



**Easley, Shirley-Dale & Mitchell, Kay (2000) *Portfolios Matter: What, Where, When, Why and How to Use Them*. Markham, Ontario: Pembroke Publishers, distributed by Stenhouse.**

After reaching a point in their professional lives when they questioned their current assessment practices as elementary school teachers, Shirley-Dale Easley and Kay Mitchell began to explore the use of portfolio assessment as a means to evaluate students' work. In their practical, how-to book entitled *Portfolios Matter: What, Where, When, Why and How to Use Them*, they offer "research-based, classroom tested, and practical answers based on years of studying" portfolios. The information shared in the book comes from years of testing portfolio assessment in their own classes and from conversations with other teachers during numerous professional development workshops. Each chapter begins with a passage that appears to have come from the authors' personal journals that they kept while teaching. In addition, each chapter is sprinkled with samples of students' work, frequently asked questions about portfolio assessment, and quick tips that teachers can follow to implement portfolios.

In the first chapter the authors establish the rationale for portfolio assessment and expound on its benefits. The authors advocate a balanced approach as the best way to determine a student's abilities. For example, teachers often define quality in different ways as evidenced by discrepancies in their grading. One teacher may give a student a high grade for work while another may consider the work to be somewhat lacking. Portfolios allow teachers to see larger amounts of work over time. Furthermore, traditional and authentic forms of assessment are useful for the classroom teacher. Using various assessment tools, such as observations, teacher-made instruments, standardized tests and portfolios, allow the teacher to portray the student's abilities more accurately. Portfolios provide concrete evidence of learning and are "the only assessment tool whereby the students and teacher act as partners in the assessment process" (p. 20). When students work with teachers, they take greater ownership for their own learning and become self-directed learners. This makes students active participants in the assessment process by guiding them to set goals for themselves and to measure their progress in reaching those goals.

The second chapter lays the groundwork for establishing portfolio assessment in the class. The authors state that not all teachers in the school have to implement portfolios at the same time. Teachers should begin when they are ready. If only one teacher decides to use portfolios, then she should seek out other support systems to help her

during the transitional period. It is also important in the beginning to collect samples of students' work or "baseline samples," which should not be revised or corrected. Teachers, and not students, should select the baseline samples, since students early in the school year are unfamiliar with the evaluation procedures. As the year progresses, the teacher will teach the students how to self evaluate by showing them exemplars and discussing the range of quality in the exemplars. Throughout the conversations, the class will construct "criteria charts," which contain a list of characteristics of quality work. When students become more knowledgeable about the subject, they can periodically revise or update the criteria charts.

Easley and Mitchell address potential portfolio problems in the chapter entitled, "Developing Your Portfolio Program. Here, the authors clarify two often confused yet related concepts: portfolios and work files. A portfolio differs from a work file because portfolios require student to evaluate their own work. The portfolio is "an evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching that occurred in the classroom. It is the summative assessment for both the teacher and the student" (p. 33). Then, the authors differentiate between working and cumulative portfolios. A working portfolio is a collection of work over a longer period of time while the cumulative portfolio contains the students' best work. As the chapter progresses, the authors focus on practical issues, such contents, storage and time issues. The portfolio should contain baseline samples as well as materials that are collected during each grading period with the idea of portfolio assessment being introduced to the students at the end of the first grading period. Students will need to practice the process several times to master the concept of portfolio assessment. The authors provide detailed, step-by-step instructions for selecting portfolio samples and for reflecting on the samples. Although many teachers claim to have little time for portfolio assessment, the authors contend that a well-established system requires some ongoing maintenance but little time. Also, middle and high school teachers who work with large numbers of students can implement portfolios if they focus on one subject or use them as diagnostic tools for special populations of students.

In the fourth chapter the authors tackle the most frequently asked question about portfolios, "What goes in a portfolio?" (p. 53). Easley and Mitchell claim that the teacher decides the number and kind of samples that are placed in the portfolio. The teacher has flexibility in terms of the "quality and quantity of the contents placed in the portfolio" (p. 55). These decisions are based on the student's age, the curriculum, and the focus of the course. The authors suggest that teachers consider the educational level (kindergarten, elementary school, and upper level) as well as the area of focus (writing, math, cross-curricular and content-specific).

Once the student has created the portfolio, "it is a natural progression to move toward a conference format" (p. 68). The sixth chapter is devoted to the procedures for sharing the portfolio through conferences. For the

student-led conference to be successful, the student must prepare her portfolio and be able to articulate the learning that occurred during the year. In addition, the parents should be informed about the rationale, the process, and the expectations for the conference. This information can be communicated to parents through a series of newsletters during the school year. In this chapter the authors provide step-by-step procedures for conducting the conferences. The suggestions include the times when a conference should be held, the numerous approaches that are possible, and the checklists that should be followed to prepare for and conduct a conference. The authors discuss the advantages and limitations for the three types of conferences: traditional, two-way, and three-way.

Easley and Mitchell suggest that changes in education are inevitable and that educators frequently face new ideas to try. To deal with the new initiatives, the authors propose the Life-Long Learner Model in the last chapter. The model consists of five parts: introducing the new idea, instilling new knowledge, developing a belief in the new idea, committing to the idea's success and seeking out support. Educators are encouraged to follow these steps when implementing portfolios for the first time.

Shirley-Dale Easley and Kay Mitchell have written a concise, teacher-friendly book on portfolio assessment. The authors provide a nice balance of procedures and concrete examples for implementing portfolios. The level of detail and practicality make this book different from others in the field. Teachers at all grade levels and in all subject areas will find the book helpful as they begin implementing this alternative form of assessment.

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**Reviewed by Nathan Bond, Southwest Texas State University**

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**Holliday, Adrian (2001) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.**

*Doing and Writing Qualitative Research* answers the questions that plague students, college professors, and practitioners alike as they begin the process of qualitative research. How is qualitative research planned, organized and structured? What guiding principles should be followed in this process? How does the writing process fit into the qualitative research process?

This book demonstrates how to *write* qualitative research within context of *doing* qualitative research. It addresses the practical problems that writers face in attempting to transfer the rich data collected in the field into a written product with step-by-step instructions that link the principles of qualitative research to the

structure and conventions of the written language. Examples and illustrations from research studies conducted within various fields and professions reinforce specific concepts and add depth and interest to the content.

The primary focus of the book is a description of a methodology to be used in qualitative research. The author maintains that the writing process itself aids in organization, analysis, and conclusions. The writing process is also useful in overcoming the common pitfalls of subjectivity and scientific rigor. This is achieved within the writing process by making the workings of the written study transparent. In order to maintain validity, the qualitative researcher must "show their work" every single time in much the same way that an algebra student provides proof that the correct answer has been determined. (p.8). Revealing the infrastructure of the research to the audience increases accountability and maintains rigorous methodology.

The ideology expressed in the book is born out of the author's experiences supervising qualitative research writing in research methodology classes as well as the author's personal research experiences. Within this ideology there is "a place for powerful, personal authorship" (p. 128) that is seldom seen in today's research. The idea of personal authorship embraces the use of first person in relating experiences or explaining the author's perspective and/or ideology as well as asserting the author's presence in the headings that are chosen. This personal authorship acts as an acknowledgement of the role the writer has within the research: an interactive and ideological force that imparts the relationships between the researcher and the study itself. It also serves to reduce abstractness by bringing out the voice of the writer. The author ascribes this new thinking to the progressive, postmodern, critical branch with the naturalist, post-positivistic tradition (see p. 20).

The book is structured in eight chapters that lead the reader from the philosophical basis for qualitative research through the formulation of topic, research questions, and research settings, to the use of data and writing conventions in presenting the final product. Discussion questions at the end of the book help the reader apply the principles presented in each chapter to their own research experience. Philosophically, qualitative research is seen as "a social activity, which is as ideological and complex as those it studies (p. 1)." The balance between the research strategy and the research setting is central to qualitative research. The researcher must maintain the freedom to creatively explore the context while carefully accounting for each move made, "taking the opportunity to encounter the research setting while maintaining the principles of social science". Holliday makes comparisons between quantitative and qualitative philosophies emphasizing the control of variables and the testing of hypotheses. Quantitative research attempts to control variables, while qualitative research invites a rich array of variables and investigates them directly. Qualitative research invites exploration rather than the validation of

quantitative research, "producing, rather than testing hypotheses is more often the outcome of qualitative research" (p. 35).

The connection between data and the social setting from which it is derived is important. In fact, collecting qualitative data most often develops a dialogue within a social setting. Thick description reveals all aspects of the research experience - both intentions and meanings of the data. Data should not be viewed as exhaustive, but representative of the different facets of the social context paired with good analysis. In this way data becomes the evidence and writing becomes the presentation and discussion of that evidence. Raw data cannot be left as is - it must be reorganized and a writing strategy developed that will allow a shift to occur between making sense of what is encountered in the field and making sense of the total research experience to the reader. This is accomplished through the skillful use of writing conventions that convey the intended message while increasing the credibility of the research. The author feels that it can be counterproductive to convey long stretches of data without a discussion of its significance. Readers may miss the point and misinterpret the data. Halliday discusses in detail such useful qualitative writing strategies as conceptual frameworks, coding, referenced themes, and triangulation.

Finally, the author broaches the serious and sensitive area of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. This is linked to the former theme of personal authorship. Any form of researcher presence is considered contamination in quantitative research, yet within qualitative research this presence creates a new third culture of interaction between the researcher and the participant. This culture is generated as each side observes and over-generalizes from the behavior of the other. It becomes essential that the researcher make appropriate claims about the people in the research setting. "Appropriate claims is not simply a matter of technical accuracy, but of creating images of the people we research which promotes understanding of their humanity and do not reduce and package them" (p 175).

*Doing and Writing Qualitative Research* encompasses both technical and academic aspects of qualitative research. It details the technical construction of qualitative research writing while making reference to the broader academic discussions and literature. This book is useful as a research text or as a user-friendly guide for anyone involved in the qualitative research process.

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**Reviewed by Lori Snyder Blaylock, Texas A&M - Commerce**

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**Muschla, Gary Robert (2003) *Ready-to-Use Reading Proficiency Lessons & Activities: 10th Grade Level*. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.**

High school language arts teachers and reading specialists looking for activities to supplement their instruction and prepare 10th grade students for standardized reading tests will find this extensive collection a treasure-trove. It contains 40 study sheets, 100 worksheets, and 11 practice tests divided into five sections: analogies, vocabulary, reading comprehension, language mechanics and word usage, and language expression. In addition, an appendix provides information about standardized tests for parents and test-taking tips for students.

Although the title says “lessons,” educators expecting to find lesson plans will be disappointed. They will find only suggestions for introducing the concept or skill at the beginning of each section and recommended strategies for using the study sheets and worksheets that follow. The study sheets are clear, concise, and arranged sequentially. They can be used by the teacher to guide instruction or by the student to review basic concepts. The practice tests follow standardized test format and cover material reinforced by the worksheets. An answer key is provided for each practice test. Despite the lack of full lesson plans the total package is a valuable resource for education collections and a useful tool for instructors who want to provide review and practice for 10th grade students over content common to standardized reading tests. Other titles by Muschla in the TestPrep Curriculum Activities Library include *Ready-to-Use Reading Proficiency Lessons & Activities : 4th Grade Level* and *Ready-to- Use Reading Proficiency Lessons & Activities: 8th Grade Level*.

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**Reviewed by Judy Druse, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas**

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**Newkirk, Thomas (2002) *Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

Thomas Newkirk, author of numerous books on writing and professor of English at University of New Hampshire, has joined a small, but growing number of authors addressing our understanding of how boys learn and how they are taught in our elementary and secondary schools. After decades of attention to girls’ and women’s education, educators and researchers are beginning to turn their attention to what has been happening to the education of boys.

Newkirk takes an interesting and literate look at one aspect of boys’ education, literacy in the late elementary years. He defines literacy as

the “written stories children choose to read and compose” (p.xv). Coming to the issue from a post-Columbine perspective, Newkirk finds a rather dismal scene for boys-one in which many of the topics most attractive to boys (topics involving violence or wild adventures) are actively discouraged or forbidden in the classroom. Through the eight chapters of this book, he presents a challenge to the reader to rethink standard practices that restrict the topics that children are allowed to read and write about in the classroom. Using data based on a set of student stories and interviews with around one hundred children in elementary schools in New Hampshire, Newkirk asserts that we are failing boys in our educational system by narrowly defining what topics are suitable for elementary age boys to engage with as they build their reading and writing skills.

In the first two chapters of *Misreading Masculinity*, Newkirk carefully addresses issues of gender equity as central to any discussion of the education of boys. He delicately and knowledgeably finds a middle ground between the two ends of the gender equity spectrum, indicating both his agreements and disagreements with such representative writings as the AAUW’s *How Schools Shortchange Girls* and Christine Hoff Sommers’ *The War Against Boys*. The third chapter takes an historical look at literacy and the ways in which schools and our educational system have routinely (if inadvertently) made reading less engaging for boys through the emphasis on silent reading, on reading as a way to keep students quiet and still.

In chapter four, he argues against the kind of moral hierarchy often applied to various forms of literature and writing, encouraging the reader to think first of engaging boys with a good adventure story (or with writing about a Simpsons show) as a beginning. Once engaged, the process of directing boys’ choices of topics for reading or writing moves more easily.

In the fifth and sixth chapters, he takes on a most difficult argument-making a case for the relaxation of restrictions on topics for reading and writing that involve violence. Chapter 5, “Violence and Innocence,” makes the case that the claims of the effects of media violence are overblown. Using excerpts from interviews with children, he lets their words show the reader how boys are capable of making distinctions between fantasy violence in an adventure movie and actual violence. Chapter 6, “Misreading Violence,” looks more closely at how violence is used in boys’ writing, illustrating that the violence in boys’ stories may be viewed in more positive ways than we have become accustomed to interpreting it. One boy’s writing experiences are examined in depth and violence in girls’ writing is briefly described.

In Chapter 7, the power of bodily humor and parody to attract boys to reading and writing activities is explored, including a number of examples from popular culture. In the final chapter, Newkirk offers suggestions for opening up the array of topics appropriate for reading and writing in the elementary school. Newkirk argues that we should

allow boys (and girls) to express themselves via fantasy writing, cartoons, parodies of TV plots and other topics that come from popular culture and offers several specific recommendations for action. A substantial bibliography completes the book.

This is an excellent read. Newkirk writes beautifully and illustrates his points with such a variety of literary and historical references that even if the reader is not in agreement with Newkirk's arguments and solutions, it is a book that will challenge the reader to think about his or her own assumptions about boys, about the role of popular culture in education, and about how both boys and girls can be thoroughly engaged in and take pleasure from their own writing and the writing of others

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**Reviewed by Carla A. Hendrix, Plattsburgh State University**

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**Tucker, Marc S. & Coddling, Judy B., eds. (2002) *The Principal Challenge: Leading and Managing Schools in an Era of Accountability*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.**

The editors, officers of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), at the request of several foundations, commissioned the papers in this volume to be "useful to a much broader community of people who share our [editors] interest in the future of school leadership (p. xii). The editors and the authors agree that the current state of principals is one of low pay, considerable responsibility, long hours, little authority, little ability to hire or fire or even assign classes, and much blame, plus little effective training for this reality.

The ten chapters are organized into four parts. The first considers the roles of principals, both instructional and moral. The second examines training methods in business, the military, and several professions. Part three summarizes training of principals in other countries. The final part considers current and past training in this country, including certification, in-service programs, and professional associations. The picture presented in all of these is generally gloomy, noting that fewer people are willing to seek careers as principals and those who do encounter immense problems.

The results of all this analysis are presented in Appendix A wherein the editors propose a model for a new way to train educational leaders; namely, the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL). Under the auspices of the National Center on Education and the Economy, NISL's goal would be "to enable principals to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to produce substantial gains in student achievement in their schools" (p. 393). NISL would not train individuals, but rather would work with districts, schools of education



and other organizations to provide curriculum and technical assistance to the school districts who in turn would provide faculty and do the training. All of this is designed for principals with 1-5 years of experience, using two years of coursework locally and making use of both personal and Web-based methods of instruction.

This book should be useful to those in university schools of education, for it has much to say about the need for change there. It will have less interest to individual principals, but it does provide a wide review of the literature as well as useful summaries of major studies, descriptions of successful programs, and listing of the authorities in the field. Academic libraries serving schools of education, especially those with school administration programs, should acquire this title.

Pages: **426** Price: **\$29.95** ISBN: **0-7879-6447-6**

**Reviewed by Roland Person, Southern Illinois University Library**



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