

Portfolio Use in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

In this workshop, the presenters will first discuss types and uses of the portfolio in second language classrooms. Previous research by the presenters (2003, 2005) indicated that the portfolio can help students to monitor and reflect on their own learning processes and progress, to feel more sense of achievement compared with traditional tests, to receive more feedback both from their instructor and classmates by sharing each other's work in progress. The portfolio can be an effective learning and assessment tool especially when used in conjunction with cooperative learning techniques. Examples of teacher's instructions, students' portfolios, and student reactions about portfolio creation from reading, writing, and speaking and listening classes will be shown in the workshop. Components of the portfolio as well as portfolio sharing activities will be demonstrated. Workshop participants will have a chance to consider how they can apply portfolio use and assessment to their teaching contexts.

Introduction

The portfolio is a useful teaching and learning tool in language learning classrooms. There are different types of portfolios, such as assessment portfolios, showcase portfolios, and collections portfolios (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Assessment portfolios consist of items students choose to include according to certain assessment criteria. Showcase portfolios contain students' best pieces of work. Collections portfolios, often called working folders, are collections of all the pieces of work during a certain period of time. In other words, assessment portfolios can occasionally mean the same content as showcase portfolios if the criterion given was to choose the best work. The most important in creating a portfolio, however, is the activity of making selections or choices and making reflections over the learning processes (Apple & Shimo, 2005; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Shimo, 2003). The criteria given for assessment portfolios should aim to promote these activities.

Benefits of Portfolios

Portfolios have the following benefits (Apple & Shimo, 2005; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Shimo, 2003):

- 1) Learners can reflect over their learning processes.
- 2) Portfolios make it possible to make a continuous assessment over a long time period.

- 3) Learners can make their original products and they can feel a sense of achievement more compared to traditional tests.
- 4) Learners can take control over their learning and feel more responsibility for it.
- 5) Learners can assess weaknesses and strengths, and progress in their ability, and (re-)set goals more effectively by looking over their work.

Students are often able to receive more feedback to their work in progress, such as easy drafts, from their teacher and classmates when portfolios are used in their classes (Shimo, 2005). Moreover, portfolios can help to promote learner autonomy especially when the portfolio assignments include a) decision-making or choice-making tasks which enable students to plan and organize their learning, b) language tasks related to both in- and outside-class activities, and c) optional tasks to accommodate students at different levels of motivation and proficiency (Shimo, 2003).

Sample Portfolio Guidelines

Portfolios can be used for any skill-based or content-based language classrooms. The sample guidelines below are from an English listening class at a four-year Japanese university (Apple, To appear). The guidelines were given to the students in the class on a handout with oral explanations:

Your Extensive Listening Portfolio (ELP) should have four parts:

1. A REFLECTIVE ESSAY of about 250-300 words typed (A4 paper). Write about how you listened to English, which strategies you used, whether it worked or not and why or why not, and your goals for listening in the future.
2. A CASSETTE TAPE. You will record your voice onto a cassette tape at the beginning of every class this semester. At the end of the tape, you should have a short speech OR conversation (with a classmate).
 - (a) SPEECH: 5 minutes non-stop
 - (b) CONVERSATION: 10 minutes for two people, 15 minutes for 3 people
 - (c) REFLECTION: Listen to your recordings throughout the semester and write a short (50-100 word) description of how you think your speaking improved. Analyze your final speech or conversation. What was good? What needs improvement? Think about your intonation, rhythm, linking, and so on.
3. WEEKLY GOALS LOGS which you must turn in every week -- Please include at least 8 sheets out of the 12 you did during the semester.
4. A short Reflective Essay (50-100 words) about "goals." Think about these questions:
 - (a) What goals did you set during the semester?
 - (b) Did you meet your goals? What strategies did you use to meet your goals?

- (c) If you didn't meet your goals, what was the reason?
- (d) What goals can you set in the future? How can you reach them?

The above guidelines intended to help students with the collection aspect of their portfolio by making the assessment criteria clear to them. The guidelines also aimed to assist students in selection and reflection processes more effectively by giving specific tasks in which students were to think over their learning processes, assess their achievement and progress, and (re-)set their learning goals.

Student reaction

In our classrooms, students have generally appreciated portfolio creation. The following comments, originally written in Japanese and translated by the authors, come from previous portfolio studies by the authors (Shimo, 2003; Apple and Shimo, 2005):

- *There are many cases where we ourselves thought, made decisions, and worked on our activity.*
- *When I compare recent works to old ones, I can see the progress, which makes me feel like studying harder.*
- *The portfolio shows a record of my thoughts and lets me examine the work I've done.*
- *Because I learn many things every week, having [evaluation] every time is good for me. Studying for a test doesn't lead to much learning, I think.*

While a few students claimed that the portfolio is simply another kind of homework after all, many students seem to have thought highly of the processes of making decisions and choices, monitoring their learning. They also felt a greater sense of control and responsibility over their learning processes.

For future portfolios

While students appreciated benefits that portfolios generally provide, many of them appreciated the cooperative elements in the process of creating portfolios. The most intriguing aspect is that portfolios and cooperative learning share certain common features. Both methodologies have a great potential to promote learning autonomy and learner responsibility, and both allow students to make choices and decisions and plan learning processes and activities. They both put an emphasis on learning processes as much as, or sometimes even more than learning product at the end. Portfolio use may become even more effective in language classrooms by integrating cooperative learning aspects in portfolio creation processes.

References

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