

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

The user will find below some training material that was found useful preparing teachers to apply *the portfolio* and *the project* as not just methods of work, but above all, as forms or tools of assessment. The part of the material concerning *the project* is followed by a case study of applying this tool to assess students' achievements in terms of acquired knowledge, developed skills and progress made during the course of American Literature.

What is a student's portfolio?

A portfolio is a conscious selection of a student's work, illustrating the extent to which he or she has achieved the aims and objectives of a course or part of it.

A portfolio enables both a teacher and a student to observe an important, yet often overlooked in the process of assessment, aspect of a student's work, namely, his or her progress in time.

A portfolio and its overview also enables a teacher to notice a student's patterns of behaviour and ways of working, which become visible only when numerous and different samples of his or her work are assessed at the same time.

Aims of a portfolio

The aims of a portfolio are to enable:

a) students

- to experience pride of the quality of their work
- to gain a skill of self-assessment and self-reflection
- to develop a sense of the progress made
- to genuinely get involved in the process of learning
- to participate in the process of assessment (students' autonomy)

b) teachers

- to create a full picture of a student's progress, including his or her attitude towards the course as well as the difficulties he or she encounters in the process of learning
- to modify the process of teaching taking into account students' needs

A portfolio as an instrument of assessment

Used for his purpose, a portfolio:

- includes carefully selected samples of a student's work illustrating the extent to which he or she has achieved the aims and objectives of a course or part of it;
- reflects a student's way of thinking

- provides evidence of progress a student has made over a period of time
- illustrates connections/integration between thematic areas
- presents attempts of solving problems
- is a source of information on a student's self-reflection on his or her work

and, as such, is assessed from the point of view of

- (1) the selection made by a student,
- (2) evidence of the progress made,
- (3) overall value of the material presented in it
- (4) aims and objectives set for a given course

The advantages resulting from the use of a portfolio

1. a better integration of learning and assessment processes
2. a better feedback for a student on his or her strengths and weaknesses
3. an increase of a student's sense of his or her control of work done as well as of the responsibility for the possibly best outcome
4. (in schools) a better feedback for parents

The threats resulting from the use of a portfolio

1. lack of regularity leads to poor results or no results at all
2. not a well-known method of work, which may distort the reliability and objectivity of results
3. a portfolio can contain too many samples of a student's work
4. a portfolio is just a collection of pieces of work not related to one another
5. the content of a portfolio does not prove a student's reflective attitude to his or her work
6. a student is not sure how to select material for the portfolio
7. the teacher finds it difficult to assess a portfolio

How to avoid the threats resulting from the use of a portfolio?

1. introduce the idea and form of a portfolio to students during your first class with them
2. organize a brainstorming session on a possible content of a portfolio
3. conclude a contract with the students concerning this content and the criteria of portfolio assessment
4. determine the schedule of in-term guidance sessions (e.g. every 3 weeks)
5. determine the deadline for handing in the portfolio for final assessment

How to introduce a portfolio as a method of work?

1. Consider why you may want to introduce a portfolio; what's your aim, e.g.:
 - a. to promote the idea and skill of self-reflection among your students
 - b. to enhance your students' motivation and their sense of responsibility for their own work
 - c. to provide feedback on the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved
 - d. to make your students' progress visible
 - e. to show both the process of doing work as well as its final effect
2. Determine learning aims, objectives and outcomes that the students should achieve and document in their portfolios (e.g. a combination of knowledge, ways of thinking, types of action undertaken etc.). These aims should be determined in the clearest possible way for the students.
3. Decide in what way(s) the portfolio is going to be used to document students' progress on the way to achieve the set aims and objectives. (what tasks the students will have to do to prove their progress; what sort of students' work a portfolio should contain), e.g.
 - a. the student's best work
 - b. the student's unsuccessful work together with a problem analysis carried out by him or her
 - c. the student's work proving his or her progress
 - d. written records of the teacher's observations made on the student's work
 - e. samples of the student's work
 - f. an analysis of the content of the portfolio being evidence of the student's self-reflection
 - g. samples of work in progress
 - h. samples of work being the effect of co-operating with other students

Each piece of work can take different forms, written, video tapes/DVD discs, audio cassettes/CDs, projects, "pieces of art".

4. Develop portfolio assessment criteria (e.g. of the whole portfolio, its elements, its presentation and combinations of these)
5. Agree with the students on the rules of work on the portfolio (limitations as to its size, way(s) and frequency of reporting on the progress of their work, the date of presenting the portfolio and handing it in for assessment).
6. "*Starting small*" is a good idea; you can introduce a portfolio for a part of a course only, or only for one group of students. As you gain experience, you will be able to apply the method on a larger scale.

A project - what is it and how is it different from a portfolio?

As a teaching/learning method, an educational project is a planned, teacher-coordinated and carried out independently by students' task, or a series of tasks, joined by a common learning aim and content (school curriculum, course syllabus etc.). It can be an inter-course task, i.e. its completion may involve students' activity in more than one course/subject; it can also go beyond the scope of school curriculum or course syllabus/syllabi. It is also important to note that a project can be a part of a portfolio.

In general, for students, it is a task characterized by almost limitless freedom as to the chosen form of presentation and the conduct of work on it. It is only its content that is required by the teacher's specific instruction and yet even this can be determined on a relatively high level of generality. A project:

- allows virtually all possible forms of artistic expression (writing, fine or plastic art, theatre, film, music, happening etc.)
- enhances students' intrinsic motivation, thus enabling them to be creative and inventive
- allows *various* patterns of interaction (individual work, pair work, group work), while a portfolio is usually only individual work;
- ensures learner autonomy enabling students to "own" their process of learning, but, at the same time...
- requires from them a great deal of responsibility for their performance

Skills developed in the process of working on a project

- assuming responsibility;
- planning and organizing one's work;
- all four language skills: reading, writing, listening, speaking;
- thinking creatively;
- self-reliance;
- gathering and selecting project material;
- solving problems;
- making decisions;
- self-assessment
- self-presentation

What is important to remember introducing a project as a method of working?

- Provide clear task instructions including the subject, aims and objectives, deadlines, project assessment criteria;
- Make sure the project will combine gathering knowledge and developing skills;

- Set time limits and deadlines for the completion of the project as a whole as well as its parts (if necessary);
- Precisely allocate and determine (or help to do so) scopes of responsibility for the completion and share of tasks within the project;
- Make sure your students know they will present their project in public, i.e. in front of their peers.

A case study

Raymond Carver's short stories - a literature project

The concept of the project

The idea for a project as one of the forms of assessment during the course of American Literature at Teachers' of Foreign Languages Training College in Toruń, Poland emerged as a result of both a coincidence and a conscious choice. While the latter consisted simply in the teacher's choosing a selection of Raymond Carver's short stories to be discussed at the beginning of the course in order to develop students' skills of interpreting short forms of fiction, and later on to be assessed, the former came as a surprise and pure accident after having seen Robert Altman's feature film "Short-Cuts" based on..... the same selection of Carver's stories!

Assessing students' skills and the progress made during a literature course has always been a difficult task. Traditional forms of assessment such as critical essays or tests usually leave both students and teachers unsatisfied and round up an interesting course in a fairly uninteresting way, providing students with little, if virtually no feedback at all. Also, a literature course involves a lot of interaction between the teacher and students as well as between students themselves, so assessing it using almost non-interactive forms of assessment does not seem to make any sense.

Thus, the project method suddenly seemed a solution to the problem, bringing more interaction as well as vigor and creativity into the otherwise pretty stressful and rather boring activity, which still cannot be avoided.

Not surprisingly, when announced to the students, it provoked reactions of reluctance ("now we'll have to do something ourselves, show the product later on and submit it for assessment"). It is a typical reaction to something new (the students had not worked with projects in this course before, and quite likely very few times in other courses) as well as something that requires one's active participation and assuming full responsibility for the task. Students are used to waiting passively for tasks given to them by teachers, so they are usually surprised when suddenly they are expected not only to prove they have learnt something or developed certain skills, but also to show their initiative and enterprise. It is just the first reaction, though, because they soon discover what a gift they have actually been given being allowed to actually show off and, additionally, get a credit for this.

The aims of the project

- to present the problems touched upon by Raymond Carver in his short stories
- to reflect Carver's narrative style
- to combine 10 stories to make a whole
- to demonstrate one's ingenuity
- to prove one's critical thinking

Instructions for the students

- Your task is to do a project presenting the issues explored by Raymond Carver in his short stories we have read together in the American literature class
- Your project should present the stories together as a whole
- It should also reflect Carver's style of narrating the stories
- With your project you should be able to prove your insight into the problems Carver presents in his stories
- The form of your project is open – show off your ingenuity
- You can work individually, in a pair, or a group of up to 5 people
- Time limit: project presentations during two last classes in the winter term, the last two weeks in January (the project was assigned in mid-November, leaving the students 2 months for preparation)

What is going to be assessed in the project?

- content (highlighting the main themes and problems which Raymond Carver focuses on in his short stories, showing his narrative style, combining short stories into a whole)
- form (the concept/idea of showing the content)
- preparation (amount of, individual share within a group)
- presentation (way of presenting)
- language competence (a project in a foreign language)

Project assessment grid

In order to make my work easier and more efficient, I developed the following *Project assessment grid* to help me gather data to be used in the final assessment of the projects. I found it useful since, especially in projects presented in the form of a performance, it was important to take notes in the course of the presentation; otherwise, many of my observations could have been lost or simply forgotten. The grid also enabled me to “jump” all around it as I watched or listened to a project being presented, which meant I was able to assess all the criteria at the same time.

The grid consists of columns devoted to all five aspects announced to the students as subject to assessment, namely: (1) the content (Carver's stories + issues presented in them), (2) the form (the idea), (3) the amount of preparation, (4) the presentation, and (5) language competence.

In the first column, Carver's stories, I simply “ticked” the stories, if they have been mentioned in the project, and “ticked” them again, if the problems they deal with have been identified

appropriately. Thus, the students could score 20 points, if they presented all the stories and at least one problem issue per story.

The next four columns in the grid considered the criteria for which it is usually relatively easy to mark on a scale to what extent they have been met. The applied scale (0-20 pts. with 12 pts. as the pass threshold – 60%) also let me mark mid-scores, i.e. not only 0, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20, but also 13, 15, 17, and 19 if after having made familiar with all the projects I decided that two similar project differ here and there just a little, which still would have to be noticed.

<i>Students' names:</i>	<i>Carver's stories</i>				<i>Idea</i>	<i>Preparation</i>	<i>Presentation</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Score</i>	
	<i>The Bath, A Small Good Thing</i>	<i>Neighbours</i>	<i>Tell The Women We're Going</i>	<i>So Much Water So Close To Home</i>	<i>Vitamins</i>	20 Impressive	20 A lot	20 Impressive	20 Proficient	<hr style="width: 50%; margin: auto;"/> 100%
					18 Great	18 Much	18 Great	18 Very Good		
					16 Very Good	16 Medium	16 Very Good	16 Good		
<i>They're Not Your Husband</i>	<i>Will You Please Be Quiet Please?</i>	<i>Collectors</i>	<i>Jerry, Molly And Sam</i>	<i>Lemonade</i>	14 Good	14 Medium-to-Little	14 Good	14 Fine		
					12 Fine	12 Little	12 Fine	12 Poor		
					0 Mediocre	0 Hardly any	0 Mediocre	0 Unacceptable		
Remarks:										

Project forms generated by the students

- newspapers
- diaries
- poems (limericks, narrative poems)
- songs
- English lessons
- English as a Foreign Language methodology lessons (!)
- entertainment shows (a circus clown)
- quiz shows (Jeopardy)
- radio programmes
- TV programmes
- films
- pictures and drawings

Assessment of a sample project

Title: „Carver City News”, a project by Piotr Dybowski, Brain Reed, Tomasz Ślesiński, Adrian Zalewski, Radosław Zieliński (3rd year students), 27 January 2005, realized in the form of a news programme (a film). Unfortunately, due to copyright issues the film cannot be attached to this CD-ROM.

How did they score?

	Carver's stories					Idea	Preparation	Presentation	Language	Score
	Students' names:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20 Impressive	20 A lot	20 Impressive	20 Proficient				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	18 Great	18 Much	18 Great	18 Very Good (17 v.good/ good)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	16 Very Good	16 Medium	16 Very Good	16 Good	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	14 Good	14 Medium-to- Little	14 Good	14 Fine	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12 Fine	12 Little	12 Fine	12 Poor	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	0 Mediocre	0 Hardly any	0 Mediocre	0 Unacceptable	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					

Remarks:

Carver's stories: all stories were presented in the project but the students failed to highlight the major problems they focus on. They only showed the basic facts/events from the plots, just as good journalists should. The task, however, also required some insight into the problems illustrated by those events, and the students were expected to prove they had pinpointed those issues appropriately. Hence, only one "tick" per story (10pts.) instead of two "ticks" (11-20pts.)

Idea: very good – the form of a news programme suits the purpose of presenting Carver's factual, journalistic and minimalist style very well, although it was not a novelty in itself (some other groups have chosen the same or a similar form)

Preparation: a lot - the project definitely required a lot of preparation as well as technical skills, use of hi-tech equipment etc., tasks and roles were evenly allocated among the group members

Presentation: impressive – a variety of locations (the studio, outdoors), CNN-like layout, attention to detail (stock exchange bar at the bottom of the screen), a variety of forms of reporting

Language: good – very good texts of news reports and announcing, occasional problems with fluency and pronunciation; Since one of the members of the group was a native speaker of English (a US citizen) I had to allow for this fact assessing the students' language performance in the project. It was most likely that Brian would have taken care of language accuracy in the texts and comments read out and made by his team-mates in the project. Thus, the whole group could not have benefited from this "undeserved" asset. On the other hand, some pronunciation mistakes and occasional problems with fluency easily noticeable in the students' performance impaired the otherwise overall positive language impression. Thus, they could have scored neither "proficient"(20pts.) nor "very good" (18pts.) in the last criterion, although just "good" (16pts.) would have been too low, either. That is why I chose a mid-score of 17pts.

Peer assessment

After each presentation, all the other students in the group were asked to comment on their friends' performance. At first they were reluctant to do so, especially, to be critical, but it lasted only until one person had made a challenging remark and they had realized this was not all about being critical for the sake of criticism, but that it gave them an opportunity to show their understanding of the task, their way of thinking and enabled them to share the responsibility for assessment.

Problems with assessment

The above project made a big impression on all viewers, including the teacher. This is usually an asset, but it can also be a drawback. As the old saying goes, "*your eyes can deceive you*". Had it not been for the clearly stated requirements included in the instruction to the project, the final score could have been higher than just 83%, because remaining under the spell of computer technology, graphics and the feeling of surprise, the teacher could easily have overlooked the fact that the students failed to meet the first requirement of the project task altogether.

Another problem with assessing any project, not necessarily this one, is the unavoidable *subjectivity* of some of its assessment criteria. On the one hand, criteria such as *concept* or *idea*, *preparation* and *presentation* are fairly subjective ones. Our satisfaction with the degree to which they are met can depend very much on our personal preference, taste, and liking. On the other hand, a project's presentation is always perceived, *willy-nilly*, at least in part, in a subjective way by its viewers, as it is the case with any performance. This, however, does not mean we can disregard these elements of a project, because they *are* as relevant to its overall assessment as the objective ones.

Still another problem is assessing an individual student's share in the overall final effect. Obviously, the bigger a group is the more difficult it is for the teacher to work it out. On the other hand, it is part of the students' responsibility to make sure their share in a joint undertaking is equal, or at least well-balanced, and the teacher can usually assume it is the case. However, he or she must be aware that there may always be some students who will want to dodge doing their job and other members of the group may be too much under their influence to be able to stand up to them.

Follow-up

After the students had presented their projects, they saw Robert Altman's *project* on Carver's stories, a feature film "Short-Cuts". They were able to compare their efforts with a proposal from a famous film director, which they thoroughly enjoyed.