Using Blogs as ePortfolios in ESL/ EFL Writing Classes
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Second or foreign language instruction has been affected by the major change in learning theory from behaviorism to constructivism and social constructivism. Language learners are now seen as active learning makers, and the learning process is considered as important as the learning product itself. Writing instruction in general, and second and foreign language writing instruction specifically, is naturally affected by these current learning theories. The process approach to writing instruction seems to uphold the tenants of social constructivism because it proposes that writers receive input through interaction in developing a text. As technology has been increasingly integrated in language instruction, various teaching tools and methods have been newly developed for students’ process learning as well as process writing instruction.

In this article, I focus on integrating ePortfolios as an authentic writing assessment method for process writing. In addition, I present practical classroom implementation of blogs as writing ePortfolios. In the conclusion, I discuss the pedagogical implications of blogs as ePortfolios.

WRITING INSTRUCTION: PRODUCT VS. PROCESS APPROACHES

Prior to the 1960s, the ‘traditional paradigm’ or ‘product approach’ was used in high school and college writing instruction (Kroll, 2001) [1]. It conceptualized writing as a solitary process and emphasized correctness of the final text. It focused on the final product and saw the teacher’s role as a judge and corrector. However, after a call in the 1960s for teachers and researchers to study how writing is actually produced, the process approach emerged (based on the “think aloud” technique by Janet Emig) and became commonplace by the 1980s.
Process writing can involve many types of writing courses (e.g., personal writing, academic writing), and emphasizes the cyclical nature of writing. According to Williams (2004), process writing can be defined as an approach to writing instruction that views composing as a multi-staged recursive activity. It emphasizes making learners aware of the processes they go through when they write, and focuses on composing processes rather than on the finished product. It also encourages a collaborative, supportive environment for composing, usually including peer participation. As contemporary learning theories have affected writing instruction, the process writing approach emerges as upholding these current main theories of learning: constructivism and social constructivism. One of the best ways of helping learners actively engage in their and others’ writing process is through developing ‘Portfolio.’

**WRITING ASSESSMENT: EPORTFOLIOS AND BLOGS**

Considering the features of process writing, authentic assessment could be an effective assessment approach for evaluating the development of writing skills. According to O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996), ‘authentic assessment’ is “the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities. Examples of authentic assessment include performance assessment, portfolios, and student self-assessment” (p. 4). Among these examples, portfolios are identified as effective authentic writing assessment.

According to Williams (2004), a portfolio is a collection of student writing that demonstrates ability, achievement, and progress, often used for assessment purposes. O’Malley & Valdez Pierce (1996) identify three types of portfolios: showcase portfolios (containing only a learner’s best work), collection portfolios (containing all work), and assessment portfolios (containing systematic collections to check learner growth). Since portfolios can give a broader and more complex picture of a writer’s ability than a single piece of writing, it is a more authentic form of assessment.

Writing samples for portfolios can be written and collected electronically through ‘ePortfolios.’ A basic distinction between hardcopy portfolios and ePortfolios is the different platform in terms of collection, storage and transport. While hardcopy portfolios are collected and stored on paper and manually shared with teachers and students, all work in ePortfolios is done electronically. Thus,
management has the potential to be easier than hardcopy portfolios. There could be various ways to integrate ePortfolios in a writing class, e.g., discussion boards, class web pages, and forums.

In addition to these, there are blogs, which can be beneficial as ePortfolios when appropriately integrated into a course. ‘Blog’ is a combination of ‘Web’ and ‘Log,’ and sometimes called ‘Weblog.’ Campbell (2003) defines blog as an “online journal that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so.” Winer (2003) suggests these characteristics of blogs:

1) They are personal and reveal the writer’s personality, which can heighten interest in reading and/or following a particular blog;
2) They are on the World Wide Web and therefore low cost and easily accessible;
3) They are published and evaluated both in their writing and design; and
4) They are part of communities and offer connections to others through topics.

There are several benefits of blogging in writing classes. For example, there is a real audience; the language is communicative; there is emphasis on the process of writing, peer review, and editing, which can lower writing anxiety; and self-publishing encourages students’ ownership and responsibility (Ward, 2004; Godwin-Jones, 2003). Because blogs are easy to use in terms of writing, saving, and uploading drafts, they are a convenient format for ePortfolios.

**CLASSROOM IMPLEMENTATION: BLOGS AS WRITING EPORTFOLIOS**

In this section, I present a sample plan for integrating blogs into a writing course. The student level at which the course is aimed is ‘intermediate’ to ‘advanced.’ The plan lays out four basic steps for introducing and evaluating blogs as writing ePortfolios.

**Step 1: Demonstration of Creating a Blog**
- Creating Blogs. Using www.blogger.com, teacher demonstrates the main functions that the class will use: creating a blog account, uploading drafts, and giving and receiving feedback.
- Steps for Creating a Blog
Step 1: Creating Your Blog

a) Go to www.blogger.com b) Create an account: Click ‘Create your Blog now’ written on the orange arrow. After filling out the form, click ‘Continue.’ c) Name your blog: Give your blog name and URL, and click ‘Continue.’ d) Choose a template: After choosing one of the pre-made templates, click ‘Continue.’ Your blog has been created!

Step 2: Modeling the Feedback Process

• Providing Feedback. Teacher brings a sample student draft, and demonstrates how to evaluate it using a Writing Feedback Form (see example below). After showing a sample on the computer screen, teacher asks students to read it silently. Teacher shows the form to students, and asks students each question on the form. After entering feedback using MS Word, teacher uploads the form with comments on the blog comment.
  • Writing Feedback Form
    a) What do you see as the writer’s main point in this draft?
    b) What part of the draft most interests you? And why?
    c) Where would you like to see more detail or explanation?
    d) Where could the writer use less detail or explanation?
    e) Do you find anything unclear or confusing in terms of grammar?
    f) Offer one suggestion to the writer which could improve the draft.
• Steps for Uploading Documents to a Blog
  a) Copy your draft.
  b) Click ‘New post’ on your blog and paste the draft.
  c) Type the name of the draft and click ‘Publish Post.’

Step 3: Classroom Procedure for Writing Instruction with Blogs

• Writing the Paper-Based First Draft. After brainstorming with group members using graphic organizers, students write the first draft by themselves in class. Then, they upload it to their blogs (see Resources for Graphic Organizers).
• Resources for Graphic Organizers
  http://www.edhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm
• Feedback on the First Draft. At home, students read one of their group members’ drafts and post feedback based on the Writing Feedback Form (see Step 2). They also use a Writing Evaluation Form (see Step 4) to assign a grade (5 pts). Feedback is due by the next day.
• Writing the Paper-Based Second Draft. Based on peer feedback, students revise the first draft and write the second one in class. If there are common grammar errors on the first draft, teacher will give a mini-lesson on those errors (Williams, 2004) [2]. Then, they upload the draft to their blogs.
• Feedback on the Second Draft. Only teacher comments on the second draft and assigns grades for both the draft (5 pts) and peer feedback (5 pts).
• Writing the Paper-Based Last Draft. Based on teacher feedback, students write the last draft in class and make short group presentations. Students offer and receive oral feedback. After class, they revise the last draft and upload the final version to their blogs.
• Feedback on the Final Version. Teacher and students post feedback or reflections. They also post a grade using the Writing Evaluation Form (see Step 4). Teacher assigns grades for both the final version (5 pts) and peer feedback (5 pts).
• Writing Reflection Journal. After finishing the final version, students write (and post) a reflection journal. Sample questions for reflection include: How do you think your drafts from the first to the final have changed in terms of grammar and content? How did you incorporate your peers’ feedback into your drafts? Students have two days to post responses. Teacher assigns grades for both the Writing Reflection Journal (5 pts) and peer feedback (5 pts).

**Step 4: ePortfolio Assessment Summary for Blogs**

• Assessment Schedule. The items listed below are evaluated during the writing process (points are indicated in parenthesis).
  a) Peer Feedback on the First Draft. Peers must complete feedback before the next class, and assign a grade to their peer’s writing.
  b) Teacher Feedback on the Second Draft. Teacher assesses peer feedback (5 pts), and evaluates each student’s second draft including comments for improvement (5 pts).
  c) Peer and Teacher Feedback on the Final Version. Teacher and students offer comments or reflections within the next two days. Teacher assigns grades both on peer feedback (5 pts) and final draft (5 pts).
  d) Writing Reflection Journal and Feedback. Students write a reflection journal by the day after the final draft due date. Teacher and students post as many comments as possible during the next two days. Teacher evaluates both Writing Reflection Journals (5 pts) and peer comments (5 pts).

• Sample Evaluation Rubrics. The rubrics provided below support systematic evaluation of student work and participation.

  a) ePortfolio Content (Total 65 points) b) Writing (10 points each, 40 total)
  1. ___ Purpose and organization
  2. ___ Word/ Sentence use
  3. ___ Mechanics/ Format/ Grammar
4. __ Editing

c) Use of Peer Feedback (5 points) This student referred to the peer's feedback on the draft. (Very good: 5, good: 4, satisfactory: 3, poor: 2, none: 1)

d) Writing Reflection Journal (5 points) (Very good: 5, good: 4, satisfactory: 3, poor: 2, none: 1)

e) Peer Feedback on Student Writing (5 points x 3 = 15 total) (Very good: 5, good: 4, satisfactory: 3, poor: 2, none: 1)

**DISCUSSION**

In the process approach to writing instruction described in this paper, students participate in peer evaluation and collaboration through interaction on blogs. This participation provides a sense of learning community, which facilitates students' learning processes and a sense of ownership of their writing process. Moreover, using blogs as ePortfolios takes advantage of web-publishing, so that learners may feel more responsibility and authorship of their writing, which may promote intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, by archiving their writing, students actually see their progress, which may also motivate them to be more conscientious writers. Last but not least, integrating blogs in writing courses enhances students' technology-related literacy.

**NOTES**

[1] According to Kroll (2001), the product approach presents rules for writing, provides a text (typically literary) for discussion and analysis, requires a writing assignment based on the text (with an outline), and feedback in the form of comments or criticism on student work before the next text is assigned.

[2] In terms of feedback on grammatical forms or language structures, considerable evidence from L2 acquisition research shows that learners will acquire only what they are ready to acquire (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Williams, 2004, p.157; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, 1997). So, teachers should be very cautious with students' learning process and selecting grammar points to repair. Williams (2004) suggests that if a specific structure appears to be problematic for many students, a grammar mini-lesson may be effective: 1) model the form its meanings, and its uses, 2) demonstrate problems that L2 writers may experience in using the form, and 3) practice identifying and correcting errors, both in prepared exercises and in authentic writing samples. Mini-lessons or short demonstrations on ‘treatable errors (errors that can be explained through recourse to a rule)’ can be an effective way of raising student awareness of
frequently occurring errors. Data-driven learning (DDL) and analysis of target corpora are also useful (O'Keefe, McCarthy & Carter 2007; Sinclair, 2004).

REFERENCES


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