

THE FUNCTION OF THE PORTFOLIO

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Abstract

The changes that are happening in education in our country are a reflection of international trends in education due to socio-economic change and rapid technological development. Therefore, there is a need for changes that will aim to promote and improve the quality of the educational process. For this purpose, descriptive assessment from first to third grade was introduced in our country in 1997/98 as a pilot project that included several schools, and then the next school year it was introduced in all schools across the country. The introduction of descriptive assessment brings other innovations, like how to summarize students' results in a particular subject. This is why it is compulsory for teachers to keep a separate portfolio for each child that is assessed descriptively.

Key words: *descriptive assessment, modern teaching, portfolio, teachers, students.*

Introduction

Monitoring, assessment and evaluation are integral elements in the educational process and as always they are topics that cause concern and open discussions among teachers and parents. The greatest attention is given to questions about the objectivity of grades. But lately, since our country started the process of integrating innovation in primary education, questions about evaluation have become more numerous and more complex.

A draft for descriptive evaluation of students from I, II and III grade of primary school was prepared in our country in 1996/97. The main goal was to develop and practice analytical descriptive evaluation of students in I, II and III grade of primary school, instead of using numerical assessment.

The introduction of descriptive assessment brings other innovations, like how to summarize the results of students in a particular subject. In order to ensure proper descriptive assessment, teachers are required to keep a portfolio for every child they assess.

Modern directions in assessment and evaluation

In these times of significant changes in the teaching process, the need for change and improvement of the processes of assessment and evaluation of students is becoming increasingly more important. Changes in the teaching process will inevitably entail changes in assessing and evaluating students.

In traditional teaching "the teacher's attention is exclusively focused on the end result of learning-knowledge, which overlooks factors that can contribute to an active role of the student

in the teaching process and its general success, such as: intrinsic motivation, motivation to achieve (the most important in the hierarchy of motives according to Maslow).¹⁰

If in traditional teaching the student was not involved in the assessment process, in modern teaching the teaching process is targeted at the student and their active role in that process as well as its outcomes.

In modern teaching, learning is a challenge for the student while pleasure and knowledge develop independently. In this kind of teaching, not only is the student's motivation greater, but also the achievements of students which are accomplished through active learning and continuous valuation and self-evaluation (students assess their own work and learn how to correct mistakes). Modern teaching doesn't require the determining of how much information and which information students have acquired in their education, but it aims to put students in situations where they think about what they can do with certain information and where they can implement it.

Modern trends in assessment and evaluation of students' achievements require the implementation of new teaching methods and assessment techniques, which are of great importance to the development of the student. Modern trends are focused on assessment during teaching, which is also called alternative assessment. "Alternative assessment contains authentic assessment, appraised performance, portfolio, exposing, demonstration and other forms of assessment ... These forms of assessment involve students in learning and seeking development of mental skills and in this way they are compatible with the cognitive theories of learning and motivation."¹¹

Portfolio

The word "portfolio" has Latin roots and is derived from the words *portrare* (carrying) and *foglio* (paper). The portfolio as a key concept in pedagogical lexicons and dictionaries, and it coincides with student records or it represents copies of individual student achievements.

Portfolios represent a limited collection of student papers which are mainly used to show the best works of students or to show the educational development of students in a certain period of time. They help to create a cumulative record of students' work by collecting samples of their work. Examples of portfolios include: samples of written tasks, artwork, essay, reports from scientific experiments, etc.

The portfolio is also a kind of "creative act is a form of self-expression in a professional context in the process of learning and teaching. The process of developing the portfolio gives an insight into their own advancement, on the one hand, but also a basis for evaluation and critical reflection on the other side."¹²

The portfolio is also a collection of student papers that show the effort, progress and success of the students. In this modern way of evaluation, students and teachers act as partners in this process. The assessment by portfolio encourages self-esteem and motivation in students to

¹⁰Оценка на оценката:(стручна трибина) (1993), редакција Марионка Велева, главен уредник, „Просветен работник”- Скопје, стр. 56-57

¹¹James H. McMillan (2007) "Classroom assessment: principles and practice for effective standards based instruction" - 4th ed. Boston: Pearson Education, Allyn & Bacon стр.15

¹²Портфолио као начин подстицања самовредновања и самовођеног образовања
<http://scindeks.ceon.rs/article.aspx?artid=0553-45690906588M&redirect=ft>

learn, while the teacher is given the opportunity to teach students how to set goals for learning, and at the same time develop critical thinking.

Portfolio is in the context all of the following:

- informal assessment, with the instruments and procedures in the assessment that can be used to gather information about student learning;
- formal assessment, as well as summative assessment that is related to giving grades and final grade certificates.
- „authentic assessments" that contain the same challenges and standards of practical competence of students that are usually faced by writers, businessmen, scientists, leaders of municipal communities, designers and historians. These include writing essays/written compositions and reports, implementing individual and group research, preparing proposals and models, compiling portfolios, etc.¹³

The importance of the portfolio is that with its implementation we assure a quality process of learning and teaching, while promoting the critical paradigm of learning and teaching, as well as documenting the process of students' achievements. In the process of creating a portfolio students have many benefits: they are given the opportunity for reflection, which means targets, teacher – student interaction, effective teaching strategies, alternative valuation methods, and also promotes a professional dialogue. Portfolios can prove the link between the context and personal history that characterize the real process of teaching in a way that no other evaluation can, and of course also provides an opportunity to document innovations in teaching and learning.

The goals of the portfolios for learning and development (for progress) are: (1) to help teachers and students to review progress and promote the development of learning in a systematic way and (2) to allow students to review their work and to see the progress that has been achieved during their learning. To be effective, the portfolios should be systematically planned and implemented.¹⁴

Types of portfolios

Teachers and students are involved in deciding what to include in the portfolio, which will be the criteria for the assessment of the learning progress. In assessing, the portfolio emphasizes the assessment of the progress that a student has achieved, and the process and the practical competence during a period of time, and that is why there are two types of portfolio:

Development portfolio- documents the level/degree of learning and provides evidence of student progress. Commonly used for formative assessment, but also can serve for assessment at the end of the semester or school year.

Representative portfolio- shows the best achievements in learning and contains the most successful work. It is used for summative assessment. The purpose of this type of portfolio is to make a final evaluation and it is mostly used together with a verbal presentation of the content included in the portfolio.¹⁵

¹³Примена на стандардите за оценување на учениците (МЦГО-Скопје-2008-стр. 73)

¹⁴Примена на стандардите за оценување на учениците (МЦГО- Скопје- 2008- стр. 74)

¹⁵Настава и учење во 21-от век, (2009), USAID, Скопје, стр. 50

Advantages and disadvantages of the portfolio

(Table no. 1)¹⁶

Advantages	Disadvantages
➤ It can be adjusted to the individual needs, interests and abilities of the student.	➤ Necessitates a lot of time for preparation and maintenance.
➤ Helps document the development and achievement of students.	➤ Portfolios' management and storage.
➤ Encourages the self- evaluation of the teacher, has a positive impact on the students in certain time periods.	➤ Restrictions on use in summative assessments. It is difficult to establish clear criteria for scoring due to volume and diverse material. This reduces reliability.
➤ Students see portfolios as personal property, which helps them to take responsibility for setting their goals and evaluating their own progress.	➤ Inappropriate use and guidelines for the criteria for the preparation or evaluation by teachers, leads to portfolio becoming folders with disorganized collections of papers.
➤ Helps in reporting to parents on the development, learning and student achievement in a particular way.	
➤ It can be adjust to individual needs, interests and abilities of the student.	➤ Have to dedicate a lot of time to preparing and maintenance of portfolio.
➤ Able to document the development and achievement of students	➤ Portfolios management and storage.
➤ Able to encourage self- evaluation of the teacher, positive impact on the students in certain time periods.	➤ Restrictions on use summative assessments. Difficult to establish clear criteria for scoring included due to volume and diverse material. This reduces reliability.
➤ Students sees portfolio like personal staff, which helps to take responsibility for setting goals and evaluating their own progress.	➤ Inappropriate purpose and guidelines for the criteria for the preparation or evaluation by teachers, leads to portfolio be folders containing disorganized collections of papers.
➤ Assist in reporting to parents on the development, learning and student achievement in a particular way.	

Research

To determine the above theory about portfolios as one element of assessment in our schools we conducted a research. For the purpose of the research we made several claims designed for teachers, because they are directly involved in the creation of the portfolio.

This statement reveals to us how much teachers are familiar with the portfolio, its elements and function. Before introducing a novelty that should become part of our educational system, it must first be presented to those who need to use in their teaching practice. The teachers are the ones who need to be up to date with those innovations, so they can apply them without having serious misunderstandings, in order to reduce the risk of possible mistakes.

According to the results of the research, we realized that a higher percentage of teachers know what a portfolio is and its function. According to their level of agreement, we can see that

¹⁶ Примена на стандардите за оценување на учениците (МЦГО- Скопје- 2008- стр. 76)

most teachers generally agreed with the claim, but not completely, which in itself opens another set of questions why they are not quite sure.

Table no.2: Views of teachers regarding the claim: I know what a portfolio is

No.	Claims	Totally disagree		Mainly disagree	I am indecisive	Mainly agree	Totally agree
1.	I know what's a portfolio.	f	/	2	1	13	4
		%	/	10	5	65	20

The next claim to which teachers responded complements the first one, as it reveals the need for additional support to teachers in preparing the portfolio as well as its maintaining.

Table no.3: Views of teachers regarding the claim: I need training in maintaining portfolios by the Education Development Bureau.

No.	Claims	Totally disagree		Mainly disagree	I am indecisive	Mainly agree	Totally agree
2.	I need training in maintaining portfolios by the Education Development Bureau.	f	3	7	3	5	2
		%	15	35	15	25	10

The need for training in any field in terms of developments in the educational process by the *Education Development Bureau* is significant. Because of their insufficient activity in training, we believe that teachers do not have enough training in organizing students' portfolios by the *Education Development Bureau*. However, according to the sequence data obtained from this research, we can see that most of the teachers (a total of 50%) do not need any training in maintaining portfolios by the *Education Development Bureau*. While the rest of the participants in the research (a total of 15%) identified themselves as undecided regarding this claim, 35% said that they needed training by the *Education Development Bureau*.

Final considerations

According to data obtained from the mini-research and the analysis of the data enabled to perform two important general conclusions:

- Teachers in the first scale of claims, responded positively and they know what is portfolio and what is their function, total of 65%.
- The teachers do not need training by the Bureau for Development to keeping the portfolio. To this conclusion came through data on the scale of claims for the teachers, 50% of them think they don't need training from the Bureau of development, 35% believe that they need training from the Bureau of development, while 10% identified themselves as undecided.

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