

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

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Abstract The paper intends to give the practitioners of portfolio assessment in English as Second Language contexts some inputs on how they can be implemented based on a review of literature in the area. The paper will be helpful to the practitioners of portfolios to understand that there is no right way to implement portfolios as each class demands a unique approach to authentic assessment, and that student participants collection of sample writing will differ. The paper briefly provides an introduction to Portfolios, tips on maintaining portfolios in Writing Classrooms, and various limitations and challenges in Indian contexts.

Key words: Authentic assessment to writing, Portfolio, Writing classrooms,

Introduction : Portfolios are ‘a purposeful collection of student works that exhibits to the student (and or others) the student’s efforts, progress or achievement in a given area (Northwest Evaluation Association cited in Wolcott, 1998). Moya and O’Malley (1994. 14) viewed portfolio assessment as ‘the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio’ (Applebee and Langer (1992. 30). O’Malley & Valdez Pierce, (1996) defined as the systematic collection of students work measured against predetermined scoring criteria. These benchmarks may include scoring guides, checklist, rubrics or rating scales. Portfolios are considered to be useful especially for non-native English students because they “provide a broader measure of what students can do, and because they replace the timed writing context, which has long been claimed to be particularly discriminatory against non-native writers (L2 contexts) (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, p.61). It has been observed that “...portfolio assessment is a useful system, which benefits the writing instructors, the students, and the whole writing program as it reveals to us the processes of writing and how it is evaluated” (Wolf. 1989).

O’Malley (1994) opines that portfolio concentrates on a comprehensive approach. Some of the observations are as follows:

- (a). Portfolios use both formal and informal assessment techniques
- (b). They focus on both the processes and products of learning
- (c). They seek to understand the language development in the linguistic, cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective domains of the participants.

According to Walcott (1998) Portfolios can be used for both internal and external assessment. They can be used by individual teachers to assess students’ growth and achievement in writing, or on a larger scale, where people other than the classroom teacher will evaluate the portfolios for various purposes like certifying individual student achievement or evaluating the curriculum. Students can use portfolios as a basis for self-assessment and development of standards, if they are given clear criteria and opportunities to evaluate and revise their own work in preparing their portfolios. Different kinds of portfolio include showcase portfolio, collection portfolio, evaluation portfolio, process-oriented portfolio and product based portfolio. Showcase portfolio presents only the students best work which includes, video recording, power points etc. Collection portfolio presents every work that is been done by the students, where as evaluation portfolio displays the assessment that took place and it is filed separately.

According to Weigle(2002), Portfolio Assessment was used as an approach to teach arts like architecture, fine arts, arts, music, design and photography in the 1970s. In 1990s, portfolios were used in America, Canada in schools, colleges as an alternative form of assessment while teaching English. In the early 1980s, teachers and language educators realized the importance of quality of learning by systematic assessment and opted for portfolios. Portfolios were used in first language teaching contexts at the school level by involving the parents also. Portfolios were introduced in the first language settings in America, Britain, and other countries.

Table1:Conventional Writing Classroom and Portfolio based Writing Classroom

Conventional writing classroom	Portfolio based writing Classroom
It Involves teacher feedback and assessment only	It includes both peer feedback teacher’s feedback besides self evaluation in choosing the best written piece of writing. .
It measures student’s ability at one time only.	It measures students’ writing ability over a period of time.

Less time for follow-up and redrafting the written pieces based on teacher feedback especially in large classrooms.	There is possibility for the learners redraft based on feedback both from the teacher and the peers
The sample pieces are written within the timeframe	There is possibility for revising and writing and submitting the best written piece of writing for evaluation purpose.
Students may feel the pressure while writing as they may not have of the sample schema, or write without specific audience in mind.	It is a collective effort through brainstorming, peer review, revising and conference with teacher which makes them understand the schema of sample writing and also understand the audience better.
Here the learner takes part in the assessment of a written piece	Here the learner is actively involved in assessment process through peer review and through self assessment based on the checklist provided by the teacher.
It does not show the range of students language ability	It captures many facets of language learning performance
It student responsibility is less; some learners may not actively take part in the process of learning to write. Hence may lack confidence to write in future.	Student learns how to take responsibility on language learning. Portfolio can build up their confidence in language learning and overcome his inhibitions and become expert writer in a period of time.

As the table shows, Portfolio assessment is a peer formative assessment. Portfolios act as a process-oriented assessment of long-term progress in writing since they provide evidence of editing and revision in the construction of a final product (Douglas, 2000). As Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) note in their history of writing assessment that instructors have used writing folders in the British Education system for over fifty years. Portfolio allows the teacher to monitor students' performance from the beginning to the end of the course. It also allows active involvement by the participants in the learning and assessment process. This enables them to improve their competence in English through peer review. "Portfolio are considered to be useful especially for non native English students because they provide a broader measure of what students can do, and because they replace the timed context, which has long been claimed to be particularly discriminatory against non native speakers". (Hamp- Lyons & Condon 2000: 61). They emphasize that specific scoring criteria need to be carefully planned in implementing portfolios.

According to White (1994) "Portfolios bring teaching, learning and assessment together as mutually supportive activities, as opposed to the artificiality of conventional tests". Portfolio can be effectively implemented with the support of the management, educational system, teachers and parents. There should be collective support to maintain, assess and evaluate the educational process. Countries like South Arabia, Japan, China, Turkey, Brooklyn, Iran and Latvia are also adopting portfolios in the tertiary level. In India, Portfolio assessment is implemented

in a different way in few schools as continuous assessment in CBSE curriculum.

Portfolio concentrates on the individual performance as the language learning is a gradual process that takes place in portfolio and the proof along with evaluation is kept as a record for students and teachers reference.

Advantages of Portfolio Assessment

According to Menucha (2000) feels that the portfolio best serve the dual purpose of learning and assessment. Borthwick (1995) added that portfolios offers teachers' vital information for diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses to help them improve their performance.

Portfolio helps in evaluating students' language skills and develops instructional goals and objectives based on documentation. Being a promising alternative assessment strategy, portfolio assessment links assessment to daily teaching practices and thus allows assessment to become a teaching strategy to improve learning (Moya & O'Malley, 1994).

Ghoorchaei, B, Tavakoli.M & Ansari.D (2010) did a study on Iranian EFL students using process - oriented portfolio in order to improve their writing ability. Their study findings show that portfolio assessment group improved better in writing ability and sub-skills (focus, organization, elaboration, and vocabulary) compared to traditional writing group.

One of the major advantages of portfolio assessment strategy is systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated, accurate and in-depth information about student abilities in different learning domains.

Conclusion

Using portfolio assessment, students can gradually improve in their writing skills. They need to follow

their written task improvement over time, create assessment criteria for a written product, and discuss the strategies/methods they use, work with peers to revise work, evaluate peers work, and identify difficulties they encounter during the performing of a required task. And when students are collaborators in the assessment process, they develop reflective skill and may improve their performance. They learn the qualities of good written task, how to judge their work against the aspects of writing, how to assess

their efforts and feelings of accomplishment, and how to set future goals for themselves.

The advantages of using portfolios include offering students a concrete way to value their work, reflect on their performance, enhance their learning and autonomy, alter their views of the teacher's role and their own role, encourage themselves to take responsibility for their learning, and involve themselves in the assessment process as observed by (Brown 1998; Paulson, Paulson, Meyer 1991; Yueh, 1999) cited in Niami .M (2009).

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