

## Chapter 73

# Teachers' Portfolios: A Reflective Tool towards Professional Development

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### ABSTRACT

*To achieve professional development and the intended educational goals, teachers' reflection has been considered as a necessary component of the teaching process. Indeed, reflection is process of questioning one's practices, intention and the emerging outcomes. Such reflection is also a source of inspiration, creativity, flexibility and thus, a means to achieve learners' motivation and interest in active and engaged learning. To enhance reflective teaching, teaching portfolios have been widely advocated in language teaching. To that end, this chapter attempts to provide a teaching portfolio model which aims at prompting teachers' reflection over their profession. Additionally, it illustrates the way such tool needs to be used by teachers so that they can reflect effectively and improve their teaching.*

### INTRODUCTION

Changing teachers' role has become a pervasive need of higher education to help students govern and accomplish their studies in an autonomous manner. This requires a shift in language teaching and assessment practices from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered pedagogy. Nevertheless, though teachers' knowledge of how to foster this learning approach, their pedagogical skills and motivation to achieve that aim are essential, yet when it comes to practice unexpected outcome may emerge. This is because teaching is a complex and highly skilled activity which requires more flexibility and planned actions to improve quality education and meet the intended learning outcomes as Grundy (1998) states: "the complexity of teaching as characterized by the individuality of students, the dynamic nature of classroom interactions and the demand for innovation defies any claim that teachers may be simply implementers of something that gains its legitimacy elsewhere" (p.31).

In fact, the classroom is a site that provides opportunities for experimentation, exploration and change for both teachers and students (Allwright, 2005). To this end, teachers' reflection is required to make

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them aware of the theory and motives behind their own teaching, to think about it, and to take some deliberate steps to develop (Gibbs, 1998). Reflective teaching is a cyclical process which includes teachers' observations of classroom behaviors, attitudes and interaction. This can result in revealing students' learning needs and styles within the course. Therefore, obtaining such data requires continuous analyses and reflection upon them as well as decision making and planning. Indeed, teaching practices also need teachers' evaluation and revision, then the adaption of their teaching contents and materials according to their students' learning needs and preferences; in addition to adopting, creating and bringing more innovation to their teaching.

To engage in those stages, teachers can use portfolios to innovate and adjust their teaching towards autonomous learning approaches. This is so, since a teaching portfolio can serve as a source of reflection and review through engaging the teacher in assessing his/her work, thereby promoting decision making regarding priorities, goals and areas for future development or improvement. Besides, this tool can promote peer-review of other teachers' portfolios and collaboration with them for effective use.

In attempt to support teachers benefit from its potential, a teaching portfolio sample is suggested in this chapter. This aims to promote teachers' reflection on their teaching and assessment practices so that these can be geared towards developing student autonomy. Its intended audience can include other faculty members, i. e., teachers, teacher trainers, alumni and department head. It is worth noting here, that this teaching portfolio sample is not exclusively concerned with language teaching, but it can also be used in teaching any discipline. It contains three sections which are: Teaching philosophy and goals, Teaching Dossier and Reflections on Teaching. This chapter describes the objective and content of these sections, with more illustrations and details, besides attempting to clarify how this tool needs to be used to enhance reflective teaching through providing guidelines of their use. Still, one needs first to account for what constitutes reflective teaching and its importance and relation to teachers' portfolios.

## **REFLECTIVE TEACHING: EXPLORING THE PROCESS**

The concept of reflective teaching stems from Dewey (1933) who provides a distinction between 'routine action'- which is guided by factors such as tradition, habit and authority, institutional definitions and expectations and 'reflective action'- which implies engagement in constant self-appraisal and development. It follows from this, that routine action is not adaptable to changing circumstances, while reflection action is flexible, thereby involving social awareness and analysis. Indeed, according to Zeichner and Liston (1996) teachers who are unreflective about their teaching tend to accept the everyday reality in their schools and "concentrate their efforts on finding the most effective and efficient means to solve problems that have largely been defined for them by (some) collective code" (p.09). This implies that unreflective teachers think about finding solutions to the problems they are facing, but since they are not reflecting systematically over their teaching they can frame problems in more than one way. Indeed, reflection "...enables us to direct our actions with foresight....it enables us to know what we are about when we act" (Dewey,1933, p.17). According to Jones and Shelton (2011) reflection helps achieve the following purposes:

1. Bring experience and knowledge together to produce new learning that is personally meaningful.
2. Connect theory to practice.
3. Strengthen a critical reflection disposition.

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