

Capítulo 11.

The use of Teacher ePortfolios as a pedagogical and assessment tool in a University Language Teacher B.A. Program at a state university

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Abstract

This chapter describes the implementation of electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) as a pedagogical and assessment tool to promote reflective practice among pre-service teachers in a state university Language Teaching B.A. program. The experience was carried out in the Teacher Practicum course during the seventh semester at the Faculty of Languages. An ePortfolio is understood as a digital collection of student work that documents learning over time and includes both the selection of evidence and a reflective component. Beyond serving as a repository of academic artifacts, ePortfolios allow students to organize, document, and showcase their learning while engaging in critical reflection about their professional development.

The chapter first discusses the conceptual foundations and educational benefits of ePortfolios, highlighting their role in authentic assessment, reflective learning, and professional development. Digital portfolios enable students to collect diverse types of evidence such as lesson plans, observations, projects, and reflections in a single digital space while facilitating feedback and evaluation from instructors. Additionally, they encourage learner autonomy, collaboration, and self-regulated learning. The second section explains how the ePortfolio is implemented in the Teacher Practicum course over a sixteen-week semester. Students observe and practice teaching in real educational contexts ranging from kindergarten to high school English classes. Throughout the semester, they document their experiences and reflections through several structured components: weekly discussions, the design of three lesson plans, classroom observation field notes, a SWOT analysis of the teaching context, an improvement plan, and a final reflective report. The portfolio serves both formative and summative assessment purposes.

The chapter concludes that ePortfolios function as dynamic platforms that foster reflective practice, professional dialogue, and the development of teacher identity. When properly implemented, they support the integration of theory and practice, strengthen digital literacy, and enhance the quality of teacher education by encouraging continuous reflection and professional growth.

Key words: *ePortfolios, pedagogical and assessment tool, university, reflective practice, professional development*

Introduction

The purpose of this work is to share how electronic portfolios (eportfolios) are used as a pedagogical and assessment tool to promote reflective practice in pre-service university students. This work was developed in the Teacher Practicum course belonging to the seventh semester of the Language Teaching program at the Faculty of Languages. An ePortfolio is a collection of work (evidence) in an electronic format that displays learning over time (Moseley & Ramsey, 2005). The use of portfolios offers an array of benefits such as the effective storage and organization of the learners' activities, projects, and evaluation, which permits easy access and search for information from anywhere when deemed necessary. Furthermore, it also allows providing feedback and evaluating in a more systematic manner, since it grants the teacher the opportunity to provide comments directly to the learners' work and share them easily and promptly, (Martínez-Monterrubio, et al., 2024).

This chapter is organized as follows: the first section defines eportfolios and details why it is useful to implement it as a pedagogical, assessment, and reflection tool. The second section specifically describes how the eportfolio is used in the Teacher Practicum course included in the seventh semester of the Language Teaching program. A detailed description highlights the role of portfolios in developing teacher identity, reflective practice, and pedagogical competence contributing to long-term improvements in teacher education quality and accountability. The last section concludes with final remarks on the topic and sets forth suggestion for eportfolio usage.

What is an e-portfolio and why is it useful?

According to Barbera (2009), portfolios contain two important characteristics that distinguish them from any other body of information that can be elaborated:

- a) A digital portfolio is not a simple collection of works or products in them, but is accompanied by relevant selection decisions.
- b) A digital portfolio would not be complete if it does not include an explicit or implicit reflective element.

The author also emphasizes that there can be “portfolios as academic assessment (and learning or evaluation tools), and portfolios as personal tools, focused on the presentation of personal achievements, acquired competencies or professional experiences”. The use of portfolios has gained momentum as highlighted by Diaz Barriga (2012), in the last decade as an innovative and useful tool in the evaluation of student learning, but it can also prove very meaningful in the training and evaluation of teachers as well. In certain curricular reforms in Mexico, it has been introduced as an alternative assessment to conventional or standardized evaluation, thus making the use of portfolios a suitable resource for authentic evaluation. Digital portfolios have certain key characteristics such as the following:

- **Digital Collection:**

It is a curated, online collection of work samples, including essays, projects, images, and videos.

- **Reflection:**

A crucial component is the process of reflection, where the individual critically examines their work to deepen their understanding and demonstrate growth.

- **Showcasing Learning:**

An ePortfolio makes learning visible by documenting a learner's journey, skills, and competencies in a purposeful way.

Common Uses:

- **Academic Assessment:**

Used by students to demonstrate their learning outcomes and progress in a course or program.

- **Professional Development:**

Can showcase a professional's skills, experience, and growth for career advancement.

- **Tracking Progress:**

Helps individuals monitor and reflect on their development of skills and knowledge over an extended period.

- **Sharing and Collaboration:**

Provides a platform for sharing work and receiving feedback from peers and instructors.

Creating a digital portfolio encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and displays their learning as well as others. An ePortfolio allows students to organize, document, and display their most significant learning experiences in one digital space. The reflective learning process of creating and building a portfolio over time deepens their learning and yields a dynamic product that makes learning visible to any audience. Some scholars view ePortfolios primarily as a tool for generating new or deeper learning while others view them as an assessment tool, (Cheng & Chau, 2013; Barrett, 2005).

Recommendations for the use of eportfolios:

Once you decide implement the use of eportfolios for students, there is a need to plan and organize the portfolio's work. The authors (Prendes Espinoza & Sanchez Vera, 2008), recommend these six steps to implement in education:

1. Giving information from the beginning. It is important to communicate clearly to all students involved in the process, the purpose of the portfolio and specific criteria for production and evaluation.

2. Limiting the number of components.
3. Defining the evaluation criteria of the portfolio.
4. Teaching and facilitating the process of self-reflection and self-evaluation. This is an important step, because students do not know how to deal with them.
5. Indicating the appropriate time for the portfolio.
6. Providing advice and preparing students for the realization of the portfolio.

The syllabus of the course should be planned when organizing eportfolios and the nature of evidences, the timing, the type of versions, and the evidence concerned with the teaching-learning activities. In regards to learning assessment, students should be aware of their competence level. Once they are aware of the evaluation criteria and the levels of achievement, a more tangible vision of the competencies to be reached during the semester. In addition, eportfolios also provide future teachers with a critical reflection on their own teaching, promoting to interact and share experiences with others and helping novice teachers in their teaching practice at early stages. To summarize, the eportfolio can be used to:

- Train and evaluate the professional performance, reflection on the teaching work.
- Promote professional discussion about teaching procedures.

The use of electronic portfolios in the Teacher Practicum class:

This next section details how this e-portfolio is used during the class with the seventh semester Language Teaching program students. The syllabus of this sixteen-week course asks the learners to develop and display their progress and development during their classroom observations and teaching practice throughout the semester. They are asked to choose a specific context to observe and carry out their practice. These contexts can be from kindergarten to high school level English classes, in private or public schools.

Classroom face-to-face sessions are every Thursday morning where the objective of the class is to talk about how their classroom observations are going as a round table discussion. This space allows for students to feel at ease and discuss how they are feeling, what they are observing, and most important what they are reflecting on in their teaching practicum. In this sense, the portfolio is a dynamic tool that serves the function of both learning and as an evaluation/assessment for student performance. Once the minutiae of the administrative aspects are in order, the content of the portfolio is described in the following section.

Portfolio content:

Once the discussion of the implementation of the use of an eportfolio for the semester is finalized in class, the need for planning and organization is important. Therefore there are five aspects that are evaluated during the semester. These are described in the next sequence:

1. The first aspect of this sequence is for the students to attend class every Thursday which is allocated for face-to-face instruction. During class time, they are asked to freely discuss anything they feel is relevant for classroom discussion. Some of the topics that have been discussed range from bullying in grade school to teaching students with learning disabilities. The range of topics is very diverse, but students have the space to discuss with each other and the teacher, anything that is happening in the contexts they are carrying out their teaching practice. The learners start documenting their findings the second week of class using Google drive by compiling and organizing content that can be updated and adapted easily throughout the semester.

2. During the second stage, students are asked to prepare three lesson plans to be taught during the semester in the context they are carrying out their teaching practice. The design of their lesson plans is based on the content the school is teaching at that level. The lesson plan is based on the particular type of format the school is using. I revise their lesson plans and we discuss if they agree with my recommendations. This particular activity is geared towards their teaching reflection as well as tapping into the previous semester's content regarding teaching methodologies.

3. The third aspect in this sequence is based on what students' are observing and recording in their classroom field notes. Their observations serve as a basis to carry-out a SWOT analysis of the context they are in. Once they are familiarized with the context, they are asked to present this analysis in the classroom. This activity serves for peer interaction, suggestions, feedback, and reflection from their classmates.

4. Once the students have all the feedback from the presentations, they can work on an improvement plan for the target context.

5. The final step in this sequence is for the student to write a reflection on what they learned from spending time in a specific classroom. Once the semester finalizes, they are asked to share their work with their classmates, provide and receive feedback from their peers as well as the teacher. As described, the use of an eportfolio in this context is for formative purposes as learners integrate information about their educational practice, specific results of the teaching-learning processes and elements that contemplate their teacher reflection.

6. The evaluation of the portfolio is as follows: 40% portfolio content, 30% lesson plans, 15% SWOT presentations, 15% final reflections.

One of the many benefits of the eportfolio is that, when implemented properly, it helps learners to think critically, and become more active, autonomous, and self-regulated (Abrami, Vekantesh, Varela & Lysenko 2012). Therefore, eportfolio users must be active participants in "constructing knowledge, refining their understanding, and learning socially through sharing with peers and teachers" (Chau and Cheng, 2010, p. 933).

Conclusions and recommendations for incorporating eportfolios in higher education contexts.

This work focused on the use of an eportfolio as a pedagogical tool in the Teaching Practicum class for seventh semester students in the Language Teaching program. What can be evidenced from this work is that the digital portfolio, more than a mere repository of evidence, is considered as a dynamic platform that permits pre-service teachers to collect, organize,

reflect and share their pedagogical experiences, thus becoming a means of both self-evaluation and metacognition, core components of reflective practice, Dewey (1989).

Among the most important benefits of the use of a portfolio, is that it offers an opportunity for reflection on the aspects of teaching, teacher -student relationships, in class dynamics, it promotes professional dialogue among peers and their teaching performance. Additionally, it is also a useful means to promote a process of reflection and learning on their teaching roles and teaching itself (Rodríguez & Rodríguez 2014).

There are some recommendations that need to be highlighted deriving from this work. First, students need to understand information and communication technologies. There are diverse tools that can aid with the exchange of information and communication promptly. In the end, the students' comfort level with technology used in the development of their eportfolio is also an important factor in motivation. For example, this can be done by incorporating user-friendly platforms that are easy to use and learn, offer workshops and on-going support in the use of these platforms, and ensure that the specific technology supports the content objectives of the portfolio. According to Klampfer and Kohler (2015), there is a positive correlation between the computer literacy of the eportfolio students and their perception of it. Secondly, school authorities and academic coordinators in the use of eportfolios in subjects that are oriented to teaching should set teacher-training programs forth. Subjects such as Teaching Methodologies and Current Trends in Language Teaching would greatly benefit students in their reflection on and in teaching since they are practicing in diverse educational levels.

Such teacher training focuses on equipping teachers to use digital tools of reflection, assessment, and personal growth, involving both preservice and practicing teachers documenting their practice.

Future language teachers also develop identity, foster digital literacy, and create collaborative learning environments such as lesson plans, videos, and reflective blogs. The outcome is students' better understanding of why and how they have learned throughout the semester and the importance of reflection for future professional development generating better educational practices.

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