EVALUATION CRITARIA FOR PORTFOLIO

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**INTRODUCTION**

In program evaluation as in other areas, a picture can be worth a thousand words. As an evaluation tool for community-based programs, we can think of a portfolio as a kind of scrapbook or photo album that records the progress and activities of the program and its participants, and showcases them to interested parties both within and outside of the program. While portfolio evaluation has been predominantly used in educational settings to document the progress and achievements of individual children and adolescents, it has the potential to be a valuable tool for program evaluation as well.

Many programs do keep such albums, or scrapbooks, and use them informally as a means of conveying their pride in the program, but most do not consider using them in a systematic way as part of their formal program evaluation. However, the concepts and philosophy behind portfolios can apply to community evaluation, where portfolios can provide windows into community practices, procedures, and outcomes, perhaps better than more traditional measures.

Portfolio evaluation has become widely used in educational settings as a way to examine and measure progress, by documenting the process of learning or change as it occurs. Portfolios extend beyond test scores to include substantive descriptions or examples of what the student is doing and experiencing. Fundamental to "authentic evaluation" or "performance evaluation" in educational theory is the principle that children and adolescents should demonstrate, rather than tell about, what they know and can do (Cole, Ryan, & Kick, 1995). Documenting progress toward higher order goals such as application of skills and synthesis of experience requires obtaining information beyond what can be provided by standardized or norm-based tests. In "authentic evaluation", information or data is **collected from various sources**, through **multiple methods**, and over **multiple points in time** (Shaklee, Barbour, Ambrose, & Hansford, 1997). Contents of portfolios (sometimes called "artifacts" or "evidence") can include drawings, photos, video or audio tapes, writing or other work samples, computer disks, and copies of standardized or program-specific tests. Data sources can include parents, staff, and other community members who know the participants or program, as well as the self-reflections of participants themselves. Portfolio evaluation provides a practical strategy for systematically collecting and organizing such data.

**Defining Portfolio Evaluation**

What is a portfolio?

A **student portfolio** is a systematic collection of student work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects. The collection should include evidence of student reflection and self-evaluation, guidelines for selecting the portfolio contents, and criteria for judging the quality of the work. The goal is to help students assemble portfolios that illustrate their talents, represent their writing capabilities, and tell their stories of school achievement (Venn, 2000, pp. 530-531)

**Types of Portfolios:**

Process and product portfolios represent the two major types of portfolios.

1). A **process portfolio** documents the stages of learning and provides a progressive record of student growth.

2). A **product portfolio** demonstrates mastery of a learning task or a set of learning objectives and contains only the best work...

Teachers use process portfolios to help students identify learning goals, document progress over time, and demonstrate learning mastery... In general, teachers prefer to use process portfolios because they are ideal for documenting the stages that students go through as they learn and progress (Venn, 2000, p. 533).

**Steps in the Portfolio Evaluation Process**

**First**, the teacher and the student need to clearly identify the portfolio contents, which are samples of student work, reflections, teacher observations, and conference records. **Second**, the teacher should develop evaluation procedures for keeping track of the portfolio contents and for grading the portfolio... **Third**, the teacher needs a plan for holding portfolio conferences, which are formal and informal meetings in which students review their work and discuss their progress. Because they encourage reflective teaching and learning, these conference are an essential part of the portfolio evaluation process (Venn, 2000, p. 540).

**Advantages of Portfolio Evaluation**

* Promoting student self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking.
* Measuring performance based on genuine samples of student work.
* Providing flexibility in measuring how students accomplish their learning goals.
* Enabling teachers and students to share the responsibility for setting learning goals and for evaluating progress toward meeting those goals.
* Giving students the opportunity to have extensive input into the learning process.
* Facilitating cooperative learning activities, including peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and peer conferencing.
* Providing a process for structuring learning in stages.
* Providing opportunities for students and teachers to discuss learning goals and the progress toward those goals in structured and unstructured conferences.
* Enabling measurement of multiple dimensions of student progress by including different types of data and materials. (Venn, 2000, p. 538)
* Allows the evaluators to see the student, group, or community as individual, each unique with its own characteristics, needs, and strengths.
* Serves as a cross-section lens, providing a basis for future analysis and planning. By viewing the total pattern of the community or of individual participants, one can identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, and barriers to success.
* Serves as a concrete vehicle for communication, providing ongoing communication or exchanges of information among those involved.
* Promotes a shift in ownership; communities and participants can take an active role in examining where they have been and where they want to go.
* Portfolio evaluation offers the possibility of addressing shortcomings of traditional evaluation. It offers the possibility of assessing the more complex and important aspects of an area or topic.
* Covers a broad scope of knowledge and information, from many different people who know the program or person in different contexts ( eg., participants, parents, teachers or staff, peers, or community leaders).

**Disadvantages of Portfolio Evaluation**

* Requiring extra time to plan an evaluation system and conduct the evaluation.
* Gathering all of the necessary data and work samples can make portfolios bulky and difficult to manage.
* Developing a systematic and deliberate management system is difficult, but this step is necessary in order to make portfolios more than a random collection of student work.
* Scoring portfolios involves the extensive use of subjective evaluation procedures such as rating scales and professional judgment, and this limits reliability.
* Scheduling individual portfolio conferences is difficulty and the length of each conference may interfere with other instructional activities. (Venn, 2000, p. 538)
* May be seen as less reliable or fair than more quantitative evaluations such as test scores.
* Can be very time consuming for teachers or program staff to organize and evaluate the contents, especially if portfolios have to be done in addition to traditional testing and grading.
* Having to develop your own individualized criteria can be difficult or unfamiliar at first.
* If goals and criteria are not clear, the portfolio can be just a miscellaneous collection of artifacts that don't show patterns of growth or achievement.
* Like any other form of qualitative data, data from portfolio evaluations can be difficult to analyze or aggregate to show change.

**PORTFOLIO EVALUATION IS MOST USEFUL FOR:**

* Evaluating programs that have flexible or individualized goals or outcomes. For example, within a program with the general purpose of enhancing children's social skills, some individual children may need to become less aggressive while other shy children may need to become more assertive.
* Each child's portfolio evaluation would be geared to his or her individual needs and goals.
* Allowing individuals and programs in the community (those being evaluated) to be involved in their own change and decisions to change.
* Providing information that gives meaningful insight into behavior and related change. Because portfolio evaluation emphasizes the process of change or growth, at multiple points in time, it may be easier to see patterns.
* Providing a tool that can ensure communication and accountability to a range of audiences. Participants, their families, funders, and members of the community at large who may not have much sophistication in interpreting statistical data can often appreciate more visual or experiential "evidence" of success.
* Allowing for the possibility of assessing some of the more complex and important aspects of many constructs (rather than just the ones that are easiest to measure).

**PORTFOLIO EVALUATION IS NOT AS USEFUL FOR:**

* Evaluating programs that have very concrete, uniform goals or purposes. For example, it would be unnecessary to compile a portfolio of individualized "evidence" in a program whose sole purpose is full immunization of all children in a community by the age of five years. The required immunizations are the same, and the evidence is generally clear and straightforward.
* Allowing you to rank participants or programs in a quantitative or standardized way (although evaluators or program staff may be able to make subjective judgments of relative merit).
* Comparing participants or programs to standardized norms. While portfolios can (and often do) include some standardized test scores along with other kinds of "evidence", this is not the main purpose of the portfolio.

**USING PORTFOLIO EVALUATION WITH THE STATE STRENGTHENING EVALUATION GUIDE**

* **Accountability**
* Critical to any form of evaluation is accountability. In the educational arena for example, teachers are accountable to themselves, their students, and the families, the schools and society. The portfolio is an evaluation practice that can inform all of these constituents. The process of selecting "evidence" for inclusion in portfolios involves ongoing dialogue and feedback between participants and service providers.
* **Understanding and Refining**
* Portfolio evaluation of the program or participants provides a means of conducting evaluations throughout the life of the program, as the program addresses the evolving needs and assets of participants and of the community involved. This helps to maintain focus on the outcomes of the program and the steps necessary to meet them, while ensuring that the implementation is in line with the vision established in Tier 1.
* **Progress Toward Outcomes**
* Items are selected for inclusion in the portfolio because they provide "evidence" of progress toward selected outcomes. Whether the outcomes selected are specific to individual participants or apply to entire communities, the portfolio documents steps toward achievement. Usually it is most helpful for this selection to take place at regular intervals, in the context of conferences or discussions among participants and staff.
* **Program Impact**
* One of the greatest strengths of portfolio evaluation in program evaluation may be its power as a tool to communicate program impact to those outside of the program. While this kind of data may not take the place of statistics about numbers served, costs, or test scores, many policy makers, funders, and community members find visual or descriptive evidence of successes of individuals or programs to be very persuasive.

 **Who evaluates**

The more we can involve students in the evaluation process, the more likely they will take ownership of it, be engaged in it, and find it worthwhile. So, it makes sense to involve students in the evaluation process of their portfolios as well. They have likely engaged in some self-evaluation in the reflection or goal-setting components of the portfolio. Additionally, students are capable of evaluating how well their portfolio elements meet standards, requirements, or competencies, for their own portfolios or those of their peers. Furthermore, older peers could make excellent judges of the work of younger students. Cross-grade peer tutoring has demonstrated how well the older and younger students respond to such interactions. Use this rubric to help you review and evaluate your own e-Portfolio or the e-Portfolios of others. I have explained in the several points:

**Operational** (e-Portfolio functions well). Indicators:

* navigation is clear and consistent
* all links work
* media displays as intended
* all programming is appropriate (not too limited or too flashy)
* spelling and grammar are correct
* published materials respect copyright laws

**Appearance** (e-Portfolio looks well). Indicators:

* appearance and navigation are clear and consistent
* images are optimized for the web
* text is readable (fonts, sizes, and contrast)

**Evidence** (academic, co-curricular and personal evidence). Indicators:

* organizational scheme connects all evidence into an integrated whole
* features or showcases a specific piece of evidence
* shows depth in major and related experience
* shows breadth of knowledge and experience
* includes a resume (one page, printer friendly)

**Reflection** (personal message is integrated into the e-Portfolio). Indicators:

* audience and purpose of e-portfolio is described or is obvious
* addresses the Career and own personal development
* reflective comments about evidence as well as reflective comments about what this evidence says about the student is integrated into the e-portfolio
* includes short-term goals (skills learner needs to add/improve)
* includes long-term goals (professional and/or personal aims)
* interpretation of learner's own achievements is expressed.

# Evaluating portfolio evaluation systems: what are the appropriate criteria?

####  PURPOSE:

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how portfolio evaluation processes should be evaluated.

####  BACKGROUND:

1. Articles in the nursing literature discuss the use of validity and reliability as criteria for evaluating portfolio evaluation processes, and recommendations include tighter specification of grading criteria, a standardized national approach to assessing clinical competence in nursing students, and inter-rater reliability checks. On the other hand, some general practitioner educators suggest that these may not be the appropriate criteria because the nature of the evidence in portfolios is descriptive and judgment-based rather than quantifiable.

####  METHOD:

Drawing on multi-method case study data from a recent study evaluating the use of portfolios in the evaluation of learning and competence in nursing education in England, we suggest that criteria developed to evaluate qualitative research may be more appropriate for evaluating portfolio evaluation processes.

####  DISCUSSION:

Multiple sources of evidence from the varied perspectives of students, teachers, practice assessors and external examiners are tapped as part of the portfolio evaluation process. Tripartite meetings between students, teachers and clinical assessors to review placements are crucial in verifying both the written evidence and students' ability to communicate and critically analyse their performance. The variety of evidence collected would potentially allow monitoring, using qualitative research evaluation criteria, both of the portfolios themselves and the systems by which they are monitored and evaluated. However, not all this information is collected consistently and systematically, as called for in curriculum documents.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

Use of qualitative research evaluation criteria offers a potentially productive way forward in evaluating portfolio evaluation processes but some aspects of current practice need to be tightened, particularly double marking, internal moderation and external examining.