

BEGINNINGS WORKSHOP

A Personal Experience With

by Lisa Meinen

How I Got Started

Two years ago when a group of children, whom I had taught for over a year, were moving on to preschool, I wanted to do something to mark my time with them. I had collected pictures of them playing together, doing activities and saved some artwork; but I wasn't sure what to do with it all. One of my co-teachers showed me the way she was putting a similar collection of materials into books for her children. With her format in mind, I created my own portfolio books. The books included pictures, artwork, developmental assessments, anecdotal notes, and project documentations. They displayed the work, growth, and fun the children experienced at school while I was their teacher.

The first set of portfolio books were made and presented to children as a good-bye gift, a culmination activity. In the process, the books helped ease both the children and the parents' transition to the new preschool

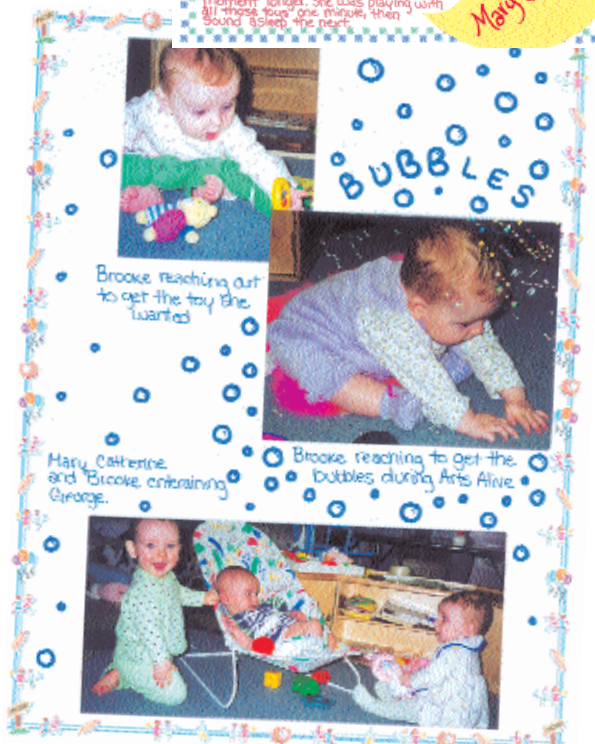
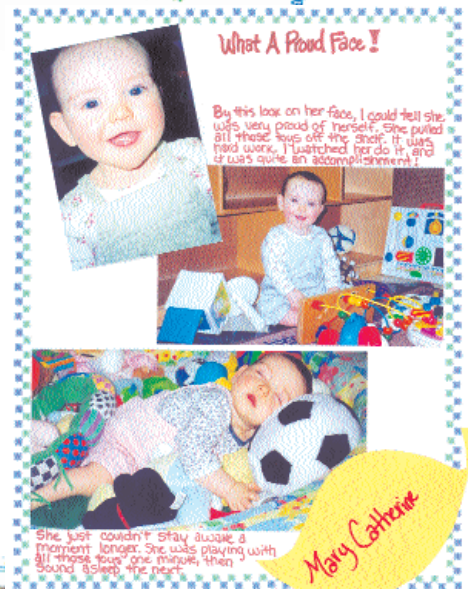


teacher. The books celebrated the time we had spent together as a group and helped the new teacher to begin to form relationships as *my* group became *her* group.

At HeartsHome, we keep the same group of children over time, and move from classroom to classroom together (see Albrecht, et. al. 2000 for more information). During this extended length of time together, you become very close to both the children and their parents. Formalizing the process of sharing that long period of time together turned out to be good for all of us.

With my present group, I am compiling each child's portfolio book as they grow. Further, I am using them more as a way to connect with parents about their child. As I meet with parents for their regular quarterly conferences, I show them how the books are progressing. I share the notes, developmental





assessment summaries, work samples, and project documentation that highlights emerging and acquired skills. As important as the assessment data is to parents and teachers, it is the pictures and artwork that are enjoyed the most by parents. I try hard to capture the child's special nature in the photos, bringing their experiences to life for parents who are not often there to see things as they happen.

WHY PORTFOLIO BOOKS?

Portfolio books build over time. They are a nice way to keep track of developmental progress and changes in skills, abilities, and interests. They illustrate the progress through developmental stages, graphically, in a way that is easily recognizable to parents and teachers.

An unanticipated advantage of portfolio books is that parents get more insight into their children's time at school. Our parents are away from their children most of the day. The portfolio books help parents better understand what their child does during their time at school and how we spend our time together — in routine, educational, and curricular activities.

As the children get older, their books come to life. They can look back at the books and take pride in how much they have learned and grown. They can feel proud, and they have an organized documentation about their infant and toddler years. They can look at pictures, read about what was going on at the time the picture was taken, look at artwork they did, and read about things I observed about them at school. Sometimes the school experiences are different than their home experiences — another exciting discovery.

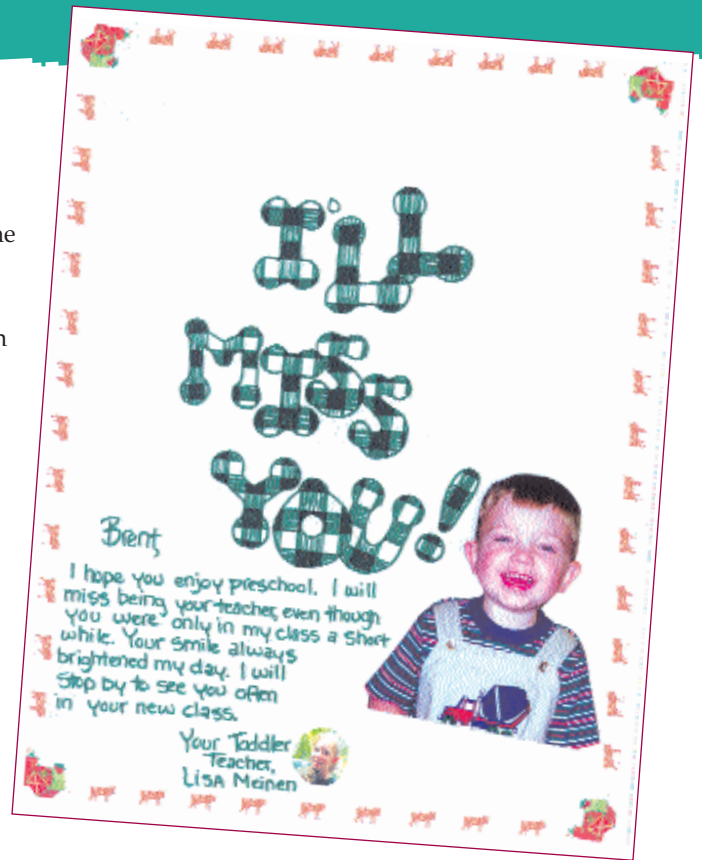
SUMMARY

It's not so important that my portfolio has a fancy cover, or that the pages are colorfully decorated. I enjoy adding the extra frills that make each portfolio unique. The heart of the portfolio is all the information collected to put inside. While working on my portfolios,



Artwork provided by the author

I have learned the importance of documenting the process, which is more important than the outcomes and products of children's work.



When organized and put all together with pictures, work samples, and most importantly all the documentations mentioned earlier, the portfolio can be a window to the child's early years of learning at school; a view through a teacher's eyes, highlighting the process of their learning. It has been a meaningful professional development journey for me as well.

How to Use Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers by Kay Albrecht

Getting Started: Meinen started her portfolio books by collecting things for the books. To get started, send teachers on a scavenger hunt to see what is laying around their classrooms that could go into a portfolio book. When they return, see if they found samples from each of the categories listed in the article.

Considering Format: Many different formats are used for portfolios in this author's program. What formats might work in your program? Collect resources to help teachers decide which formats might work for them.

More Than Just Products: Portfolio books, as conceptualized by Meinen, are more than products of children's work. After teachers collect products from their classroom scavenger hunt, help them consider what else would be needed to bring the entry in the portfolio book to life.

Purpose Before Portfolio Books: Using portfolio books to connect families to their child's school experience was one of several goals for this teacher. Talk with teachers about what other goals a program might have for portfolio books.

Time! Time! Time!: Portfolio books sound extremely beneficial and time-consuming. Brainstorm strategies for getting portfolios completed without spending too much time in the preparation phase. Identify shortcuts, who else could help, etc. Try out your ideas.