

The Learning Portfolio

This was something that I was able to successfully implement last year at Kansai University in the English Communications course. It is simply having the students reflect on the contents of the coursework that they have been learning. There are several ways that they can be implemented, and several useful methods that can be utilized for the classroom.

With the class that I taught, it was based on a curriculum of theme based content learning. In the course, I wanted the students to learn about themselves and the world around them and where they fit in the world.

To illustrate, here was the basic first semester syllabus:

CHAPTER 1A, 1B Introduction, the self and where you fit in the world

CHAPTER 2A, 2B Family, family relationships

CHAPTER 3A, 3B University community, education

CHAPTER 4A, 4B Region, Kansai and other regional areas

CHAPTER 5A, 5B Country, national regions

CHAPTER 6A, 6B World, international arena

CHAPTER 7A, 7B Exponential growth, presentations

Based on the syllabus, the idea was to have the students reflect on what they had learned. The directions that I gave in the first semester were not very clear, but the results (for the most part) were very well done.

Uses: aside from the obvious of having the students reflect and produce writing, I was also able to use it as the basis for the students oral test. While the main written test was going on, I called students up one by one to ask them questions on the leaning portfolio. The students were required to hand in the learning portfolio the second last class, so it was easy to have this accomplished as I had an opportunity to read and grade the portfolios. I chose to grade the portfolio on the amount of work that went into it and not on the grammar/spelling. I was also clear that I was looking for deeper answers that showed that the students were reflecting on what they were learning. A very beneficial use that I had was to see what the students thought were most important in the class and what they were learning. It gave an opportunity to have the students communicate to me what they were feeling about the content of the course (something I found very useful, as I took a different path than a number of my co-workers who were teaching the same course very differently).

Other uses:

Steve Quasha had given a presentation to Kobe JALT that I attended and explained the possibility of peer review where students could review each others work.

The portfolios could be created online and submitted electronically.

The portfolios could be a collection of 'best work'.

The portfolios could be an ongoing project though out the academic year.

Those are just a few examples of how they might be utilized for the classroom.

Changes that I will make are that I will give better examples of how to set up the portfolio and cleaner instructions. I will also give more time (4 weeks before they are due, rather than the 2 I gave last year).

References:

Pedler, Action learning for managers.(2008) Gower, Surrey, UK.

Pollard (2002) Readings for Reflective Teaching. London: Continuum.

Zubizarreta (2009) The learning portfolio: reflective practice for improving student learning

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