

Assessment

Using Portfolios to Assess Students' Learning

Teachers in tertiary classrooms are mainly concerned not with discriminating between students but with teaching complex ideas and checking the acceptability of students interpretation and application. The problem is that complex learning cannot be adequately described in quantitative terms (Biggs & Tang, 1997). Using portfolios as a mechanism to assess student's learning may offer a valuable alternative.

What is a Portfolio?

- Collection of student work
- Carefully selected and justified
- Not a heap of material
- Grounded in a constructivist view of learning.
- "Meaning is created by the learner not imposed or transmitted by direct instruction."

Purpose of Portfolios

- Used to demonstrate:
 - achievement of topic or course objectives
 - progress/ improvement towards a goal
 - understanding of complexity of professional roles
 - synthesis of what students have learnt in a number of topics
 - capacity to use new understandings in novel ways in unpredictable work contexts

Role of Assessment of Portfolios

- To determine how well the objectives of the topic or course are attained so that they can be reported in institutionally appropriate ways.
- To convey to students what is expected of them.

Assessment processes using portfolios

The following phases are usually followed:

1. Set the criteria
2. Select the evidence that would be relevant to submit for judgement against those criteria
3. Make judgements about the extent to which those criteria have been met.

Note: Both teacher and students are involved in these processes.

Role of the teacher

- To be clear about the course objectives
- To communicate these clearly to students
- To give constructive formative feedback as the student selects items for the portfolio
- To form an holistic judgement about student learning attainment

Role of the Student

- To gain a clear understanding of what is required to be attained in the topic or course
- To reflect on what they might do to achieve these objectives
- To select items that are evidence they have achieved the objectives.
- To critically justify the inclusion of items

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- **Value of Portfolios**

- Advantages
 - valid, authentic (real world tasks)
 - focus on higher order thinking
 - can demonstrate progress
 - encourage engagement with learning
- Limitations
 - low stakes
 - Reliability?
 - Time consuming

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Dr Janice



Orrell