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USING PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN A FIRST LEVEL SPANISH CLASS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to share the observed behaviors and reported experiences of a teacher and Spanish 1 students as they progressed through the portfolio assessment process. The study was completed in a large urban high school in eastern Pennsylvania with seventeen participants from a Level One Spanish Class. The class met every other day for the entire school year. Methods of gathering data included teacher observation, surveys, interviews and conferences, and student work including class assignments, projects, and portfolio entries. Teacher field notes that included transcripts of detailed class discussions and observations were also part of the data methods employed. The study suggested an increase in reflective thinking for some but a lack of reflective thinking for others. Some lower- motivated students, identified by a survey, were not able to reflect well and often needed prompting by the teacher. The beginning of the year survey also suggested that low self-motivated students are better motivated by knowing that they will be required to look back on their work and eventually will need to display it in their portfolio.

Organization was a major issue in the portfolio process. The study suggested that students who are not organized in their daily school work were most likely going to have the most difficulty with the portfolio organization process as well.

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RESEARCHER'S STANCE

I have been in the teaching profession for approximately fourteen years. The years went by fast, but from each one I learned something more about my students and myself. I am constantly making changes in how I do things with the hope to better serve the individuals in my class. Since day one, I have had the constant question in my mind, "What can I do to have my students be better motivated to learn the content while enjoying the process along the way?" In other words, "How can I get them to learn without realizing they are even learning?"

When I was a young teacher just out of college, I thought I had all the answers to this question. After all, how could *I* not be a fun person? How could a student not *want* to try and do his/her best for me? All I had to do was talk to each of them with respect while being caring and entertaining, right? I soon found out that although teacher influence did have an impact on learning, many other factors affected their motivation. I recognized that many of them lacked the motivation to learn anything in general, let alone Spanish. I also realized that many students took a test, got it back, looked at their grade and either threw out the test or filed it in a notebook never to be looked at again. Out of sight and out of mind!

I have started to put more emphasis on the learning process itself. My content was and always will be important for them to learn, but I have switched my

previous question to a more general one: “What instructional strategies can I employ to help my students better motivate themselves?” I felt that if they were encouraged to learn ways to help motivate themselves to learn, then they would most likely enjoy the process along the way because they had a REASON to succeed for themselves! Maybe some of my students were not aware of what makes them want to succeed.

I asked myself what new information I learned since returning to graduate school that might help me achieve this goal. I also asked myself “what did I do in past years that I could do better and did it relate to some new concept and skill that I learned?” I thought about assessments, organization of material, discussions of progress made, class activities, and overall student attitude about learning. I thought about how I have a filing system for students to use as a place to put their graded tests, a warm-up book that they sometimes use for reflections on their progress, and a notebook where they are expected to keep handouts and any class activities that they have done. I then thought about how each of those things is so important, but often just got tossed in the garbage by many students at the end of the semester. Then I remembered what I had learned about the portfolio process and how it could be used as a way for students to combine some of these materials in a more organized way. Maybe students would consider the portfolio to be more valuable and maybe they would not throw it away because they had more ownership as to what goes into it. Maybe my students would be

more motivated to succeed knowing that they are going to “showcase” their work and not just file it in their binder. I wondered if my students would use their reflection pieces as a way to better understand their individual learning process. Would a deeper understanding of their individual learning process help them to succeed? I was hoping that the answers to these questions would be “yes” because my students gained an understanding of Spanish, as well as knew more insight about themselves as learners. I thought that maybe seeing their hard work displayed in a creative fashion would make them feel as though they had accomplished something. I hoped these goals, if achieved, would not only help students in Spanish my class, but also in their future activities.

In order to meet my goals as a teacher, I decided to focus on the topic of Portfolio Assessment and the impact it had on students’ grades, motivation and self-awareness. I chose this not only to benefit my students, but also to improve on my own organization and teaching style. I always had students put their tests and quizzes in a folder and every so often they reflected on their grades. I also had a warm -up book in which they sometimes wrote about what things they were having difficulty understanding and how they planned to improve as well as daily grammar or cultural warm-ups. Both reflection on tests and the goal-setting/self-evaluation were considered to be part of a Portfolio Assessment. I also had students keep a notebook with different sections for their work. I felt by

employing a Portfolio Assessment, I could help them organize these three activities to be even more beneficial.

I always have had students who struggle while learning a foreign language. I also noted the negative attitude towards learning a language without really knowing why. I felt that some students had lost sight of the control they had over their own learning. I felt Portfolio Assessment might help these students by aiding them to take ownership of their work and discover some things about the learning process when completing reflection exercises. Portfolio Assessment provided a means for there to be interaction between student and teacher by way of conferencing; therefore, I would be able to gauge how well they were grasping the new material. I could make changes to my teaching as needed by spending more time on and creating different activities for the topics in which they were having trouble. The students had the opportunity to have some choice in their pieces of work. Portfolios provided a way for students to track their progress from the beginning of the unit to the end, which might be beneficial. It was a way to demonstrate to them how their hard work and dedication paid off.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Recently, student portfolios became a common means of implementing an authentic assessment process (Katula, Ray & Sherrill, 1999). Portfolio Assessment was created to organize student work that a learner had chosen, reflected upon, and presented to document growth and change overtime (Barrett, 2007). The implementation of Portfolio Assessments encouraged teachers and schools to focus on important student outcomes, provided parents and community with creditable evidence of student achievement, and allowed students to reflect upon their learning process (Barrett 2007; Donovan, Larson, Stechsulte & Taft, 2002; Burke, 2005). The research based on Portfolio Assessment suggested that students would have an increase in motivation, a greater feeling of ownership of their work, and a better sense of self-awareness (Calfee & Perfumo, 1996; Burke, 2005).

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment was described as an ongoing process consisting of gathering and analyzing data to ascertain what a student was able to do. Evaluation was explained as being the process of interpreting the evidence of student learning (Burke, 2005). The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act made

teachers look at their assessment strategies and analyze what they felt worked best (Popham, 2008). When looking back at assessment strategies of past teachers, it was observed that there was a great need for teachers to use a number of different types of assessments in order to teach for understanding and not to just rely on the traditional standardized test that had one correct answer (Popham, 2008).

Donovan, Larson, Stechschulte & Taft, (2002) also agreed that standardized tests generally focused on one final answer instead of the actual learning process that was involved along the way. The findings suggested that, “Alternative assessments give students the opportunity and ability to judge their own work and to show the skills they are acquiring in school” (p. 31). Burke further stressed the importance of the learning process and that teachers needed to evaluate students’ learning using assessments that required students to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of key concepts, knowledge and skills, not just the final answer. The findings of Barnes and Bramley (2008) reported that students were more motivated to do better when completing types of assessments such as real world projects and activities in which they had some choice. (Barnes and Bramley).

Motivation to Succeed in School

Winke (2005) explained that a person was to be considered motivated when he or she had the desire to do something for him/herself. In the education field, many teachers have been faced with the problem of unmotivated students

(Winke, & Boekaerts, 2002). How could a teacher accurately evaluate students when a student was not motivated to demonstrate to the teacher what he/she knew? According to Marzano (2003), many different theories have since been developed as to what affects motivation the most. These included, the actions of the teachers, self-acceptance, self-worth, personal fulfillment and understanding. Phillips and Steinkamp agreed that many low-motivated learners lacked high self-esteem, did not have sufficient parental support, seemed to think there was no true purpose to their learning, and/or may not have had any control over or connection to their learning. The research suggested that key components of assessments and class activities needed to be addressed in order to impact motivation. First was the need to provide instructional programs that offered alternatives to traditional educational practices (Renchler, 1992). Second was goal-setting/ reflection activities (Burke, Renchler). Third was providing ways for students to gain ownership of their learning (Copeland, Davis, Foley, Morely & Nymun, 2001). Fourth was do-able but challenging activities (Burke, 2005). Finally, real-life, meaningful and relevant information and tasks were also suggested as a way to aid student motivation (Boeakakaerts, 2002).

Ways to Measure Motivation

Chapman (2003) stated there were seven recommended ways that effective teachers measured student motivation. Information reported directly from the students was the most common way to measure motivation. Other methods to

measure motivation were self-reports; which were questionnaires or surveys used to have students rate their cognitive engagement and checklists and rating scales; which were scales in which teachers assess their student's desires to participate. Topics such as attention and persistence as well as student's reactions to difficult tasks were rated. Another way motivation was measured was direct observation, which was when the observer took notes for a given amount of time. The teacher recorded whether a specific behavior that he was interested in was present. Work sample analyses; student projects, portfolios, performances, journals or logs, were measures suggested as ways to gain evidence of higher-order thinking skills. Focused case studies were said to be beneficial only when the focus was only on a small group of students within the class. This involved recording observations of interaction and engagement within the total context of the classroom.

One example of an authentic assessment used by educators was a student portfolio that contained evidence of student's thought process and growth over time (Popham, 2008; Burke, 2005). It was alleged to have a positive effect on motivation, specifically in the areas of reflection and self-evaluation (Barrett, 2002; Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, 1999). The research from the study done by Katula, Ray and Sherrill (1999) suggested that through the use of a student portfolio, teachers were able to observe a significant growth in student motivation. In order to reach this conclusion, the researchers implemented and then evaluated the use of a portfolio in one elementary and middle school. The

portfolio comprised students' reflections, peer and parent conferences, and parent and staff surveys.(Ray and Sherill, 1999).

Portfolios

A portfolio, explained as a way to tell a story of a student's educational journey, was recommended as an authentic assessment device that provided many benefits for both student and teacher (Burke, 2005). Critical components that were recognized consisted of reflections and artifacts that captured the learning process (Barrett, 2007). Portfolios also represented important contextualized learning that required complex thinking and expressed skills (Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, 1999). They encouraged teachers and schools to focus on important student outcomes, provided parents and community with creditable evidence of student achievement, and allowed students to reflect upon their learning process (Barrett, 2007; Donovan, Larson, Stechschulte & Taft 2002; Burke, 2005). Burke stated "The portfolio helps the classroom environment become a seamless web of instruction and assessment" (p. 58). There were two types of portfolios that seemed to be used the most. These were the showcase portfolio and the educational/growth portfolio.

A showcase portfolio was mostly used when one wanted to see a collection of a person's best work. Many professionals have used these to document the applicant's strengths (Barrett, 2007). The showcase portfolio might be used to

demonstrate end-of year accomplishments by containing the student's best, most important or favorite work to highlight student strengths for employment or admission into a university (Mueller, 2011). The showcase portfolio in an educational sense "may seem to be too fluffy and simply be seen as a "scrapbook of stuff" rather than a collection of evidence that the student met learning standards, district goal, or course objectives" (Burke, p. 63.)

An educational portfolio, characterized by student and teacher working together to help each other become aware the students' learning strategies, included reflections and discussions on work completed and goals (Courtney & Abodeeb, 1999). It was noted as being "a powerful tool for the enhancement of instruction and assessment addressing educators' concerns about authentic assessment, documentation of academic process, and teacher and student involvement" (Valencie & Calfe, 1991. p 333). Calfee & Perfumo (1996) stated that this type of portfolio encouraged teachers to evaluate the meaning and approach to their lessons (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993). According to Mueller (2011), educational portfolios showed growth or change over time, helped develop process skills such as self-evaluation and goal setting, and could be used to identify student strengths and weaknesses. Donovan, Larson, Stechschulte & Taft (2002) noted that "There were many advantages to portfolio assessment. For example, this type of assessment was more likely to motivate students to put forth their best effort and take pride in ownership" (Donovan, Larson, Stechschulte &

Taft, 2002, p. 24). Research by Biehler also suggested that if teachers use educational portfolio assessment appropriately, students could be more likely be more motivated to succeed. This was based on the fact that student motivation was affected by engaging lesson, hands on activity, student investigation, social interaction, usefulness, self-fulfillment and reflection (Biehler, 1997). Burke agreed that educational portfolios could be a motivating factor in students' learning (Burke, 2005).

The purpose of a study done by Schult (1998) was to determine how students viewed the portfolio assessment process. In a study of seventh grade students in a middle school science class, Schultz found that there was an improvement in the students' organization and overall academic performance. In another study on Portfolio Assessment done by (Ogan-Bekiroglu & Gunnay, 2008), participants were nine nine-grade high school students. The portfolio assessment lasted for eight-weeks in a physics course. They collected data in the form of written documents and interviews and then analyzed their students' perception on the benefits, enjoyable aspects and problems of portfolio assessment. Ogan-Bekiroglu and Gunnay concluded that their students' overall perception of portfolio assessment was positive and that portfolio assessment did not only address students' progress but also increased their overall learning

Contents and Process

The contents of a student portfolio reflected its purpose (Burke, 2005). Students put anything into their portfolios as long as it contributed to the purpose of telling the student's educational story (Paulson & Paulson, 1991 & Barrett 2007). The portfolio's contents needed to be more than just a thick folder that contains all of a student's work but instead, it needed to be personalized and a document of student's efforts and achievement (Seiter, 1995). The contents of the portfolio, sometimes known as artifacts, demonstrated how the student had taken the learned information, transferred the knowledge and demonstrated understanding with the ability to transfer this knowledge into other situations in life (Dovan, Larson, Steacchsulte & Taft, 2002).

The contents for a portfolio differed specifically within a foreign language class. Contents required in a portfolio assessment for a French 1 class demonstrated learning of each of the four-language skill areas including reading, writing, listening and speaking (<http://www.nclrc.org/portfolio>). Listening artifacts were difficult to represent; therefore, the National California Foreign Language Project suggested to take into account what students listened to, for how long, and what they learned from the listening experience and then had the student include something about his/her experience (<http://www.nclrc.org/portfolio>). The California Foreign Language Project agreed

that the use of a target language couldn't be captured through solely written means. Audiotapes and videotapes, used to capture oral language, needed to be included within the portfolio. Foreign language pedagogy suggested that technology increased the opportunities for students to practice communicating which benefited overall proficiency (Verkler, 1999). The National Capital Language Resource Center stated that "Portfolios can provide educators with a concrete performance measurement of what students can do in the language" (<http://www.nclrc.org/portfolio> Section 2.3, para. 2). The contents in the portfolio provided students with opportunities to show their work, were vehicles for reflection, and demonstrated a certain degree of mastery within the foreign language (California Foreign Language Project). Mueller (2011), suggested that the student and/or teacher included contents that demonstrated the student's best work, evidence of growth, evidence of achievement, evidence of standards met and a favorite/most important piece. Herbert (1998) suggested that teachers not get too focused on controlling all of the contents of the portfolio and believed it was important not to become rigid about what went into a portfolio. Herbert also discovered that the conversations that took place as portfolios were being completed gave students the security to suggest additional entries that are more personal or unique to their own school experience.

Three main steps were given for the process of creating a portfolio. The first was to collect all work into a working portfolio; the second was to select pieces

for the final portfolio; and the third was to reflect on the selections (Burke, 2005). Barrett expanded upon this process stating that the portfolio process allowed students to collect, select, reflect, project, and celebrate their work. This supported student learning by helping students in organizing their work, thinking about the thought process that went into completing their work, linking information from one lesson to another, and allowing students to collaborate with others about their accomplishments (2007). By engaging in these activities, students might see an increase in their motivation since motivation was believed to be affected by finding a purpose for their learning (Phillips and Steinkamp, 1995).

Selection of Contents for an Educational Portfolio

There were different ways to go about selecting pieces and determining who would choose each piece. Both the teachers and students needed to show evidence that the students met goals and understood basic concepts. Burke (2005) suggested that some pieces be student-selected while others be teacher-selected. Popham (2008) also agreed that students be involved in the selection process so that they had more ownership over their work. By giving students more ownership over their work, students became more aware of the time and effort put into its completion (Rea, 1991, as cited by Hall, Hewitt-Gervais, 1999). Mueller (2011) also agreed that allowing students to choose some pieces promoted

meaningful reflection. Mueller further suggested that peers collaborate, provided reflection, and did some of selection of contents too. Lockledge also agreed that students needed time to work in pairs or groups of three to help with reflection and overall organization of the contents (Lockledge, 1997). Parents also have chosen pieces they had found interesting, impressive and/or surprising. (Mueller, 2011). According to Katula, Ray and Sherrill (1995), the most important part of the selection process was the reflection that was done afterwards. By engaging in this reflection, the students created meaning of what was selected.

In a study by Hall and Hewitt-Gervais (1999) regarding the contents of their portfolios, teachers stated that seventy eight percent of the work included in the portfolio was mostly written with thirty-two percent of this written work pertaining to tests, quizzes, research projects/report. Twenty nine percent of the work were work-sheets. Twenty-four percent of the items included artwork. Sixteen percent was attitudinal information. Ten percent consisted of awards, photographs, computer discs and audio/video tapes.

Some students preferred to keep their portfolios purely academic in nature and choose not to decorate the outside while there are others that chose to be creative and make their portfolio more original (Lockledge, 1997). Lockage suggested that teachers encouraged students to demonstrate their individuality.

Student Reflection

Burke (2005) stated that student reflection was an important process in helping students to become empowered in their own learning. Reflection, considered to be the process of looking back on the work one has completed and asking oneself what, why and how the learning took place, was a process mentioned that might be beneficial to students and teachers. (Courtney & Abodeeb, 1999). According to Barrett (2007), "Portfolios support reflection that can help students understand their own learning and provide a richer picture of student work to document growth over time" (p. 1). Seiter (1995), reported in his research findings that there was a positive impact on increasing higher-order thinking when teachers implemented the reflection process. Reflection helped students become aware of the ways they learn. Reflection activities encouraged them to relive their learning experiences. They were asked to think about how they measure their progress, what they knew, what lessons they'd learned and which strategies seemed to work for them (Murphy, 1999). They noted how far they came from the beginning and then thought about where they could go next. Lockledge (1997) also agreed that when students learned to evaluate themselves they developed a sense of self-reliance and that their comments demonstrated the thinking process they used when completing assignments.

Burke (2005) suggested that writing prompts, otherwise known as stem questions, be used as an avenue used to initiate the reflection process when building a portfolio and might include such leading statements such as “This piece was my greatest challenge because...” (p. 66). Burke stated that many students “stare at their portfolio pieces and have no idea what to write” (p. 65). Burke suggested either to assign them a stem question or to allow them to pick one to complete. Mueller (2011) suggested the use of prompts and leading questions noting that questions for students to answer such as why the student chose a certain piece, what strengths and weaknesses does student observe in his/her work and/or what types of goals does he/she have. Lockledge also agreed that writing prompts aided in getting students to reflect (Lockledge, 1997).

In their study of fifth, seventh and eight grade students participating in a number of alternative assessments including portfolios and reflections, Donovan et al. (2002) reported that it seemed to be difficult for students to go into detail about their feelings. Courtney and Abodeeb (1999) agree with this idea noting that role-modeling helped students hear and experience a way to express themselves within their portfolio reflections using appropriate reflective language (Courtney and Abodeebb, 1999). Burke also agreed, noting that students cannot reflect appropriately without being taught how to do so. One possible reason for the difficulty students had when reflecting may be due to their past schooling experiences as stated by Lockledge, (1997). He explained “For older students

who have become grade conscious, it is even more difficult to sort and justify because too much of schooling has involved relying on other's judgment about the quality of one's work" (p. 4).

Benefits for the Teacher

Another advantage of using portfolio assessment was that the students were not the only ones to benefit. There were also many benefits to the teacher. For teachers, the benefit of gaining insight into their students' thinking process was a tool that could be used to help shape future instructions (Murphy, 1998). Portfolios engaged teachers by allowing them to take a closer look at a student's work, analyze what they see and then decide if they needed to make any changes to their teaching (Calfee & Perfumo/ Murphy and Camp, 1996). By using portfolios, teachers collaborated as to what they noticed as common patterns of learning going on in their classes that allowed them to be able to better meet the needs of their students. Because of this, teacher development had the ability to be an ongoing process (Calfee and Perfumo , 1999). Hall and Hewitt-Gervais (1999) stated that "The majority of interviewees reported that students portfolios had a positive effect on their teaching, specifically by serving to focus their teaching on areas of student need" (p. 20). This study also suggested that the information they gathered from their students' reflections and portfolio contents helped the teacher to examine the growth of their students and aided in marking and grading.

Barnes and Bramley (2008) discovered through listening and conferencing with students that they were able to find out what motivates and engages each student. This then allowed the teacher to make changes in teaching methods to better meet each student's needs and desires. Burke (2005) agreed and suggested that the final portfolio product was important; however, it was the process of creating the portfolio that was also important because the information gathered informed the teacher of how their students learned. Portfolio use brought instruction and assessment together because the teacher focused on the ongoing learning process of their students rather than an end of the unit assessment that separates learning, testing and teaching (Popham, 2008).

Conferences

In-class conferences used to discuss the process and the contents of the student's portfolio provided an opportunity for teachers to aid students in selecting pieces and reflecting on their work (Paulson & Paulson, 1991; Calfee and Perfumo 1996). By having the opportunity to tell their own stories, students took ownership of the activities and processes that led to their educational growth, thus making the experiences more meaningful (Mueller). Student-teacher conferences allowed the student to create meaning of what has been learned throughout the portfolio process as well as to take note of his/her successes (Burke, 2005; Katula, Ray & Sherrill, 1999). Assessment was no longer

something done *to* students; but instead, they got to play an active role through discussing their self-assessment (Mueller; Katula, Ray & Sherrill, 1999). Katula, Ray and Sherrill noted that “Current ideology suggests that having students involved and aware of this information will help them work through learning difficulties provided with an open line of positive communication with the teacher. (p. 33).

There are numerous ways to conduct a conference; however, Mueller (n.d) suggests that teachers may want to choose one of the following formats:

- ❖ a teacher might review a portfolio at one or more intervals, and then prepare questions for the face-to-face conversation with each student;
- ❖ a student might run the conference by taking the teacher through her portfolio, highlighting elements consistent with the purpose of the portfolio;
- ❖ a "pre-conference" might occur in which teacher and student discuss how the portfolio should be constructed to best showcase it or best prepare it for evaluation (Para. 7).

Portfolio conferences took a significant amount of time, but they are needed in assuring that the portfolio process had reached its full potential as an assessment tool (Popham, 2008). Popham suggested that we should “hold as many of these conferences as we can” and “in order to make the conferences time efficient, be sure to have students prepare for the conferences...” (p. 201). One report by a French 1 teacher stated that the conferences were very time consuming, so the teacher need to divided conferences into multiple days or request class coverage

or some type of assistance while conferencing (<http://www.nclrc.org/portfolio/1-1.html>).

Assessing the Portfolio

Calfee and Perfumo (1996) noted, “If student portfolios are to serve for assessment, then they must include judgments, whether in the form of grades, narrative comments, or measures (p. 23). Hayden agreed noting that there were many benefits to the process of creating portfolios, but that at some point in time a grade needed to be assigned (Hayden, 2010). For the educational/growth portfolio, some beneficial assessment tools consisted of a checklist, some sort of reflective essay, and/or a rubric. Popham (2008) also agreed that a rubric and/or checklist were useful when grading portfolios. A checklist was described as a list of criteria the student must have included in their assessment used to demonstrate the existence or nonexistence of these required pieces (Burke). A reflective essay entailed students writing about their current strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement (Hayden, 2010). A rubric was defined by Popham as “A scoring guide employed to evaluate the quality of a student’s responses to performance tests, a student’s portfolios or any other kind of student-generated response (Popham, 2008, p. 361). Mueller (2011) suggested that students be somehow involved with the assessment of the portfolios noting that they might feel as though they had more ownership over it.

A rubric set the standards and expectations for students that provided a tool for evaluation for teachers (Lockledge, 1997). Mueller (2011) recommended the use of rubrics because they provided some consistency and clarity to the grading process for both teachers and students. After they created the portfolio, students had the opportunity to objectively examine their work and focus on self-evaluation (Calfee and Perfumo, 1997). Students also could have viewed and asked questions about the rubric criteria before they began to prepare for their assessment as this provides a guideline for students to follow along the way (Burke, 2005). Wortham, Barbour, & Desjean-Perrotta (1998) stated that when students were able to view the rubric prior to completing the task, it provided them with guidance and a chance for self-assessment (Quinones, 2007, p. 15). Being involved with creating a rubric gave students a sense of control over their learning (Popham, 2008). Donovan, Larson, Stechsulte, & Taft (2002) also explained that students could be involved with creating the rubric; however, time needed be devoted to teaching them the appropriate way to do so (Donovan, Larson, Stechsulte, & Taft, 2002).

Hayden (2010) stated, “The final portfolio should be assessed with a rubric. Criteria for a rubric could be the following: all required items included, content/details, use of writing conventions, creativity neatness, organization, use of transitions, voice “ (p.3). Verbal descriptors for each of the numerical values decided by the teacher were included in the criteria. (Burke, 2005). In order for a

portfolio assessment to be effective, a well-developed rubric designed with criteria that are explicit and identifiable were a necessity (Barrett, 2007). When creating this rubric, Popham (2008) also suggested to make sure that the skills being assessed were truly important; that there was a clear and concise evaluative criteria, not an overabundant of criteria as this can confuse the learner; the label given to each column clearly matched the criteria listed; and the length of the rubric was suited to the needs of the teacher. Popham stated that by designing these well thought out rubrics, the teacher instructed his/her students better throughout the learning process. When implementing a portfolio assessment in a research study on using various alternative assessments, Donovan, Larson, Stechschulte, & Taft (2002) noted that the building and implementation of rubrics provided a reflection of the teachers' and students' ideas which was a powerful teaching tool.

Some Concerns with Portfolio Assessment

One component of a portfolio was the reflection piece written by students. Popham explained that these student-constructed responses were generally difficult to evaluate. (Popham, 2008). Another thing to consider before implementing a portfolio assessment was the significant amount of time it took to conduct it appropriately (Popham, 2008; Donovan, Larson, Stechschulte, & Taft, 2002). In-class conferences needed to be well-planned and contributed to the

increase amount of class time devoted to portfolio assessment.

(<http://www.nclrc.org/portfolio/1-1.html>). As stated by Popham, (2008)

“Proponents of portfolios are convinced the quality of portfolio assessment is with the time such assessment takes” (p. 207).

Conclusion

Portfolios actively involved the students in their education by allowing them to collect and organize their thoughts and work completed throughout the course in order to tell their educational story. Reflecting on their work and conferencing with the teacher allowed students to develop and improve upon thinking skills. Students took these skills with them and continued to have opportunities to use them for the rest of their lives. Assessing the portfolio and analyzing students’ reflections provided much insight to teachers. This allowed for them to improve on their teaching by adapting and changing new lessons based on their students’ needs. As Seitzer (1995) stated, “Portfolio assessment is not the panacea for educational reform but with additional research it may provide educators with another valuable tool for higher student achievement” (p. 23).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Goals

Lack of student motivation and self-awareness has been one of the top concerns and challenges faced by myself and my peers when teaching high school students. For this reason, I decided to try a new approach in my teaching to hopefully have students improve in these two areas. I chose to use portfolios and all of the elements that go into creating one to answer my research question, which is; “What are the observed behaviors and experiences of students who demonstrate low motivation and/or lack of self awareness when they are asked to construct a portfolio? I first identified my low motivated students, then I introduced the entire class to the process of portfolio assessments. Then once students understood the process they wrote their first reflective piece, which was to identify their goals and possible outcomes for this long-term assignment (Appendix C).

Setting

The site in which the study took place was in an urban area in the Northeast portion of the United States. There were an estimated 2000 students attending this high school in grades nine through twelve. The school had a diverse population. One of the things that occurred in my foreign language classes

was that there was a mix of ages from 14-17 and abilities from honor students to students who need in class support. The class met every other day for 90 minutes.

Participants

There were 19 students in this block-one Spanish class. Students were ages 14-17. All students participated in the interventions, but the data included in this study only pertained to the students who have returned a signed, parental consent form. There were two students with Individual Education Plans and one student who was 17 as a sophomore.

Procedure

The first step in the research process was to submit an application to the Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSRIB). The board reviewed my application to ensure the study was to be conducted in an ethical manner and to provide adequate measures to protect my students. While only the students who had a signed consent form were included within this study, all students who were in my class participated in the portfolio process. Portfolio assessment strategies provided a structure for in-depth assignments. They have been known to transfer much of the responsibility from the teacher to the student (Barrett 2007). They also have helped students learn to reflect on their own learning process (Seiter, D. 1995).

The first day of class I gathered data about the students' motivational level (See Appendix A). The survey consisted of questions asking them about

situations dealing with study habits, desire to learn, grades and self-awareness. After I collected the survey, students were asked what they thought a portfolio was and how it might be used in our class. I then discussed with them what a portfolio really was, reasons that one might choose to keep a portfolio and how they would go about the process on our class. I gave them a letter that clearly identified the goals, process, and instruments to be included (See Appendix B). Students wrote their answers to the first prompt and then put the document in their portfolio (Appendix C). As they continued to write, they revisited and read over their work as we added new reflections to it. They put all class-work, tests and quizzes in their class binder to use a holding place for possible portfolio pieces. As the classes progressed, they completed more of the prompts, and they transferred work related to their reflections into their portfolio. As student wrote writing their prompts, I collected data in my field log from conversations that I heard or took part in.

We also had a portfolio conference when I had one one-one conversations about the contents of their portfolios. During these conferences, the students and I had the chance to view the materials and reflections in the portfolio together, which led to insights that I also included in my field log. I tailored my conversations to individual needs and my concerns for each student. I also used this time to get answers to some of the questions I had after writing my reflections in my field log.

Trustworthiness Statement

I made sure that I was being an ethical researcher. I needed to ensure that the people involved in my study are all willing participants. Without their approval, I could not use the data collected as a means for analysis. I knew I needed to clearly inform my potential participants of the details of my study, including all of the ways I was going to keep real names anonymous by creating pseudonyms for each of the participants. I created a consent form for my principal (Appendix G) and for my students and their parents or guardians (Appendix I).

I sat down with my principal and explained my study to him. Once I had his consent, I had a conversation with my students about my plans for the study and allowed them to ask me any questions that they had. I assured students and parents, (by way of the consent letter students took home) that my main focus throughout the study was to always focus on student achievement and the best means to help them learn the content. I also made sure that the parents and students knew that whether they consented to be a part of this study or not, no one would be treated differently. I also informed students that as my study progressed, they always had the option to withdraw from this research study without any penalty. I included my email and phone number for parents to reach me with any concerns. To make sure that students knew that my data would be secured at all times, I explained that all information relevant to my study would

be placed in a locked cabinet in my room at school or in a locked drawer in my home. I also reminded them that my computer is guarded by a secure password.

During my graduate studies, I was advised that it is always important to take into consideration multiple views that I might have prior to my study.

Recognizing that certain views might have existed for me before my study allowed me to be a superior, honest and more objective, researcher. The first view I had was that because some of these students were in a Spanish 1 classroom and they were already sophomores that for some reason or another they were not as advanced as the ones who get assigned a foreign language as a freshman. I guess I assumed this because if a student failed Spanish 1 as a Freshman then he/she would be reassigned to it as a sophomore or possibly because if the student didn't get it as a freshman it is likely that he/she had to take another "core" class due to failing grades. I needed to change this way of thinking once I discovered that there was at least 1 student in my class that was a sophomore and in Spanish 1 because she switched languages from French to Spanish at the end of her Freshman year. I also found out that there were students who requested Spanish 1 last year, but the guidance counselor could not "fit" it into their schedule.

A second view I had was that all students would appreciate and be excited about the effort I was putting into helping them create a portfolio when in reality my research findings might show that I have some students who actually resent me for making them do more work. I also might have individuals who are not

interested in getting to know themselves better within their role as a student. I might also need to consider the notion that the reflection process may be extremely difficult for them, and I might need to provide examples and scaffold some reflection activities. I would make these unexpected findings beneficial to my study because they might provide me with even more opportunities to try and increase student motivation using different methods. They might also provide me with useful information that I could use to understand some of issues my students were having with learning Spanish.

In order to make sure I was getting a clear picture of how my study was progressing, I collected data from several sources including surveys, interviews, a field log and student work. The reason I gathered so many forms of data was to attempt triangulation, which showed that the data I had collected were valid and essential to my study.

Hendricks (2006) discussed the three methods of data collection that could be used during research studies – artifacts, observational data, and inquiry data. Artifacts could be “various types of student work and other items created by participants” (p. 73). In addition, Hendricks (2006) stated, “There are many forms of observational data, including field notes, checklists, and photographs. Inquiry data are collected to elicit opinions, attitudes, and other types of feedback from participants. Surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups are typically used for collecting inquiry data” (p. 73).

The first source of data collected was work completed by students. I used a first-day survey and a motivation survey. I administered this survey (See Appendix A) within the first week of the study to evaluate their motivational level and their level of self-awareness. The questions specifically referred to their feelings about their academic performance as a whole, motivation, self-regulation and past experiences with a foreign language. Another source of my data collection was in the form of the tags/prompts completed by students and work collected for their portfolio (Appendix C). I read each response carefully and took notes on some of the common themes that I noted throughout their reflections in my field log. This allowed me to further identify how specific students might be motivated to succeed as well as other issues that could affect their performance.

The second source of data collection was my own observations and reflections in the form of a two-column field log. This field log contained notes based on what I observed in class. I took notes for a period of each class. On the right side of my field log I wrote my reflections about the data gathered.

The third source of data was student conferencing. I used the notes/ data collected from these conferences to gain an understanding of students' thoughts on the portfolio process. I had hoped that these conferences would allow me to become closer with students and show them that I had a sincere interest in their

learning. I discussed some of their artifacts and reflections, chosen by myself and the students, and allowed them to speak freely about their work.

As a final source of data, students filled out a questionnaire that asked them a number of questions about the portfolio process. This let me know if and how my students benefited in any way by participating in the portfolio process.

Data analysis

I analyzed these sources of data at different points in time throughout my study to help me to create my researchers “story”; i.e., I examined the consistency found among the different data sources. I organized my codes into bins, and then I generated common themes that I noted throughout my field log. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define this process as, “Systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field-notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings. Analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (p. 147).

MY STORY

My story began when I found out about a week before school that I did not have my Spanish 1 students every day for a semester but instead every other day for the year. I was worried if I would have enough time to collect the data that I needed in order to support my study on Portfolio Assessment. I decided that I would need to make a few minor changes in my study, but that it would still be enough time. I also decided that I could only worry about the things I could control and the fact that I now had this class every other day was not one of those things.

The first day of the school year was accompanied with the normal nervous-yet-excited feelings that I get every year despite being a teacher for fourteen years. Every year brings on a new set of students with different personalities and educational needs. I didn't waste any time starting my study. As soon as I went through the ritual of seating charts, information sheets and book distribution, I handed out a paper explaining the portfolio assessment assignment for the year. I tried to initiate a discussion about portfolios but was completely unsuccessful! No one seemed to care or have anything to contribute. I tried asking questions as to whether they had done this before, and they stared at me. There they sat, staring, what a great start to my thesis study! Finally, one student raised their hand and said, *I think I made a portfolio in like 3rd grade*. Well, at least this

was something. I then asked if she enjoyed the process and she said, *Miss, I don't remember*. I handed out my parental consent form and asked them to please get it signed and hand it back to me. I talked about my study and thought I sounded pretty impressive, intelligent and hardworking considering I was a mother of triplets, a full time teacher, and a graduate student writing her thesis. Apparently this did not matter to them as they stared at me with blank faces and put their handout in their backpacks at the end of class. A successful first day, I really didn't think so, but I guess it could have been worse. At least no one was opposed to doing the assignment.

Who are these kids?

I went home that evening and could not wait to look over the information sheets that had been filled out by my students that day. I found out that I had three students who had failed Spanish One the past year and were retaking the course to try and get credit. One student seemed to be above level, and I wondered if she should have been put in an upper level course. The majority of my class did not participate in after school activities. No one had a job yet either. One in particular, Steph, seemed to be really excited to learn Spanish.

The First Survey

I had decided that since I did not get much feedback or conversation out of my first class that I really needed to get to know them better. I was excited to give them the survey I had created to find out about their perceived motivation and self-awareness. I started class by collecting my permission slips. I was pleasantly surprised by how many I got back the first day. Maybe they really were listening to me the other day! I then gave them the survey and told them it was a way for me to get to know them better and help them learn. Once again, they took the survey, handed it in and said absolutely nothing. No comments were made whatsoever, and I was standing there with my field not with nothing to write but “no comments”. I went through the lesson and waited anxiously for someone to say something, anything, to either me or the person sitting next to him/her. I ended up with nothing except a few of them saying goodbye to me at the end. I have NEVER had a class that had been so quiet. Of course, this had to happen at the most inopportune time when I actually WANTED them to have conversations. I was getting worried.

Maybe the Survey Will Help

Once again, I went home that night and anxiously opened my folder to read the surveys from my students. I found out the following information, ten out of the twelve students have plans on going to college, eleven felt that high school

education was important, five felt that they somewhat pay attention in class, four agreed that they were self-motivated to succeed in school while five somewhat agreed and three disagreed with this same statement. I also learned that half of the students do not take time to look over their tests when they get them back to make sure they do not make the same mistakes again, and five of the students felt that sometimes they would not succeed at anything they did.

After looking over my surveys and gathering data, I knew that I had a very mixed group of students in class and that the portfolio might be a way that some students who normally do not look over work would be able to do so. I also thought that maybe some of the reflections they would write for me would enlighten me as well as themselves as to why they answered the survey questions as they did. I was beginning to get excited again about the portfolio. I started thinking about all of the benefits I had read about from my literature review. I only hoped that they would become more talkative.

The First Portfolio Piece and Portfolio Cover

I had planned to have students create a cover for the portfolio, discuss how to write a reflection, create a table of contents page, and then write a course goals paragraph to place as the first page in their portfolio. As I spoke about the reflection process I, once again, got just blank stares. I tried to explain to them how I used reflection as a way to improve on my teaching. I moved on to the idea

of decorating their portfolio and thought that some would be excited to be able to put their own personal touch to his/her work. I had asked, at the end of last class, that they bring some photos or magazine cutouts that they could use on the cover to personalize it. Karissa said, *Miss, can I bring this home to decorate it?* I had to think about it for a minute, as I was not prepared to answer this question. I decided to say, “Sure, if you want to bring it home that is fine but just make sure you bring it back next class.” Based on past experience of students not bringing things back from home, I decided not to push the idea of bringing it home to decorate. Luckily, she brought it back but unfortunately Lisa did not. I should have gone with my gut instinct on this one.

Chris scribbled his name in pencil on the front of a black binder. Bob just sat there staring at the black binder. Jake forgot his binder and told me that he might need help getting one. I didn't hesitate to get one from my closet and give it to him. Rachel brought so many pictures to put on her cover. I was happy to see at least one person interested in this. I then looked around and saw four other students reach in their backpack and take out pictures too. I wondered if they were embarrassed to take out their pictures at first. Brandon said, *Hey, I really don't have any pictures at home.* I wondered why but suggested that he cut some things out of a magazine then. He replied, *Don't have that either.* I asked him why not and he said, *Well, I live with my grandma and she is old. We really don't have magazines and my mom has my pictures, but I don't see her too often.* This

made me sad, and I knew I would have to give him some extra attention throughout the year. Jermel seemed to be a polite, athletic and respectful boy. I would have never guessed he had any family issues. Brandon was not in class for this lesson, and I knew I would have to make sure he did not fall behind. I was excited to assign and read the responses to the writing prompts since I had gotten to know a few students better.

Responses to Writing Prompt

Students wrote a heading for soon to be table of contents. I assigned the writing prompt dealing with course goals and expectation. The first question on the prompt was ***What kind of work would you like to include in the portfolio and why?***

Brooke *I would like to include probably my tests and quizzes to see the way I progressed or where I had my downfalls.*

Chris- *Don't know.* Alexis wrote *Reports, essays, projects b/c I want to know how I did this year.*

Jermel -*No answer*

Brandon- *Learning how to make the portfolio.*

Jake- *Easy work so we can pass and be happy.*

Scott -*Stuff that show me I passed.*

Josh- *I would like to learn to sing songs from the Phantom of the Opera in Spanish because I've listened to it and it sounds awesome. I would love to learn how that is said.*

These responses made me think about a few things. I wondered whether Josh had a different idea of a portfolio than what I did. I was interested in seeing if they would be able to say that they saw the benefits of the portfolio at the end of the study that they mentioned here. I also was curious why Jermel didn't write anything at all.

The next question was, ***What do you hope to learn about yourself by doing the reflections of the work?***

Brooke- *Nothing really, maybe just to see struggles,*

Chris- *To see how I improve. (Not really)*

Alexis- *How I can be good in the class, Like the language.*

Jermel- *How I can learn and find out what other stuff I like.*

Brandon- *Being more organized*

Jake- *I hope to learn that I passed*

Josh- *I hope to learn that I can indeed learn another language and pass it through.*

Katlyn- *I would like to learn how I can do better and what I did to get a certain good grade*

I was intrigued by what I read and wanted to know what they felt was going to be the biggest challenge for them when we put this portfolio together. My thinking was that if I knew what they thought would be challenging ahead of time then maybe I could add something to my teaching beforehand to make the process more enjoyable.

The next question was, *What do you feel are going to be the biggest challenges for you when creating this portfolio?*

Brooke- *I don't think it is going to be much of a challenge.*

Jermel- *Keeping it organized*

Alexis- *Probably the organizing. I am not very organized.*

Chris - *No answer at all!*

Brandon- *Putting papers in order*

Jake- *Putting papers together because papers are hard to keep track of.*

Josh- *I find it is learning materials and organizing it.*

Katlyn- *I think the biggest challenge for me will be putting the bad grades or papers in the portfolio*

There was clearly a concern with organization, so I now knew I would have to have a discussion about this in an upcoming class before continuing. Katlyn had made it clear to me that she really does not want to look at her bad grades and that she would rather be making a showcase portfolio.

My next question dealt with areas of concern about the portfolio process. The question was, “*Provide me with any other feelings that you may have about the portfolio. Explain to me why you did not have any concerns if that were the case.*”

Brooke- *I don't have concerns. It is only a portfolio. I don't care too much to be honest.*

Chris- No answer **AGAIN**

Alexis- *No concerns*

Jermel- *Just to know what we are going to be putting in the portfolio*

Brandon- *Organization and the final reflection. I'm not good at being organized.*

Jake-*No concerns*

Josh- *I have no concerns because I feel it will help me succeed in Spanish.*

Katlyn- *I don't have any concerns about creating this portfolio because I think it is a good idea. I think it will be good for me to look back on my work, good and bad.*

I was starting to get the idea that Brooke either didn't care about this assignment or that she was an overall negative person. I knew I had to get to know her better. I also thought that maybe Chris might need to be “prodded” more by me in order for me to get a better understanding of why he chose to not write more than a few words for each question. I would need to pay special attention to Jermel and Brandon in the area of organization because they wrote

about it twice. I was surprised to read Katlyn's response to my last question because I had the impression that she did not want to see any bad work in her portfolio. Maybe she was in the middle and knew it would help her but really didn't want to be reminded of any bad grades. I was glad that I gave this survey because I knew where to start. I would say I first needed to look how they kept themselves organized. I also knew I had to discuss the benefits of doing reflections more. I was becoming excited to get to know them all better and proceed with my study.

Organization

I walked in the class ready to give them the best speech ever on organization and why it was important. Then I thought about how I had always tried to be organized but in actuality I was not a great success. I decided to let them in on how not being organized could/had affected me. I said, "After reading some of your responses to your questions about the portfolio, I get the feeling that many of you may need some help with being organized." For the first time this year I heard at least half of them laugh and then say, *yeah*. I asked the class what methods they use to keep organized and then shared with them the fact that if I didn't have my color-coded folders for each class then they would never get the correct grades because I would lose their papers. I told them that it is the worst feeling for a teacher to be searching in front of the class for handouts or papers to

return to students. Karissa said, *I am just really organized, I put my papers away right away in my binder.* Jermel said, *I am a mess but am trying to get better.* Jake just sat there and laughed. I said, “I think that Karissa has a great idea.” “Let’s start trying to be better organized by making a conscious effort to date the papers I give you and put them in your binder right away.” Chris stared at me blankly as if he wasn’t even listening. I asked him if he was organized, and he said in a short, almost annoyed tone, *nope.* I then asked him if he wanted to improve his organization, and he responded, *Uh, I don’t know.* I said, “Well maybe we can work on it.” *Uh, whatever,* he replied quietly with a slight smile. He was very hard to read. The first words that came to mind when describing him to myself were shy, lazy and unfriendly and possibly insecure.

Past Teachers

During the days in between classes, I had spoken to one of my colleagues who asked me about some of my students. She informed me that Mark, Lisa and Scott had all failed Spanish 1 last year and then explained to me what she thought the problem was for each of them. I was told that Chris was lazy; Lisa was lazy and never really did her work. Scott was really lazy. I also found out that Scott has people in his immediate family who are fluent in Spanish. Even though I knew that they were repeating the course because I read their information sheet, I now had an idea as to the fact that I may need to really work

on their motivation. Maybe these would be the students that most benefit from the reflection writings!

Teacher Selected Writing Prompt- Why do you feel learning a foreign language is or is not important?

I wanted to find out their opinion on learning Spanish. I thought that this would give me a better understanding their feelings about the upcoming course. I would be lying if I said that I had some preconceived ideas about who would tell me that they thought it was stupid.

Chris smiled, smirked, stared; I really don't know what to call it, and then started writing. He wrote, *I think learning another language is pointless. 99% of the time I won't use it or I will forget. I don't know anyone who I would actually talk Spanish to and this is America, English is the main language.* Could this maybe have been the "Unfriendly Chris" answering this question? Well, I now knew that I had the extra challenge of trying to make Chris see the value in learning a foreign language. He made it quite clear that he sees no point in being in my class.

Brooke started writing immediately and her response was very interesting. She wrote, *As much as I don't want to learn another language it is very important that I do. I think to know Spanish with all the Spanish speaking countries and people, it will help me in life. I can get a better job knowing another language and if I*

were to travel to a Spanish country, in which I plan to one day, I will have the knowledge of a language and I won't have to look like another tourist.

I thought about how I maybe had the wrong picture about Brooke. Maybe she really did care, just not about school in general. I was happy that she had stated her plans to travel abroad. I would need to keep her interest in this.

Katlyn- *I think it is good because we will be compared to other countries so our country stays strong.*

Jake wrote, *I think it's important because if you live in another country than the USA then you need to know the language. It is also important because you need another language for college.*

Jermel wrote, Yes I do think that having two languages is important. People that know two languages are always fit to get a job cause one day you might get a customer or boss that speaks another language.

Reflection of Current Grade

My goal for having my class write a reflection about their current grade average was to see how they viewed their progress. I asked them to write how they felt about the grade they achieved so far and why their average resulted in the number it did.

Scott– His average was a 74 percent. Scott wrote, *I need to bring up my work ethic..especially homework.* I think that this made me realize that at least Scott saw himself as I did. I would have given him the same advice about his average

especially since this is his second year taking Spanish 1. I thought to myself that I needed to find a way to help Scott improve.

Jermel's average was a 69 and he wrote, *My grade is this because I do not study and do not take the time out to do my homework. I don't take the time to learn and practice. I need to do these things.* I was sad but happy at the same time about this reflection. I was happy that he was able to reflect and admit what he does not do in order to succeed. I was sad though because if he is self-aware then why isn't he trying to improve? I thought about how I needed to have more conversations with him to try and find this information out.

Alexis's grade was a 95 and she responded to the prompt by writing, *I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. I am paying attention because I never took a Spanish class at all. I guess I could maybe raise my grade a little or leave it.*

Jake, whose grade I recorded as a 60 at this time, left the space empty. He didn't write anything! I was upset at this because his reflection was one of the ones I really wanted to read. I had to find another way to get some answers from him.

Josh wrote, *Could have done better on the quizzes. I am going to study more and get into the B or A- range. I should be able to get a B+ If not, I am going to improve on tests/quizzes and I should be ok.* Josh seemed to think that he could do a better job studying, but what surprised me is how he seems to say that he thinks he can get between a B and A- but that he should be ok with a B+. It was as

though he was trying to make sure that he didn't set his goals too high for himself and he was letting himself know that as long as he improved on test and quizzes then he would be satisfied.

Chris had a 94 and said that he would *just keep doing work to maintain grade*. I didn't know if this work he mentioned included studying too. After all, he did take the class last year. Has he decided that the reason he failed was lack of the completion of assignments and now all he has to do to do well is do them?

Rachel's grade was a 73 and she wrote, *I didn't study hard for first 2 quizzes It takes me longer to learn than others*. Rachel's reflection let me know that she was aware of time it takes her to learn. By her mentioning that she didn't study enough, I thought that maybe she will do better on her future tests. We were only half way through the marking period.

Brandon's grade was an 80. All he wrote was, *I was absent. I want to see if I can do better but am also happy about grade*. Brandon's reflection included what I thought was a major issue with his grade. As I stated before, we were only half way through the marking period and he already had missed 5 days. I guess considering the fact that he missed all of those days, that fact that he was doing so well was a good thing.

As they were reflecting about their grades, I listened intently to the conversations they were having with one another. The problem, once again, was that not much conversation was going on at all. Chris was just sitting there, and

he wasn't doing anything at all. Justice came to work with Chris and she said, *Are you going to do anything?* He said "yeah" and smiled/smirked. Once again I thought to myself "Was he being Insecure, Lazy, Shy or Unfriendly Chris?" Once Justice sat next to him, he started writing. I guess he was just being "Lazy Chris" Josh and Lisa were working well and Josh would say to Jenna, *Come on you need to do this.* Every so often Lisa would laugh. Jake and Jermel worked well, but they were behind the rest of the class. Their papers were all over the place and I tried to help them get organized while they were writing their reflections. Wow! They were actually motivating each other! I would defiantly need to gather more data on how often my students help each other.

Class Presentations of Weather Report and Reflections of Assignment

For this particular class ,I had students present their presentations on the weather reports that they had been working on. I gave them a few minutes to gather their information and rehearse at the beginning of class. Justice and Chris had planned to use a PowerPoint. When I first asked his group to go he said, *I don't want to.* When I gave my usual "come on" encouragement and smile, he once again smiled/smirked. I must explain, I call it a smile but it is more of a happy but yet shady smirk. He continued to keep me guessing as to what that expression really meant. Chris spoke quietly but correctly and he did the assignments as it was to be done. Maybe I was observing the "Shy/Insecure

Chris.” His partner, Justice expressed (before the presentation) to him that she thought he was immature. As they were setting up, Justice also joked that he wasn’t to touch anything because he would mess it up. Once again, the smirk appeared. I learned a lot about both Chris and Justice during this class. I learned that they were friends, but Justice seemed to know Chris’s lazy and irresponsible side. I was intrigued by their relationship.

Brandon was absent so he and Brooke could not present. Brooke expressed concern about him being absent by saying, *He is always absent and we will never get to go*. I could tell that she said these words in a matter of fact way. I was thinking the same thing at the time but assured her he would come next class.

Jermel and Jake presented a PowerPoint. Before presenting, Jermel stated, *I hate being in front of people and presenting*. Jake nodded and said, *Me neither*. I encouraged them and told them to not worry so much. Their comments made me realize that they might not be too confident in themselves.

As another piece of their portfolio, I had them do a reflection on the project. I asked them to explain the project, so when they went back and read it, they would remember what it was. I asked them to write about, what type of presentation they did, how well they thought they did, what could they have done differently, and give me an opinion on the project as to how it may it might have helped them learn the information. The class sat down to write and I could hear Chris saying, *I thought it was dumb*. Justice said, *You are dumb, you never like anything*. Rachel

said, *I was nervous but I think it helped me* to Katlyn next to her. Katlyn agreed. Bob sat there and stared at me with a blank face. I said, “What’s wrong?” He responded, *Nothing*. I said, “Why aren’t you writing?” He replied, *I don’t know what to write*. I helped Bob get started by asking him the prompts out loud. He then seemed to be able to write his reflection. Jake also sat there staring at the questions. I also prompted him to begin writing. As I looked around, I counted six students simply staring at their papers. I offered advice as to how I would have answered the questions if I were a student. I thought about some of the concerns mentioned at the beginning of the project. Some stated that they might have issues reflecting. This class was to be remembered as a good example of this occurring. It was clear that my students hadn’t had much practice with writing opinions that do not have one correct answer. They filed their papers in their portfolio binder and updated the table of contents. At this time I noticed the same people, Jake and Jermel, having their papers all over the place. I helped them organize their binders and update the table of contents.

I was ready to read what they finally ended up writing. Chris wrote down exactly what he said for what he thought about the project *except* he provided me with insight as to why he thought it was dumb. He wrote, *Thought it was dumb, I don’t like presentations*. I pondered as to whether or not he thought my idea of having them do a weather project was dumb or if the fact that it was a presentation made him not like it. I thought more about Chris and I connected the

fact that he often plays the “cool guy” with his shady smirks so maybe him being on display in front of the class, doing a presentation with a partner might shatter his “image”. Was the “Insecure Chris” the one who wrote this reflection, I pondered.

The majority of the class wrote about their pronunciation as an area of concern. Jake wrote that he needed to work on his confidence. I was really happy to read that 8 out of 12 of them wrote that the weather project was a good idea and that it helped them learn the material. Karissa wrote, *I feel this shows me that I can learn and have fun at the same time*. I was happy that Karissa felt this way and was pleased that the students’ overall opinions of the project were positive.

Class observation and Students Complete Tag Question of Choice

I started class with a conversation with Chris to try and figure him out. I asked him why he did not go to the pep rally the other day because I saw him get escorted to a silent study hall. His reply was *I hate pep-rallies. I hate everyone*. I said “wow, everyone?” “Even your friends?” *I don’t have friends”, he said with a smile*. Even though I thought this would have been an opportune time to get more information out of “Unfriendly, Insecure Chris”, I realized that I had an a lesson to conduct. Besides, I could tell that he was in no mood to open up.

Tag question of their choice

During this activity for the portfolio, they had to pick a tag question of their choice and answer it. I had them pick up their test folder from the bin and also

used the contents of their class binder to have them see all of the “pieces” they could write about. Jake had NO IDEA what we were doing nor where his papers were. He was completely unorganized. It was almost comical which I felt terrible about feeling, but the class, as well as Jake, seemed to think it was funny that he was such a mess. Chris wrote one sentence and called it a day. “Lazy Chris” just sat there and stared at the rest of the class, emotionless as usual. Rachel was very focused while writing as though she was in her own world, ignoring all that was going on around her. Jermel was rustling through papers and was not organized. He had everything shoved in his binder. Brandon also was in complete disarray. He had papers all over and he had no idea what he was supposed to be looking at. He said, Man, I am absent too much. He didn’t even have the tag questions that were to be part of his portfolio! Oh my, I thought, how am I supposed to be gathering information on their reflections if I can’t even get them to be organized enough to find their work?

Bob said he needed a binder for his class-work and that he just kept forgetting to get it. It is now the fourth week of school. What was he waiting for, I thought to myself. Now that I knew I continued to have a problem with organization, I was intent on helping these students improve and at least be able to locate their work to use for the portfolio.

Responses to Prompts of Choice

Once the class was organized, they started to write. Rachel chose to do the prompt called “**What I learned.**” She wrote, *I learned I need to be confident when giving presentations and make sure that I rehearse my lines. Confidence is something I need to improve on.* I thought that it was such a great thing at her age to know that confidence is something that can be improved.

Alexis picked the “**Proud of**” prompt and wrote, *I am proud of my grade because I never thought I would get a good grade in Spanish. I thought it would always be hard for me to learn a foreign language.* This made me happy because I never knew that Alexis had been apprehensive about learning Spanish. Now that I was aware of this I could make sure I praise her and encourage her good work.

Katlyn chose the “**I wish**” prompt and wrote, *I wish I had studied more for my lines of my presentation so that I would make less mistakes when speaking.* I heard her say, *I do not like making mistakes* while writing her reflection. Her statement is consistent with what I have been learning about her. She was the one student who didn’t want to put anything bad in her portfolio. I was starting to think she was a perfectionist.

Brandon chose the “**What I learned**” prompt and wrote, *I learned that I am so unorganized and I need to be organized soon or I am in trouble.* I agreed with

this statement but wondered how much effort he would be willing to put forth to try and change his organizational skills.

Chris wrote about the “**My goal**” prompt and briefly scribbled down, *My goal is to do well and study hard*. I asked if he could write more and he said, *Nope, that’s all I have to say*. I was definitely seeing the “Lazy Chris” again.

Jermel chose the “**Proud of**” prompt and wrote, *I am proud of my last test. I am starting to learn more words and take time to study I am proud I went from an F to a C*. Jermel’s last test showed him how it feels to succeed in something. I hoped he would continue to improve.

Jake was completely unorganized and **never got it done**. I tried to help him organize his binder. He took so many papers out of his book-bag. The papers were from other classes too. He was completely quiet and shy the entire time but accepted my help.

Lisa

While the class was working, Lisa and I had a discussion. I was intrigued by the fact that she never says, or writes much and never brought back her portfolio after bringing it home to decorate. She has been keeping her stuff in a folder I gave her. I said, “How are you doing this year in comparison to last year in Spanish?” She said, *I am doing better this year because my friends are not in the class and I am not socializing as much*. I now had an answer to why she was so quiet in class. There is **such power** to a simple conversation with students.

Chris

As I mentioned, Chris is either shy, lazy, insecure, unfriendly, or a combination of them all. I noticed that the different “faces” of Chris showed depending on what activity we were doing. I had planned an in-class interview based on things Chris wrote and the lack of his interaction and conversation (his short answers with a smile) to everything so I was so intrigued as to what makes him “tick”. I often thought of him as not being motivated because of his lack of responses to prompts and lack of enthusiasm; however, he had me wondering if he really is more motivated than it appears but just wants to look cool. I took advantage of some free time in my classes to engage in a conversation. I said, “So, Chris, you are a real mystery to me, and I really am curious as to what you are all about. One of the girls, Justice, next to him overheard me and said. *Miss, he is shady and immature. He drives me nuts and has been driving me nuts since 7th grade. No-one knows what he is thinking.* I sat down next to him and asked what friends he hung out with, trying to get to know him by who he associated with. At first he said, *No-one*, but then he said a name of someone I knew. This gave me NO insight because this student was just as hard to read as he was! I then asked him where he goes after school. He said with a smirk (again) *home*. I asked, “Are you playing baseball this year?” He said, *I might not because next year I will have a car and it will be easier.* Ok, I still wasn’t getting the answers I wanted. Maybe there were no answers. Maybe what you get is what you see with

him. I was not satisfied. I asked him where he lives to get an idea of family background (income issues?). He did not seem to have any income issues and he lives in a nice area. There was an awkward pause as though he had been down this road of someone trying to get to know him once or twice before. Well, I thought to myself defeated, at least I could say that he is definitely protective of himself and does not really care to let me know what he is all about. I guess I felt some comfort hearing that his friend called him “shady”. At least his behavior was consistent and it wasn’t just directed at me. I still found there to be much benefit in showing him that I was interested and willing to have a conversation with him.

Organization and Test Reflections

I gave them time to organize their notebooks as I had noted that it continued to be a problem for quite a few of them. I had people who were organized work with people that seemed to need some help. I noted that Chris, Jake and Jermel were a mess with their organization. I was upset though because Brandon had missed so many days so he had to makeup one of the missed tests during class. He really could have benefited from this activity. I engaged in few conversations with individuals based on some of their reflections and my observations while they were working.

I spoke to Brandon about his class absence issue. He was being taken to court because he missed so many days. I asked him why he was out so often, and he said he misses the bus. I asked about getting public transportation here, and he says he has no money. I asked about mom or dad driving and learned that he lives with a lady that his mom used to know and her boyfriend. *They do not drive nor have any money.* Also, I learned he had “step” brother who was shot in Allentown and killed. He is seventeen and failed 5th grade and 7th grade. He said, *I am trying to deal with life and make the best of things, Miss.* I offered him my assistance with helping him reach his goals. He said, *Thanks, I guess I should take my quizzes now.* Wow, it was amazing what a teacher can learn in just 5 minutes of a simple conversation. As I went to give Brandon his test, I heard Chris say, with a smirk, to Bob, *Get going, you are more of a mess than me now.* I was happy to hear Chris try to motivate someone else, even if it was in a sarcastic matter.

Test Goal and Reflection Piece

For this piece of their portfolio, I had them guess their grade before a test and then compare what they got to what they guessed and then comment on the results. I had them tell me how they felt about their grade and then write what they felt they needed to do the same or different next time to prepare for a test. I need to mention that the test they took was probably the easiest one they will take

for me as it dealt with the basics of the language. The following are their guesses followed by their actual grade and then what they wrote.

Chris guessed 92 and achieved an 88. *He wrote, I feel like whatever. I guess I will do better in the future because I will know it better. This sums up my ability.* He made no comment on how to improve despite the fact that I said, “Why don’t you try and write something that you think will make you do better on the next quiz.” His response was, *Nah.* “Why not”, I asked. It was as though “Lazy Chris” was saying *I really don’t care much.* I was starting to get frustrated because I always one of my strong points as a teacher was being able to figure out my students. Chris was making this very challenging for me. I was determined to keep prying though.

Josh guessed a 73 and achieved an 86. He wrote, *I feel satisfied and it is probably the best I could have done. I guess I maybe could have studied longer but I think I studied a lot. In order to improve, maybe paid more attention to the harder stuff.* Josh seemed to be pretty well aware of himself and I thought that his reflection seemed to be truthful. I was happy to learn that he studied.

Brooke guessed a 94 and achieved a 95. She wrote, *I feel good about the grade and the mistakes I made were stupid so I really do know my stuff. I don’t need to do anything different as long as I pay attention in class. I really do not care too much If I would of looked over more stuff, I would have got 100...oh well.* I thought it was an interesting reflection because Brooke kept trying to make

me realize that she didn't care but her grades and class participation were wonderful. I needed to find out why she kept writing that she didn't care. Was she afraid of failure or had she always failed and didn't have high expectations for herself?

Bob guess a 72 and achieved a 69. He wrote, *I don't like the grade because I can do better and I need to study the stuff I don't know more than what I know.* Considering his was one of the lowest grades in the class, I was happy to know that he thought studying would help his grade. I was looking forward to seeing if he would follow through on this.

Jermel guessed an 82 and achieved a 79. He wrote, *I thought I could have done better, just simple mistakes.* He also said to me while writing, *Miss, I just need to be constantly reminded to study because I always forget.* I told him that if knows he needs to be motivated by someone else then he needs to ask his grandmother (who he lives with) to help him but that he also needs to try and be more independent because people aren't always going to be there to cheer you on. He agreed and said, *I am trying to work on this.* I was seeing another benefit to students writing reflections. As they were writing they might feel that they wanted to share something more with me to explain their thoughts. I considered this to be an unexpected benefit to my student.

The students put their reflections with their test in their portfolios. I noticed Jermel just slipping it in the back, despite our conversation about being self-aware

a few minutes ago, and told him to punch holes in the paper and put it in the correct order. He did and said, *Thanks*, as though he appreciated my reminder, and then sat down. I noticed a few others doing the same, so I stopped everyone and reminded them that there was a table of contents to be updated and a specific place for this reflection in their portfolio. Chris looked annoyed and just placed it in the box. Jake walked back to his desk, opened his portfolio, and hole punched the paper, updated the table of contents and then put it in the box. At this time, I looked around and saw 7 people who looked bored because they were sitting waiting for the same people to be organized so we could move on.

Brandon and Jake

I made an opportunity to get to know two of my key “players” in my study while they were working on a project. I initiated a conversation with Brandon and simply asked him how he has been lately. Brandon said to me, *Miss, we had no gas last week and I had to cook something to eat on a hot plate* That was not the response I thought I would hear, but I was happy that he felt comfortable enough to share that with me. I replied, “Wow, things are that bad?” Brandon said, *Well, I told ya I live with step mom and step dad and they have no money. It is bad* . I then sadly said, “Wow, I am sure this makes it hard for you to focus in school.” Brandon, *Well, I get used to it but now my uncle died and I had to miss school to go to New York. Also my step dad is sick and I had to help him go to the*

Dr. I am going to court for attendance but I have to miss school. My heart sank, as I thought, here I am trying to collect data on his motivation and behaviors and the things I feel like worrying about for him are just the simple amenities of life. I tried to hide my pain for him and cheerfully replied, "Well, when you are here, you do pretty well, and I think you are making big changes in your life. I am proud of you." Thanks Miss. Maybe my encouragement would help him to persevere and make a better life for himself.

Jake, who didn't say a word when I helped him organize his notebook the day before, then chimed into the conversation and said, *Yeah miss, we are poor too.* Let me describe Jake to you. He is about 5 foot 2 and skinny as can be. I asked him, "Do you eat?" He said, *Yeah, I get free meals at school, but my bus gets here too late to eat breakfast.* I said, "Well, come to class 2 minutes late and get something to eat." He smiled and said, *O.K.* Then Jake said, *I guess it is just hard to be motivated when you don't see yourself going anywhere.* I pondered this statement for a bit and said, Well I see you going somewhere." "Let's work on that." "Maybe you and Brandon can help each other out." They gave each other high fives. I thought, again, how important a simple dialogue with students could be.

More organization

Today I decided, **again**, to take time in class to organize our folders and notebooks as well as portfolios based on my last observations of them being very unorganized.

We updated the table of contents to have them evaluate how well they were progressing in having the correct contents of their portfolio. Students also organized their notebooks. Justice helped me and asked if she could help others too because she was already done. Jermel was a mess again and needed a lot of assistance with his organizational skills. I pondered how he could be a mess again when we just went through his portfolio a few days ago. I also noted that his regular class binder and his backpack was unorganized too.

Brandon and Jake were very unorganized again too and needed help finding papers. I was getting frustrated because I had taken time before to help them but they never seem to try and keep themselves organized. I knew I couldn't give up on them though. They were aware of their faults and willing to accept my help. That was more than some of my other students were willing to do.

Chris just flipped through his book but really didn't seem to be checking if he had anything in the correct order. It was a though he was just going through the motions. I asked him if he was looking at his contents, and there it was again, the smirk! I looked at his table of contents, which was not up to date. I paired him with the girl that seemed to know him the best, Justice, and she seemed to almost

yell at him for being so lazy. She stated, Chris, *What is wrong with you?* He gave her the famous silent smirk. Justice then grabbed his portfolio and basically did it for him. He just sat there. I thought to myself that maybe Justice was acting the way I would if I had known Chris for as long as she did.

I looked around and noticed Josh helping Lisa with her table of contents. They were also discussing some of their reflections. I was happy to see that people were starting to help each other and actually talk about their progress. I took advantage of this moment and suggested that they pair up and share their portfolio with each other. Well, this did not go to well because some were still trying to get organized. I did notice, however, that Katlyn and Rachel started talking quietly.

Pre and Post Quiz Reflections

For this reflection and pieces to include in the portfolio, I decided to have my students take a pre-test after only seeing new vocabulary words for two days. I then had them take a post-test after having been working with them for about a week. They were asked to write their first grade and then their second grade as well as a reflection as to what information these grades tell them about their progress.

Bob wrote, *On the first quiz I got 7/21 on the second 10 days later I got 8/21. I got this grade because I didn't study much. I need to study more.* This was the second time that Bob wrote in his reflections that he needed to study more. I was

curious as to why he kept writing that he needs to study but never does. I asked him, “Bob, if you know you need to study, then why aren’t you doing so?” He answered, *I guess I just forget*. I informed him that I may need to contact mom soon to let her know of this lack of progress. He said, *O.k.* Wow, I thought, why didn’t he seem to care if I call mom?” I would have to look into this more.

Brandon wrote, *On the first quiz I got a 7/21, and on the second I got 17/21. I got this grade cause I studied. This shows me that I have improved a lot in 10 days.* I was happy that Brandon could write about his success and that he could see the benefit in studying. I only hoped that it would continue.

Rachel wrote, *On the first I got a 4/21 and on the second I got a 14/21. I studied a little but I could have done more studying. This tells me that I need to push myself more and do more.* I knew that Rachel had always had trouble when it came to tests based on the prior information I had received from her guidance counselor. I admire her drive to succeed and hope that she will not give up and will be rewarded for her time spent studying.

Brooke wrote, *On the first I got a 19/20 and on the second I got a 20/20. This tells me that I already know my stuff.* I read her reflection over her shoulder and she looked up and said, *I should have passed Spanish last year in 8th grade but I didn’t because I was just lazy and didn’t do any work.* I told her that I was happy that she had changed her ways this year. She smiled. This was another example of a student wanting to explain his/her reflection, I thought to myself.

The Day I Wanted to Give Up

Today we had a project due about the different Spanish speaking countries, which I had planned for them to include in their portfolio as a work of art they created. They were to research a country and write me postcards from the country telling me all sorts of interesting information. I wanted them to decorate the front of the postcard with a visual to represent the country. I thought it seemed like a fun project and a break from the normal routine. Well, I guess I was wrong. Five out of my eighteen students did not have it done even after having two entire class periods (3hrs.) to work on it. In class they had computers, and I suggested that if they did not have Internet access at home then they could print out the information they needed in class. I had a one-on-one conversation with each student as to why they did not have it done. Justice had it done and was excited to show me. She always seemed really motivated to do well and was always willing to help others too. Another asset that I loved about her was her ability to be social and vocal while helping others. I used her to help me get the others on track with their report while I continued to walk around the class and talk to each student. Of course, she went to Chris and asked him why he didn't do it. She was kind of making fun of him, but he didn't seem to care. He just sat there and said, with a smirk of course, *Shut-up*.

I was happy that Rachel had hers done too and was proud of her work. As I mentioned before, I admire her work ethic. Katlyn's project was beautiful, and I

could tell she put a lot of time into completing it. Josh was putting his finishing touches on the project. There were three people absent today too! Of course, Brandon was one of them.

I talked to Bob, whose mother I spoke to last week and seemed very supportive, about why he did not have his work. Bob said, *I think I had more done and left it at home. I just forgot. Can I hand it in for more points on Wednesday?* “Bob, you should have had almost all of it done last class and I saw you wasting time. I am sad that you did not take advantage of the time I gave you.” Bob, *I know, I need to do better.*

Bob’s mother had informed me that his behavior and lack of motivation was consistent throughout all of his classes. She took away his Ipod last week as well as his PlayStation. I was perplexed as to what could make Bob do better. I tried to motivate him. Mom tried to motivate him. He knew of his need to study more and try harder, but yet there was no change. I wished there were a magic wand that I could use to change these types of students.

Moving on to another one of my students I would like to use my wand on, I went over to talk to Chris. Chris did not have his project either. *This is just stupid and I don’t want to do it.* I replied, “I don’t think you want to do any assignments. Everything is stupid to you. Sometimes you have to do things because it is required even if you do not think they are fun. This is life.” He replied, *I just forget.* I asked, “Do you think you work to your fullest potential in

here? *No, I am lazy.* “Well, since this is the second time you are taking this course because you were “lazy” last year, don’t you think you should learn from your mistakes?”, I almost angrily asked. All I got in return was, *Yeah, I guess.* I finished our conversation by saying, “I think I need to let mom know about the fact that you didn’t turn in your assignment and you have no plans of doing it.” Chris, with the smirk once more, said, *Mom won’t care. She will pretend to be mad for a minute but then not really care.* Oh how I wished I had that magic wand.

With my imaginary magic wand, I continued towards Jermel. Jermel stared at me for a second and then said, *I forgot to do it at home. I thought we would have the whole class today to do it.* I said, “Jermel, you seem to want to do well but you forget.” He replied, *I am lazy too, but I will do it if someone tells me to.* I had heard this before from him and I was really thinking that this was the truth. He needs a constant reminder. I was angry, but for some reason, not as angry as I was with Chris. I said, “Hey, Jermel, do your work for the entire year and that is your permanent reminder. What else can I do but tattoo it on your head?”

Brooke, my student who knows everything already but just failed last year because she didn’t hand in anything, looked at me and said, *Yup, it is home on my table done and all. I just forgot to grab it before I walked out.* I wondered if this was the truth as I had heard this many times before. She told me she would bring it next class.

My wand sparkled over to Jake. I asked where his stuff was. He told me that he really forgot about it and he had a few things written at home. He reminded me that he doesn't have a computer at home. Once again, I had to restate what I told them about twenty times in class about printing stuff out if they needed it. Jake was very quiet on a daily basis and today was no different. He just sat there as though to say, *Yep, I don't have it, Oh well.*

I finally saw Brandon two days later and hoped by now he would have his project since he had two extra days to do it. Nope, he didn't! Brandon said, *I have other classes to worry about too and lots going on. I was out the one day too. I don't have a computer.* I replied, "I know you have stuff going on but this is worth a big grade and I reminded you to print stuff last time because I know of your situation." I told him to work on time management and that I would help him with that.

I talked to the class about how the ones who didn't hand in the project worth a lot of points would have until next class to hand it in for partial credit or I will have to call home. Brandon commented, *I am a failure in life.* Chris said, *Yeah man.* Jermel then chimed in and said, *You all are making me depressed.* Well that makes two of us, I thought. My most unorganized and mysterious students, Bob, Jermel, Jake and Brandon were the ones who did not have it done at all. What was I to do now? I really wished the teacher stores made

those magic wands that would make students work to their potential. It was so frustrating to observe day after day.

Tag Question of Choice

We added to the contents by having them complete one more tag question. I had them update the table of contents and put their postcard project that I graded in the portfolio with a reflection of their grade. I did contemplate not doing this though because of the number of students who still did not hand it in but decided that if I didn't include a disaster as part of my study then I would just be pretending my class was something it wasn't.

Once again, organization is a problem. Jake continues to have absolutely no clue what to do and his papers were everywhere. The class was actually making fun of him in a joking way asking him what was wrong with him. It seemed like it was the first time he had ever heard of the portfolio and he was slowly pulling crumbled papers out of his backpack. I did mention to him that he may need to come in after school to catch up on his portfolio and get organized Justice, as always, was a leader and helped him or at least tried to help him. Brandon was also once again unorganized and Chris had to be prompted three times to start writing. I paired Kaitlyn up with Jermel to help him but then he said he didn't

need any help....he did! I had them share some of the contents of the portfolio with each other. Bob and Chris did not say a word to each other. Rachel shared hers with Kaitlyn and so did Brooke. Once again, we went over the table of contents to make sure everyone has the portfolio up to date. Chris didn't even have the table of contents up to date! Neither did Bob. I really wasn't getting anywhere with these two students. I was starting to be depressed now.

Time for Some Answers/ Conferences

Conversation with Brooke

"I am concerned how in many of your reflections you seem to say that you are lazy and you don't care but I think you really do." *I do well here and I don't care and in other classes I get a fifty and I care. I had this class for 3 yrs and I am still in Spanish 1. I pay attention in other classes.*" So, paying attention for you is caring? " *Yep!* "So why don't you study if you care?" *I get bored. I don't know how.* "Have you tried?" *Yep and I get bored.* "You might be a freshman again next year if we don't work on this." *I hope not.* "Ok then you might need to study". *I don't know how.* "Can I help you and would you even try?" *Yes.* "Ok then can you come in after school and we will work on how to get started." *Ok, but I really don't like to study and I just need to do my work.* "Well, after reading some of your reflections, it seems as though you feel good about yourself when you get a good grade. Imagine feeling that way in all of your classes." *True, True, Miss. You have a good point.*

Brooke seemed to be very aware of her faults. I thought her biggest challenge was trying to get herself to change her behaviors and beliefs when it came to studying. She was a smart girl. I hoped to see some improvement soon.

Conversation with Lisa

“I am concerned how you say here that you do not think you are good in Spanish. I think you are and that you may just need to make sure you hand in all of your work.” *Nope I am not good in Spanish. I failed the final last year and one marking period.* “How can we improve this year.” *Well my mom threw away my project and that is why I don’t have it.* “Ok, well maybe we can come up with another assignment so you can get some points.” *Ok. I get stressed on tests too. I forget stuff.* Do you make note-cards? *No, maybe I can try that.*” I like how you said you did well on this assignment here and you are proud of yourself.” “Isn’t it a good feeling to feel good about yourself?” *Yeah, but I am just not good at Spanish.* “I am hoping by the end of the year we can change that.” Would you try and be more positive...at least just a little?” *Yeah, I can .*

It was clear to me that Lisa wanted to tell me that she had her mind set that she would not be able to do well in my class. I knew now that I had to praise her accomplishments. She definitely seemed to be insecure too. I was not happy to hear that she believed that she never would do well. Was it just an excuse or did she really feel that way?

Conversation with Jermel

I knew exactly what I wanted to know from Jermel after reading his reflections and my observations. I didn't waste any time and said, "I see that you have written many times in your reflections that you need to study more and not forget when you have tests. You even started writing it down. I also see in your reflections that you thought you should have studied more and that you need to improve on your organization. So, I guess I am concerned if you have met your goal at all so far." *I really have studied more this year than in all of my past years but I am still not good at remembering even if I write it down. I need someone to remind me all the time but this is the first marking period I ever made honor roll.* I thought that maybe I was being too hard on him. Maybe he wanted me to acknowledge that he was doing better. I wished I knew his past organizational skills and test scores before starting this year. "Wow, I guess that is good. So for you this year has been an improvement and you are now aware of your faults and what it takes to succeed.", I replied. He said with a smile, *Yeah I never studied in the past and my grades were bad.* I also asked him about his organizational issues and he informed me that he was always bad at keeping organized. He said he never really learned how to be organized in school. He said he lived with his grandma and she really never helps him with that stuff. I gave him some suggestions on how to work on his organization as well as some of the benefits of knowing where all of your things are. He said he would try and work on it. "Well

I am happy that you are improving and I will help you to keep checking in on yourself by looking back at your goals and reminding you as much as I can to stay on top of your studies. Do you have any questions for me regarding the class or portfolios?”, I asked. He said, Nah, *I am liking it so far but it is hard to be organized.*

Conversation with Bob

I read over all of the reflections of Bob’s portfolio and stopped at the few where he mentioned that he needed to study more and be more organized.” “Have you met your goal?, I asked. *No.* “Why not?”, I asked determined to get a response. *I don’t know. I guess I don’t study enough. I only look over stuff in the morning. The class every other day thing is hard. I also try and get stuff done for other classes. I have always been unorganized.* “Are you doing ok in other classes?, I asked. *Failing Geometry.* I wondered why he was failing geometry too and if he really was studying as he said he was. I questioned him as to if he wanted to go to college and he told me yes. He also told me that he loved playing baseball and wanted to play in college too. I then said, “Well maybe you need to set some long-term goals for yourself and work on getting yourself there. I need you to organize the portfolio better and use the checklist.” *Sure, Ok, he said, I would like to see better grades. I think I am missing 2 things in my portfolio. I*

will go and check now and try and do them. I look forward to our next conference so that you can tell me how you have improved. I concluded. Ok, I will try.

This conference with Bob made me think that Bob really does have good intentions. He was so calm and polite during the conference. He was listening intently to my comments and continued to go to his seat and work on the portfolio. What surprised me the most was when he went back to his seat, Chris gave him the smirk and a chuckled at Bob. Bob just ignored him and continued working on updating his portfolio. I felt proud!

Conversation with Brandon

I tried to go into my conversation with Brandon with an educational mindset as I felt as though I had gotten to be too emotionally concerned with his upbringing and home-life. I wanted to make a point to try and find out how I could help him while in my classroom. Brandon and I looked at his portfolio, page by page, and I stopped turning when I got to the reflection that read, *I think no matter what I do I will still suck at Spanish.* I asked him if he really felt this way. He said, *Sometimes.* I asked how we could change this mindset and he replied, *I don't know really. I guess I just was in a bad mood that day because I am still going to try.* I was relieved that he told me this and that he hadn't given up. I told him that I really thought he could do well. I assured him I would help him as much as I could. I then asked him why he seems to always be

unorganized. He said that he had been that way since first grade and it is probably too late for that to change. *It is just the way I am.* I thought about that for a minute and pondered how simple that seemed. Had my unorganized students been this way since childhood? How am I supposed to change something that has been a problem for 10 years? I asked him if he felt organized when he did the portfolio, and he said that he did feel organized only when he had help. I knew now that I needed to continue having students pair up. I would defiantly need to use Justice's energy and willingness to help others more.

Conversation with Chris

I had a well planned conference for Chris. Chris was one student who I felt I could change, even if just a little. I looked over his portfolio with him and asked him why he does not write very much for his reflections. He said, *I just don't have much to say.* I asked him about one of his reflections where he stated that he does not like to do any school work at home. *I don't mind doing it in school, but once I am home then that's it.*" He had told me that he was planning on going to college, so I asked him if he was aware of how much work college entails outside of the classroom. He said, *Yeah.* I suggested that we work on his mindset and at least try to do something at home every night. *Not gonna happen.*" "Well", I said, " I will keep trying to help you because I really think you have the potential to change." He said, *We'll see.*

We then got off topic, luckily, and started talking about his detentions. The reason I say that it was lucky was because I found out that he does not go to detention because he hates taking the bus home. He said. "I don't know anyone on my bus." He also didn't go to a pep rally one day, as I remembered, so I said, "Do you have anxiety about being around a lot of people you don't know?" *He said, Maybe, don't know.* I also thought about how he said he wasn't playing baseball this year because he wasn't really friends with anyone on the team. He said that he just prefers to go home and just hang out. I asked if he thought that he might be stuck in a routine and that he needed to change things up a bit. He seemed to listen to me but really didn't give me any reply. Then, the moment came, he said. *I think you had my brother too, I just saw his name in the book* "**Oh my gosh!**", *I* said. "Bruce is your brother." **Yes!** I finally had an "aha" moment! Bruce was in my class 3 years ago twice. He failed the level one class and retook it. He was so similar to Chris. I at least had an idea of Chris's family now. I asked him how he was, and we talked about what he had been up to. I was so shocked that the two of them were both so alike and I had the hardest time figuring out Bruce too! I was still determined to find out more.

Portfolio Evaluation

I walked into class and felt so excited to be finally giving a survey about my study. I wanted to know how they felt about the portfolio. I knew this information

would be extremely valuable. Below are the questions I asked and the students' responses.

1. What do you feel were the benefits of completing this portfolio?

Katlyn- I was able to look back and see my progress throughout this semester.

Karissa- It helps the teacher know how you feel about your grades and how you like the activities done in the class.

Brandon- Being more organized than last year.

Alexis- Being organized, knowing where things go, everything on track and in order.

Brielle- I think a benefit is I can always look back on the work I completed and see how I've progressed throughout the year.

S- Showing what I learned and how long it took.

Bob- The benefits were looking back at goals you made and how you will plan to complete them.

Jermel- We get to see how well we are doing and the progress that we are making.

Chris- Knowing what I've completed.

Brooke- I'm not really sure what the benefits are. Maybe to see how we progress or where our downfalls are.

Josh- It helped keep track of stuff but I don't feel it really benefited me.

Justice- Organization and reading my goals.

2. What do you feel are some disadvantages of doing this assignment?

Katlyn- I do not see any disadvantages with this assignment.

Brielle- It might be bad for someone who doesn't like expressing their feelings or someone who doesn't do their work.

Steph- People not staying organized when they are absent.

Alexis- Losing some things, being a little unorganized

Brielle- Its just hard thinking about what to write sometimes when we do the entries.

Bob- Constant organizing.

Karissa- Some disadvantages are that it takes some time and effort out of class time to work on this assignment..

Chris- The time to make them.

Becca- There were not really any disadvantages.

Josh- Studying I have many problems when it comes to studying.

Justice- No problems

Jermel- I was unorganized.

3. Do you feel that you were more motivated to do your work and to do it better while working on the portfolio? (Please explain)

Katlyn- Yes, because I wanted good work in my portfolio.

Steph- Yes, I do because it made me feel like I could express my happiness of a good grade without actually doing so.

Brandon- It was okay didn't see an improvement but learned to stay organized.

Alexis- Yes, I was more motivated. With the portfolio organized and everything I felt like I knew everything.

Brielle- Not really. I always try my hardest no matter what because my grades are important to me.

Scott- No, cause its not very useful for me.

Lynn- Yes, I was more motivated because I want to see progress throughout the year, so I worked harder.

Bob- Yes, because it made me think of my goals.

Chris- No, it doesn't have an effect.

Brooke- No, not really. The portfolio was just kind of there, like any other binder I have in any other class.

Josh- Not really, because it just seemed to make me do more work and study.

Justice- Yeah I guess so, because I saw my work.

Jermel- I was more motivated because I wanted to write good things about myself.

4. Did the portfolio process contribute to your organization? If so, how do you feel it did so?

Katlyn- Yes, because I am able to keep all my tests and projects in one place.

Steph- It helped me organize some of my work because we put a checklist in the inside.

Brandon- Kept papers in order when I needed to.

Alexis- Yes, it did. I felt very organized.

Breanna- At times, but I'm usually very organized.

Scott- Yes it showed me to have more current work/tests in a neater place.

Lynn- This did not contribute to me organization.

Bob- Yes, it let me see that if organized the easier it is to find stuff.

Chris- No, its still bad.

Brooke- The portfolio is organized because it should be, My binder is organized because it should be. Not because one or the other was organized did it contribute, no.

Josh- No, it did not I mean sorta I did better in my work but It just put a dent into a better grade.

Justice- Yes, I think so.

Jermel- I tried but I don't think it helped. It made me more aware though.

5. Have you come to a better understanding of yourself as a learner through doing this portfolio assignment? (Please explain)

Katlyn- Yes, because I can see myself progressing and learning.

Steph- Yes, I have because I express my feelings and compare different work.

Brandon- Somewhat I feel I got way more to learn then just a portfolio assignment.

Alexis Yes, with the portfolio I felt that everything was on track.

Brielle- Sometimes. I know I'm a hard worker in school and I can just see how well I work.

Scott- Yes, I found more organization skills.

Lynn-Yes, I have because I know that if I study I will do well.

Bob- I don't know.

Chris- No, I don't think its done anything.

Brooke- No, I'm very aware of what kind of learner I am.

Josh- I don't know to be honest I learned something yet didn't consider it to make me a better learner.

Justice- Yes, it helped me see my faults.

Rachel- Yes, I can see that I need to study to do well.

Jermel- The reflections helped me learn about how I need to change myself.

I carefully looked at the above information and felt proud that I could say the Portfolio Assessment was not the complete disaster that I thought it would be. I was happy to see that some of my students found value in looking back at their past work. I felt that the one student who did not find any value whatsoever, Chris, did not put in the effort necessary to see any positive benefits of the Portfolio. I was intrigued that the negative thoughts about the portfolio were concerning organization, problems reflecting, and the time it took to make them, which I read about in my literature review. I felt the same way as my students about these issues and often tried to come up with ways to address them but none

seemed to be successful. Some students saw the value in looking at goals and some did feel more motivated; however, I had hoped there would have been more. I was upset that the students who started off the class with the least amount of motivation and self-awareness, ended up being the ones who had the most negative opinions. I was happy that Jermel was seeing value in the Portfolio because he seemed truly intent on changing his lack of organization and effort outside of school. Now that I had the results of the survey, I wanted to talk to the class and see if I could get any more information about why they answered the questions the way they did.

Final Conversation about the Portfolio

I was excited to have an informal conversation with the class about the answers to the portfolio survey. Of course, Brandon was absent again. I wanted to find out why they thought organization was such a problem. I also wanted to find out any suggestions that they might have had in order to make the portfolio assessment more beneficial for everyone. I went over some of the responses to the questions with them without naming who wrote it. I asked the class why they felt organization was such a problem. Jermel responded, *I guess if I have always been unorganized then I am going to always be that way and doing a portfolio isn't going to change 15 years of being this way.* I heard a few laughs and saw some nods of agreement from some other students. I informed them that I kept

reading the same goals of *I need to study more and I need to try harder*. I inquired as to why they kept writing these things but they never seemed to try and reach these goals. Chris, who doesn't say much, enlightened me and said, *Miss, I just tell you what you want to hear to make you happy*. Wow, talk about being honest and letting me know how he felt! I questioned the class as to if they felt the same and Bob, Jake and Scott smiled and then said, *Yup*. So there it was, the answer to if setting goals and writing reflections were a way to help students improve and become more self-aware. It might have worked if they set more truthful goals but I guess I would never know. Three of my students who were already doing well said, *I think they help because they make me want to say I achieved them; I think I learned more about myself and I knew I would have to evaluate my work so it may me try harder; I like thinking about how I can do better and what makes me work harder*. This made me feel a little better at least. I then questioned them as to how they felt about the time it took to make them. Brielle said, *Well, I was always organized and done before half of the class even got started so I was bored*. Brooke said, *Yeah, me too but I didn't mind because I just sat there and chilled*. "Unfriendly" Chris said, *It was dumb and I was bored*. I replied, "Chris, maybe you were bored because you should have been doing something to occupy yourself like write a reflection." Chris chuckled. I did not receive any suggestions as to how I could have made the process less time consuming. The next thing I wanted to talk about was their overall motivation. I

asked them if they thought that they were more motivated to do well knowing that they might need to include some of their work in the portfolio. Katlyn said, *Yeah, I think I was more motivated because I want to take it home and be able to look at it later and feel proud.* Justice said, *I guess, Miss, I think it could be good if you really care about that stuff.* I looked at Bob and said, “Do you agree?” He said, *yeah, I guess so.* Jermel said, *I think it can help too, but I need to do more.* I glanced at Chris and said, “So, what can you add to this conversation?” Chris, said, *Nothing, I think it didn't help and it took too much time.”*

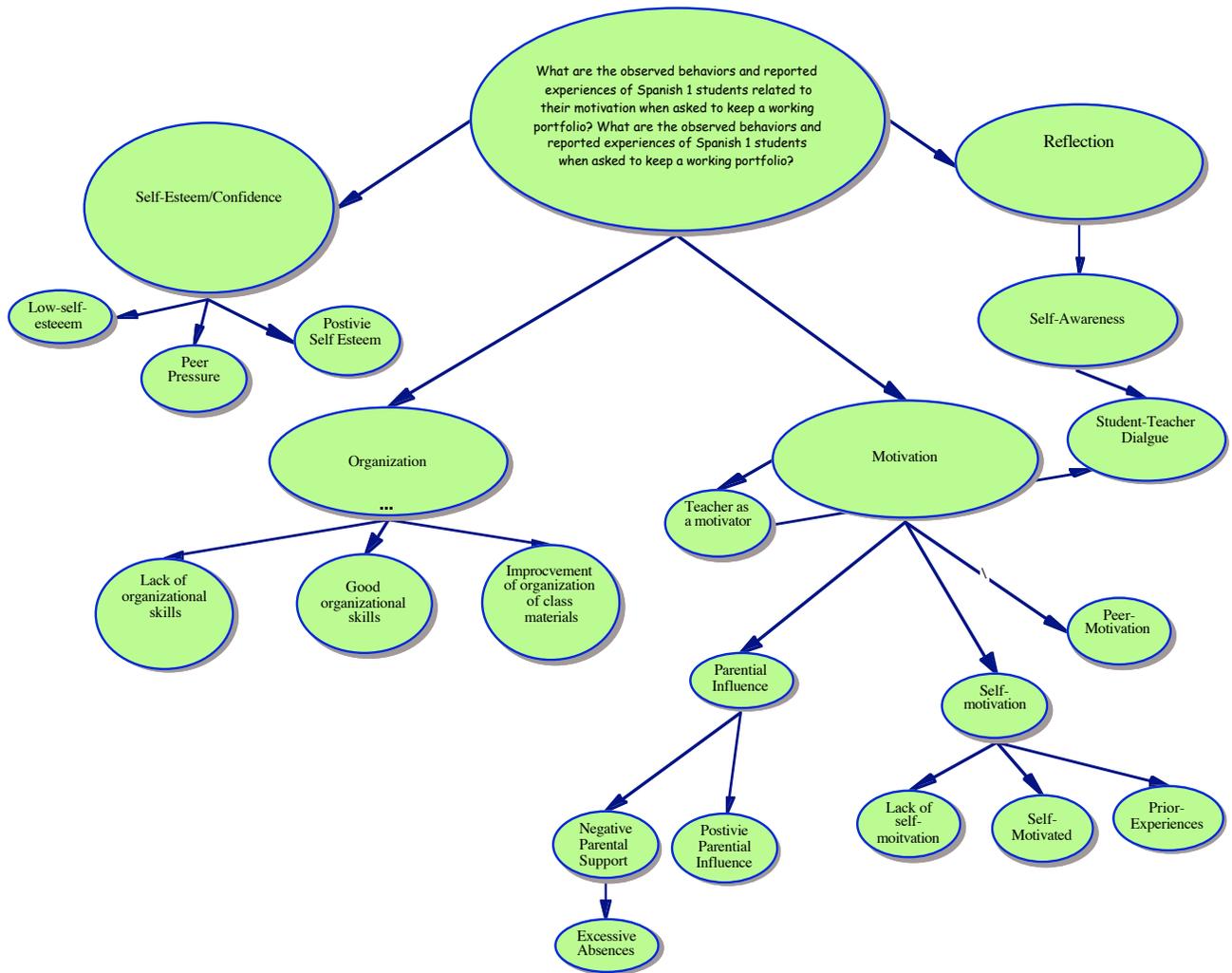
Final Thoughts

This conversation confirmed what I had already believed. The portfolio can benefit those who are good learners because it allows them to see how much work they put into getting their good grades. The average learners may see some benefit too because they are the ones who need the extra push to get them to become good learners. They may find benefit to seeing their progress as they continue to try and improve. The learners who are not motivated will not see as many benefits to the Portfolio Assessment because they will not put the effort into organizing it and writing thoughtful reflections or goals. They may, however, become more aware of their faults as they are asked to discuss why they choose not to put in the time it takes to succeed in school. These students require the most attention and conversation from the teacher in order to see any benefits at all.

FINDINGS

Graphic Organizer

Throughout my study I saw reoccurring codes on many pages of my field log. I was able to connect some of these codes in order to show how each one related to the other. The most common topics that were mentioned on almost a daily basis were motivation, organization, and self-esteem/confidence.



Theme Statements

1. Implementing a portfolio assessment was very difficult to successfully integrate into my Spanish 1 classroom. Overall student organization and the lack of thoughtful reflection when answering the prompts have been two areas of consistent concern.
2. There was evidence that students felt there were two main advantages to the Portfolio Assessment. The reflection process allowed students to learn about themselves. The emphasis on keeping things organized was advantageous to many.
3. Students who demonstrated low self-confidence and/or low self-motivational skills may be more resistant to and not benefit from the Portfolio Assessment.
4. Portfolio Assessment can provide a means for the teacher to learn about their students. The reflections can provide a beginning for further discussion as well as a way for the teacher to adapt his/her instruction.

Implementing a portfolio assessment has proven to be very difficult to successfully integrate into my Spanish 1 classroom. Overall student organization, the time it takes to create them, and the lack of thoughtful reflection when answering the prompts were areas of consistent concern.

It seemed like almost every time I tried to have students add to their portfolios and do a reflection I was faced with the problem of students finding

their papers in their backpack and binders. I tried to tackle the problem of organization from the first day of doing the portfolios after reading some of their comments from the survey. Some of the concerns they had about creating the portfolio before implementing it were; *Keeping it organized; Probably the organizing; I am not very organized; Putting papers in order; Putting papers together because papers are hard to keep track of and I find it is learning materials and organizing it.* Even though I spent a lot of class time trying to help them, I did not see much of an improvement. To further support my findings, in my final portfolio evaluation I noticed that the students I first identified as least organized made stated that the portfolio did not help them with their overall organization and wrote; *This did not contribute to me organization; No it (my organization) is still bad.* I cannot forget the statement made the last day by one of my unorganized students when he said *Miss, I have been unorganized for twelve years now. I do not think that is going to change now.*

Each time that we added to our portfolios, it took up a lot of class time. Some reasons why were; the students needed time to ponder and then write their reflection; some students had to organize themselves every time before beginning and some students needed to be prodded in order to write anything at all. When faced with the challenge of trying to get through mandatory curriculum and daily interruptions, the time taken out of class made me feel rather stressed. I was not the only one who felt that the time it took to create the portfolios was an issue.

Some of my students wrote the following when stating what they felt were the problems with the Portfolio Assessment; *Some disadvantages are that it takes some time and effort out of class time to work on this assignment; The time to make them.*

I also had a constant problem motivating my students to write thoughtful reflections. One possible reason for the difficulty students had when reflecting might be due to their past schooling experiences as Lockledge, (1997) explained “For older students who have become grade conscious, it is even more difficult to sort and justify because too much of schooling has involved relying on other’s judgment about the quality of one’s work” (p. 4).

I became frustrated a number of times because there seemed like there was nothing I could do to get them to be thoughtful. There were many times when I would try to prompt them to write more and they would just look at me and say *I have nothing else to say*. This concern was also mentioned by Donovan et al. (2002) when they reported that it seemed to be difficult for students to go into detail about their feelings. I had tried to provide examples for my students of the ways to get themselves to think more and write an in-depth reflection. I knew that this was concern at the beginning of the portfolio assessment since I had read at least two people write that reflecting might be difficult for people who don’t like to think about why they do certain things. One student even wrote, *It might be bad for someone who doesn’t like expressing their feelings or someone who doesn’t do*

their work. Another clue that made me realize that my students might have a problem with reflection was their obscure answers to “What do you hope to learn about yourself by doing the reflections of the work?” of their first survey. Some of the responses that they wrote were; *Nothing really, maybe just to see struggles; To see how I improve. (Not really); Being more organized; I hope to learn that I passed; To learn that I am awesome.* I feel that they started off the class not really wanting to or knowing how to discover more about themselves. The lack of the desire to try and discover more about themselves along with the short, almost fake responses to prompts, made it very difficult for me to feel as though these pieces of the portfolio were beneficial to many.

There was evidence that students felt there were two main advantages to the Portfolio Assessment. The reflection process allowed students to learn about themselves. The emphasis on keeping things organized was advantageous to many.

I noted that there were students that did not mind the reflection process and looked forward to seeing their progress throughout the study. The students in this category were both identified as self-motivated and not self-motivated from my beginning survey, proving to me that the portfolio assessment did reach all types of students. During the conversation about portfolios, I heard at least three positive responses when I asked if they felt that they learned more about themselves. One student said, *I like to reflect because I get to think why I do things.* Throughout my study I also heard comments and read reflections from students who found

benefits to thinking about their work; *I think they help because they make me want to say I achieved them; I think I learned more about myself and I knew I would have to evaluate my work so it may me try harder; I like thinking about how I can do better and what makes me work harder. I was more motivated because I wanted to write good things about myself; I learned that I need to follow through on my goals.*

Even though I felt that I was not able to keep the entire class organized, there were many students who had positive comments about the organizational process. I learned that although it may have seemed to me that students were not unorganized, what I perceived as organized was different from what they saw. I also felt that even though I didn't think their organization was improving throughout my study, they felt it was. This made me realize that I must always be careful to not be too overbearing because some might feel as though I am being too hard on them. I felt as though some small steps for some were as important as big steps for others. I was forced to look at each student and look at where they started and where they were at the end. I decided that even the small improvements were better than none. During the study I felt like a broken record when it came to me talking about how to be organized, but by the end of the study it was clear to me that they were actually trying and learning from my suggestions and help. For example, final survey comments that supported this finding were written about whether they thought that the Portfolio process contributed to their

organization. The students wrote' *Yes because I am able to keep all my tests and projects in one place; It helped me organize some of my work because we put a checklist in the inside; Yes, it did. I felt very organized. At times, but I'm usually very organized; Yes, it showed me to have more current work/tests in a neater place; Yes, it let me see that if organized the easier it is to find stuff. I tried but I don't think it helped. It made me more aware though.*

Students who have demonstrated low self-confidence and/or low self-motivational skills may be more resistant to and not benefit from the Portfolio Assessment.

Based on the survey about student motivation and self-awareness, the data I collected in my field log, and the end of the year portfolio survey, it was clear that the students who started off with the least amount of motivation were the ones who also gained the least from the Portfolio Assessment. Chris was a student who was one of my identified lower-motivated students. Throughout the process, he continuously wrote very brief reflections and made negative comments about the reflections and activities we were doing. He also stated, *The portfolio process didn't help at all and I just wrote what I thought you wanted to hear.* When asked if there were any advantages to the assessment he wrote, *No I don't think its done anything.* One other student identified as low-motivated also made negative comments throughout the study. At one point he stated, *I don't see how this thing is going to help me during the third week of the study.* I think this finding goes back to the idea of "The amount of effort you put into something is what you will

get out of it.” The students who did not have any motivation at the beginning were not willing to put in the effort to actually see if the Portfolio Assessment would help them. For these students it was viewed as *Just another thing we have to do*.

Portfolio Assessment can provide a means for the teacher to learn about their students in order to adapt his/her teaching style. The reflections and comments of the students can provide a beginning for further discussion to discover what other factors may be affecting certain students’ motivation.

Looking back to what I read in Delpit and Dowdy (2003) reminded me how important it was to have daily conversation and interaction with students. The Portfolio Assessment provided me with many opportunities to do this. Delpit and Dowdy wrote, “Language exists not merely on the level of words, sentences, paragraphs and dialects, accents and linguistic differences. It is a social phenomenon that has complex personal implications relating to how the more formal aspects of reading, writing and talking are interpreted on a daily basis. It has to do with how things are said, questions are asked or answered, and how much teachers and students listen to each other” (p. 151). In order for me to learn all that I could about my students, it was important to be constantly thinking about how my words were heard and interpreted. I also needed to show students that I “was listening” to them whether it was by written, oral or body language communication. It was then important to make opportunities to have one-on-one informal conversation with students. This allowed me to try and get more details about some topics that I felt may be of concern. As Freire (1970) also stated,

“The teacher is no long merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (p. 80). The advantage of good communication and further conversations about their reflections was that I was able to target some of the reasons why certain were having difficulty or not performing their full ability. For example, Brandon and I had many conversations that dealt with his personal life and family situations that were affecting his studies. Brandon was rather quiet to begin with, and he was not the type of person to offer information about his issues without being asked. Despite having a very difficult life, he remained rather positive. His absences were always a concern and when he fell behind in his portfolio, it was very hard to get him caught up. This also led to enlightening dialogue that allowed me to understand him better. Once in class Brandon wrote, *I suck and life and Spanish and I should just give up in Spanish* while stating *Man I am just a loser*. These two statements were red flags to me that I needed to invest some private time to find out what was going on. I spent a lot of time trying to have conversations with Chris which were often unsuccessful. I did notice; however, that towards the end of the study Chris started to open up more. I learned that some students took more time to let a teacher see who they really were. Some students were more protective of themselves and I needed to be persistent with my daily conversations in order for me to find value in them. It was also necessary to really understand

and listen to what my students were saying in order for me to find ways to motivate them and get them to become better learners. A simple conversation was worthless unless I took the time to think about what hidden insight it may have given me about how my students learned best. Barnes and Bramley (2008) discovered through listening and conferencing with students that they were able to find out what motivates and engages each student. Without doing that I feel that the teacher advantage of them doing reflections would have never existed. I needed to be constantly evaluating my students' statements and actions.

THE NEXT STEP

Due to a last minute change in my schedule this year, I was only able to implement half of my Portfolio Assessment. My original schedule to be that I saw my students everyday until January but it changed to me having them for every other until June. I am anxiously looking forward to having my students continue to create their portfolios so I may give them a final grade. I will be using The Final Grading Rubric (Appendix E) as my final evaluation. I am also looking forward reading more reflections and having at least another one or two student-teacher conferences.

Having my students every other day was a disadvantage for me throughout my study because I did not get to do as many things as I had hoped. The one advantage, however, was that I had more time to change my Portfolio

Assessment as I learned what worked best and what needed more attention. The extended time also will allow students to track their progress throughout the entire school year rather than just a semester. Along with having more conferences and doing a final evaluation of the portfolio, I would like to have some of my students produce more thoughtful reflections. In order to help them develop their reflective thinking skills, I may have to do some more modeling or provide them with written samples of what I consider to be a meaningful reflection. I also am going to continue working on organizational skills. I plan to have students who are extremely organized work with the ones that need some assistance. I also will try to not just stress organization when it comes to the portfolios, but also with their class notes and notebook.

I also plan on continuing being a “cheerleader” for my students who really do have the intentions to do well but just can’t seem to get it together. I plan on getting to know them even better and suggesting ways that maybe they may see some improvement in overall achievement, even if it is small. I think some of them are just starting to realize that they need to change soon or else they will find themselves failing the course.

I would like to give the Portfolio Assessment survey again at the end of the year to see if their opinions might have changed. I am curious to know if by me making some minor changes to the assessment will affect their effort and performance.

In conclusion, I would consider using a Portfolio Assessment in years to come because I feel that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. I think that I would definitely take more time at the beginning of the assessment to teach organizational skills and stress how important they will be for the Portfolio and class-work. I might even consider giving them “organizational” grades throughout the semester to help them constantly think about how important it is. I will also attack the issue of reflections from a different approach. I think I need to have them practice reflections based on some personal experiences before I have them reflect on class-work. By doing this, I may even be able to learn something else about them prior to implementing the Portfolio Assessment. I could collect the reflections and provide feedback as to how they may make them more thoughtful.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A-1:First Day Survey

In order for me to have a better idea of your past experiences with Spanish as well as other information, please take the time to fill out the answers below to the best of your ability. I will keep this information in a file to refer to throughout the year.

1. My name is

2. My email address is

3. My mom/dad/guardian's phone number is

4. My mom/dad/guardian's email is

5. If you did not attend Freedom last year, what school district did you attend?

6. Please list any past experiences with languages (this includes family members or friends who speak another language, as well as any classes previously taken).

7. If you took Spanish before, please specify the level and the grade received.

8. Why are you taking Spanish this year?

9. What do you feel will be the most difficult thing for you to grasp while taking a foreign language and why? (Spelling, grammar, vocabulary etc.)

10. What are your future plans? (Career/college etc)

11. What are your hobbies?

12. Do you have a job and/or are you involved in any after school activities?

13. Are there any preferences/needs regarding your education in this class? (Ex. Prefer to sit in front or have paperwork on file in guidance or the nurse.)

14. My goal for the course is to

15. One more thing I can tell you about myself is

Appendix A-2: Motivation/Self-Awareness Survey

1. I have plans of continuing my education after high school.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

2. I think that a high school education is important and necessary.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

3. I pay attention in class.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

4. I want to graduate with a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

5. I currently have a GPA of 2.2 or higher.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

6. Sometimes I feel that I won't succeed in anything.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

7. I do my homework well.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

8 - I am self-motivated to succeed in school and do not need to be motivated by anyone.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

9. I look forward to learning new things in school.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

10. I rarely miss a day of school and if I do it is most likely because I am sick.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

6. I study for most of my tests.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

7. When I get a test back I try to take time to look over it to make sure I don't make the same mistakes again.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

8. When I know my teacher is going to contact my parents if I am not doing well, I try harder to bring my grades up.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

9. I have a goal to make honor roll at least one marking period a year.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

10. I have good study habits and try to make sure I have time to get my work done every night.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

11. I feel as though I am working to my full potential as a student.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

12. I rarely complain about school.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

13. I work hard in school even when I don't like the teacher or the class content.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

14. On my last report card, I had A's and B's in all of my classes

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

15. I am very well organized

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

16. I set goals for myself and try my best to achieve them.

I Agree I Somewhat Agree I Disagree I Strongly Disagree

Appendix B: What is a portfolio and what are the guidelines?

What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is a collection of your work.

What is the purpose of making a portfolio?

It provides you and your teachers with an organized collection of all of your effort, progress, reflections and achievement. It can help you focus on your strengths and weaknesses. You get to play an active part in creating this portfolio. In other words, it is your own. You may also be able to focus on self-improvement in this class as well as others.

How do I create my portfolio?

1. The first thing you need to do is get a large 3-ring binder and then decorate the front with something that expresses who you are.
2. As we complete assignments, they are to be placed into your regular Spanish binder. We will designate class time to add to our portfolio.
3. You will be given a number of writing prompts (Each of them will be worth points towards the grade of the final portfolio)
4. Some of the pieces of your final portfolio will be things that you choose to include while others will be ones that I instruct you to include.
5. You and I will have an in-class conference halfway through the process.
6. The portfolio will be graded using a checklist and rubric with all requirements.

Appendix C: Prompts and Pieces to Include

-Portfolio Tag Names and Leading Statements for Pieces of Work to Include.

-Use this as a checklist. Be sure to check off each one as they are completed.

-You are required to do one reflection a week.

-A “piece” can be a project done (if it is too big to include in the binder please take a picture of it), homework, test, or a class activity. If it is a speaking activity, please describe the activity before writing your reflection.

1. “Improvement Piece”- If I would get the chance to do this piece again I would...
2. “What I learned” By doing this assignment I learned....
3. “Teacher Choice” My teacher chose this because
4. “I wish I would have...” For this piece, I wish I would have...
5. “ Proud of This” This is something I am proud of because....
6. “My best work” This is an example of my best work because...
7. “ I feel.” After seeing my grade on this assignment I feel _____ . I think I received this grade because ...
(OR) I feel that the errors I made were mainly due to...
8. “ Not too happy” I am most unhappy with this piece because...
9. “My ability” I think this piece best sums up my ability because ...

- 10 “Rough vs. Final” Look at your rough copy, final copy and project grade. Tell me how you feel about your progress. Compare and contrast the two pieces of work.
11. “ Post-conference thoughts” After my conferences with Mrs. Cierech I feel ...
12. “My goals” My goals for this assignment are...

Appendix D: Reflection of Portfolio

Please answer the following questions based on your experience with the portfolio process.

1. How do you feel the portfolio process contributed to your organization?

2. What do you feel were the benefits of completing this portfolio?

3. What do you feel are some disadvantages of doing this assignment?

4. Do you feel that you were more motivated to do your work and to do it better while working on the portfolio? (Please explain)

5. Have you come to a better understanding of yourself as a learner through doing this portfolio assignment? (Please explain)

Appendix E: Portfolio Rubric

Task	10	8	6	4-2
Content	Student has all of the required pieces of their portfolio according to the checklist	Student has missed 1-2 of the required pieces	- Student has missed 3-4 of the required pieces	- Student has missed 5 or more of the required pieces.
Organization	All information is in the order of the checklist.	1 or 2 items are out of order.	3-4 items are out of order	5 or more items are out of order.
Evidence of thought process while completing Tags	-Student has answered all questions with detail. He/she has shown great evidence of effort.	Student has answered most Tag Questions with detail; however, 1 or 2 may show lack of effort or thought process.	Student seemed to rush through at least 3 or 4 of the questions and their answer lacks depth and sufficient thought process.	- Student did not put effort into answering 5 or more questions. Their answers lack explanation and/or detail.
Cover	- Art was colorful and neat - Art complimented their final portfolio. -Great evidence of trying to demonstrate themselves as individuals.	- Art had some color and could have been neater Art could have complimented their final portfolio better. Good evidence of trying to demonstrate themselves as individuals	- Art was not colorful or neat - Art slightly complimented the final portfolio. Not much evidence of trying to relate the cover to themselves as individuals.	- Art was unoriginal, not colorful, messy, or unrelated to the portfolio and/or the student.
Final Reflection of Portfolio	Student demonstrated great thought process and gave well detailed response	Student demonstrated good thought process and gave detailed responses	Student demonstrated some thought process but lacked some detail in responses	Student did not demonstrate thought process and lacked detail and/or explanations in their answers

_____/50

Teacher comments:

NOTE: The portfolio will be due on _____. Lateness on this assignment will result in a lost letter grade for each day late. Plagiarism of another student's work will result in ZERO credit.

Appendix F: Principal Letter

May 4, 2011

Dear Mr. LaPorta,

I am currently enrolled in a Master's program in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. I am about to begin my Master's Thesis study. The focus of my research this semester will be to attempt to improve student motivation and self-awareness by implementing the use of a student portfolio. In doing this, I am hoping not only to improve students' overall grades, but also to have them gain a better understanding as to why they choose to put more effort into some assignments over others and what motivates them to succeed. This study will take place starting September 2010 and end in December, 2010. I will be giving 2 preliminary surveys to gauge the level of student motivation for my Spanish class. All students will participate in the portfolio process; however, I will only be including data for the 10 identified (from analysis of survey answers) lowest motivated students.

At the beginning of the unit all students will receive an outline and description of the portfolio process. They will also know the topics of assignments, projects, tests and quizzes that we will be covering during the creation of their portfolio. They will receive a checklist with prompts and artifacts that must be included in their final portfolio. They will receive a rubric on how this portfolio will be graded. At the end of the unit, students will take a survey to inform me if they feel their engagement improved as a result of my interventions. There are no anticipated risks for participation in the study. IEP and instructional modifications will, of course, be adhered to throughout the data collection period.

Data from those who sign on as research participants will be used in my study. This study is voluntary, and a student may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If the student withdraws, or the parent/guardian does not provide consent, I will not include that student's information or data in my study.

The names of all participants will remain confidential. There will also be no mention of the name of the institution, specific faculty members or cooperating teachers. I may need to alter minor details in student work to make sure their name is anonymous. Additionally, all research materials will be secured in a protected location and destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

My professor at Moravian College is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted via e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at jcierech@bethsd.org. If not, please sign the bottom portion of this letter and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Jennifer Cierech
Freedom High School
Foreign Language Department

(PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE)

Appendix G: Parental Consent Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am currently enrolled in the Master's of Education program at Moravian College, pursuing a degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The courses I have been taking for the past few years have enabled me to be progressive in my teaching, and keep current with current pedagogical trends in order to provide the best possible experiences for my students. The Master's of Education program requires that I conduct an action research study that focuses on a major component of my teaching practices. I have decided to focus the effects of portfolio assessment and its effects on student motivation and self-awareness in my Spanish class.

Data will be collected through surveys, student conferences, student work and observations. Within the first week of the study, I will administer a survey to the students to gauge their perceived motivation and self-awareness. Students will, throughout the study, create a portfolio that will include their chosen work. I will conference with the students twice during the study. Students will also regularly make entries in their portfolio by answering "tag" questions pertaining to their work that they could have done better on, their best work, the most difficult etc. Hopefully, this will provide a way for students to see how they are progressing and to gauge their progress. The portfolio will also aid them in keeping themselves organized.

The portfolio will be evaluated at the end of the study and I will encourage them to bring it home for your viewing. All participation in this study is completely voluntary and the entire class will be participating in the process. Only data from those who sign on as research participants will be used in my study. If the student withdraws, or the Parent/Guardian does not provide consent I will not include that student's information in my study.

The names of all participants will remain confidential. There will also be no mention of the names of the institution, specific faculty members or cooperating teachers. Minor details in student work may need to be altered, however, in order to maintain student anonymity. Additionally, all research materials will be secured in a protected location and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. My professor at Moravian College is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted via e-mail at jshosh@moravian.edu. Mr. LaPorta, Principal of Freedom High School has already consented to this study. If you have any concerns please feel free to contact him in the Main Office at 610-867-5843. If you have further questions about this study, please contact me in a timely manner so that we may discuss it. I can be reached via e-mail at jcierech@bethsd.org. If not, please sign the bottom of this letter along with checking off the appropriate box and return it to me at your earliest convenience. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Jennifer Cierech
Freedom High School Foreign Language Department

Please circle one:

My child has permission to participate in this study. _____

£

My child does not have permission to participate in this study. _____

Student Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Field Log

Observations:	Reflections: