

## Portfolio: What Is It?

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**Abstract.** The article analyses the importance of portfolio in lifelong learning and in the general system of education. There are different types of portfolios devoted to teaching/learning and developing competence in different fields. The paper deals with the problems of the compilation of the teaching/learning portfolio and its use in lifelong learning and the general education process. Special attention is given to teacher's portfolio as a selected collection of documents and materials that exemplifies the teacher's theories, development and achievements as a result of a continuous process of reflection of self-evaluation. The teaching/learning, the project preparation, research work and competence as well as the variety of document sets of European languages and cultures are discussed in this article. Paper mentions European Language portfolio, which encourages learners to concern themselves with several European languages, cultures and mutual understanding among citizens in Europe where the development of plurilingualism is viewed as a lifelong process.

### Language Learning and Teaching: a Holy Alliance

Bilingualism and multilingualism have become a way of life in these super-complex world developments. Multilingualism is considered to be a real value in the changing value-rich education.

"Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical, intellectual, and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language" (Brown, 1987).

Language learning/teaching is not a set of easy activities it is a complex process, "involving a seemingly infinite number of variables" (ibid). These variables make language teaching and learning so interdependent that it is impossible to define teaching without learning and vice versa. Gage (1964) noted, that, "to satisfy practical demands of education, theories of learning must be stood on their heads, so as to yield theories of teaching". Barnett (2000) writes about teaching and research as a holy alliance. Teaching and learning might be considered as a long-lived inseparable alliance.

The commonality of learning and teaching is reflected even in methods and means of achieving goals. This might be seen in preparing the teacher's or student's portfolios for more efficient and responsible language teaching and learning. The teacher's portfolio is a guide to the student's learning process, the latter being an essential foundation for the theory and practice of teaching.

**The object of the research** is the portfolio formation and its innovation functions in a changing university.

**The aim of the article** is to view portfolio as a mean of developing learning and as an ongoing process, a lifelong process, encouraging autonomy and student-teacher relationships as a learning system of both agents; to present the introduction of new principles into portfolio formation and its functions in language learning/teaching; to highlight quite new modes of portfolios.

### Towards Innovated Structure and Functions of Portfolio

Scholars notice that the last decades of the twentieth century will go down into the history of language learning/teaching as a period when this occurrence expanded in its scope of innovations when exceptional qualitative changes taking place in higher education conditioned new tasks and functions in all its fields. The pertinence of old and new approaches has been checked by their fit or match between what higher education institutions do as well as what the society and the world expect of them. The concept "portfolio" comes from the field of fine arts and financial investment. The artist's portfolio is usually a leather or plastic folder for a selected samples of paintings and drawings. The investor's portfolio is a collection of securities, stocks, bonds, life insurance forms, etc. Both types of portfolio are constantly controlled, evaluated and supplemented by their owners.

Dictionaries present the following definitions of the word "portfolio":

"Case, usually like large sheets of paper, drawings, etc.; such receptacle containing official documents of State department, (fig.) office of minister of State" (The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition revised by Dorothy Eagle, 1975).

In education portfolios became popular in the mid-1980s. In Lithuanian educational terrain they were called "methodical packs". These packs were collected at random without any methodological approach to grouping different materials and documents. Only at the end of the last century the term "portfolio" came into use and much attention has been paid to the methodology of this collection.

Portfolios differ according to the goals attached to them: a teaching portfolio (TP) and a learner's or student's portfolio (LP or SP), a teacher-student cooperative portfolio (TSP), and special course portfolio (SCP), such as Business English portfolio (BEP) or British Studies portfolio (BSP) and so on. These portfolios are "vehicles for ongoing assessment which represent activities and process, more than products" (Bastidas, 1996).

Some more definitions of portfolio might help to disclose the essence of this means of more effective and responsible teaching and learning.

"Portfolios, as assessment tools, have been defined as a purposeful and systematic collection of students' work that demonstrates the students' progress, efforts and accomplishments in one or more areas" (Bastidas, 1996).

"While collecting writing samples, students engage in reflection, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation with the assistance of teachers, peers, and parents" (Paulson et al., 1991).

These collections assist teachers in making decisions and helping students to learn and achieve their goals, as they are "a factual description of a professor's major strengths and teaching achievements. It describes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality for a professor's teaching performance" (Seldin, 1991).

But teaching/learning portfolio should not be viewed as a simple documentation or a collection of randomly arranged materials.

"A teaching portfolio is a collection of documents that represents the best of one's teaching and provides one with the occasion to reflect on his or her teaching with the same intensity devoted to scholarship or research" (Murray, 1994).

"The portfolio is a narrative document in which a faculty member concisely organizes details of his or her teaching efforts and accomplishments" (Zubizarreta, 1994).

"The TP could be defined as a selected collection of documents and materials that exemplifies the teacher's theories, development, and achievements as a result of a continuous process of reflection and self-evaluation" (Bastidas, 1996).

TP is not a one-time collection of teaching plans, materials, tests, description of methods and facilities. It is a means of collecting teaching and/or learning materials over time. TP materials are constantly revised, added, substituted or discarded.

### Experience of Kaunas University of Technology (KTU)

As it has already been mentioned, the idea of portfolio is not new but its structure, functions and tasks have changed much. It aims at presenting student-teacher cooperation in creation, access and participation (Learning/Teaching Portfolio), the research functions of the university and its departments as well as student-teacher research (Research Portfolio), the responsibility of the department to the society (Society Service Portfolio), the adaptability to the world developments (the European Language Portfolio or Project Portfolio).

The idea of comprising portfolios is popular at KTU. The teachers of different disciplines prepare those selected teaching collections for more flexible and effective teaching in a changing university. In 2001 the Institute of Educational Studies headed by Prof. Palmira Jucevičienė, organized a special seminar devoted to the lifelong studies in higher school.

"Lifelong education has become a conduit for the entry of new ideas and new language into the teaching life of the university" (Duke, 1992).

The European Council held in Lisbon in March 2000 has confirmed that the move towards *lifelong learning must accompany a successful transition to a knowledge based economy and society*. Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training, it must become the *guiding principle. Lifelong learning concerns everyone's future, in a unique individual way*. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision, the latter requiring cooperative efforts from both individuals and organizations.

Following these ideas, KTU seminar had the aim to negotiate the activities that might help to:

- develop new effective teaching and learning methods;
- ensure easy access to and sharing of information about lifelong learning and for it;
- provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners as possible (e.g. distance learning);
- achieve higher levels of education and qualifications, etc.

KTU seminar has been theoretical and practical exchange of ideas. It has lasted for a year and included different lectures and workshops (eight in number), one of them being devoted to *competence portfolio* and its formation.

"Competence may be defined as the complex of personal knowledge, abilities, skills, understanding, values, qualities and physiological features, expressed in efficient performance" (Jucevičienė, 2001).

There should be made difference between *competence* and *qualification*.

"Qualification relates to the function of a particular job and knowledge and skills, necessary for performance, whereas competence relates to human activity, which depends not only on knowledge and skills, but also on personal qualities, etc. Qualification may be reflected in diplomas and certificates, whereas the indications of competence are facts about performance and its results" (Jucevičienė, 2001).

As far as the content of a portfolio is concerned, it should be noted that in the context of a world undergoing change, in which globalization has both positive and negative aspects, the aim of this collection is to present learning and teaching as the process of negotiation. UNESCO's policy papers define that this should be embodied by a series of convergent and sometimes contradictory processes: democratization, globalization, regionalization, polarization, marginalization, fragmentation which have an impact on the development of the whole higher education and call for appropriate responses in all its areas, i.e. in portfolio designing as well.

*The European agenda for change in higher education in the XXI century* (Palermo, 1997) speaks of the impact of European integration, the demand for unified attempts and documentation in higher education, increasing globalization of teaching, learning and research, and the mission of higher education in helping to construct a future Europe-wide society. On the other hand, the pursuit of regional and transnational objectives must be balanced through higher educational solutions in fostering each country's identity, nationhood and cultural heritage. Such balance is made



easier through designing transnationally acceptable structures and functions of special means – portfolios. Innovations usually take place within the existing processes and means expanding their scope, changing their structure and functions, as well as introducing new content.

### Teaching Portfolio: Manifestation of Competences and Qualifications

In language teaching/learning portfolio designing process no distinction is usually made between competence and a teaching/learning portfolio. Competences and qualifications are needed through the whole process of teaching/learning portfolio collection and its implementation in practice. Moreover, both types of competences are included (generic and specific).

*Generic competence* is applied in different context of performance. It includes communicative, information, problem identification and solving, planning and organization, evaluation, design and other competences.

*Specific competence* reveals individual's abilities, attitudes, etc.

Analysing different portfolios one can notice that they differ not only in their definition but as well as in the mode of their structure, the latter depending on the teachers' creativity, competence and qualification.

Hamn and Adams (1992); Murray, Bozzone and Zubizarreta (1994) have suggested the following lists of entries which might be included in the TP:

- teacher's philosophy, principles, educational theories, etc;
- principles of both human learning and language learning;
- principles of language teaching.

### Program Design

- a statement about students' needs to learn English (or a special course, e.g. Business English);
- goals and objectives of the course;
- general statements about the syllabus;
- guidelines for developing language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and language components (lexis, grammar);
- principles of language achievement assessment;
- statements about the teacher's role;
- statements about the student's role;
- the statement about the use of the native language.

### Methodology

- effective teaching techniques;
- effective exercises, activities and tasks;
- stages of language lessons.

### Professional Development

- students' evidence of learning;
- actual products of learning;
- audio, video, computer-aided programs and other facilities;

- teacher-created materials;
- language assessment tests;
- recent changes in language teaching;
- workshops, seminars, conferences;
- articles or books;
- new ideas;
- organizations, the teacher belongs to.

### Personal Achievements

- published articles;
- articles to be published;
- certificates, honours and distinctions.

### Teacher's Reflections

- specific impressions about the students, thrills and disappointments;
- student's evaluation data;
- colleagues' statements about your teaching;
- the supervisor's evaluation;
- self-evaluation;
- analysis of these evaluations;
- a list of issues to be improved;
- a plan and expectations to improve your skills.

Mention should be made about so-called *literacy portfolio* which aims at satisfying "socio-cultural requirements of the contact of use with the psycholinguistic-cognitive needs of the learners" (Johns, 1995).

Literacy portfolios are useful for specific programs (ESP, EAP, British Studies, American Studies and special linguistic courses for learning grammar, phonetics, etc.). There are several steps to be followed in designing such portfolios and other kinds of portfolios as well:

1. *Determine portfolio role within the framework of the curriculum*, i.e., its importance in defining which elements, should be included.
2. *Decide about students' assessment*, i.e., how each entry and whole student's portfolio should be evaluated.
3. *Study requirements of the target situation*. The term target situation analysis has been introduced by Robinson (1991). For example, ESP program might need genres study.
4. *Determine students' needs* through tests and questionnaires.
5. *Determine students' goals*.
6. *Make entry decisions*, i.e., decide about the number of entries.
7. *Make portfolio management decisions*, e.g., state the number of audit procedures.

Mention should be made about recent developments in portfolio design: international project portfolio (IPP), and researcher's portfolio (RP).

Trim (1998) speaks about a number of working models for European Language Portfolio, "in which learners can record the full range of their language qualifications and learning experiences. ... in this way to encourage young

people and adults to concern themselves with several European languages and cultures, even though this concern does not lead to exams and qualifications”.

The structure and the objectives of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) are determined by the aims of the Council of Europe in the field of modern languages as follows:

- the deepening of mutual understanding among citizens in Europe;
- respect for diversity of cultures and ways of life;
- the protection and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity;
- the development of plurilingualism as a lifelong process;
- the development of the language learner;
- the development of the capacity for independent language learning;
- transparency and coherence in language learning programs.

The collection of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) is aimed at:

- motivating learners by acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language skills at all levels;
- providing record of the linguistic and cultural skills they have acquired (to be consulted, for example, when they are moving to a higher learning level or seeking employment at home or abroad).

Functions of the European Language Portfolio might be listed as follows:

a) The pedagogic function.

Enhance the motivation of the learners

- to improve their ability to communicate in different languages,
- to learn additional languages,
- to seek new intercultural experiences.

Incite and help the learners to

- reflect their objectives, ways of learning and success in language learning,
- plan their learning,
- learn autonomously.

Encourage learners to enhance their plurilingual and intercultural experience, for example, through

- contacts and visits,
- reading,
- use of the media,
- projects.

b) The documentation and reporting function enable learners to inform others in a detailed and internationally comparable manner.

Some of these functions, however, might seem rather complicated to be realized at the present state of the University development.

Any approach or theory is not very useful unless it is put into practice. This could be accomplished by the best

known tool – portfolio which might be defined in the most general way – a purposeful collection of a student’s work over some period of time.

As it has already been mentioned, there are many forms of that collection. It is difficult to decide which is the right one or the best one.

“A portfolio has to fit the context in which it is being used” (Smith, 2001).

The author presents the most generalized framework of the portfolio:

- introduction (what will portfolio present?);
- compulsory part (Reflection on process and product);
- personal choices (Reflection on choice, process, product);
- reflection (Reflection on the learning process with the portfolio);
- conclusion (Message to the reader).

The compulsory part is the most important as it includes tasks all learners are to fulfill. These activities reflect the main part of the course.

The personal choices are many and varied. They are suggested by the student. The teacher negotiates with every student improving the content and methods of learning.

## Conclusions

Portfolios aim to evaluate the whole process of teaching and learning at a definite stage of the process, to describe it and to show its development. Moreover, the written collection of teaching documents is always available to be reviewed, innovated and shared.

“The TP provides the teacher with an opportunity to become a reflective practitioner” (Bastidas, 1996).

It provides and inspires the teacher’s development. Zubizarreta (1994) notices that the TP “is the only instrument that concurrently improves instruction through the process of reflective writing and self-scrutiny and evaluates performance within a framework of narration and evidence”.

In the case of learning or student’s portfolio (LP or SP) the teacher is expected to help students to comprise their portfolios, to remind them from time to time about the necessity to change some portfolio materials, stressing the values of their commitments and the possibility of portfolio grading.

Good collection and management of portfolios throughout a term or a longer period is the main factor of portfolio’s influence on effective language teaching/learning.

Portfolio may play a significant role in looking for effective ways in realizing lifelong learning. The coordination method of portfolio design enables a coherent policy development and the mobilization of all educational resources in favour of lifelong learning.

Mention should be made about the pedagogical benefits of portfolios (especially of the ELP):



- *transparency* – any language curriculum that aims to develop learner's communicative proficiency can be restated in terms of the common reference levels;
- *transferability* – a portfolio facilitates “transfer” both inside and outside educational systems;
- *awareness – raising and reflections* – it involves the learner in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning and the development of learner's autonomy.

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## Portfelis: kas tai?

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje akcentuojama *portfelio* reikšmė testiniam mokymuisi ir bendrajam lavinimui. Yra įvairūs portfelių tipai, skirti mokymui ir mokymuisi, kurie ugdo kompetenciją skirtingose srityse. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos mokymo ir mokymosi portfelio parengimo ir panaudojimo problemos testinio mokymosi ir bendrojo lavinimo procese. Ypatingas dėmesys yra atkreipiamas į mokytojo portfelį kaip pasirinktų dokumentų ir mokomosios medžiagos rinkinį, iliustruojantį mokančiojo teorijas, tobulėjimą ir pasiekimus, kaip nuolatinį savęs įvertinimo rezultatą. Kalbama apie šio mokymo, mokymosi, projektų rengimo, mokslinio darbo, kompetencijos ir Europos kalbų bei kultūros dokumentų rinkinių įvairovę. Straipsnyje minimas Europos kalbų portfelis, kuris įgalina besimokančiuosius įvertinti savo kalbų mokėjimą, Europos kultūros pažinimą ir tautų tarpusavio supratimą, kur daugiakalbystės ugdymas yra suvokiamas kaip testinis procesas.

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