

TEACHING ENGLISH CONVERSATION THROUGH PORTFOLIOS¹

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Abstract

This plain class action research explores the application of portfolio in English classroom setting, particularly advanced conversation. Students created portfolios about their friends' presentations, which cover the contents of the presentations, grammatical errors, mispronunciations, and fluencies. In short, they assessed their friends' performances. It shows that it can raise students' critical thinking, motivations, as well as makes the class more lively, particularly in questions and answers session. In addition, it can be one of lecturer's records in giving students final assessment.

Keywords: Portfolio, teaching English, teaching conversation

Introduction

Common assessments that educators are currently using are conventional ways, namely the use of multiple choice and other structured format tests for assessing many important student outcomes and progress. Ideally, the goals of assessment are to see students' competences and what they can do more than is possible to assess with multiple choice tests. According to Wiggins (2000) assessment is authentic when it is used to examine the performance of students on tasks that are both intellectual and worthy. Current goals (Arter and Spandel 1992) for students go beyond knowledge of facts and include such things as problem solving, critical thinking, lifelong learning of new information, and thinking independently. Goals also include disposition such as persistence, flexibility, motivation, and self confidence. In short, it shows educators how students' soft skills are. Consequently, we can see if students give effective feedback to their friends' presentation.

However, in reality, what is supposed to happen in the class, as portrayed above, is not as expected, particularly if it is implemented in conversation class. One of the obstacles of teaching English conversation is that the class is heterogeneous. In other words, some students are good but others are not. In addition, from the external aspect, they have different social background and from internal aspect they have different motivation and psychology of learning. Therefore, it becomes one of barriers in teaching them.

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Such conditions above were experienced by the writer in his class, conversation V class. In this class, students have to present their paper about social issues, economic issues, and technological issues. The problem faced is when a student is having a presentation, others who have already had a basic speaking and understanding English tend to be disruptive and busy with themselves instead of paying attention to their friend's presentation. They even tend to distract their friends particularly for those whose abilities are mediocre, moreover low. It, therefore, led the writer to find strategies that make the students focus, pay attention, and be respectful to their friends. One of which is by getting them to do an activity in the class, so-called composing portfolio of their own of every meeting. The objective of this plain writing is to elaborate the application of portfolios to the students in class as well as its effectiveness, particularly in conversation class.

Discussion

Portfolios were originally associated with artists and fashion designers, who would gather examples of their work in a large folder or box and take them to galleries or fashion houses to market them. School portfolios have been around for years, and from the beginning they have been a collection of each student's work. (Kuhlman 2006). A student portfolio is defined as *a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student's effort, progress, or achievement in (a) given area(s). This collection must include student participation in selection of portfolio content; the guidelines for selection; the criteria for judging merit; and evidence of student self-reflection.* Such definition implies that assessment should be done continuously, communicate students and what are valued.

A major purpose of classroom portfolios is to provide a profile of where a student began and how he or she has developed. In other words, portfolios provide an ideal tool to manage formative assessment. The collection should demonstrate progress in the development of knowledge, skills, values and/or attitudes in a given area over time (Arter and Spandel 1992).

This portfolio emphasizes the important role of formative assessment in the teaching of conversation classes. When we collect information about students' learning progress, we can see how students are progressing, then plan future teaching strategies and learning activities based on this information. The following figure (Davis and Mackin 2007) describes how lecturers collect, organize, analyze and act on assessment information about their students.

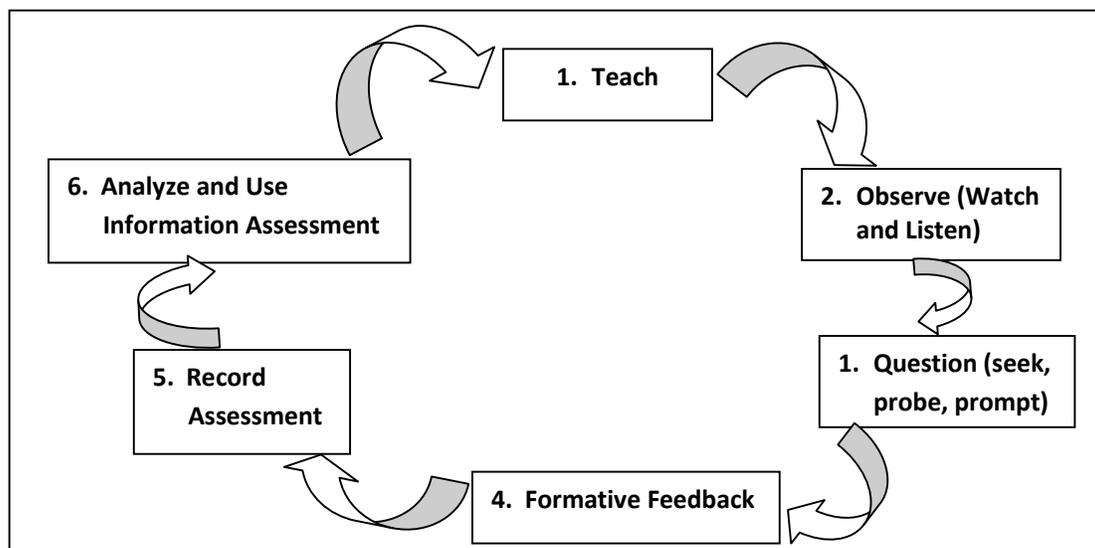


Figure 1. Formative Assessment Cycle (adopted from Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. 2007)

Assessment package 1: observing and identifying students' needs (with a focus on in-class strategies). It provides ideas for teachers on how to collect and record assessment information and give feedback, about students' learning in speaking (see diagram boxes 1-5 above). Emphasis is on classroom management, teacher language and teaching strategies.

Assessment package 2: using portfolios to assess (speaking); making an assessment plan. It focuses on what to do with assessment data that has been gathered and recorded in student portfolios and profiles (see diagram boxes 5, 6 and 1 above).

Assessment package 3: using profiles to assess (speaking); assessment for guided (speaking). It describes practical and successful portfolio and profile strategies.

I introduced the project to my classes in the following sequence:

The most important thing before applying portfolio is determining the objective. Without purpose, a portfolio is just a folder of students work. Different purpose could result in different portfolios. The objective of the portfolio in my conversation V class is to lead students to focus on the class, to pay attention to the presenters (no matter how their capabilities are), to gain information being presented and to give feedback to the presenters both in form of questions and comments about their performances or peer assessment, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and other aspects of language.

The first step is providing students information the goals of conversation V subject, what they have to do within the ongoing semester, how I assesses them and the outcome after accomplishing the subject. I then drew students to decide their turns for presentation. For the first presentation, I just let the class flow. The students did their presentations followed by question and answer session. I observed not all audience paid attention to their friends' presentation and less gave feedback. Then at the end of the class, I motivated the audience to more actively speak in the class, because the main goal of conversation class is to give their ideas. Then, I ask them to make their own portfolio to record how the class goes, started from the following meeting and next. I provided them the example of conversation assessment format. The following is the format of conversation assessment that they had to complete every meeting.

Table 1: speaking score sheet

**PORTFOLIO
SPEAKING SCORE SHEET**

Speaker's Name : _____ Date of Test : _____

Criteria	Points Allowed	Points Earned	Total
CONTENT	40		
1. Being excellent to generate ideas and to communicate it clearly and with good organization of ideas (introduction, content and conclusion)	36-40		
2. Being able to generate ideas and to communicate occasionally and with enough organization of ideas (introduction, content and conclusion)	31-35		
3. Being able to generate ideas, and to communicate and to provide organization of ideas	26-30		
4. Having enough ideas and provides few organization of ideas (introduction and content only)	21-25		
5. Does not provide organization of ideas	16-20		
PRONUNCIATION, INTONATION, ACCENT	20		
1. Minimal pronunciation errors	17-20		
2. Occasional pronunciation errors	13-16		
3. May include frequent pronunciation errors but does not require special listener effort.	9-12		
4. Pronunciation is comprehensible but may require frequent listener effort.	5-8		
5. Pronunciation is comprehensible but may require constant listener effort.	1-4		
FLUENCY	15		

1. Excellent fluency; smooth and continuous pace; virtually no repetition or hesitancy	13-15		
2. Very good fluency; smooth and continuous pace; occasional repetition or hesitancy	10-12		
3. Satisfactory fluency; inconsistent pace; intermittent repetition, and hesitation that interfere with comprehension	7-9		
4. Minimal fluency, inconsistent pace, intermittent repetition, and hesitation that interfere with comprehension	4-6		
5. Labored expression, frequent repetition, hesitation or long gaps.	1-3		
GRAMMAR	10		
1. Free of grammar errors	10		
2. 1-5 grammar errors	8 – 9		
3. 6-10 grammar errors	6 – 7		
4. 11-15 grammar errors	4 – 5		
5. 16-20 grammar errors	1 - 3		
BODY LANGUAGE	5		
1. Excellent body language by moving body frequently and having much expression	5		
2. Very good body language by moving body occasionally and having expression	4		
3. Minimal body language by moving body and expression	3		
4. Little body language and expression	2		
5. No body language and expression	1		
SLIDE/VIDEO	5		
1. Good, well arranged, video	5		
2. Good, well arranged, real world, animated slide	4		
3. Good, well arranged, real world, animated slide	3		
4. Good, well arranged, real world, animated slide	2		
5. Good, well arranged, real world, animated slide	1		
TIME	5		
1. 10 – 14 min.	5		
2. 9 – 10 min.	4		
3. 8 – 9 min.	3		
4. 7 – 8 min.	2		
5. 6 – 7 min.	1		
NOTES AND RECOMENDATIONS			
TOTAL SCORE			

Corrector :

NAME: _____ SIGNATURE _____

As shown in the format above, the students had to complete all aspects based on their friends condition. However, they did not just fill in the score, but also give proof of such scores. In other words, they have to record whether the content of their friends' presentation is well correlated to the issues or not. In addition, they had to also give proof about their friends grammatical errors and mispronunciations. Furthermore, they were obliged to explain their friends' performance in terms of fluency, the manner of delivery, even the slides. They had to also give questions as their feedback as well as record their friends' questions and the answers. The portfolios of every meeting had to be submitted in students center learning environment (SCELE) in Teknokrat website. So, all the folders of their portfolios are kept in SCELE as one of class assessment.

After implementing this portfolio, based on my observation and analysis, students were more active and motivated to improve their speaking because they had to record and explain verbally how the class went. It raised their critical thinking by giving responds to their friends' presentations. Eventually, it made the class more lively. In addition, it also raised their awareness of the importance of giving respect and attention to their friends because with no attention, they had nothing to say or to comment even to record in their portfolios.

Everybody could also learned from their friends' weaknesses. Therefore, they could do better in their own presentation. They were more improved because their friends' mistakes were like drills for themselves. It is well correlated to Bishop's statement (1996) that portfolios are one of the best ways for students to analyze their strengths and weaknesses, to construct learning as they need it to create the portfolio, and to demonstrate their abilities in a variety ways".

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