

**Using Portfolios for Assessment Purposes:
Practice through Researching Practice
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Abstract:

It seems that no act is complete until it has been evaluated and criticized by others, thus; in order to develop professional competencies of teacher educators, attention should be turned towards some key assessing areas within the teaching and learning contexts. Based on the assumption that portfolios are rapidly gaining momentous popularity because of its ability to promote development of higher-order skills such as reflection, critical analysis and self evaluation in students, our main aim in the present paper is to shed light on using portfolios for assessment purposes in our educational settings. However, to be effective, both students and instructors need to be very clear about the purpose of the learning portfolios and the underlying principles, as well as the key process in portfolio development. Hence, clear guidelines on portfolio development need to be fixed, yet opening the door for originality and creativity of students. It is also very important to consider this process as a continuous dialogue between students and instructors.

Key-words:

Portfolios, assessment, learning outcomes, reflection, self- evaluation

Résumé:

Il semble qu'aucun acte n'est complet tant qu'il n'a pas été évalué et critiqué par les autres, donc, afin de développer des compétences professionnelles des enseignants, l'attention devrait être tournée vers certains domaines dans l'évaluation de l'enseignement et des contextes d'apprentissage. Basé sur l'idée que les portfolios sont gagnés rapidement une popularité fondamentale en raison de sa capacité à promouvoir le développement des compétences telles que la réflexion, la critique 'analyse et d'auto-évaluation des étudiants. Notre principal objectif dans le présent article est de démontrer l'utilisation de portfolio pour des fins évaluatives dans nos systèmes éducatifs et d'enseignement. Néanmoins, pour être efficace, les étudiants et les pédagogues devraient être très clair sur le but d'utiliser le portfolio et aussi les principes dans le développement du portfolio. Par conséquent, des lignes et principes doivent être fixés clairement sur le développement des portfolios ouvrant la porte à l'originalité et la créativité des étudiants. Il est également très important de considérer ce processus comme un dialogue continu entre les étudiants et les instructeurs.

Mots-clés:

Portfolios, l'évaluation, l'apprentissage, réflexion, d'auto-évaluation.

Introduction: Defining Portfolios

Significant attention seems to gradually grow in portfolios as a form of assessment which may provide a more *authentic, student-centered experience and growth-oriented interactions* between learners and teachers than tests and final assignments. There are various benefits in using portfolios to assess adult learning and outcomes and it requires from the teachers careful planning, patience and flexibility with students. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to provide a preliminary overview of the process of portfolio assessment, illustrating with examples, describing practical details, and offering suggestions for implementation in our educational system.

Portfolios have long been recognised as an authentic assessment tool which is used to examine and diagnose students' progress. It is a systematic collection of student achievements and thus, their learning outcomes evidenced by the compiled material in the portfolio that illustrate the achievement (Venn, 2000). Krulik and Rudnick (1998) contend that portfolios are best used for diagnostic and *self-assessment* purposes and therefore should not be neglected, i.e., it should include evidence of student reflection & self-evaluation, guidelines for selecting the portfolio contents, & criteria for judging the quality of the work. On their part, Paulson and Meyer (1991:60) define portfolio as:

“A purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's effort, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection”.

By constructing a portfolio, students may recognize their own growth and learn to take improved responsibility for their education and development. Teachers may use portfolios for assessment purposes and to record educational outcomes. The following example presents a portfolio evaluation instrument:

School: _____

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Birth date: _____ Grade Level: _____

Activities: _____

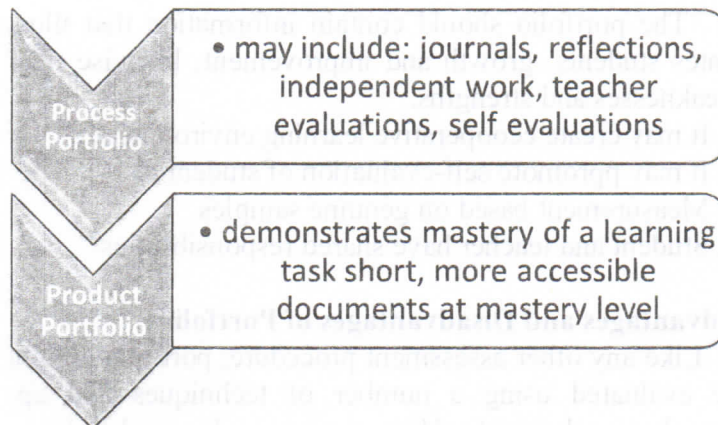
Principal: _____

Names of the School's Portfolio Team:

Evaluator's Comments:

Portfolio Evaluation Form

There are several items of portfolios suggested by Crowley (1993:545) which seem to be appropriate for problem solving situations such as samples of journal writings, student-made concrete representations, and group projects. It has manifold types according to the intended assessment purposes. We may suggest the following types:



Characteristics of Portfolios

Portfolios may provide an important position in creating an intersection of learning and assessment; hence, teachers should find how they may join both processes successfully. Some characteristics of good portfolios are suggested by Paulson and Meyer (1991:61-62). They may be summarised as follows:

1. The portfolio may offer the student an opportunity to learn about learning. Thus, the end product must include information showing that a student has engaged in self-reflection.
2. The Portfolio is something that is done by the students, not to the students. Such assessment, in addition, offers a concrete way for them to learn to appreciate their own work and value themselves as learners.
3. The files and document compiled in the portfolio is the kind of documents which students take on new meaning for certain purposes. For instance, a portfolio for problem solving activities should be separated from other portfolios such as a portfolio on mathematics projects or classroom exercises on certain topics in mathematics.

4. The portfolio should contain information that illustrates students' growth and improvement, likewise their weaknesses and strengths.
5. It may create cooperative learning environment
6. It may promote self-evaluation of student
7. Measurement based on genuine samples
8. Student and teacher have shared responsibilities

Advantages and Disadvantages of Portfolios

Like any other assessment procedure, portfolios might be evaluated using a number of techniques and approaches such as *checklists*, *rating scales*, and *rubrics*. There are numerous benefits of using portfolios in assessment, however, one should be conscious about how to use them and when. Among the gains they may offer the following:

- It is more natural since it is collected in the classroom and shows the actual students' work on solving problems, including the ways and strategies they use to learn.
- It may provide information about students' growth on a certain period of time (e.g. every semester).
- It also may encourage student self-evaluated skills and allows realistic assessment of proficiency.
- Giving students the opportunity to actively participate in the learning process.
- Providing a process for structuring learning in stages.
- May offer a profile of learners' abilities, skills and interests.
- Facilitating cooperative learning activities, including peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and peer conferencing.

On the other hand, there are some drawbacks regarding the use of portfolios to assess student learning, they may be summarised as what follows:

- Teachers are likely to encounter difficulties to attain acceptable levels of reader/scorer/assessor reliability of portfolios.
- It takes more time for teachers to assess portfolios since they have to make selective criteria of assessment using rubrics (It is Time consuming and efforts demanding) (Payne 2003).
- Gathering all necessary data: Problems with storage (difficult to manage).

Portfolios for Assessment Purposes

Portfolio for assessment purposes seems to be essential, not only to improve the complex task of student assessment, but also to contribute to a more positive attitude and enjoyment towards learning (Thomas et al 2004). It may afford evidence about students' ability to solve problems, to analyse them in level-headed ways. Portfolios can also be used as a *diagnostic assessment* to identify students' misconceptions on learning tasks and to encourage students' self-assessment. Portfolios, indeed, are recognised as flexible and may grant tremendous opportunities for assessing learning effectively.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that portfolio assessment is an ongoing process, and it seems to be an imperative part in education for the purpose of creating effective learning environments. Teachers should be cognisant of the fact that assessment system should match between both the curriculum and the learning process. In this vein, the rationale behind assessment covers in some way every aspect of educational fields, namely learners, teachers, parents and school administrative.

The integration of portfolio in assessment in an EFL classroom seems to be more appropriate than trying to replace existing and traditional forms of assessment. The most vital consideration is to involve students in their learning to assist them to learn through assessment. As it seems to be obvious, nothing is perfect, and there will always be strengths and weaknesses of all kinds of assessments, and a unique perfect model does not exist. Nonetheless, if teachers and educators try to work with their own experiences and appraise the existing literature on portfolio research, they may, in all probabilities be able to design a better assessment tool.

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