

The Use Of Portfolio As An Assessment Tool

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Abstract: After the advent of the assessment reform in North America around the 1980's, learning became considered as evidence for assessment. This latter came to support learning, adjust learning behavior and improve performance. Portfolio as a learner-centered assessment strategy is based on the philosophy which views assessment as an integral part of instruction. It is a purposeful, multidimensional process of collecting evidence that illustrates a student's accomplishments, efforts and progress over time. This paper defines portfolio as a self-assessment and self-reflection tool with its various types. It explains its various uses and its main components, along with the main steps of its implementation. At the end, it gives a short description of portfolio's main points of strength and weaknesses.

Index Terms: Assessment, Learner-centeredness , Learning evidence , Learning progress, Portfolio Creation, Portfolio implementation, Self-reflection.

1 Introduction

There exist two main types of assessment, namely formative and summative. Formative: provides feedback and information during the instructional process, while learning is taking place (For Learning improves the quality and monitors progress). Summative: takes place after the learning has been completed and provides feedback that sums up the learning and teaching process (Of Learning, at the end of instruction).

2 Portfolio Definition

Many are compelled by the logic of using teaching/learning portfolios as means of documenting the effectiveness of both teachers and learners. Since teaching is a process that requires a complex approach to accurately measure its effectiveness; portfolios are among the recent and essential tools faculty can use for such a task.

"Seldin, 1997: 2 cited in Kaplan. *The Teaching Portfolio The portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all the document and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it presents selected information on teaching activities and solid evidence of their effectiveness*" (p1) If students are to be lifelong learners, they need to be able to monitor and control their own process of learning.

2.1 As a Self-assessment Tool:

"O'Malley and Pierce, 1996 cited in Beck, et.al
Portfolios provide an opportunity for (EFL/ESL) learners to monitor their own writing progress and take responsibility for meeting goals. By documenting growth over time through a systematic collection of their work, portfolios enable learners to see possibilities for reflection, redirection, and confirmation of their own learning efforts. It should measure not just the amount of content students know, but the extent of their understanding, their ability to make connections, and their ease in transferring knowledge to new situations.

2.2 As a Self-reflection Tool:

Cain, M, et.al (2005) The skill of reflection involves the ability to effectively use high-level cognitive skills such as critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making, as well as the ability to tap into affective areas and articulate thoughts and feelings. This skill needs to be modeled first by teachers themselves. Teachers must then help their students to acquire the skill by providing opportunities for practice (p21) Generally speaking, reflective statements in a portfolio have some features like the following :

- Self evaluation with respect to a teaching and learning experience;
- The relation of teaching practice to student learning;
- Connections between ideas and practice; and
- Ideas for future changes in practice.

3 Types of Portfolios

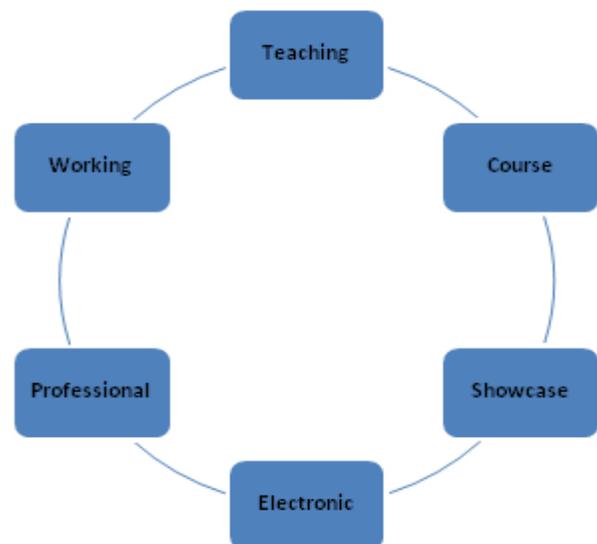


Fig 1. The Different Types of Portfolios.

4 Portfolio Content

- **Material from Oneself** such as titles, enrollments, course syllabi, teaching methods, readings, homework assignments, new course projects, materials, instructional innovations.

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- **Material from Others** such as student course or evaluation data, honors or awards, statements by alumni on the quality of instruction.
- **Products of Teaching/Learning** such as student scores on pre- and post-course examinations, graded student essays, along with professor's comments, student publications or conference presentations, letters, emails or other evidence of professor helping a student with his career.
- **Other Possible Items** such as a videotape of the professor teaching, participation in off-campus teaching, invitations to guest lecture in another class.

5 Steps to Portfolio Creation

5.1 Stating the Philosophy: Is the part of the portfolio where the writer presents his ideological stance on teaching and/or learning:

- What are the goals he aims at as a learner?
- What demonstrates his desire to grow as a learner?
- What teaching practices does he prefer? Why?

5.2 Evidence Collection: the most common source of documenting effective teaching/ learning is the end-of-semester student evaluations, Mid-term feedback, Sample course syllabi, homework assignments, and/or exams, Methods used to evaluate/improve teaching.

5.3 Planning and Preparation: the writer should begin to plan about the audience and purpose which helps in giving shape to the portfolio. In some circumstances the structure of the portfolio might be dictated by institutional policy where the institution may have restrictions in terms of the length and content of the portfolio statements.

5.4 Assessment and Examination:

- Demonstration of perseverance in pursuing goals or completing work to a high standard of quality.
- Showcase of effort, progress, and achievement in reading and writing.
- Demonstration of communicative skills in a second language
- Demonstration of collaboration skills

5.5 Shaping and Organizing: the following guidelines make the portfolio shaping easier;

- ❖ Title page and table of contents
- ❖ Headings and subheadings that clearly identify and separate the portfolio's components
- ❖ In the body of the portfolio, references to material in the appendix, where appropriate
- ❖ Evidence to support every statement on the approach or contribution to teaching/ learning.
- ❖ Brief explanatory statements accompanying each item in the appendix, where appropriate (What is the item's context, purpose, or relationship to what is said in the body of the portfolio?)

6 Strategies of Portfolio Implementation

- **The Collection of Evidence:** during the daily learning activities, students collect evidence of learning achievements. As Friedman Ben-David et al.

Explain, it "is limited only by the degree of the designer's creativity."

- **The Reflection on Evidence:** the author after collecting the best works is required to think about how these items changed his learning/teaching and how it helped develop him on a personal and a professional level.
- **The Evaluation of Evidence:** in order to judge the quality of the evidence it contains and determine what are the strengths and weaknesses, especially in practice. It should be a continuous process throughout the portfolio development period.
- **The Defense of Evidence:** the portfolio developer is given a chance to defend his choice regarding items' selection for the portfolio.
- **The Assessment Decision:**

Davis, M.H and Ponnampuram, G.G. 'Portfolio Assessment'. (*JVME*, 2005 *Portfolio assessment is thus an ongoing process (i.e., continuous assessment), charting student progress toward the expected standard in each exit learning outcome. For each candidate to benefit from such ongoing assessment, his or her portfolio supervisor must have regular review sessions to discuss the ratings with the student and monitor the student's progress toward the curriculum learning outcomes* (p 280)

7 Issues in Portfolio Implementation

- ✓ The **time** factor is one problem voiced by teachers and principals alike.
- ✓ **Parental or community support** for such a new and unfamiliar system of assessment.
- ✓ how to set standards for the portfolios.
- ✓ The **lack of knowledge or training** necessary for implementing portfolio-based student assessment.
- ✓ The current **status and role** of **traditional, standardized testing** (especially high stakes testing related to promotion and graduation).
- ✓ **Reliability and Validity** : It can be sometimes hard to establish scoring systems that are reliable, ratings of several examiners must be collated to arrive at a reliable evaluation of the portfolio evidence of a particular student. Also, difficulties about the verification of the portfolio material as evidence represent a real threat to its validity. Even, the plagiarism issue when it comes to practice is another challenge to overcome in this area.
- ✓ **Practicability** in terms of feasibility, cost effectiveness, and acceptability includes the establishment of suitable modifications during the assessment process based on student- staff contact time for the ratings and supervision, examiner's reading, feedback and briefing as well as adequate secretarial support to log individual student grades will appease these concerns.,
- ✓ **Depth, not breadth** it is not possible to have a portfolio that represents every aspect of a unit. However, products in the portfolio, if chosen properly and carefully can illustrate the depth and mastery of the area assessed.
- ✓ **Interpretation of results** what it really says about the student.

- How does the learner compare to others at his age or grade level?
- Would the results be meaningful to those outside the school system such as college admission officers or those selecting scholarship recipients?

8 Advantages of Portfolios

- Involvement Of Learners
- Increase Of Accountability
- A Common Vision Of Goals
- Authentic Picture Of Learning
- Improved Teaching/ Learning
- Reflection Of Assessment Reform

9 Disadvantages of Portfolios

- Lower Comparability
- Difficulty Ensuring Standardized Testing Conditions
- Cost
- Scoring
- Time

10 Conclusion

While portfolios provide teachers and administrators with diverse, multi-source information for the purposes of assessment and evaluation, the core reason for embracing portfolio work in the enterprise of teaching and learning is to inspire students to become active, engaged, and reflective learners. The portfolio promotes and sustains students' academic enrichment and personal growth, making it a powerful idea for significant learning. Portfolio-based assessment offers a viable alternative to traditional, standardized, high stakes testing. It provides a means for those students at risk for academic failure to demonstrate progress within a format less restrictive and inflexible than the traditional means. The portfolio-based assessment method also allows the student to demonstrate specific skills within the context in which they were taught rather than within the context determined by the test constructors.

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