

PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS

Establishing a Portfolio Policy

(Excerpted with Permission from R. Newman. *Creating Portfolios with Kids in Out-of-School Programs: IDEAs for Communicating with Parents and Enhancing Program Quality*. Cape Charles, VA: Newroads Media, 2005. Pages 49 - 51)

Before implementing Portfolios, it is important for programs to develop a Portfolio Policy. This will ensure that Portfolios reflect the goals of the program and provide maximum benefit to children and families. Developing a Portfolio Policy generally involves consideration of the following issues: the purpose of Portfolios, what will be included in Portfolios, access to Portfolios, related privacy protection issues, and how Portfolios will be shared with parents.

What Is the Purpose of Portfolios?

It's important to define and describe the purpose of Portfolios. Here are some questions to ask to determine the role Portfolios will play in the program:

- *Will Portfolios be developed for all children?*
- *Will different types of Portfolios be created for different purposes? (Private Portfolios? Learning Portfolios? Skill Development Portfolios?)*
- *To what extent will staff use Portfolios as a tool for making decisions about guiding children's development and planning program activities and experiences?*
- *How will Developmental Checklists be linked to Portfolios?*
 - *Will they be used as a reference for staff use only?*
 - *Will they be used to conduct in depth observations and/or as a tool for focusing on selected Developmental Tasks and related Developmental Indicators?*
 - *How will Developmental Checklists guide the focus for conducting observations, writing Anecdotal Records and Running Observations, and selecting items for Portfolios?*
 - *Will completed Developmental Checklists be used by staff as a planning tool?*
 - *Will completed Developmental Checklists be shared with parents?*
- *Who will be involved in selecting items for inclusion in Portfolios? Staff only? Staff and children working together? Individual staff? A team of staff who work with a child? Will parents be invited to participate in selecting items?*
- *To what extent will parents be involved in contributing or requesting items for inclusion in Portfolios?*
- *What will happen to Portfolios at the end of a program year or session?*
 - *Will the Portfolio be kept and shared with staff in the next year or session?*
 - *Will the Portfolio be returned to the child? To the parent?*
 - *Will selected Portfolio items be retained in the program to pass on to others? And some returned to the child or family? Who will decide what to retain and what to return? The child? The staff? The parent? A combination?*

- *Will Portfolios be available to other professionals who may work with the child? If so, what protections for the child/family and what procedures will guide the sharing of Portfolios with other programs and professionals?*

What Will Be Included in Portfolios?

Decisions about what and how much to include in Portfolios will depend on a number of different factors. Here are issues that will need consideration:

- *How often will observations be conducted regularly or intermittently?*
- *Will observations be conducted for each child?*
- *How can staff observations be scheduled? How much time can be made available for staff to conduct observations?*
- *How skilled are staff at conducting observations and documenting observations?*
- *How much experience does staff have in linking selected items to children's development?*
- *To what extent will children be involved in selecting their own work and play samples?*
- *What criteria will be used to select items for Portfolios? Will items be collected because they are representative of the child's work, exemplary pieces of work, or both?*
- *How willing will children be to allow individual items to be placed in Portfolios, rather than taking them home?*
- *To what extent will Portfolio contents be used to plan and adjust program activities?*
- *To what extent will parents be involved in recommending and/or selecting items to include in Portfolios?*
- *To what extent is the program committed to individualizing Portfolios for each child?*
- *What resources are available to the program to copy children's work, take photographs, record audio and/or video tapes, etc.?*
- *How much and what kind of space is available for storage of Portfolios?*

Who Will Have Access to Portfolios? How Will Children's Privacy Be Protected?

Because school-age children are interested in their own development and setting their own goals, they enjoy being involved in building their own Portfolios. Therefore, it is important to develop a Portfolio Policy that makes some Portfolio items accessible to individual children so that children can review and add items to their own Portfolios. This may require maintaining two Portfolio files for each child:

1. *One file containing confidential items (e.g. Staff Developmental Checklists, Anecdotal Records, and Running Observations as well as children's Journal Entries). This file would be stored in a secure place.*

2. *A second file containing work samples and audio and visual tapes collected by the child, program staff, and in some cases, parents. This file would be stored in an area accessible to children on a daily basis.*

If children keep Journals as a program activity, it will also be important to store Journals appropriately so that children's privacy can be protected and honored.

Finally, it is advisable for a Portfolio Policy to address whether or not parent permission will be required in order for staff to conduct formal observations that will be placed in children's Portfolios. Taking photos of children and recording children on audio or video tape may also require permission forms. Here are examples of questions to ask when considering the use of permission or release forms:

- *Will the program secure written permission from parents to use Developmental Checklists to conduct formal observations of children? Who will be responsible for developing and approving permission forms? How will forms be introduced to parents? How will signed forms be maintained?*
- *How will the program secure written permission from parents to share Portfolios with other professionals, if requested? Who will be responsible for developing and approving permission forms? How will forms be introduced to parents? How will signed forms be maintained?*
- *How will the program secure written release from parents to photograph or record children, to document children's experiences for Portfolios? Who will be responsible for developing and approving permission forms? How will forms be introduced to parents? How will signed forms be maintained?*

It is recommended that programs consult legal advice when exploring issues related to parent permission or release forms.

How Will Portfolios Be Shared with Parents?

Portfolios are valuable tools for communicating with parents about children's development and their experiences in the program. When developing a Portfolio Policy, it is important to determine how Portfolios will be shared with parents. Here are some key planning questions to ask:

- *How will Portfolios be introduced to parents? Through a letter describing the purpose and importance of Portfolios? At a parent meeting? Through email or newsletter articles? What is the best vehicle available to introduce Portfolios to families?*

- *Will Portfolios be shared in person through a conference or meeting or will Portfolios be sent home for review and comment?*
- *What strategies will be used to solicit feedback from parents and involve parents in contributing ideas about what should go into Portfolios?*
- *To what extent will children be involved with sharing their Portfolios with parents?*