

## 4.6 Student Portfolio – A “bridge” between school and family

The wave of educational reforms in Russia has brought with it an increasing dissatisfaction with a traditional approach toward student assessment (i.e., standardized testing instruments, the grading scale). This approach has often been limited to assessment of student outcomes at a specific point in time and has provided little information about teaching and learning processes. Recently, educators have put emphasis on a search for alternative forms of measuring the processes inherent in actual classroom learning and teaching. These approaches call for more student involvement in planning assessment, interpreting the results of assessment, and in self-assessment. One such approach which has gained popularity is the use of student portfolios.

Portfolios are valued as an assessment tool because they can be fully integrated into the curriculum. And many teachers, educators and researchers believe that portfolio assessments are more effective than “old-style” tests measuring academic skills.

Recently, portfolio assessment has been widely introduced and recommended in Russian schools. Many schools are developing and implementing portfolios as an additional form for measuring academic skills and informing instructional decisions.

In this module we suggest to view the PORTFOLIO as a means of parents’ involvement, as a bridge between family and school.

Parents know their children better than anyone else. By supporting and fostering the learning of a child at home, parents can make a considerable contribution to his/her success at school.

A Student portfolio serves as a useful guide to school life and may contribute to improving family contacts with school and intensifying the cooperation between parents and the teachers. Family participation in their child’s school life is an essential prerequisite for the learning motivation and the educational success of the child.

The module “Student portfolio” can be related to any time in a student’s school career. The sooner it is introduced the easier it is implemented. The

module has a certain focus on parents and their involvement in school life. The portfolio serves as a “bridge of interrelation” between parents and school.

The module is based on existing school projects which were launched in many Russian Federation schools, mainly as an alternative form of students’ assessment. And also as a means of involving parents – the task of parents is to be experts, supporters and “first aid” partners of their own children.

The module is based on numerous publications and issues on student-parent cooperation and integration. Among numerous and various forms of parents’ involvement in school authors suggest: school meetings, school visits, talks, seminars, workshops, interviews etc. The variety of forms is great. Most of them have proved to be effective.

### Target group

The project is aimed at teachers and form (class) teachers of all school types and grades.

Participants: about 20-25 participants

### Aims

- Getting to know about portfolio implementation in everyday school life.
- Developing the teachers’ competence in how to involve parents by means of student portfolio implementation.
- Offering a training session at which examples of good practice are demonstrated.

## Sessions in practice

### What is a student portfolio?

Portfolios are collections of student work representing a selection of performance. A portfolio may be a folder containing a student's best pieces and the student's evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the pieces. It may contain one or more works-in-progress that illustrate the creation of a product, such as an essay, evolving through various stages of conception, drafting, revision.

### How does it work?

There is no single correct way to develop portfolio programs. In all of them students are expected to *collect*, *select* and *reflect*. They are supposed to choose particular pieces which they believe are good products (e.g. an approach to a mathematics problem or a write-up of a science project). In building a portfolio of selected pieces and explaining the basis for their choices, students generate criteria for good work with teacher and parents

### Why try it?

Students at all levels see assessment as something that is done to them in their classwork by someone else. They have little knowledge of what is involved in evaluating their classwork. Portfolios can provide structure for involving students in developing and understanding criteria for good efforts, in coming to see the criteria as their own, and in applying the criteria to their own and other students' work



## Session 1: How are you going to let the teachers know what a portfolio is?

Suggestion: Apart from the brief introduction, do not tell the teachers what it is, try to get them to work out what it could be.

### Step1

Split the teachers into groups of 4 or 5  
Tell them they have to imagine their school is going to introduce a portfolio for each pupil.  
As a class teacher, what would they like to put into a portfolio?

Give the groups time to discuss this then bring the groups together and write up the suggestion from each group.

Then show everyone your 'Model structure of a student portfolio.' [Either as a handout or power point slide]



### Model structure of a student portfolio

**Part 1** *About Myself*: whatever a student decides to write about (family, age, hobbies, appearance etc)

**Part 2** *Portfolio of learning documents*: school results, reports on individual student's progress.

**Part 3** *Achievements and results*. Certificates, diplomas, rewards which a student has won. These documents certify the student's achievements.

**Part 4** In it a student together with his/her **parents** and teachers collects various *works* in various school and out-of- school activities. (photographs, videos, science experiments, hand-made articles, projects, compositions, researches, pictures, etc.)

**Part 5** *Testimonials, reports, opinions*, recommendations of teachers, **parents**, administrators about the student.

**Part 6** *Portfolio presentation* . Portfolio conference – giving a report about his/her progress, displaying his/her works.

Discuss:

Is your structure the same as their structure?

If there are differences, discuss these.

Decide what should be included.

## Session 2: Parent roles in portfolio making

The portfolio's contents are determined by the main purpose the portfolio is intended for. Parents, teachers, students or appropriate administrators can all view a student portfolio through different lenses.

Parents play an important role in the process of portfolio making. It is important that they are familiar with their child's portfolio. The parent works with the child (and the teacher) to set new goals based on the discussion about the child's progress.

If the portfolio is parent focused, it is used to involve parents in their children's education programmes and to report individual student progress. It would be important for a teacher to show parents evidence of the child's level of proficiency.

Teachers and administrators need to educate parents about how portfolios work and what advantages student portfolios offer.

### Step 1

Ask the teachers how they could begin to educate parents about these portfolios.

The teachers should say they would like a meeting with the parents.

Split the teachers into groups and ask them to write a letter of invitation to the parents.

When all groups have done this, compare the letters.

Then show them your letter. [Either as a handout or powerpoint slide]

#### A Letter of Invitation

Dear Mr/Mrs. ...,

We will be happy to welcome you to the seminar "Student Portfolio" which will take place on November 15th, 2009 in school No.117 at 5 p.m.

We invite you to participate in the parents' workshop.

We are quite certain that a parent participation in a student portfolio-making is of vital importance and your contribution will be valuable for us.

Discuss: Are they saying the same thing?  
What are the important common points for inclusion?  
Produce a letter which everyone agrees is correct.

## Step 2

The teachers must now decide how they would run the seminar for the parents.

Divide the teachers into groups and give them copies of your 'Brainstorming Session for Parents'

The teachers must look at your model and decide if they would make any changes to it.

When they have agreed on a model, they could have a role play session, being the parents at the meeting.

Then they could discuss if any changes should be made to the 'Brainstorming Session'

## Step 3: Brainstorming session for parents

Parents are divided into groups. Each group gets the task to present their understanding of the term "portfolio".

Each group is given a paper "portfolio" which they have to fill in with the things which are spread on the table. On the table there are: students' writing collections, essays, diplomas, certificates, posters, photographs, projects, etc. Parents decide which of the things should be included in the portfolio.

After filling in portfolios groups explain the basis for their choice.

Pros and cons of the portfolio. Parents write 3 points "for" and 3 points "against" using a portfolio.

Groups "collect" all points "for" and make up a poster "Portfolio Benefits".

Task: Fill in part 1 of the student portfolio. Parents are asked to do homework together with their children.

## Step 4: Portfolio conference discussion

It could be held annually at the end of the school year. Parents are invited to take part in it.

Discuss the idea of a 'Portfolio Conference'

- When would it take place?
- Where would it take place?
- Who would organize it?
- What would be the focus of the conference?

Collate key points from the discussion as guidance for schools.

## Session 3: Formation of a portfolio

### Step 1: Management of a portfolio

Split the teachers into groups to discuss the following points [either on a handout or on a power point slide] and any other points they think would be relevant:

There are certain important questions which come with the use of portfolios, such as:

- What should be placed in the portfolio?
- How often should items be added to the portfolio?
- Who decides what goes into the portfolio?
- Who should be given responsibility for its safekeeping?
- What should be done with the portfolio at the end of the school year?

Bring the groups back together and write up the answers the groups have come up with.

Discuss the answers and make up a final list of helpful management suggestions from the groups' answers.

### Step 2: Practical organization of a portfolio

Look at 'Tips for Portfolio Makers'.  
[Either as a handout or a powerpoint slide]

Ask the teachers to think about the practical aspects of this in their schools.

Discuss how to organize making a portfolio. Add anything helpful that the teachers may suggest.

### Tips for the portfolio makers

- It is essential that all entries in a portfolio be dated and numbered chronologically.
- Teachers should keep in mind that the purpose of the student portfolio is to document student growth in learning.
- It is important to have space in the classroom to store students' portfolios.
- Teachers need administrative support to initiate a portfolio programme. They need such material as folders, file drawers, access to a photocopy machine, and time to plan, share ideas, and develop strategies.
- It is essential that parents are involved and considered as partners and enthusiastic supporters.
- Students need specifics with clear guidelines and examples to get started on their work.

### Step 3: Roles of parents, teachers and students in contributing to the production, management and organization of the portfolio.

Parents, teachers and students all have a range of ways they can help in the formation of a useful portfolio.

Give the teachers the blank form – Handout ... [give it a number]- and ask them to fill in how parents, teachers and students can help produce the portfolio. What are their various roles? What are the different things they can do?

Then look at your completed form-Handout ...- and discuss the similarities and differences.

Make up a form which everyone agrees with.

### Parents – students – teachers, their activities in portfolio production

#### Handout ...

Teachers	Parents	Students*

\*If you want to include the role of students as well [you've indicated it's also about involving students], you'll need to add a column for pupils in these handouts. Produce the handout in landscape format to give more room for writing.

### Parents – students – teachers, their activities in portfolio production

#### Handout ...

Teachers	Parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform parents about the portfolio</li> <li>• Inform parents about school events where a child is participating</li> <li>• Inform parents about the child's progress</li> <li>• Organize portfolio parents-students conference</li> <li>• Hold parents workshop "How to develop and implement a student portfolio"</li> <li>• Interview parents</li> <li>• Motivate parents to participate in portfolio implementation</li> <li>• Consult parents on various items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help a child to collect documents</li> <li>• Check how the child fills in his/her "Portfolio of results"</li> <li>• Coordinates portfolio production with teachers</li> <li>• Participate in parent meetings and conferences</li> <li>• Collect the best work of a child</li> <li>• Motivate students' learning</li> <li>• Encourage and stimulate students' activity and self-education</li> </ul>

## Comments and suggestions

Do you want to produce an evaluation sheet for the module?

Do you want to add each of the handouts / power point slides as separate numbered appendices [annexes] [A4 size] at the end of the module so that they are easy to photocopy or to put on a power point presentation? This would be in addition to including them in the body of the document as at present.

Remember to include your poster.



## Links to school assessment, particularly on portfolios as a means of assessment

- Development and Implementation of student portfolios in foreign language programs / California Foreign Language Project: Research and Publications /  
 ➔ [www.stanford.edu/group/CFLP/research/portfolio/portfolio2/html](http://www.stanford.edu/group/CFLP/research/portfolio/portfolio2/html)
- Student portfolio as an effective instrument of pre-vocational training/ secondary School(5-9 forms)/Портфолио ученика как эффективный инструмент предпрофильной подготовки. /Vocational education/  
 ➔ [www.rosinka-school.ru/portfolio.php](http://www.rosinka-school.ru/portfolio.php)
- Portfolio regulations/Положение о портфолио/  
 ➔ [school.websib.ru/132/p17aa\\_pr.html](http://school.websib.ru/132/p17aa_pr.html)
- Learning and teaching intercultural competence/  
 ➔ [www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/WhitePaper\\_InterculturalDialogue\\_2\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/WhitePaper_InterculturalDialogue_2_en.asp)
- Primary School Students' Adaptation to Secondary School/Parents Meeting/Сценарий организационного родительского собрания (5 класс) ➔ [psy.1september.ru/2005/12/30.htm](http://psy.1september.ru/2005/12/30.htm)
- Student Portfolios: Classroom Uses/  
 ➔ [www.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/classuse.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/classuse.html)
- Working with parents/from "Integrating refugee children" by Anna Vershok/  
 School has always been in constant search for the most effective and reliable ways of parents' involvement in school. The question of how to attract parents to school remains one of the most acute. In the above-mentioned publications the authors focus their attention on the problems of parent-school interrelation. The authors suggest various forms of parent-school interrelation, ranging from: school meetings, school visits, talks, seminars, workshops, interviews to: joint class – and out-of-class activities, conferences, publications.  
 The Student portfolio as a means of attracting parents to school is one of the less investigated forms of parent-school cooperation, though this project is being realized in a number of Russian schools and proves to be effective.`

## 4.6.1 Evaluation: Student Portfolio

We chose to evaluate the Russian module “Student Portfolio: A ‘bridge’ between school and family” because we felt it was easily transferable to the Scottish school system. It is easy to adapt and contains values and principles which equate with ours.

Curriculum for Excellence, the new curriculum framework in Scottish “Early Years” establishments and schools, considers all aspects of children’s development and not only aims to raise attainment but also to recognise and develop wider achievement. Its focus is on making children confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens.

Many of these elements are reflected in the Russian module which allows us, especially with our modifications, to make links to development work within Curriculum for Excellence in this area. This should help to integrate the portfolio into developing mainstream practice. The focus in Curriculum for Excellence on working with all parents and involving them in their children’s learning also makes this portfolio a valuable tool to support collaborative working between teachers, parents and children.

### Our Approach and modifications

As stated in the Russian module:

“A student portfolio serves as a useful guide of school life and may contribute to improving family contacts with school and intensifying the cooperation between parents and the teachers. Family participation in their child’s school life is an essential prerequisite for the learning motivation and the educational success of the child.”

In the evaluation of the student portfolio we are focussing on this element of the portfolio as this is a key element of how we intend to use it in schools. We see it as a tool for recording progress and achievement in all areas of school life as well as interests and successes outwith school. The portfolio would not be used for recording test results or school reports as in the Russian module. These are already kept in school files. The portfolio would contain examples of their home, family, where they came from, activities in school, and activities outside school as well as examples of their school work throughout a school academic year. This would show their academic progress and attainment as well as their achievement in other areas of their school life.

The structure of the portfolio would remain very similar to the Russian model but we wouldn’t use Part 2 of the Russian module (i.e. tests and school reports as previously explained) nor its Part 6 which we think is too formal and which we would approach in a more informal way, as explained below.

## Our revised draft structure

**Part 1** *About Myself:* When students first arrive they can write, draw pictures or bring in pictures of their family, previous school, hobbies etc. As well as helping the student to settle in to a new environment this can give us an insight into the family and previous school history of the student

**Part 2** *Achievements and results:* Certificates, diplomas and rewards which the student has won would be included. These need not only be school certificates but could also be for activities outside school: e.g. swimming, football etc.

**Part 3** *School work:* The students together with their parents and teachers can collect work from school activities – photographs, topic work in picture or written form, hand made articles, class written work the students are proud of.

**Part 4** *Comments from teachers /students themselves:* The students and teachers would be encouraged to write comments beside items put into the portfolio. The comments could be to explain why that item was chosen by the student or teacher or the teacher could be in praise of the item.

Instead of the Russian Part 6, at the end of the academic year the students would be encouraged to look back in their portfolio to see how much their work had progressed in that year. This would be a celebration of their achievements in all areas, not just academic subjects. We would hope it would encourage them to continue working hard in order to progress further during the next academic year.

## Dissemination and awareness-raising

Dissemination of the idea has started initially through sharing the idea with EAL staff, Early Years' teachers and workers, Quality Improvement officers and a Depute Director of Education. Discussion with EAL staff has been part of our initial evaluation of the project and supported the planning of how the Bilingual Support Service sees that the portfolio could be used in our context. They have worked with one of the partners to discuss the necessary adaptations to the Russian module.

The other partner has had discussions with various Early Years' establishments, and examples are being collated of how they are recording pupil progress and achievement to inform the development of this portfolio. This interaction is a two-way process and our work should also inform their development and help establishments to incorporate the portfolio idea into their own practice. This supports sustainability.

The partner will then explore developments in other sectors for the same purpose and has also highlighted this portfolio in relation to current Early Years developments to the relevant Quality Improvement Officer. The partner has, in addition, spoken on the topic of Early Years developments to authority Early Years staff and has discussed the portfolio with her line manager, a Deputy Director of Educational and Social Services, who could see its potential to fit into and support current mainstream development work. The idea has been mentioned in a report compiled by this Deputy Director for the Corporate Equalities Group.

EAL staff will drive the pilot of this portfolio by working with pupils, parents and teachers on how to compile the portfolio and support its production. Collaborative working is an effective way of training people.