

THE USE OF PORTFOLIOS IN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT

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Represented by a Member of the Editorial Board Professor V.I. Konovalov

Key words and phrases: interaction; language accomplishments; portfolio; questionnaires; personal responsibility.

Abstract: The article deals with one of the ways of evaluating language proficiency, i.e. a portfolio of students' papers. A few techniques of compiling instructing materials are shown here. A primary focus is on the discussion of learners' achievements and methods of involving students in assessing their progress in language acquisition.

The concerns of language teachers lie with the process of instruction itself as well as with assessing learners' language skills they need for a wide variety of purposes. In order to carry out these tasks, teachers need more than access to different assessment techniques and instruments. They need an understanding of the nature and purposes of evaluation, procedures for collecting and interpreting different kinds of information about students and student learning. We believe that for purposes of second language evaluation in education, language is best viewed as a skill. It is possible to know a lot about a language without being able to use it.

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress and achievements in given areas. Such professionals as photographers and architects have inspired student portfolios as a means of keeping a record of their accomplishments to show to others. Teachers must take the lead in starting this activity off on the right track. They must ensure that the portfolios are used as a new kind of evaluation procedure. In the beginning, it is vital to negotiate with students how to implement portfolios. Students need guidance in setting them up. A file folder can serve as a portfolio. Folders should be clearly marked with each student's name. Samples of writing, tests, translation from English into Russian, tape-recordings of speaking samples can be included in a portfolio. Portfolios have most frequently been associated with written language, but can also be used effectively with oral language. In this case, students keep audio recordings of speaking samples in their portfolios.

Language portfolios can have a very specific focus, such as writing or translating as examples of language development. Samples of writing such as article reviews, book commentaries, article summaries, quizzes, questionnaires and tests can be included in portfolios. The implementation of portfolios takes time and a willingness to explore alternatives before the optimal strategy emerges. The number of pieces in a portfolio should be limited for practical reasons. Students may keep a portfolio for completed work and corrections, which reflect current and previous accomplishments.

The primary value of portfolios is in the assessment of student achievement. They are particularly useful in this respect because they provide a continuous record of students' language development that can be shared with others. If portfolios are reviewed routinely by teachers and students in conference together, then they can also provide information about students' views of their own language learning and the strategies they apply in reading, writing and translating. This in turn can enhance student involvement in and ownership of their own learning. Classes in which portfolio assessment plays a major role are often quite different from classes that use only tests or more conventional forms of assessment. They are usually more student-centered, collaborative and holistic.

The positive effects of portfolios on student learning arise from the opportunities they afford students to become actively involved in assessment and learning. This does not happen automatically, however, simply by having students keep portfolios of their work. Rather, it depends critically on teachers' conscientious efforts to use portfolios as a collaborative assessment process. They must be used actively and interactively, and they must be an integral part of instruction and instructional planning.

There are the following benefits of portfolios. Portfolios provide:

- a continuous, cumulative record of language development;
- a holistic view of student learning;
- insights about progress of individual students;
- opportunities for collaborative assessment and goal-setting with students;
- tangible evidence of student learning to be shared with other students and educators;

– opportunities to use metalanguage to talk about language.

As a result portfolios promote:

- * student involvement in assessment;
- * responsibility for self- assessment;
- * interaction with teachers and students about learning:
 - excitement about learning;
 - students' ability to think critically about schoolwork;
 - collaborating sharing classrooms.

Responsibility and excitement for learning come from sharing one's accomplishments with others who are supportive and collaborative. Thus, the sense of responsibility and excitement for learning that can result from the use of portfolios is definitely dependent on:

- * their being used interactively;
- * students' assuming ownership of them;
- * students' controlling the review process.

Suggestions for making portfolios interactive vehicles for promoting student involvement in learning are as follows:

- negotiate with students to determine how the work will be assessed, what criteria will be used for assessment and how the assessment will be used;
- plan portfolio conferences periodically so that students can review their work with their teachers and jointly set individualized goals;
- organize reviews of individual student portfolios by small groups or the whole class; it is important in this case that all students' portfolios be reviewed in this way and that students be taught how to provide positive, constructive feedback to one another;
- ensure that discussions of student portfolios are positive collaborative;
- always adopt a supportive attitude.

Portfolios make students the agents of reflection and decision- making and thus give them control of their own learning. They encourage students to reflect on their own learning, to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and to identify their own goals for learning. Here are some specific ways of accomplishing this:

1) during portfolio conferences students should be asked to control the review process and to describe their current strengths and weaknesses and to indicate where they have made progress;

2) students should compare pieces of work in their portfolios and to identify what makes one piece better than another and what they might do differently if they were to redo a piece;

3) students should be asked to select their best work, or the most improved one, or their most difficult work and explain why each was selected;

4) while providing responses to or feedback about portfolios the teacher should be interested, supportive and constructive;

5) the teacher should encourage students to reflect on their work in the presence of other students so that they see this as an integral part of classroom teaching and learning and so that they become comfortable with self-assessment and adept at giving supportive feedback to their peers. It is important when students share their portfolios and the interaction becomes noncompetitive and student-centered.

Besides using portfolios as a way of student involvement in learning, they can be used to plan instruction that is responsive to students' needs. This is largely an issue of reviewing evidence of student achievement in their portfolios and keeping a record of areas that require additional attention. That's why the teacher should plan regular conferences with students to review the contents of their portfolios and look for recurrent and persistent difficulties experienced by students and keep a record of them. After listening to students' comments about the difficulties they are experiencing or the areas they feel are important to improve, the teacher should build these into lessons and engage students in joint goal setting. The following questionnaire may be given to students to reflect on work they include in their portfolios. It can be adapted to specific kinds of work such as writing assignments, book reviews or some work related to their general interests. Students do not need to respond to all questions, and additional questions can be added to make the questionnaire more relevant. This is a sample self-report form for student portfolios.

1 What makes this a good or an interesting project?

2 What is the most interesting part of this project?

3 What is the most difficult part of this project?

4 What did you learn from doing this project?

5 What skills did you practice when doing this project?

6 How is this project different from or better than other projects in your portfolio?

7 What is the best part of this project? Why?

8 What is the weakest part of this project? Why?

9 How would you make this project better?

10 What assistance or resources did you use to complete this project?

As well as using portfolios to boost student involvement in learning, teachers can use them to plan instruction that is responsive to students' needs. This is largely an issue of reviewing evidence of student achievement in their portfolios and keeping a record of areas that require additional attention. Hence, teachers should:

– plan regular conferences with students to review the contents of their portfolios;

– review students' portfolios after major units or periods of instruction to monitor the impact of instruction;

– look for recurrent and persistent difficulties experienced by students and keep a record of them;

– make provisions for keeping track of observations across time and of a number of students so that frequent and common difficulties can be identified;

– listen carefully to students' comments about the difficulties they are experiencing or the areas they feel are important to improve and build these into lessons;

– engage students in joint goal setting and instructional planning, and ensure that these goals and plans are incorporated into instruction.

Reviewing and responding to portfolios is time consuming and it may not fit into classroom routine, therefore it is necessary to reconceptualize the role of a teacher which becomes that of a facilitator and listener. It is advisable to reorganize a way of doing things in class to make time for portfolios activities. Portfolios should become an integral part of teaching if they are to lead to the benefits described earlier.

Setting up portfolios is a method of collecting information used for language evaluation. In making decisions about language instruction and acquisition, both qualitative and quantitative information is used. All information, whether qualitative or quantitative, refers to characteristics of a lot of things such as a student's reading ability, a teacher's enthusiasm, the instructional approach of the textbook or the complexity of a text or the topic of a videotape, etc. Teachers need to be clear about information in order to avoid misunderstandings. The quality of data used for evaluation is of primary concern. Two basic technical aspects of quality should be considered: reliability and validity. In the most general terms, reliability refers to consistency and stability. Validity is the extent to which the information is relevant. Reliability and validity are both critical for judging the quality of qualitative information (for example, when observing student behavior in class or assessing their conversational skills) and quantitative information (for example, from tests and rating scales). At the same time, there is the practical side of gathering data that is an acceptable procedure for making vital decisions. Reliability and validity outweigh practicalities, and validity is the most crucial quality of all. Without validity, gathering information is a waste of time.

By their very nature, portfolios provide an ongoing record of student development. It is also useful to record observations and insights arising from the review of portfolios and include these in the portfolios themselves. Recording comments about conferences is especially useful and important because the conferences do not provide a written record. Students' willingness to collaborate in the use of these procedures and their confidence in the value of those activities is critically dependent on using information emanating from them to plan instruction. Detailed record keeping of student performance demonstrated in portfolios and during conferences can also facilitate the planning of individualized instruction and the assessment of individual development. Such detailed records are also necessary if conferences and portfolios are to be used systematically in assigning grades. A variety of record-keeping methods can be useful. Teachers should make notes as soon as possible after reviewing portfolios or conducting conferences. Any delay in recording comments should be minimized so that records are accurate. The following kinds of questions can guide note taking.

- 1 What knowledge or skill did the student demonstrate?
- 2 Where did the student demonstrate growth or improvement?
- 3 Where did the student appear to have difficulty?
- 4 What strategies did the student use to cope with difficulties?
- 5 How did the student organize his work?
- 6 Did the student have a strategy for planning writing or reading assignments?
- 7 Does the student know his strengths and weaknesses?
- 8 What likes and dislikes did the student express?
- 9 What goals are appropriate for this student?

During conferences about a portfolio the teacher may ask the following questions.

- 1 What kind of materials have you included in your portfolio?
- 2 In what ways are they the same? Different?

- 3 What does your portfolio reveal about you as a reader? (A writer? A person?)
- 4 What does your portfolio suggest your strengths are?
- 5 How does your portfolio reveal how you have changed?
- 6 What do you think people will learn from your portfolio?
- 7 How do you plan to use your portfolio?

This kind of work provides opportunities for students:

- 1) to be self-reflective;
- 2) to assume responsibility for their own learning;
- 3) to collaboratively set individual learning goals;
- 4) to assume ownership of learning;
- 5) to recognize and enjoy their accomplishments;

6) to communicate orally in one-to-one conversations with their teachers about schoolwork in ways that are important to them.

We recommend recording insights and feedback pertinent to instruction that arise from portfolios and conferences in a separate notebook set up for this purpose.

Использование «портфолио» в обучении иностранному языку

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Ключевые слова и фразы: анкеты; личная ответственность; портфолио; сотрудничество; успехи в языке.

Аннотация: Описаны способы оценки уровня освоения иностранного языка посредством студенческих «портфолио». Обсуждаются некоторые технологии накопления инструкционного материала. Основное внимание сосредоточено на обсуждении прогресса обучающихся и методах вовлечения студентов в процедуру оценки собственных достижений.

Nutzung der «Portfeuille» in der Ausbildung der Fremdsprache

Zusammenfassung: Im Artikel werden die Weisen der Einschätzung des Niveaus der Aneignung der Fremdsprache mittels studentischer «Portfeuille» beschrieben. Es werden einige Technologien der Ansammlung des Instruktionsmaterials besprochen. Die Hauptaufmerksamkeit ist auf der Erörterung des Fortschritts ausgebildet und die Methoden der Einbeziehung der Studenten in die Prozedur der Einschätzung der eigenen Errungenschaften konzentriert

Utilisation du «portfolio» au cours de l'apprentissage de la langue étrangère

Résumé: Dans l'article sont décrits les moyens de l'évaluation du langage professionnelle par l'intermédiaire des «portfolios» des étudiants. Sont discutées certaines technologies de l'accumulation du matériel d'instructions. L'attention principale est prêtée à la discussion du progrès des élèves et aux méthodes de l'initiation des étudiants à la procédure de l'évaluation de leurs réalisations.
