Response to: *Portfolios for Science Education: Issues in Purpose, Structure and Authenticity*

Portfolios in a science classroom are an idea I have always planned on implementing. They are an assessment tool that allows students to take ownership in their education. With the use of portfolios students can decided which work they would like to use for evidence of accomplishment of an objective. In addition with the use of portfolios, students are allotted the time to reflect on their learning. When given this time, students can assess really what has been gained by the term and where more attention is needed.

As Dr. Angelo Collins states in her paper there are many uses for portfolios. One can use them in the classroom so students can showcase their work. Another option is for either new or veteran teachers to use them for employment purposes. The paper focuses on all three. However, as a future teacher wanting to gain more knowledge on portfolios used in a science classroom, the information presented for employment purposes seems out of place and inappropriate. I

This paper was written in 1992, in the early days of portfolios. Collins states “portfolios in science education are in their infancy” (Collins 461). While some aspects have changed with time, most of the information presented in this paper still holds merit. Collins states that “a portfolio is a container of collected evidence with a purpose” (Collins 452-453). This has not changed. In addition, the challenges that using portfolios presents—goal and use—also has not changed. “The goal is an assertion of what knowledge and skill the documents in the portfolio provide evidence about: the use is how the portfolio will be utilized” (Collins 453). Having clear expectations for the portfolio will help clarify goal and use. Without clear guidelines, these two blend into one.

Evidence, and what qualifies as evidence, has changed a bit over the years. No longer are there certain categories of evidence. Today types of evidence are in one category with reflection/self assessment in another; in order to have a complete portfolio one needs both parts. The older system
included a class of documents called production. There could be any of three types of documents in the production phase: goal statements, reflections, and captions. “A goal statement is the personal instantiation of the portfolio purpose by the person developing the portfolio” (Collins 456). I feel today this is still a vital part of a complete portfolio. Without a purpose there is no reason to collect work together. The next part, reflections, allow for students summarize the documents in the portfolio and discuss any growth brought by this piece of work. The last section is captions. Captions are attached to the evidence. In a short paragraph there is a description as to what the piece is, why that piece is evidence, and what it is evidence of. “By writing captions, students have become aware of how much they have accomplished, especially when they compare recent evidence with earlier portfolio documents” (Collins 457). All three of these are included in the today models of portfolios. Students introduce the topic, they describe the work and in a reflection they describe what was learned and how the piece fits the criteria required.

Again, this journal article provides great insight to what portfolios were before. It is nice to see where we were and where we are now, and compare the two. That is when we see change.

Works Cited