



The notion of the European Language Portfolio



Michael Anetopoulos, chairperson of QLS, talking about the ELP in Athens

The literary meaning of the term “portfolio” is a collection of past work. However a portfolio does not represent only a mere collection of past work. The Council of Europe urges that the portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student’s efforts, progress or achievement in language learning.

There are various ways of preparing portfolios depending upon the purpose and other overt and covert reasons. However, the four general steps –collection, selection, reflection and connection– are the most common to all portfolio development procedures. In the first step, students are required to collect their tasks. Commonly speaking, students select the tasks that are appropriate for their portfolio. The level of students is also a significant factor affecting the process of selection -in the lower classes students may need frequent help from the teacher while the upper levels may accomplish independently. The most important process of portfolio construction is self-reflection upon the task. Reflection is carried out by writing; however it can also be accomplished verbally. Specifically, reflection is a strong approach of self-assessment and enhancement of the learning process.

The portfolio generally includes the sample of learner’s tasks that show his/her progress over a certain period. It also depicts the story of student growth in performance. For instance, in the process of writing, the learner can include the earlier draft, the improved one and the final version of his/her task. This helps assess how the learner has progressed over time and estimate the limitation of his/her learning as well as the constraints that shape his/her learning process.



The portfolio motivates the learner to demonstrate outstanding performance. Generally, student-led exhibitions have many elements of product-oriented portfolios. Students can publish magazines and books and develop projects and other educational materials.

Portfolio items

It is very essential to develop an understanding of what types of item/entries are included in a portfolio. The emphasis of the nature of item depends upon the level of the students. From its definition, it is clear that portfolio construction is a continuous collection of tasks that fulfill the pre-determined curricular objectives.

Writing

Specifically, writing is a main characteristic of the portfolio. This type of entry includes journal, explanations, reflections etc.

Investigations or discovery

Gathering data, constructing arguments, and performing simulations are examples of this type of entry.

Application

This entry comprises of such items that demonstrate student understanding of concept, principle, and procedures to solve problems in well-grounded, real world context.

Interdisciplinary

This entry's focus is on use of English within other subject areas.

Projects

By projects we mean a type of activity that takes a period of days or weeks and requires a formal presentation of what has been learned or investigated; the focus is on the development of the skill of independent learning and group work.

Instructional use of portfolio assessment

Recent research has revealed that the portfolio has a significant impact to the learning process. The portfolio also reflects the series of communication between the teacher and the learner, which can be an evidence for appraising the learning process, gives a map of the impact of what happens inside the classroom to what the learner is to acquire. Needless to say, it also promotes a live communication between parents, teachers and students by means of portfolio-conferences, exhibitions and portfolio exchange. Furthermore, effective student-teacher communication helps promote the instructional power that can minimize the possibility of gap between teacher and learner.

Except some concern of overload, teachers have been benefited from the use of portfolios in their instructional strategies. Some of them are listed as follows:

- made them more reflective about both their students and teaching process;
- enhanced their ability to carry out assessment; and
- focused on more learner-centred teaching.

Issues to resolve

In the context of portfolio construction, there are some issues, which need to be discussed and taken into account.

Clear purpose



The purpose of the portfolio must be clear to enhance the process of instruction and student learning.

Sharing responsibilities

It is essentially important to determine the accountability of teacher and students in the construction process. In the classroom context, teacher and students share the process of portfolio construction.

Conclusion

The portfolio, as it grows through the classroom activities, authenticates the learning process. Seamlessly, the portfolio improves the educative relationship between the teacher, students and stakeholders; and makes a worthy learning environment that helps the learner to be capable of transforming the world at large.

ELT NEWS: June 2007

*Data provided by Anastasia Spyropoulou
(anastasia@eltnews.gr)*



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
This document reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.