

**PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: A REFLECTIVE
PROCESS ON ENHANCING WRITING
COMPETENCE**

K.Chellamani

This paper focuses on the necessity to observe process based learning and build-in assessment measures for students to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Portfolio writing has been taken as a form of alternative assessment. This paper narrates the author's attempt on Portfolio assessment towards enhancement of writing competence of post-graduate students in teacher education. The students were trained to collect resources for the syllabus content, develop learning material and present the information through power point presentation. During the process, the students do share, reflect and incorporate the feedback given both by the teacher and by his peer group and finally post their write up in the class blog. The assessment on their writing was formative during the course period. Finally they had summative assessment which was also quantified. It was tallied with their achievement scores in the university examination.

One of the primary tasks that teachers perform is to communicate clearly and accurately their students' progress in schools (Carey 1988). The achievement of students are measured and indicated through abstract numbers and grades. The individual's achievement is spoken in comparison with other members in the group. There is little room for describing an individual's achievement in terms of his achieved ability. Of late, the need for assessing the learner potential has been realised and Portfolio Writing has been taken as a form of alternative assessment. The terms alternative assessment, authentic assessment, or performance-based assessment are often used synonymously "to mean variants of performance assessments that require students to generate rather than choose a response" (Herman, Aschbacher and Winters 1992). The researcher attuned to this alternative assessment and wanted

to involve the students in meaningful performance tasks. Henceforth, the author desired to know about Portfolio assessment and how it differs from the present assessment practice. Burke (1999) and Fogarty (1998) have defined the approaches in assessment, with a focus on three components:

Traditional assessment with a focus on grades and rankings, knowledge, curriculum, and skills, implemented through classroom assessments (tests, quizzes, home work assignments), and standardised tests (either norm referenced or criterion-referenced).

Performance Assessment, with a focus on observable results and standards, application and transfer, implemented through standards, tasks, criteria and scoring rubrics.

Portfolio Assessment with a focus on growth and development over time, implemented through selection, reflection and inspection of class work, along with goal-setting and self-evaluation.

REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIOS

Through reviewing related research studies, the researcher understood that Portfolio Assessment provides opportunities for students to be aware of themselves and their progress in learning. Well-designed portfolios should illustrate students' progress during a term, semester, or year. Reflection is often designed as "meditation, thoughtfulness or careful consideration of some subject matter, idea or purpose". The ongoing interactions between thought and action deepen our understandings. If the number of work samples goes huge in number, they may be chosen on the basis of its relevance to the instructional goals and they should illustrate the students' progress on the goals. Students' achievements on practice tests can have illustrations of interim progress. The post test data when compared with pre test information will illuminate the changes occurred in skills. To develop

a good portfolio, a teacher should plan methods to assess students' status before or during the beginning of instruction.

REFLECTIONS OF RESEARCHES ON PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

In the past decade, portfolios have become a popular assessment tool in teacher preparation programs (Fredrick McMahon & Shaw 2000; Krause 1996; Mokhtari & Yellin 1996; Kenney, Hammitte, Rakestraw & Lamontagne 2000; Otis Wilburn & Winn 2000). Mokharti and Yellin (1996) found that the majority of their elementary education candidates reported that the case of portfolio assessment promoted more collaborative learning (86%), increased student reflection (71%), and aided in the establishment of a psychologically secure environment in the classroom (63%). Stone (1998) stated that "research supports portfolios as a means for reflection on experience, for linking theory to practice, for teaching assessment, and for professional growth". Rogers (2003) proposed a Teacher Development Portfolio (TCDP) that consists of four inter-related components: a candidate profile, a candidate portfolio, the 'bench mark' assessments, and the formative assessments. Computer-based technologies have been used to collect, store, and present evidence of meeting standards in the form of electronic portfolio (Georgi & Crow 1998; Lankes 1995; Mckinney 1998; Niguidula1993). Electronic portfolios have the potential to preserve many of the teaching and learning artefacts collected by the teacher candidate during the course of teacher training (Doty & Hillman 1998; Mckinney 1998; Sheingold & Frederiksen 1994). According to Barret (2000), the process of developing electronic teaching portfolios can document evidence of teacher competencies and guide long-term professional development. The competencies may be locally defined, or linked to national teaching standards. Two primary assumptions in this process are: 1) a portfolio is not a haphazard collection of artefacts (i.e., a scrapbook) but rather a reflective tool which demonstrates growth over time; and 2) As we move to more standards-based teacher performance assessment, we need new tools to record and organize

evidence of successful teaching, for both practicing professionals and student teachers.

Subjects

The wide spectrum of evidences motivated the investigator to attempt on reflective practices in her post-graduation instruction (M. Ed. in teacher education). The class consisted of twenty students. It is a course that intends to prepare students for teacher profession. Although, it has internship in the course component, it does not have any relation to the theoretical inputs.

Methodology

The author handles a course on, “Advanced Methods in Teaching” which comes under the main title, ‘Educational Technology’. This paper contains all theories of teaching, models of teaching, the meaning and operation of teaching strategies, tactics and the evaluation systems in teaching. It is designed to give a sound base for future teachers to take up their teaching profession meaningfully. It has been the practice of learning the course paper for getting scores in the final examination and does not make any link to their Internship programme.

According to the perception of the author, the system is more on testing the students’ memory on what their teacher said in the class. As they are active learners and inquisitive thinkers, the author feels that they can be tested on what they have learned and what they are able to do with their knowledge. It could probably focus more on learning processes than on products. There should be provision for more detailed and timely feedback to students about the quality of their learning and how students think, reason, and apply their learning. For such learning based assessment, the classroom teaching needs a change from a teacher-centric to a learner-centric direction.

Learning is perceived not only as an individual's internal process but also as a social practice. Students gather information and assemble meanings from interactions between and among students and teacher. It promotes development of metacognitive process among students; help them towards critical assessment and learning. The role of the teacher is to act as a moderator, provide tutorials and organise students' presentations and provide reflections to happen among peer, from teacher and from self. Having kept this concept in mind, the researcher wanted to make her classroom teaching with reflective practices. The instructional programme was structured and operated in five subsequent phases. Assessment is in-built throughout the programme.

Objectives

The course paper was on Advanced Methods of teaching. The author wanted to develop skills of students in advanced methods in teaching along with theoretical inputs in advanced methods of teaching. Accordingly, the researcher framed objectives before initiating the treatment programme.

At the end of the semester, the students should be able to,

- Understand theories of teaching for effective classroom instruction;
- Analyse teaching skills and activities and understand their application to classroom situation;
- Understand the different styles and strategies of teaching and their application to classroom teaching;
- Develop skills of analysing interaction in teaching learning situation;
- Understand the theory behind different models of teaching together with their syntax, uses and outcomes;
- Derive teacher competencies and assess teacher performance;
- Develop the skills of using and interpreting the different tools of teacher assessment;
- Understand the use of technology in teaching;

- Develop the competence in communicating the audience appropriately in their writing;

Procedures

The functional aspects of the above objectives equip students with content knowledge, realising its relevance in teaching, building awareness on technological facilities in teaching and learning with hands on experience in teaching and using technology. The programme was in five phases: Decision Making, Setting the platform, Field Implementation, Sharing and Reflecting, and Summative assessment.

Treatment

The entry behaviour of the students was assessed on skill in technology usage, and writing competence in their academic performances. The focus of the programme was to tune students to comprehend the course component holistically, seek resources independently and in groups, develop presentations, share and evaluate materials for course components. Since technology is inevitable today, the author wanted to have optimal utilisation of technology by students. With this focus, the author gave an overall orientation on the course component and directed them the ways and means for resource finding. As it was learner-centric and process-based learning, the relevant technology use was also identified. Ultimately, it was decided that students will find resources from library and from on-line and post the material content in the 'group g-mail' account of the class. Here they would share resources and help each other in enriching their resources. Their preparation for class room presentation would be uploaded in slide share. With this decision, the programme had a move to the second phase.

The programme design had assessment dimension. The assessment was continuous and comprehensive. It was on students' (a) submission of assignments and (b) their power point presentation

in class (assessed by the individual, peer group and the teacher). As this assessment was for their growth, the assessment form was named as 'Developmental reflections'. It includes establishment of standards and determined criteria. For example,

Standards:

Students will comprehend the theories of teaching and its utility in practice.

For the above standard, the determined criteria could be:

The student can

- explain the theories of teaching
- state the relevance of theories in teaching
- compare the similarities and differences in theories of teaching
- illustrate teaching-learning programme designed on the principles of a teaching theory
- understand the use of technology in teaching.

The assessment continuous and comprehensive. Students were assessed on content knowledge, delivery and utilisation of technology. Rubrics were framed to name the quality of students' achievement. The selected rubrics were: 'Outstanding', 'Satisfactory' and 'Needs improvement'.

As scheduled earlier, students did present their area of topic using power point. Students did interact, question and clarify their doubts. The teacher played the role of a moderator and a facilitator of learning in the class room. Of course, the teacher observed students' understanding and helped them to comprehend concepts with clarity. At the end of every presentation, the candidate was assessed based on the criteria framed in the assessment form. The class room became a learning centre encouraging every student to act, react and make sure of understanding the concepts. Students used lap-tops and mobiles for on-line resource access during classroom interactions. The technology atmosphere reduced tech-phobia which some students experienced in the beginning of

the programme. After every presentation, students uploaded their preparation in group slide share. It was observed and assessed by every individual and their feedback was posted. The students in turn reflected and made steps for further development. The corrections were carried out and the artefact was posted in the group blog which was in the 'Read only' format. This was used by all the students for their final examination preparation.

University examination has internal assessment component, for which the researcher collected their artefacts along with self-reflection in hard copies. Taking into account the students efforts throughout in the learning process, their classroom presentation, and the artefact submitted the teacher evaluated the student's performance in the developed evaluation Proforma. It had 4 point scale with scores - A= 71-80; B= 61-70; C=56-60; D=50-55. The assessment framework demonstrates that assessment is a complex system, learning process based, and not just writing a reproduction of what the teacher said in the class. It provides greater opportunity for students to have what and how of learning and above all the meaning of assessment.

DATA COLLECTION

This research was on students' achievement in the course paper titled, 'Advanced Methods of Teaching'. Achievement was in terms of their conceptual knowledge and application of advanced methods in teaching. The learning environment was structured in such a way that students listen, observe, seek resources, prepare assignments, present power point delivery, collect feedback and reflect for development. It was not a learning of a content rather learning for development of professional aptitude. In this process based learning students were asked to submit their reflections in a page write up for assessment. The dimensions of the write up were on: Assessment on the presenter, Self-assessment on one's presentation and Self-reflections on the learning process. These reflections were compared with their SWOT analysis which was

collected earlier. The qualitative statements in the reflective portfolios are the achievements in terms of skill development. Incorporating all the elements in the learning process, the teacher's summative assessment describes the quality of achievement and the quantity in figures. Thus it satisfies the university requirement.

DISCUSSION

We have seen in the introduction the meaning of portfolio assessment as it focuses on growth and development over time; implemented through selection, reflection and inspection of class work; and it requires goal setting and self-evaluation. Here in this instructional programme, the author collected SWOT of the students. From the data collected, the strength of the students in technology was made use of. Parallel to this strength, some students had tech-phobia. Since most of the students had come from institutions where media of instruction was native language, a very few students had communication ability. In an overall perspective, the skills they wanted to develop were: Decision making, Self-confidence, Communication skill and Interpersonal skill. Throughout the programme, students were allowed to discuss, present, interact, reflect and comprehend what they were doing. It was both in person and on-line. This at the end helped them to get away from their fear and weaknesses and boost up their confidence. It was reflected in their viva presentation. Moreover, in their reflection write up, it was stated that they are no more scared of technology and know the maximum utilisation for the present need. End semester examination was not a threat to them. They all scored high credits.

At the outset, the researcher realised the impact of students' involvement and participation in classroom teaching and learning towards enhancement of their writing competence. It results in development of interest, technological skills and self-confidence. It has created matured attitude on achievement, i.e., achievement is not in quantum rather how much acquired.

REFERENCES

- Barrett, H. (2000) Create your own Electronic Portfolio using off-the shelf software to showcase your own student work. *Learning & Leading with Technology* 27, 7, 14-21.
- Burke, K. (1999) *The Mindful School: How to Assess Authentic Learning*. Skylight Publishing, Arlington Heights, IL.
- Cannell, J.J. (1987) *National Norm-referenced Elementary Achievement Testing in America's Public School: How All Fifty States are Above the National Average*. Friends for Education, Charleston, West Virginia,
- Carey, L. M. (1988) Developing and using Portfolios and Mastery Charts. *Measuring and Evaluating School Learning*. Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Doty, L. & Hillman, C. (1998) Training pre-service teachers in technology: A portfolio approach_[On-line]. Retrieved from http://www.coe.uh.edu/insite/elec_pub/HTML1998/pt_doty.htm.
- Fogarty, R. (1998) *Balanced Assessment*. Skylight Publishers, Arlington Heights, IL.
- Frederick, L., McMahon, R., & Shaw, E.L. Jr. (2000) Pre-service teacher portfolios as autobiographies. *Education*, 120, 634-640, summer.
- Georgi, D. & Crow, J. (1998) Digital portfolios: A confluence of portfolio assessment and technology. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 25,1, 73-84.
- Herman, J. L., Aschbacher, P. R. & Winters, L. (1992) *A Practical Guide to Alternative Assessment*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria.
- Haertel, E. (1990) Student achievement tests as tools of educational policy: Practices and consequences. In Gifford, B. R. & Haertel, E. (Eds.) *Test Policy and Test Performance: Education, Language, and Culture*, 35-63. Kluwer Academic, Boston.
- Kenneth, W. & Yvonne, S. (1996) Portfolio purposes and possibilities. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 40, 1, 30-37, September.

- Krause, S. (1996) Portfolios in teacher education: effects of instruction on pre-service teachers' early comprehension of the portfolio process. *Journal of Teacher Education* 47, 2.
- Kenney, S. L., Hammitte, D. J., Rakestraw, J. & LaMontagne, M. J. (2000) Special education and the P-16 initiative: Addressing CEC Competencies through portfolio development and assessment. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 23, 2, 93-108.
- Lankes, A. M. D. (1995) Electronic portfolios: A new idea in assessment. ERIC Digest. [On-line]. Retrieved from <http://ericae.net/db/edo/ED390377.html> 1998, March.
- McKinney, M. (1998) Pre-service teachers' electronic portfolios: Integrating technology, self-assessment, and reflection. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 25, 1, 85-103.
- McNeil, L. (1988) Contradictions of control, Part 2: Teachers, students, and curriculum. *Phi Delta Kappan* 69, 6, 433-438.
- Mokhtari, D. & Yellin, D. (1996) Portfolio assessment in teacher education: Impact on preservice teachers' knowledge and attitudes. *Journal of Teacher Education* 47,4, 245-248.
- Niguidula, D. (1993) *The Digital Portfolio: A Richer Picture of Student Performance*. Coalition of Essential Schools. [On-line]. Retrieved from <http://www.ces.brown.edu/publications/subject/Research/exhibit/dp.htm> 1998, March.
- Otis-Wilborn, A. & Winn, J. (2000) The process and impact of standards-based teacher education reform. *Teacher Education and Special Education* 23, 2, 78-92.
- Paris, S.G., Lawton, T. A., Turner, J. C. & Roth, J. L. (1991) A developmental perspective on standardized achievement testing. *Educational Researcher* 20, 12-20.
- Resnick, L. & Resnick, D. (1992) Assessing the thinking curriculum: New tools for educational reform. In Gifford, B. R. & O'Conner, M.,C. (Eds.) *Changing Assessments: Alternative View of Aptitude, Achievement, and Instruction* 37-75. Kluwer Academic, Boston.

- Ricky, L. & Icy, L. (2009) Balancing the dual functions of portfolio assessment. *English Language Teaching Journal* 64, 1, 54-64, April.
- Rogers, D. (2003) Teacher preparation, electronic portfolios, and NCATE. In *Proceedings of the 2003 Conference of the Society for Information Technology in Teacher Education Conference*, Albuquerque, 163-165, March 24-29.
- Sheingold, K. & Frederiksen, J. (1994) Using technology to support innovative assessment. In Means, B. (Ed.), *Technology and education reform*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Smith, M. L. (1991) Put to the test: The effects of external testing on teachers. *Educational Researcher* 20, 5, 8-11, June.
- Stone, A. (1998) The metaphor of scaffolding: Its utility for the field of learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 3, 4, 344-364.
- Terttu, K. & Marja, V. (2004) Portfolio, peer evaluation, and mind map in an introductory course of information studies. *Journal of Education for Library Information Sciences* 45,4, 273-285.
- Wolf, D., Bixby, J. & Glenn III, J and Gardner, H (1991) To use their minds well: Investigating new forms of student assessment. *Review of Research in Education* 17, 31-74, January.