M03-3: Portfolio

What is a Portfolio?

Of course, there are many different examination methods that allow you to assess students: oral exams (e.g. presentations) or written exams (e.g. written tests (open answers or multiple choice), Assignments/essays/papers, poster, etc.). But let’s take a closer look at the portfolio as a maybe less common examination method.

A Portfolio is “the product, created by the learner, a collection of (…) artifacts articulating experiences, achievements and learning. Behind any product, or presentation, lie rich and complex processes of planning, synthesizing, sharing, discussing, reflecting, giving, receiving and responding to feedback.” (JISC 2008, p. 6). Portfolios can be paper-based or digital. The latter allows you to add in digital media resources to support your portfolio (videos/pictures, links etc.). General examples for different content (also called “artifacts” or “evidence”) that can be collected in a Portfolio: journal entries, collages, photos, video and audio tapes, drawings, reflections of the own learning process, items produced in the regular course of classroom activities, such as essays, group work outcomes etc.

There are so-called “product portfolios” and “process portfolios” (Barrett 2009). Product Portfolios document an achievement and showcase the final – usually the “best” – products. In this case, they are a tool for summative evaluation. Process-portfolios, on the other hand, document the learning process (also mistakes or imperfect outcomes). They are a tool for formative evaluation. Also, they often focus on reflection. Reflection is a central aim of portfolios. As John Dewey said: “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.“ (1933). He considers reflection as a cognitive process that allows active problem-solving, by thinking about experiences, beliefs and theoretical knowledge and that results in developing alternative courses of action. Reflection, therefore, is an individual process: “Reflective thinking generally addresses practical problems, [but also] allowing for doubt and perplexity before possible solutions are reached.” (Hatton & Smith 1995, p. 34). Portfolios should encourage reflective thinking.

According to Barton and Collins (1997), portfolios should be:

1) Multisourced (allowing for the opportunity to evaluate a variety of specific evidence) Multiple data sources include both people (statements and observations of participants, teachers or program staff, parents, and community members), and artifacts (anything from test scores to photos, drawings, journals, & audio or videotapes of performances).

2) Authentic (context and evidence are directly linked) The items selected or produced for evidence should be related to program activities, as well as the goals and criteria. If the portfolio is assessing the effect of a program on participants or communities, then the “evidence” should reflect the activities of the program rather than skills that were gained elsewhere. For example, if a child's musical performance skills were gained through private piano lessons, not through 4-H activities, an audio tape would be irrelevant in his 4-H portfolio. If a 4-H activity involved the same child in teaching other children to play, a tape might be relevant.

3) Dynamic (capturing growth and change) An important feature of portfolio assessment is that data or evidence is added at many points in time, not just as “before and after” measures. Rather than including only the best work, the portfolio should include examples of different stages of mastery. At least some of the items are self-selected. This allows a much richer understanding of the process of

change.

4) Explicit (purpose and goals are clearly defined) The students or program participants should know in advance what is expected of them, so that they can take responsibility for developing their evidence.

5) Integrated (evidence should establish a correspondence between program activities and life experiences) Participants should be asked to demonstrate how they can apply their skills or knowledge to real-life situations.

6) Based on ownership (the participant helps determine evidence to include and goals to be met) The portfolio assessment process should require that the participants engage in some reflection and self-evaluation as they select the evidence to include and set or modify their goals. They are not simply being evaluated or graded by others.

7) Multipurposed (allowing assessment of the effectiveness of the program while assessing performance of the participant). A well-designed portfolio assessment process evaluates the effectiveness of your intervention at the same time that it evaluates the growth of individuals or communities."

Portfolio as Assessment Tool? Advanteges and Disadvantages

ADVANTAGES

• "Allows the evaluators to see the student, group, or community as individual, each unique with its own characteristics, needs, and strengths.

• Serves as a cross-section lens, providing a basis for future analysis and planning. By viewing the total pattern […] of individual participants, one can identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, and barriers to success.

• Serves as a concrete vehicle for communication, providing ongoing communication or exchanges of information among those involved.

• Promotes a shift in ownership; […] participants can take an active role in examining where they have been and where they want to go.

• Portfolio assessment offers the possibility of addressing shortcomings of traditional assessment. It offers the possibility of assessing the more complex and important aspects of an area or topic.

• [When applied in a community, it] Covers a broad scope of knowledge and information, from many different people who know the program or person in different contexts (eg., participants, parents, teachers or staff, peers, or community leaders)." (Sewell et al.)

DISADVANTAGES

• "May be seen as less reliable or fair than more quantitative evaluations such as test scores.

• Can be very time consuming for teachers […] to organize and evaluate the contents, especially if portfolios have to be done in addition to traditional testing and grading.

• Having to develop your own individualized criteria can be difficult or unfamiliar at first.

• If goals and criteria are not clear, the portfolio can be just a miscellaneous collection of artifacts that don't show patterns of growth or achievement.

• Like any other form of qualitative data, data from portfolio assessments can be difficult to analyze or aggregate to show change." (Sewell et al.)

Presentation

Presentation

Literature

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