifically determined, which would be open to less fault finding by the American public. Bobbitt's work, as well as similar work by some of his peers, created the rationale for standardized testing used in schools today (Callahan, 1962, pp. 81-86).

The principles of scientific management conflict with underlying assumptions of portfolio advocates in any number of ways. When scientific management techniques are applied to education, schools became factories, places to produce uniform products. Too, factories are evaluated in terms of production numbers and monetary value, quality is considered only as earning potential is impacted. Clearly, portfolios, which emphasize the unique strengths and potential of each individual child, contrast sharply with the beliefs and structures of scientific management.

A Side Trip: Ranking and Evaluating

In his article, "Ranking, Evaluating, and Liking: Sorting Out Three Forms of Judgment," Peter Elbow (1993) distinguishes between evaluating, "the act of expressing one's judgment of a performance or person by pointing

out the strengths and weaknesses of different features or dimensions" (p. 188) and "ranking," which he defines as "the act of summing up one's judgment of a performance or person into a single, holistic number or score" (p. 187). Elbow highlights the benefits of evaluation saying, "Evaluation requires going beyond a first response that may be nothing but a kind of ranking and instead looks carefully at the performance or person to make distinctions between parts or features or criteria" (p. 187). He concludes, "I am... *for evaluation*. Evaluation means looking hard and thoughtfully at a piece of writing (or reading) in order to make distinctions as to the quality of different features or dimensions" (p. 191).

In contrast, Elbow dismisses ranking, typically done through the vehicles of grades or standardized tests as "unreliable" and "woefully uncommunicative." Report cards and standardized tests "quantify the degree of approval or disapproval in readers but tell nothing at all about what the readers actually approve or disapprove of" (p. 190). Elbow suggests that learners tend to become so preoccupied with the "oversimplified quantitative verdicts that they care more about scores than about learning" (p. 190). He decries "that crude, oversimplified way of representing judgment— distorting it really— into a single number, which means ranking people and performances along a single continuum" (p. 191).

I agree with Elbow wholeheartedly. Literacy portfolios are a tool for evaluation. Portfolios focus on learner strengths, interests, and possibilities rather than weaknesses and deficiencies. They reveal the range and depth of a learner's performance for a variety of purposes and audiences. Portfolios promote careful, thoughtful reflection first by the learner, and then, I would argue, by viewers of the portfolio. The information gathered is much more complex, much richer, than the letter grade or check mark that appears on a

report card or the percentile rating on a standardized test. Certainly, I am a huge advocate of this kind of evaluation.

At the same time, I see report cards and standardized tests, the public's desire for numbers and certainty, as a reality that is not going to go away. I am hugely concerned with a trend I perceive in many colleagues in the assessment field, who deal with instruments such as standardized tests simply by brushing away or belittling them. In the introduction to his wonderful book, *The Constructive Evaluation of Literate Activity*, Peter Johnson (1992), for example, explains that he didn't use the word "measurement" or "testing" in the title of his book because:

> The derivation of 'test' is actually instructive. It came to us from Latin via old French with the meaning 'a piece of burned clay or skull' from the practice of testing metals by incineration in a clay vessel resembling a skull. Current tests are not so far from this origin.
>
> Measurement, too, is restrictive in that it implies a concern for comparability and standardization, and a belief that the measuring process is somehow amoral, nonreactive, and linear. Testing, as it is currently done, is about as nonreactive as vivisection (pp. 5-6).

Johnston concludes this section of his book by quoting Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi who defines wisdom as, "the ability to construct multiple realities...which does not lie in becoming mesmerized by that glimpse of reality our culture proclaims to be ultimate, but in the discovery that we can create various realities" (p. 7). While I certainly believe teachers should be creative in envisioning new evaluative possibilities and structures, I also believe that we have to deal with existing realities, including report cards and standardized tests.

As a professional, I believe I need to be responsible for creative ways of responding to the public's demands for accountability at several different levels. First, I deal with it in my classroom. Despite the detailed picture

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provided by Robbie's portfolio, his parents probably also wonder, "How is our son doing as compared to the rest of the class?" I can see several different ways of addressing this issue. I might begin by clearly delineating my expectations for the third graders, perhaps through a series of benchmarks. Parents would probably feel more comfortable if I held a meeting the first week of school and said, "By June, I expect all children to do the following:

- read a chapter book every month (one hundred pages is typical length)

- compose a piece which demonstrates skillfulness in each of the following genre:
    - personal narrative
    - thank you letter
    - letter requesting information
    - invitation
    - notice of an event or activity

- write a research report in which they:
    - select a topic
    - propose possible questions
    - gather data from at least three different sources
    - compile information in a draft
    - present a final product

- read, rehearse, and perform a play or poem

- accurately evaluate their reading and writing by criteria on a rubric created by a collaborative effort between teacher and students

- spell at least two hundred high frequency words correctly (or have strategies for dealing with difficulties in spelling)

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- spell 80% of words in daily work correctly
- write in cursive neatly and legibly

This list is certainly not comprehensive, and would have to be revised according to individual children or schools, but it represents a beginning, a set of expectations parents can use as a lens for evaluating their children's performances.

At this back-to-school meeting, I might also share a sample rubric and demonstrate how I evaluate children's reading and writing according to specific criteria. Furthermore, I might have anonymous samples of third grade work— audiotapes of oral reading and also writing in various genres— pieces I consider below average, average, and above average. I could display these samples and invite parents to compare their child's performance to these typical third grade samples.

Furthermore, as a professional, I need to use all the evaluative tools available to me. Portfolios are one assessment instrument. They do not, however, tell me everything that I need to know about every child. I need to rely then, on a variety of tools, running records (Clay, 1985) or CAWLS miscue analysis (Rhodes & Shanklin, 1993) for assessing students' strengths and needs in reading; samples of writing that show that I have clearly looked hard for evidence of growth and problems, e.g., weekly work samples in which I've counted percentage of words spelled right, kinds of errors, etc. (Ruth and Murphy, 1988), and anecdotal records documenting children's day-to day behaviors and progress (Rhodes, 1992). Parents feel much more confident when I can provide them with these kinds of concrete data.

Finally, I need to deal with the issue of standardized tests. Certainly, I'd rather not use them at all. As a teacher, I find portfolios and day-to-day assessment tools that evaluate the performance and growth of individuals far

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more helpful. Farr (1993) reminds me, however, that educators must acknowledge that different audiences need different kinds of information. Audiences such as districts or states, need information that compares the performance of schools or districts. Given, then, that standardized tests are probably a reality, I need to be an active advocate for tests most in line with my philosophy and practice, least harmful to students, least expensive, and least time-consuming.

Farr believes teachers need to act as change agents in the assessment industry by working with test publishers to redesign the format and purpose of standardized tests. He calls for the "elimination of the designation of subskills and reporting on those sub-behaviors as if they are actually distinct" and says we should push for assessment tools which more closely resemble the kinds of reading, writing, and assessment we value in real life:

> What large scale assessment can and should do is to report a global comprehension score, with no special subtests on traditional focuses like word recognition and vocabulary. Without the time-consuming battery of accompanying tests, reading tests can be shorter while using longer passages of a variety of types. These passages must evoke different purposes for reading that reflect the real reasons students read in and out of school. Thus, the reading test will be more authentic (p. 34).

Farr suggests that performance assessment tasks which integrate reading from multiple sources with writing may be the key to communicating with parents and aggregating data at the district or state level. Such assessments must be simple enough for teachers to use, incorporate different genres of reading and writing, and provide opportunities to opportunity to draft, confer, revise, and edit with all stages of the process being included in the final submission. They should be scored using a criterion rubric, with benchmark pieces available for comparison. Children should be made aware of the assessment criteria before they start the task and should be involved in some kind of self-assessment.

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A typical task for third graders might consist of reading a newspaper article about a child cut by glass on a school playground, a story or non-fiction piece about children cleaning up their world, and a list of city aldermen. Students would be asked to read the different texts, then write a letter to persuade the aldermen why the playground needed to be cleaned up and how that might come about. Children would also write a self-reflective letter about their process and evaluate their work according to criteria provided by the testing company.

Interestingly, Farr cautions against the misuse of these tests, they should not be used to report individual performance or scores any more than portfolios should be used for large-scale assessment. If the purpose of these instruments is to aggregate data and assess institutional, not individual performance, schools don't need scores from every child. Farr advocates matrix sampling, saying "Good sampling should yield results similar to those obtained when all students take the entire test. Nothing is lost in reporting, since individual scores are of little concern. In addition, matrix sampling provides a general indication of the progress of groups of students, not a blueprint for instruction of individual students" (p. 34).

By responding to the public need for ranking and comparability, I do not diminish my advocacy for children. Instead, I obtain increased credibility and public confidence. This allows me increased freedom and power to use things like literacy portfolios, tools I do believe in, to act as an advocate for children.

Creating New Wineskins

New wine calls for new wineskins. If we truly want to use literacy portfolios as a tool for helping children work toward learner skillfulness and

independence and for including children's voices in evaluation conversations, we must also think about restructuring schools. This is a monumental job. Rex Brown proposes:

> The general task is to move away from fragmentation and toward more integration; away from the isolation of teachers or school or district and toward the idea of a community of learners; away from the politics of confrontation and toward a politics of collaboration; away from a largely vertical, authoritarian organizational structure and toward a flatter, more democratic structure; away from an emphasis on minimal basic skills and toward an emphasis on challenging everyone in the system; away from a system with little clarity of purpose and toward a system drawn into the future by a compelling vision of what this nation will achieve in the world as it both understands more deeply and enacts the values and ideals on which it was founded (p. 248).

As we develop a new vision of schools, then, we must reconceptualize not only underlying purpose, but also traditional notions of evaluation, curriculum, and pedagogy. These new beliefs will not be compatible with existing institutional structures, so time and space will also have to be completely reconceptualized. Eisner's dimensions of schooling— intentional, structural, curricular, pedagogical, and evaluative— seem a logical framework with which to begin envisioning this New School.

The Intentional Dimension: Creating a Foundation

Effective schools begin with "goals and aims that are explicitly advocated and publicly announced," which Eisner identifies as the school's "Intentional Dimension" (p. 73). "Intentional dimensions" are generally comprised of a vision statement, a broad over-arching assertion of what a school is about, which is then fleshed out in a series of more explicit goals. At the New School, the Vision Statement addresses both the development of the whole child and her/his responsibility to the larger society. Perhaps it will be

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similar to the vision statement of the Ontario Public Schools which states, "The major purpose of a school is to help each student develop his/her potential as an individual and as a contributing, responsible member of society who will think clearly, feel deeply, and act wisely" (as quoted in Brown, 1991, p. 211). Israel Scheffler's definition of education might also provide a starting point:

> The formation of habits of judgment and the development of character, the elevation of standards, the facilitation of understanding, the development of taste and discrimination, the stimulation of curiosity and wondering, the fostering of style and a sense of beauty, the growth of a thirst for new ideas and visions of the yet unknown" (as quoted in Bracey, 1990, p. 110).

At Nancie Atwell's Center for Teaching and Learning, teachers take a more aesthetic approach to their vision statement. Marge Piercy's poem, "To Be of Use," hangs in the entryway as the school's over-arching vision.

"To Be of Use"

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward, who do
what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along.
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.

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But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.

Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

<div align="center">Marge Piercy</div>

This poem, along with Howard Nemerov's "September, The First Day of School," comprises the vision statement for teachers at the school in Edgecombe, Maine. This, too, poses intriguing possibilities as the New School creates its vision statement.

The New School's vision is more explicitly detailed in the goals, a series of specific statements about the organization's intended purposes. The New School's goals might sound similar to the Ontario Schools' Goals for their Intermediate and Senior Divisions (as quoted in Brown, 1991, pp. 211-212). In the Ontario Schools, "it is the shared responsibility of students, teachers, and parents to help each student to :

- Develop a responsiveness to the dynamic processes of learning, which include observing, sensing, inquiring, creating, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and communicating

- Develop resourcefulness, adaptability, and creativity in learning and living

- Acquire the knowledge and skills to comprehend and express ideas through words, numbers, and other symbols

- Develop physical fitness and good health

- Gain satisfaction from participating and sharing the participation of others in various forms of artistic expression

- Develop a feeling of self-worth fostered by realistic self-appraisal, confidence, and conviction in the pursuit of excellence, self-discipline, and the satisfaction of achievement, and

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reinforced by encouragement, respect, and supportive evaluation

- Acquire skills that contribute to self-reliance in solving practical problems in every day life

- Develop a sense of personal responsibility in society at the local, national, and international levels

- Develop esteem for the customs, cultures, and beliefs of a wide variety of societal groups

- Acquire skills and attitudes that will lead to satisfaction and productivity in the world of work

- Develop respect for the environment and a commitment to the wise use of resources

I would add "Develop an enduring passion, joy, and delight in learning and life" to the top of this list. These goals, along with the statement of vision will comprise the theoretical underpinnings of the New School. This philosophy will then be operationalized in the evaluative, structural, curricular, and pedagogical dimensions of the school.

The Evaluative Dimension

Eisner (1991) believes evaluative structures have a dynamic impact on the shaping of a school:

> Evaluation practices within schools...are among the most powerful forces influencing the priorities and climate of schools. Evaluation practices...operationalize the school's values. More than what educators say, more than what they write in curriculum guides, evaluation practices tell both students and teachers what counts. How these practices are employed, what they address and what they neglect, and the form in which they occur speak forcefully to students about what adults believe is important... (p. 81)

For that reason, creating an evaluation philosophy is one of the first tasks at the new school.

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The overarching goal for the school, "to help *each* student develop her/his potential as an individual and as a contributing, responsible member of society who will think clearly, feel deeply, and act wisely" will cause evaluation to be very different than that typically found in schools. Traditional assessment systems are based on models of deficit or scarcity, the assumption that there are certain goods— "A's," placement in special programs, appointments to Ivy League Schools and all their subsequent benefits— which can only be earned by a few. One of the primary purposes of evaluation, then, has been to identify those few worthy students so that they are sure to reap their just rewards. At the New School, however, teachers concentrate on evaluating students in ways that enable *all* children to become increasingly capable and successful learners. Teachers assess students not so that they can label or sort— good/bad, fast/slow, smart/dumb, but rather to help children identify their strengths and to provide instruction so that children can reach their full potential. Students are encouraged to take risks, approximate, and make as many mistakes as they need to become competent learners. Feedback is generally given through oral conferences and anecdotal records. No evaluation is ever final until both teacher and student are satisfied.

Zessoules and Gardner believe that the New School should put aside the current "culture of testing" in which "assessment is typically associated with the possession of information, rather than the mastery of ongoing processes (like learning to write, revise and take criticism, or even more radically, to integrate the results of a critique into a work, and adopt, instead, a markedly different culture of assessment" (p. 51).

This culture of assessment is characterized by several different qualities. First, an assessment culture "nurtures complex understandings,"

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which are very different from the fragmented, decontextualized tasks found on most of today's evaluative instruments:

> Most current forms of assessment require highly specialized yet surprisingly superficial kinds of knowledge. We test students for what they know rather than what they understand. Yet these kinds of skills have little or no relevance beyond school walls. Individuals outside schools are rarely, if ever, asked to diagram sentences, draw a color wheel, complete an isolated analogy, or fill in missing pieces of a mathematical formula (1991, p. 50).

The isolated bits of knowledge recognized and valued in a "testing culture" also stand in sharp contrast to the kinds of tasks competent learners are asked to perform in real-life situations, where people "are expected to pursue projects over time, to collaborate and converse with others, to take responsibility for their work— provoking and engaging in reflection and revision— and to amplify their understandings and apply them in powerful ways or in new or surprising contexts" (1991, p. 50). Zessoules and Gardner conclude, "If assessment is to be a moment in an educational process rather than simply an evaluative vehicle, then it must be seen and used to develop complex understandings" (1991, p. 50).

In an assessment culture, evaluation is continuous and ongoing. Students' evolving understandings, as well as their final products, are documented and evaluated.

> Powerful assessment should reveal more than what students know and understand. Powerful assessment must also capture how those new understandings metamorphose. In this way, assessment serves as evidence of students' evolving strengths and weaknesses. Assessment reveals how students' capacities to solve sophisticated problems, make sensitive judgments, and complete complex projects broaden and deepen over time (p. 58).

Assessment, then, is not merely done at the beginning or end of the learning process, but is carried on throughout.

Third, and perhaps most important, an assessment culture must

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emphasize reflection and self-evaluation as habits of mind:

> Students' ability to confront...real-world challenges— to understand their work in relation to that of others, to build on their strengths, to see new possibilities and challenges in their work— all depend on their capacity to step back from their work and consider it carefully, drawing new insights and ideas about themselves as...learners. This kind of mindfulness grows out of the capacity to judge and refine one's work before, during, and after one has attempted to accomplish them: precisely the goal of reflection (p. 55).

An enormous part of the New School's evaluative focus centers on teaching children the habit of ongoing evaluation. It is absolutely critical for learners to develop reflective habits of mind, "to understand their work in relation to that of others, to build on their strengths, to see new possibilities and challenges in their work. This kind of mindfulness grows out of the capacity to judge and refine one's work and efforts before, during, and after one has attempted to accomplish them" (Zessoules and Gardner, 1991, p. 54-55). Students are expected to keep reflective journals and portfolios, which show not only their finished products, but also their processes over time (Zessoules and Gardner, 1991, pp. 58-61). Teachers continually meet with students, and review their portfolios, asking questions like the following (Hansen, 1987, 1992 a, b, c, 1993, 1994):

- What is the most exciting thing you have learned since we last talked?
- Who helped you learn that?
- What was easiest or most difficult for you?
- How do you want to demonstrate that learning?
- What idea(s) are you currently pursuing?
- What do you want to do with this learning?
- What resources are you currently using?

- Are you having any particular problems?
- How can I be of help?
- What do you plan to do next?

Notes from these conferences are reviewed frequently by teacher and child and serve as a basis for planning instruction.

The New School does not use report cards or standardized tests as tools for communicating with parents, instead, teachers rely on conference logs, as well as students' reflective journals and portfolios as a basis for quarterly parent/teacher/student conferences. These conferences begin with a review of notes from previous conferences (see Chapter VI). The child shares her portfolio, the parent and teacher comment on what they see as areas of growth and concern, and then the team engages in joint goal setting for the next quarter. Each teacher does approximately two of these conferences per week. In that way, teachers are in constant communication with parents and are not overwhelmed by the end-of-quarter reporting syndrome.

Building a School: The Structural Dimension

Much of what goes on in schools is determined by the physical plant. Ideally, creators of the New School would build a new physical structure, spacious and open, with lots of windows and light. A large central meeting area, art and music studios, and a technology laboratory would be easily accessible to all classrooms. Because the building would be jointly owned by the school district and the community, it would house not only the New School, but also the local library, a stage for community theater and dance groups, and perhaps some kind of recreation facility. The school might also serve as home to a preschool or daycare facility or the education department of a local university.

Such a building probably would remain a goal for the future. Nevertheless, certain key features will somehow be incorporated into an already existing structure. First, the building will be aesthetically pleasing, an attractive and comfortable place to teach and learn. Children's language (Graves, 1995) and art, matted or framed, will cover the walls. Halls and classrooms will be filled with planters and aquariums, enabling children to pursue interests in zoology and botany.

Since the New School emphasizes concepts of community, relationship, and responsibility to others, a large, comfortable, multi-purpose area or meeting room is absolutely critical. The school's focus on community also calls for each lower grade class to adjoin an upper grade. The two classes, connected by a double door, comprise a "learning family." Each older child is then responsible for mentoring one younger child. Older students read with their young charges, recommend new books and authors, and assist with the development of skills, e.g., using the table of contents in a reference book or composing a coherent summary of a picture book or novel. The older children also edit writing and assist younger children in creating final products. They coach the younger members of their learning family on self-evaluation and help them prepare for quarterly portfolio conferences. Additionally, the entire learning family participates in whole group discussions and activities almost every afternoon.

The New School challenges the institutional need to control, limit, and manage children and encourages us to help children develop into responsible, trustworthy individuals, capable of making wise decisions and functioning capably in society. Children, then, are not confined to their classrooms or learning families but move freely about the school. Elizabeth, pursuing her goal of writing non-rhyming poetry, might go upstairs to ask

the librarian for help in locating poetry books, then to the art room to illustrate one of her favorite poems. Robbie and several other children draw on Joanna Cole's *The Magic School Bus in the Human Body* to transform an entire hallway into a walk-through exhibit of the digestive system. Children meet in the technology lab to create a flier for the Champa House.

Children almost never leave their classrooms, however, for special services. Learning Disabilities, ESL, or Chapter One teachers, and speech and occupational therapists work in classrooms, teaming with children's regular teachers. Specialists concentrate on helping each child use her/his unique strengths to overcome learning difficulties. If a child is particularly artistic, for instance, the specialist helps him use drawing as his first way of demonstrating knowledge. Before writing a book summary, he draws a cartoon strip, then write subtitles for each frame. Gradually the amount of text accompanying each frame increases until the child can produce conventional text as needed. Another child might come at this same task through a one-act play or readers' theater.

Because children in today's society deal with any number of very difficult issues, each learning family has a full-time counselor to address children's emotional and social needs. The counselor holds one-on-one sessions and also conducts a variety of small groups. She is available for class presentations and frequently mentors children interested in studying issues in her field. The counselors are also aware of a variety of community resources and often assist families in finding support to meet their daily needs or deal with problems such as substance abuse or domestic violence.

These expanded notions of community provide children with exposure to a wider variety of people. They also give teachers the support necessary to deal with difficult students. Children like Robbie entertain and

challenge, but also drain the energy and tax the patience of classroom teachers. A larger community increases the odds that each child has someone— an instructional assistant, an administrator, a custodian, a cook, a university researcher, a community member— who views him/her as hugely worthwhile and interesting. In the New School all of the adults care for all of the children, or perhaps more accurately all people care for each other (Noddings, 1984; Martin, 1992).

Expanding School Concepts of Time

Rex Brown identifies time as "the most frequently given reason for not moving toward an instruction more conducive to thoughtfulness" (p. 235). Brown describes the fragmented nature of time in schools saying "articulation from grade to grade is poor, and teachers in one grade do not know what their students studied in the previous grades or what they will study in the next" (p. 246). Furthermore, days are broken into a myriad of tiny segments that make it difficult to accomplish anything of great importance. The New School calls for expanded concepts of time.

So what might time look like in these schools? To begin, the "school year" is structured in an entirely different way. Gone is the nine month year, adopted during agricultural times. Instead, schools are open year-round with different options available to meet children's educational needs. Students have the choice of participating in special activities when they are not in school. A child might, for instance, spend an entire three week off-track working on a special project with a poet, weaver, computer specialist, or dance troupe.

Furthermore, children do not have a new teacher every year. In traditional schools, teachers spend the first weeks or even months of school

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becoming acquainted with their students, creating and establishing workable expectations and routines, and assessing students' strengths and needs. At the end of each year, teachers spend several weeks wrapping up, helping children sort through files and desks, making recommendations for new teachers, and packing their rooms away for the summer. When children stay with a teacher for two or even three years, huge amounts of time are saved. Teachers and students (not to mention parents) don't have to spend time getting to know each other and establishing/learning new routines every year. Having spent more time with their students, teachers hopefully know children better and can potentially do a better job providing appropriate instruction. This long-term perspective also helps teachers more fully appreciate children's growth and development, thus they can help children recognize and document their learning histories more accurately and specifically. For these reasons, concepts like multi-age classes or looping (where a teacher stays with a class for two or three consecutive years) are an important aspect of time management in the New School.

Time in the New School has had to be restructured not only on a yearly but also on a daily basis. The twenty or thirty-minute segments and the constant interruptions of the typical school day prevent children from fully immersing themselves in their learning and creating quality finished products. Robbie (and probably many other children) prefers to settle himself and work for two or three hours, or an entire morning, uninterrupted. "Once I get going," he says, "I don't stop." It would also seem difficult to develop the self-evaluative skills and reflective habits of mind critical to skillful, thoughtful, lifelong learning. In most traditional schools, there simply isn't much time to think.

Time at the New School, then, has been restructured to provide

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learners with more uninterrupted blocks. To begin, the typical six hour school day has been greatly extended. The New School opens at 7:00 or 7:30 every morning and stay open until 4:30 or 5:00 every afternoon (Graves, 1995). These extended hours allow children time to engage in in-depth study and produce quality finished products and also enable parents, particularly working parents, to participate more fully in their children's education. Students arrive at school any time between 7:30 and 8:30 and leave anytime between 4:00 and 5:00. Days begin and end with an activity block in which children work with a guest teacher from the community— a neighborhood poet, artist, or geologist— or pursue their own interests, e.g., writing a research report, painting a mural, rehearsing a play, or simply completing a jigsaw puzzle or playing a game with a friend.

The formal school day begins at 8:30 with the entire school coming together for communitas (Graves, 1995). These large group meetings, led by either the principal, a teacher, community member, or an older child, are times for reading aloud, presenting a Readers' Theater, report, poem, science experiment, or sharing a joke, a success, or a big idea. The New School has an ongoing community service project, the creation and maintenance of a library for a battered women's shelter, and this is often discussed during communitas. Communitas is also a time for discussing concerns of the learning community, e.g., vandals writing graffiti on the school walls or children being disrespectful in the cafeteria.

From 9:00-9:30, everyone at the school engages in a block of sustained silent reading (for very young children this is shorter at the beginning of the year). From 9:30 until 11:30, children participate in reading, writing, and math workshops where they engage in more formal, teacher-directed learning (Graves, 1995). Unlike traditional schools, however, these times are not

broken into a series of short segments. Instead, children might spend the entire two hours learning or developing a skill, such as note taking, interviewing, or organizing a research report. The next day or the next week, children work in a different subject area; they might, for instance, spend several weeks (or even longer) immersing themselves in a concept such as multiplication, place value, or plane geometry.

From 12:30 until 2:30 students participate in Explorers' Club (Copenhaver, 1993). During these times, children research a question or pursue a topic of their own interest. They begin each Explorers' Club with a goal-setting or planning session, then spend the entire workshop on an identified task, e.g., gathering data, writing a play, doing a science experiment, designing a brochure, without interruption. During this time, children move freely between their classrooms, the library, art and music studios, and technology laboratory. They take breaks for physical activity, inside or out, as needed.

From 2:30 to 3:00, children engage in a time of reflection. They review their goals and plans for the day, record their learning, and write in dialogue journals or confer with teachers and peers about their progress, they also set goals and make plans for the next day. Sometimes, children select artifacts and write reflections for their portfolios (Graves, 1995). Many days, part of this time is also be spent in small or large groups where students share accomplishments, review progress toward goals, discuss successes and failures, and help each other plan for future learning.

From 3:00 until 4:00, everyone in the school has a community block (Graves, 1995). During this time, learning families meet to work on their community service project. Some days, they take walks around the neighborhood, observing and learning in the neighborhood surrounding the

school. Children pursue issues begun inside their classrooms, e.g., noise or air pollution, or racism. Graves (1995) suggests that during these walks each child might be assigned a specific task— one child looks for the most beautiful thing, another looks for something they would like to change, still another might stop and conduct a quick interview with a community member about the history of a building in the area. Students also have times to visit the people inside these buildings, and to interview shopkeepers, members of the police force, or other community workers (Graves, 1995). These neighborhood friends are encouraged to take an active role in the school, either by mentoring children, sharing expertise, or providing materials or funding.

In a further effort to integrate school with the real world, the New School tears down walls by inviting the community into the school. In this age of decreasing funding, it only makes sense to explore multiple building uses. Libraries, for instance, could easily be managed as joint ventures between schools and local governments. Stages and multi-purpose rooms could be shared with community music or drama clubs. Such groups either share expenses, pay to use the facilities or barter services with the school. A chorus, for instance, might use the music studio and stage in exchange for some of their members organizing a school choir. A dance school might use the gym in exchange for teaching weekly ballet classes in the before-school activity block.

The Curricular Dimension

The curriculum at the New School contrasts sharply with traditional elementary school notions of curriculum in which students are expected to acquire a smattering of facts in any number of areas. John-Steiner (1985) aptly describes this consumption of unrelated facts as the "cafeteria approach to

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curriculum," where people pick up a little of everything, but never truly master anything. Believing that "less is more" (Brown, 1991, p. 238) the school does not have a curricular scope and sequence that consists of a list of topics to be mastered in different grades. Instead, the focus of the curriculum for all grades is "Learning to think like a _____ (scientist, mathematician, historian, artist...)." All teachers focus on helping students develop the attitudes, habits, and strategies that will enable them to become skillful, lifelong learners— how to ask questions, set goals, make plans, use resources, gather data, evaluate progress, present a final product. Teachers "make sure that students learn how to learn, how to find information they may need, now or in the future." (Brown, 1991, p. 238).

Students are, however, expected to pursue topics in depth. They regularly select areas of interest, which they study for periods ranging from several weeks to several years. As they study these topics, they are expected to learn to ask good questions and gather data from resources which include not only print, but also people and technology. Students at the New School regularly apprentice themselves to mentors. Some of these mentors are peers; when Jonathan, for instance, wants to learn about reptiles, he goes to Phillip, who has been studying snakes for three years and has several of his own. Other mentors are adults, either staff at the school or members of the larger community. Students are also expected to apprentice themselves to "distant mentors," experts who do not live in one's geographic area or time period (John-Steiner, 1985). John Steiner suggests, "Immersing oneself in the works of a predecessor and retracing his or her path, yields a use counterpoint to the cafeteria of school learning for the person preparing for a creative life" (p. 208).

As they explore their chosen topics, students read and write in a variety

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of genre. They take notes, talk, draw, and write to make sense of what they are learning, and gather additional data from peers, teachers, and community organizations. Students are expected to shape and organize the information they gather and create quality finished products, which incorporate writing, art, drama, music, and technology. Children then present their final products and evaluate their successes and failures. Their learning journeys, including successes and failures, are documented in their portfolios, which are exhibited to parents and others at the end of each quarter. Thus, children develop the attitudes, strategies, and skills that enable them to become skillful lifelong learners.

Literacy at the New School

Most progressive educators feel fairly confident about literacy instruction in their classrooms. For the past ten years, teachers have focused on helping their students read and write authentic texts for authentic purposes and audiences. They fill their classrooms with children's literature and build reading and writing workshops into their daily schedules. They attend conferences and buy professional books. I would propose, however, that we have not progressed as far as we would like to believe.

Scribner, (as quoted in Belanoff, 1994) suggests that teachers must promote three different facets of literacy. The first, "literacy as adaptation," stresses functional aspects of the ability to read and write and is most traditionally recognized and reinforced in school settings. The second, "literacy as power," emphasizes ways in which reading and writing can advance group and community status. Scribner's third category, "literacy as grace" "stresses intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual participation in the accumulated creations and knowledge of human kind made available

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through the written word" and might be equated with Rosenblatt's efferent notions of literacy (1982). Scribner concludes that an "ideal literacy is simultaneously adaptive, socially empowering, and self-enhancing" (as quoted in Belanoff, p. 13).

Most progressive educators would argue that they promote all three aspects of literacy in their classrooms. They push children to read and write, then teach them the power of the written word, both as a tool for impacting others and for affecting one's intellectual and emotional beings. I would argue, however, that school literacy, even in the best classrooms, is actually much narrower. As teachers, we define reading and writing operationally by the kinds of texts we make available to our students. In most elementary schools, the reading materials available, even in best-stocked classrooms, are weighed heavily in favor of fiction. Although the typical adult reads approximately 75% non-fiction (Trelease, 1982), in schools children are encouraged, by simple accessibility, to read in almost the entirely opposite ratio. This inequity discourages or excludes many children from fully or successfully participating in school literacy (Smith, 1984).

Robbie's texts, for example, will probably always come from the world of science and technology. He will read, but he will read information books, newspapers and magazines, computer handbooks and car repair manuals. Because non-fiction and functional materials are scarce in schools, many days Robbie elects not to participate in school reading. The dearth of non-fiction and functional reading becomes increasingly serious when dealing with low income children, who are often classified/labelled/treated as illiterate (or worse) simply because the kinds of literacy that occur in their homes are largely functional— recipes, letters, newspapers, phone books, repair manuals— genres rarely seen in schools. Because reading in school matches

nothing these children see in their real lives, they see little applicability (Heath, 1983).

We also narrow literacy with our operational definitions of what counts as writing. Although children in "process" classrooms are invited to write anything they choose, a few genre, such as personal narrative, fiction, and report writing, are generally viewed as much more credible. Again, teachers don't verbalize these beliefs, but their actions clearly demonstrate what they value. In many classes, for instance, children are expected to log or document the pieces they are writing and publishing. In most classes, though, these lists of finished writing include only personal narratives or fiction, they rarely include the letters children write to ask the Chamber of Commerce for pamphlets about the city or the thank you notes to class visitors. They also don't include functional writing— forms filled out to enter the school Invention Convention, the invitations or programs created for a class play, or maps drawn to guide scout troop members to an after-school meeting. Those pieces, published texts that often have more authentic purposes and audiences than the personal narratives and stories that do receive credence, should be recognized. They match the kinds of writing adults do in the real world. Disappointingly, our actions indicate to children that those kinds of writing are not truly important.

Furthermore, although many teachers strongly advocate the development of "voice," or the empowerment that literacy can bring, (sometimes described as the "political" aspects of literacy [Edelsky, 1994; Shannon, 1993]), little is actually done in this area. Children might feel very differently about literacy if they knew that their reading or writing truly had the potential for impacting their worlds. Often, however, this side of literacy is not only discouraged but squelched by the bureaucracy so prevalent in

schools. At one school, for instance, the first graders came out of their excellent reading and writing class to discover that several coats had been taken from their hooks and stuffed behind the ice cream freezer across the hall. The classroom teacher told me that this was not an isolated incident, children's coats often disappear and are found in trash cans or even stuffed in the toilets. Evidently, the school's intermediate students find these incidents amusing. Christy, whose coat had to be retrieved from behind the ice cream freezer, decided to make a sign to hang in the hall. She worked at the project for almost half an hour, but her teacher, discouraged by three years of dealing with similar problems in a bureaucracy that refuses to address such issues, wearily dismissed her efforts. "You can hang it if you want," she said, "but it won't do any good." I shudder as I think about the lessons of powerlessness, of not mattering, of not being able to affect change, that Christy learned that day.

Children could also begin developing political voices on a much larger scale. As I finish my dissertation, for instance, Congress is debating the feasibility of replacing the federally funded school lunch program (and several others) with block grants which states would administer as they saw fit, which could be disastrous for children, especially in low income areas. While children cannot vote, they could at least express their opinions. Perhaps, if children wrote their stories, or letters, or drew pictures, a few Congress members might remember those names or faces and think twice before they enacted a bill which could have such unfortunate consequences for children. Students could also compose form letters, almost like petitions, which they could take home for their parents and neighbors, many of whom are registered voters, to sign. Entire classes could then mail their letters to Washington, DC. Thus, children could begin developing the political voices

that literacy advocates often discuss, but much less frequently demonstrate for their students.

The New School will better operationalize Scribner's definitions of literacy, with purposes and audiences that more closely resemble real world kinds of literacy. Classroom and school libraries contain equal numbers of fiction and non-fiction texts. Furthermore, they contain a wider variety of reading materials— magazines, cookbooks, craft manuals, pamphlets, and CD-ROM's. Functional reasons for literacy— reading an announcement over the PA system or deciphering the school lunch menu, writing a note to grandparents or making a sign for the hall— are labeled, recognized, and acknowledged.

Literacy as a political tool is also much more actively practiced. For young children, this development of voice might come in local settings, e.g., making signs or solving problems on a school or neighborhood level. Older children however, learn to exercise their voices at community, state, and national levels, whether that means working on a political campaign, lobbying for an issue at the State House, or working for a Congressperson.

Valuing Different Ways of Knowing

At the New School, not only are different kinds of literacy acknowledged and valued, but children are allowed to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways. Increased emphasis on written language has resulted in the devaluation of oral language and performance— recitation, debate, poetry, and plays— in our classrooms (Lenz, 1994). Some children do not learn or demonstrate what they have learned through the medium of written language. Robbie's written work is often less than adequate. Allowed to talk or perform, however, he eagerly demonstrates mastery of school

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curriculum as well as a vast knowledge of the world around him.

Some of Robbie's classmates—David, Russ, and Luis— demonstrate that same knowledge through art (Ernst, 1994; Hubbard, 1989). In mid-November, for example, David sketches a perfectly proportioned picture of a semi-truck, his "best ever, "and decides to put a copy in his portfolio. On the way back from the xerox machine I ask what he will write for his reflection. "Nothing," he says, "I'm not going to write a reflection." When I insist that all of the artifacts in the portfolio must be accompanied by a written reflection, David makes a quick decision. "I'm not going to put this in my portfolio," he declares, "I just wanted a copy to give to some of my friends." I understand, as never before, how some students are minimalized because schools generally expect knowledge to be filtered through a screen of words rather than images or movement or even music.

At the New School, children don't always have to encode their knowledge in words, instead, they are allowed to demonstrate what they have learned by drawing, reciting, or performing. Sometimes, children who are proficient writers are asked to display their knowledge in other ways, for example, through images or music or drama, to encourage them to expand their talents or think in new ways. At the New School, different children's ways of knowing are equally valued.

Expanded Uses of Technology

Expanded understandings of literacy also include expanded understandings of how written text is produced. At the New School, technology is an integral part of the curriculum. Children use computers to compose multiple drafts of stories, reports, newspapers, letters, and signs. They experiment with a variety of formats and fonts and graphics to produce

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quality finished products. They create diagrams and charts, databases and spread sheets. They have ready access to the school library but expand their number of potential resources by linking to the card catalogue at the public library. They use the Internet as a tool for finding information and making connections.

These real world uses of the computer are skills children will need in our increasingly technological society so they should begin learning to use them now. Teachers at the New School, then, are constantly thinking how they might begin to provide our students with greater access to high-quality, up-to-date technology. Children need to use computers in the ways that adults use them every day.

Technology might also help many children overcome learning problems. When Patrick, for instance, composes on the computer, he doesn't struggle with letter formation or directionality, the computer takes care of those things for him. Too, the fluid nature of composition on the computer, the ability to cut and paste, to revise and delete, opens up whole new worlds. A laptop computer would enormously ease his learning difficulties and the cost of the machine would be quickly recovered, given the money paid to the support personnel Patrick now requires. A lawyer might reasonably argue that PL 94-142 mandates that the school provide Patrick with the least restrictive environment, which in his case would appear to include his own laptop computer.

The Pedagogical Dimension: Teachers at the New School

Teachers at the New School are knowledgeable, highly skilled, highly trained professionals who have high expectations for themselves and their students. They are deeply committed to children and recognize that "teaching

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is most of all a special kind of relationship, a caring stance in the moving context of students lives" (Daloz, 1986, p. 14). Collaboration between teachers and students is critical to the philosophy of the new school. Teachers regularly work with students to decide what will be learned and create lesson plans. They set goals and make plans to achieve these goals. They decide on times for group work and times for individual project work. They provide continuous feedback to students and parents.

Drawing on Daloz' (1986) model of mentoring, they work at providing support, challenge, and vision for their students. They are encouraging and supportive of children's strengths and efforts but they are constantly thinking about ways to help children move forward. They are not afraid to get up in front of a class when the need arises. They know that different children learn in different ways and they approach subject matter "through narrative, logical-quantitative approaches, philosophical, foundational inquiries from aesthetic point of view, and in ways that create and draw on student experiences" (Brown, 1992). They use a variety of assessment tools for different purposes e.g., while literacy portfolios are central to their work with children, they also see value in taking Running Records (Clay, 1985) or an occasional timed writing sample.

Teachers at the New School are enthusiastic and positive. They love teaching and are proud of their chosen profession. These teachers are rebels. They are not tied to the strictures of how things have always been done, nor do they bow to union mandates at the expense of good sense or good education. They don't subscribe, for instance, to the notion that teachers have to have thirty minutes of planning time every day. Instead, they recognize that an hour every other day might be more beneficial in terms of planning and/or meeting with other people.

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Staff development at the New School is continuous and ongoing. Rex Brown (1991) asserts:

> Schools and districts that are farthest along in developing more thoughtfulness among students have also created more thoughtful environments and conditions for the adults in the school...Good schools are symbolically rich places, where vivid and interesting conversations are taking place up and down the hierarchy. Adults are visibly engaged in inquiry, discovery, learning, collaborative problem solving, and critical thinking (p. 233).

The New School, then, is a place where all people— adults and children, principals and custodians— are learners.

A head teacher or instructional leader deals with issues related to the art and craft of teaching. She spends most of her time in classrooms, doing demonstration teaching, team teaching, and coaching. She covers classes so that teachers can watch and learn from each other and engage in team planning and peer coaching. She observes and evaluates teachers on an ongoing basis, often spending extended periods of time in a particular classroom. She facilitates the teacher-research group and finds books and articles for the weekly professional growth times. She coordinates the mentor program and university collaborations and supervises student teachers. A business manager handles scheduling, supplies, and monetary matters for the school.

Teachers set goals and document learning and growth in professional portfolios very similar to those they ask their students to keep. They are expected to engage in research in their own classrooms and encouraged to read and write professionally. Staff meetings at the New School are not times for talking about fire drills or problems on the playground. Instead, teachers talk about their research, literacy, teaching, and learning.

Teachers also have extensive opportunities to collaborate and learn

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from each other at the New School. In most schools, teachers rarely get the opportunity to observe their colleagues at work. They buy books, go to conferences, and pore over magazines looking for teaching ideas, when the people who could give them the best help are probably right next door, working behind closed doors. At the New School, teachers are recognized for their expertise and encouraged to help each other. Schedules are adjusted, support personnel are utilized, the head teacher covers classes, or does whatever it takes to allow teachers to work together. Teachers are also encouraged to form mentoring relationships with their younger or less experienced colleagues. Someone who has taught for years partners with a new teacher. A teacher who's skilled at teaching math or technology trades expertise with a team member who is coming back to the classroom after seven years as a reading specialist.

In Conclusion

In his article, "Toy, Mirror, and Art: The Metamorphosis of Technological Culture," Paul Levinson (1977) suggests that technological media pass through a series of three developmental stages— toy, mirror, and art. Although Levinson works in the field of communication and developed his theory at least ten years before portfolios became popular in the field of education, I would suggest that the theory has definite applicability to the portfolio movement.

Levinson proposes, "New technologies usually make their first appearance in the culture as novelties, gadgets, gimmicks, and toys. The content here is dominated by...the new technique...The toys usually perform on the sidelines of the overall society" (p. 162). Barb and her colleagues at Pennington have been doing portfolios for a little over three years. In the

beginning, concerns focused largely on the medium. Teachers occupied themselves with obtaining physical containers, deciding on the formats for reflections and share sessions, and creating forms for welcome letters, tables of contents, and compliment pages. During those early days, the reading and writing artifacts that went inside the portfolios were important, but probably secondary to creating the structures and formats.

Portfolios have become an important part of life at Pennington, an icon of the shared culture at the school (Gee, 1992). Teachers provide physical space and materials for the portfolios. They schedule weekly times to work on portfolios and teach mini-lessons so that children can more accurately represent themselves and more explicitly self-evaluate. Pennington teachers do workshops at the district and state levels and the portfolios have received publicity in local newspapers. The portfolios, then, are "clearly visible" at Pennington and in Mayfield. At the same time, I would argue that "the[ir] potentialities [have been] poorly understood" (p. 154); the portfolios' possibilities have not been fully explored. Barb and other Pennington teachers can readily articulate that portfolios are first for providing children with a place to represent themselves as readers, writers, and learners, and secondly for teaching children to self-evaluate. Still, until recently, I am not sure that teachers have questioned how they might use the information children provided, nor have they actively considered why students need to self-evaluate or how self-evaluation might fit into children's overall development. In Barb's classroom and most others, the portfolios have not had a substantial impact on curriculum or evaluation. I would argue that these perceived deficits are not at all indicative of failure on the part of the portfolio project at Pennington, but are rather typical of a medium in the "Toy" stage. In fact, reflection about these shortcomings may even push the

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project into the next phase, medium as "Mirror."

Even now, there are definite signs that the medium is moving, or possibly has moved, to the "Mirror" phase. During the this phase, "the novelty item becomes a more practical device, used for various types of literal transactions with reality. The content in this phase attains a high prominence while the visible technology recedes... the entity of 'audience' comes into play for the first time" (p. 163). Barb and other teachers at Pennington have mastered the physical organization and structures of their new medium. The contents of the portfolios more accurately represent what is going on in classrooms. Teachers know how to help children write good reflections and organize and share their portfolios. Format has become more automatic, enabling teachers to attend more to the content and direction of the portfolios.

Consequently, purposes and audiences for the portfolios are becoming more and more important. Last year, Barb and I experimented with how we might use the portfolios as an instructional tool. We worked hard at helping children set goals, develop plans, become strategic, and evaluate by criteria. Instinctively we somehow understood what the portfolios could do. At the time, we did not, (or at least I did not) have the words or the understanding to say, "We are doing this because we want to use the portfolios to help children develop the attitudes and behaviors of independent, skillful, lifelong learners." Now that we have been able to give words to our actions, we need to concentrate on making this goal and its accompanying behaviors more explicit for our students.

The Pennington teachers also wanted to use the portfolios to discover what children valued as readers, writers, and learners. Now that some of these values have been identified, teachers are beginning to consider how

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children's voices might fit into evaluation framework at the school. Perhaps these questions indicate that portfolios are moving into the third phase of media development. Levinson suggests that during this final stage, a medium moves from being a mirror of reality as it really is into an art form, or a vision of reality as it might be. The most marked characteristic of this phase is the ability not only to copy a reality, but also to, "dissect it, and put it back together again in new ways...to mold, bend, shape, fracture and reconstruct realities to the dictates only of the writer/director/editor's imagination" (p. 158). In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate how portfolios might lead us to a new and enlarged visions of schools. At Pennington, a few teachers are beginning to use the portfolios to imagine a new reality, life without report cards. This is only a beginning.

Levinson cautions, however, that media do not always move from one phase to another. The "toy phase does not guarantee continued development: lacking, the proper environment, the technological toy may long endure in a case of arrested development" (p. 155). Furthermore, most technologies, "well-suited to the second stage mirror task, simply lack the ability to make the artistic jump" (p. 159). This warning holds important implications for the portfolio movement.

Literacy portfolios are a medium of tremendous possibility. They are an excellent tool for helping children develop the self-evaluative habits, as well as other attitudes and behaviors, critical to independent, skillful, lifelong learning. Portfolios have the potential to transform evaluation and maybe even schools. Such goals, however, are costly and requires us to rethink the fabric of our philosophy, structure, and pedagogy. Literacy portfolios will not be effective in environments which emphasize control and obedience, that fragment time and space into millions of tiny pieces. Literacy portfolios will

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not be effective in places where curriculum consists of lists of unrelated facts to be memorized and regurgitated upon demand. Literacy portfolios will not flourish in schools where teachers are not learners, nor will they be effective in places where teachers are not willing to assume their adult responsibilities and take an active role in student learning, or look critically at their practice and address the needs and questions of the general public.

Most of all, literacy portfolios will not be effective unless we are willing to change the focus of evaluation from weakness to strength, from deficit to capability. Literacy portfolios are about helping all students, not just the most capable, realize and use their unique strengths and abilities. They will be a useful tool only if we truly want to hear what children have to say, only if we are willing to listen and act upon their knowledge and insights about their learning. Literacy portfolios hold enormous possibility and potential for changing the face of education. As professional educators, we must decide whether they will be toy, mirror, or art.

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