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Autor

Edgar Mauricio Gaviria Monsalve

Universidad de Antioquia

Escuela de Idiomas

Medellín, Colombia

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Portfolios to Reflect on Teaching Practices

Edgar Mauricio Gaviria Monsalve

Thesis, Research and Practicum Advisor

Astrid Tangarife Sánchez

Master in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Medellín

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Abstract

This paper was aimed to determine the effectiveness of portfolios to reflect on teaching practices with preservice teachers at Escuela Normal Superior de Medellín where students have been provided with tools and didactic elements to develop their professions with children. Data were collected by means of interviews, journal reports and students' reflections. Results showed that the portfolio is a potential tool for teaching learning practices because it allows students to monitor their learning processes, self-assess, improve their performance and reflect on their future practices. Moreover, the portfolio development fosters preservice teachers' professional development, and the ICT's and virtual environments play an important role in its construction.

Key words: Portfolios, reflection, teaching practices

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

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Preface

This action research was born from my desire to explore new tools and strategies to help preservice teachers to reflect on their teaching practices. Most primary school teachers are required to teach different subjects regardless if they were trained for that specific work. For that reason, I thought about multiple strategies for my students, but at the end, I decided to work on portfolios because I think that it contains a lot of characteristics that could allow students to confront this specific challenge in the Colombian context. From the beginning of my academic program, I had wanted to change the traditional method to teach English in schools based on grammar translation. I found in portfolios a very innovate tool for preservice teachers since it allows them to think, adapt, transform, modify and reflect on the content they are going to teach. From the first moment that I started to teach, I knew that these strategies were going to be very appropriate for my students and help them to be professionals in what they do.

Description of the Context

The Escuela Normal Superior De Medellín is located in the city of Medellín, Antioquia. The school was founded on June 26th, 1842 by Dr. Mariano Ospina and it is well-known in the city for its high quality. It is also a model of excellence in the city winning different awards such as Premio ciudad de Medellín in 2010 as the best official educational institution in Medellín. The mission of the institution is to train teachers for primary and secondary school by providing them with high academic, pedagogical and research competences, with the capacity to understand contexts, design curriculums and lead pedagogical projects that encourage the social transformation of the country. By 2023, the school will continue to be a well-known educational institution that trains its students for life, science, peace, progress and democracy.

The school is surrounded by hundreds of trees and green areas which makes it an ideal ecological environment for academic activity. Currently, it follows a full working day and offers primary and secondary levels at the same time. The school is composed by more than forty rooms, including labs, director and coordinators' offices, libraries, a restaurant and a reading room. For the English class, students count with a big room, an interactive board, a library with didactic material, dictionaries, booklets and books.

The group in which this action research was implemented was composed by 22 students from different social backgrounds, fifteen males and females. Some graduated from the school in 2018 while others come from different neighborhoods of the city. Students are committed and show interest in class topics. They participate actively in their training process and they are aware of their mission as future primary school teachers. Students make the classroom a good class environment; few discipline issues are found. Students feel motivated to learn English because they consider that this language is very important for children's

education. In relation to the teachers, most of them are full time teachers with long trajectory in the educational field. They are committed, autonomous and critical teachers who participate in social processes. Regarding my cooperating teacher, she teaches in secondary school and in the complementary cycles.

The institution has an agreement with the mayor office of Medellín called the Bilingual English program for complementary levels in Escuela Normal Superior. The program is composed by four levels; in the first two levels students are expected to acquire some language content, and in the last two, didactic elements and strategies for teaching English to children. The courses are aimed at preparing teachers to be part of a globalized world that demands the domain of communicative and research skills in which English is involved. Additionally, the program intends to train teachers committed with the protection of the environment who are able to interact linguistically and culturally, being aware of the importance of English from childhood.

Statement of the Problem

Through my observations, some conversations with my cooperating teacher and a short questionnaire applied to the students, I noticed that the teacher's practices were centered on providing the students with some theory for them to subsequently apply it. Usually, one class was used for reading and the second for presenting and discussing the topics. The teacher is always attentive to students' needs and doubts and highlights the importance of promoting independent work. She applies the principles of constructivism because she gives students the necessary tools for them to construct and strengthen knowledge through practice. Through some conversations with her, she affirmed that students should be taught some theory so they acquire conceptual and didactic elements for teaching children. She states that students should have the opportunity to apply what they learn, through practice. I found these

principles very interesting in the way that students put into practice what they learn; this way, they do not only understand content but also start reflecting on what they learn.

It is important to remark that in the Colombian context, the majority of primary schools do not have English teachers with a degree; therefore, primary school teachers are required to teach English at some moment in their careers. This action research is relevant because they will hopefully have some elements to face this requirement; this integration of knowledge and practice should help students to find something applicable and useful in their learning process. In brief, the developmental focus of the school provides students with experience to deal with real classroom situations in which they can apply what they learn and use it as variably as possible.

In order to collect some evidence of the students' needs and some gaps found in their learning process, I designed a short survey in which I asked them about their needs in English, specifically what they need to learn to teach English in the future. The survey inquired about the kind of activities they wanted to do in the English class, what they thought their English level was, and how they thought English should be taught to children. In relation to the first question, I found that the students wanted to be taught English with different activities such as songs, game boards, word search, games, readings and videos. Surprisingly, they did not mention anything related to the teaching of grammar. With respect to the second question, the students think that their English level is intermediate, and finally, for the third question they answered that children must be taught English in a varied way with different kind of activities such as videos, songs, images, games and crafts. Students are aware of their needs, which is important because it allowed me to identify and elaborate a working plan. It also allowed me to think about strategies to be implemented. All this information made me think about a strategy in which they could think about themselves as teachers, create their own teaching

material and reflect on it. As a result, I thought of portfolios as an appropriate tool for this purpose; additionally, it makes a strong connection with the school syllabus since it aims to help them develop contemporary teaching skills.

Theoretical Background

Pre-service teachers need opportunities to start reflecting on their future performance because it may help them start shaping their personality and identity which is vital for their careers. Furthermore, it is important that they start thinking on how to create or adapt teaching material according to their students' needs. Portfolios emerge as a potential tool for this purpose. In the following lines, I will elaborate on the concepts underlying my action research proposal; namely, portfolios, portfolios to encourage reflection, authentic vs non-authentic material, and advantages and disadvantages of non-authentic materials.

Portfolios

According to Genesee and Upshur (1996) "a portfolio is a purposeful collection of students' works that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress and achievements in given areas" (p. 99). In the same line, Paulson et al. (1991) define portfolios as a collection that expose the student's efforts, progress, and achievements. It is important to highlight the "purposeful" quality of portfolios because they follow a structure and systematic guidelines that make possible to collect students' work with specific purposes. In this respect, Danielson and Abrutyn (1997) (as cited in Viafara & Lopez, 2011) classify portfolios according to their purposes; one of them is *display portfolio* which collects their best work for exhibiting it and interpreting its meaning. Danielson (2007) affirms that the purpose of a display portfolio is to demonstrate the highest level of achievement attained by the student (p. 13).

Some of the characteristics of display portfolios are the possibility of adding new material over years, documenting of students' growth and students activities out of school. Display

portfolios can also be used to save different kind of material such as drawings, poems, lists of books, and others. The audience for the display portfolio is the student, parents, other students and the teachers. I focused on display portfolios because I thought it would help my students to feel proud of what they did, monitor their progress, self-assess their performance, and reflect on their own work.

Regarding the purposes of portfolios, they allow students to demonstrate what they have learned. According to Paulson et al. (1991), teachers can use portfolios to encourage self-directed learning, enlarge the view of what is learned, foster learning about learning, demonstrate progress towards identified outcomes, create an intersection for instruction and assessment, provide a way for students to value themselves as learners, and offer opportunities for peer-supported growth. Research and literature on portfolios refer to their main characteristics such as the alternative means of evaluation they offer, the continuous opportunities for students to monitor their progress, and reflect on their own experience (Defina, 1992; Dolan & Fairbairn, 2001; Nieto, 1994).

Similarly, George (2005) (as cited in Muayyad Naji, 2015) affirms that the portfolio allows teachers to implement formative and summative assessment with their students at the same time that they learn; collaborative reflection, monitoring of comprehension and the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes are also possible. In relation to the content and structure, Coombe et al. (2007) (as cited in Muayyad Naji, 2015) state that portfolios should demonstrate the students' participation in four important areas: the selection of portfolio content, the guidelines for that selection, the criteria for evaluation, and the evidence of student reflection.

Portfolios to Encourage Reflection

According to Bazle (1992), a portfolio serves to collect samples of students' work and

experiences, and reflect on what they do, say and think. In the same line, Paulson (1991) affirms that Portfolio assessment requires students to collect and reflect on examples of their work (p. 61). Several authors have referred to portfolios as a tool for reflection; portfolios offer different alternatives in diversity, depth, growth, and self-assessment; they foster reflection, promote self-evaluation among preservice teachers, and become a powerful vehicle for critical reflection (Linda, 1990; Wolf, 1989; Paulson et al., 1991).

Likewise, portfolios can help teacher educators address one of the most challenging tasks they face: training new teachers to be what Schon (1987) has called "reflective practitioners"; through reflective practice professionals become aware of their implicit knowledge base and learn from their experience. Weiser (1997) elaborates on reflection as an inherent part of revision because students can revise their outcomes as a result of their own reflection about something they have done, or about comments they have received from a peer or an instructor. This reflection helps students think whether something they have done can be improved. Since they are in charge of revising their own work and reflect on it, they may become responsible and get authority to assess their own work.

A recent qualitative case study aimed to determine whether the theoretical underpinning and expectations of an e-portfolio aligned with the current practices and attributes of students' training during school practicum as teachers was carried out in South Africa in 2017 by the Department of curriculum studies at Stellenbosch University with 11 preservice teachers. The data were collected through two semi-structured interviews containing the following themes: reflection, training, professional development and the social dimension of the e-portfolios, and were analyzed through framework analysis. All participants were equipped with tablets and received training on how to use them. They were introduced to the notion of e-portfolios and were assisted to create blogs that worked as platforms.

Moreover, they were taught about the collection of artifacts and reflections on their learning experiences and how to make comments on others’.

The results were divided into three themes: Digital literacy, reflection, and the value of the e-portfolio during teaching practice. Concerning digital literacy, the results showed that each student had a different skill and their experiences were varied. In relation to the quality and purpose of the training, some students were concerned about some cognitive overload because the teacher tried to cover too much content; others expressed that this overload could have been avoided if a step by step process had been carried out. In addition, some of them referred to the lack of support on the follow-up process. Related to the literacy mobile skills, the results showed that students had varied skill levels; some of them struggled with the creation of the blog while others did not show any difficulty. Finally, in relation to the ubiquitous use of the tablet, students valued the use of this tool and highly rated its creative use.

Concerning reflection, the students referred to the preparation received in reflective writing, the importance of the teacher’s feedback, and the personal value in reflective practices. Related to the students preparation in writing reflections, the study showed that at the beginning of the research students had difficulties in this aspect, they also seemed to be confused with academic writing when creating a blog to reflect, and they found challenging to make comments on reflections. The study also showed that real-time feedback from facilitators would have been helpful, as expressed by the students. In the end, students highly appreciate the practice of reflection.

Concerning the value of the e-portfolio during teaching practices, this tool was seen valuable as a way to have access to peers’ reflections, and to allow personal development. With respect to the impact of the peer’s blog, it showed that this was a good resource for

students to learn from each other; having access to others' descriptions and reflections allowed students to gain insight into other contexts. Moreover, the integration of mobile devices and reflective practices was found to be supportive for novice teachers. This research study allowed researchers to raise interest in future research in South Africa regarding the use of portfolios.

Authentic Material

Nunan (1989) defines authentic materials as any material not specifically produced for the purpose of language teaching such as newspapers, internet, magazines and the like. In addition, Baird (2004) states that authentic materials must be used in accordance with the students' ability. Authentic materials are also known as real-life or genuine materials. Martinez (2002) (as cited in Al-Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014) defines them as materials addressed to native speakers' daily life and not for teaching purposes. In the same vein, Klickaya (2004) characterizes authentic materials as materials that show the real world.

Likewise, several authors have referred to authentic materials. For example, Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1989) mention real-life materials as materials that are created and used for a social purpose in the language community of the native speakers. Furthermore, Rogers and Medley (1988) name as authentic, materials that expose the genuineness and naturalness of the language and well-contextualized in the native speakers' context. Finally, Wong, Kwok and Choi (1995) state that authentic materials are used in real world and they were not thought for the teaching and learning of English (p. 61).

Non-authentic Material

Unlike authentic material, non-authentic materials are specially designed for learning purposes and the language used in them is artificial with well-formed sentences all the time (Adams, 1995; Miller, 2003). Peacock (1997) states that non-authentic texts are especially

designed for language learning purposes. The language in non-authentic texts is artificial and unvaried. Non-authentic material is adapted, simplified or written keeping in mind the proficiency level of learners. They include cassettes, videos, CD's, DVD's, dictionaries, grammar books, workbooks, photocopies and others.

In the same line, Berardo (2006) declares that the artificial nature of the language and structures used in non-authentic material makes it unlikely that the learner encounters it in the real world, and very often they do not reflect how the language is really used. They are useful for teaching structures but are not very good for improving reading skills since they read unnaturally. Also, they can be useful for preparing the learner for the eventual reading of "real" texts. Researchers conclude that non-authentic material is commonly used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language, and it is specifically designed for the language learners.

Advantages and disadvantages of non-authentic materials. Widya (2017) states that non-authentic materials are suitable and appropriate for the learners. She affirms that real-life materials are too complex and difficult to be understood, but non-authentic materials are designed by the teacher based on the learners' proficiency level. This makes them easier for the learner to master the lesson. Moreover, it is better for the teacher to use their own materials. Those non-authentic materials are argued as more culturally appropriate for the learners. Therefore, learning the target culture of English is no longer seen important.

Smith (1997) states that English as a global language does not require the learners to internalize the local culture of the target language. Contrary, Brosnan, Brown, and Hood (1984) (as cited in Oura, 2001) states that authentic materials reflect the naturalness of a language. Hence, students should be exposed to the variety of language form and vocabulary. He thinks that the simplification of non-authentic teaching materials will increase the

difficulty of the task. Equally, Guariento and Morley (2001) clarify that the goal in using authentic materials is not to achieve a complete understanding but the comprehensive process which takes place when the students extract the information and knowledge from the materials and make use of them.

As a result, the complexity of the authentic materials should not be a constraint. Moreover, Gilmore (2007) says that the unedited authentic materials are suitable for learners to improve their English since the materials expose various grammatical rules and language features and learners extract new knowledge of the language. Finally, Gilmore states that learning new things involves exposure. Once learners are exposed to language features, their language proficiency will be more likely to improve.

Research Question

How can portfolios help pre-service teachers reflect on their teaching practices through the creation of their non-authentic material?

General objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of portfolios to help pre-service teachers reflect on their teaching practices through the creation of their non-authentic material

Specific objectives

To set the guidelines for the creation of teaching material

To collect in a portfolio the material pre-service teachers create

To reflect on their own practices based on their knowledge of pedagogy

To self-assess their performance on the development of the portfolio

Action Plan

Among the several strategies used for students to reflect on their own practices, I found convenient to propose the use of portfolios to encourage reflection about their practices as future teachers. For this purpose, I scheduled a plan to carry out my research project with the following actions strategies: for the first week, I planned the socialization of the research proposal with the educational community: students, the principal, the coordinator and my cooperating teacher for them to know the research project that I would implement in the school and share their ideas and expectations about it. Likewise, I would ask for the students' consent since this is an ethical issue in which participation is voluntary.

Additionally, from the first week I would start writing my journal and making reflections after each class because it would provide me with important information that could be useful for my research; it would serve as an important data collection instrument. Furthermore, I would write the most important findings, reflections and students' comments and attitudes towards their learning process. In the same way, I would present the guidelines for the creation of portfolio for students to get familiarized and know their main characteristics, uses, concepts and applicability. On March 2nd, we would start designing the non-authentic material using students' previous knowledge on didactics and pedagogy. For this purpose, we would include four specific units or the creation of the material that would be collected in the portfolio.

In order to collect data for answering my research question, I decided to implement a focus group to inquire about the students' perceptions, feelings, emotions, the usefulness of the tool, and the difficulties related to the creation of the portfolio. On May 4th, I would carry out an interview with the cooperating teacher to know his perspective in relation to the

effectiveness of portfolios to encourage reflection. In addition to this, I would randomly collect 6 portfolios to analyze; I would analyze their reflections and self-assessments.

Finally, I would analyze the data collected: My journal, the interviews to the students, the interview to the cooperating teacher, and the students' portfolios to triangulate the results, and start writing the final report. On June 19th, the final report would be presented to the academic community in Universidad de Antioquia.

Development of Actions

My research project was intended to develop a portfolio in a complementary course at Escuela Normal Superior de Medellín. They were expected to create some teaching material after a topic was taught as well as reflect and self-assess their performance as future teachers. For this purpose, I socialized my research proposal on the first week of March; all the students attended this presentation and some doubts concerning the development of the project were resolved; important aspects such as the kind of portfolio to be implemented, the organization, and its use were explained. In the same way, taking into account ethical issues, the procedures about data collection and confidentiality were introduced to students. Additionally, an informed consent was given to all students with the purpose of the study and how the information was going to be used. As a result, all the students signed the informed consent.

Furthermore, as an important tool for data collection, I wrote a journal during the time stipulated for the research. This tool was used to register the main class situations, the supporting theory, and some reflections that allowed me to think about my teaching-practices. I also registered all the changes made to the implementation of the portfolio and the development of the research due to the national situation caused by the Covid-19. As a consequence, I registered my new experiences working on virtual environments with my students.

On the second week of March, I presented all the information concerning the portfolio and non-authentic material to the students and I gave them the guidelines for the creation of the portfolios. Due to the international emergency caused by Covid-19, the Colombian government implemented a national quarantine and students were sent to recess. After 40 days students returned to classes but this time, by means of virtual learning environments; the school decided that students had to take virtual classes and they gave students a timetable for them to take the classes. This situation forced me to modify the original plan. The students were required to have internet connection, a laptop or cellphone. Consequently, we decided to create a WhatsApp group and to work through Zoom application. Some of these changes were introduced to the implementation of portfolio; the paper portfolio I wanted to implement was changed for an e-portfolio and the quantity of material for creation was reduced to two. On May 4th, the students were asked to create the first teaching material and do their first reflection and self-assessment.

On the last week of May, I carried out an interview to my cooperating teacher aimed to inquire about his perspectives in relation to the portfolio as a tool for reflection. I asked him on how portfolios could help preservice teachers reflect on their teaching practices, what he considered necessary for the portfolio to be a good tool for reflection, and how portfolios could help preservice teachers to apply their previous knowledge. In this interview the teacher showed a good knowledge of the use of the portfolio. He also provided me with good insights about the use of the portfolios and the advantages of using it. Any question needed clarification.

Additionally, I interviewed three students selected randomly in order to let them express their feelings, opinions and difficulties in the construction of the portfolio. I asked them how the construction of the portfolio helped them in three different aspects: the creation

of the teaching material, the reflections about their teaching practices and the self-assessment of their performance. I also asked them how they evaluated the effectiveness of the portfolio for the reflection of their teaching practices, whether they thought that the systematic construction of a portfolio could help them to improve their performance as future teachers, how the project could be better implemented, and their recommendations to the student-teacher for a future study. They expressed that they found useful the use of the portfolio not only to reflect on their teaching practices, but also to learn about the use of ICT's and to grow as professionals. They highlighted the importance of the accompaniment of the teacher in all the process.

Data analysis

I analyzed five students' reflections, my journal, an interview to the cooperating teacher and three interviews to the students. I did the analysis based on Saldaña (2009). First, I took into account his definition of codes: "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute" (p. 3). I also considered Layder (1998), (cited in Saldaña, 2009) who recommends never to overlook the opportunity to "pre-code" by coloring significant participant quotes or passages that strike us (p. 16). For this purpose, I started to make a preliminary coding of the data in the interviews as I did the transcription. I used different colors for each code and labelled the codes.

For creating different themes, I followed the recommendations given by Agar (1996), (as cited in Saldaña, 2009) who proposes not just only seeing what the data have in common but also differences (p. 6). For example, I found that some students considered the portfolio very useful while others did not. In this case, one code was named "students' feelings about the portfolio" and at the same time, it was divided into two sub-codes: "negative feelings about the portfolio" and "positive feelings about the portfolio".

Subsequently, in relation to the amount of data analyzed, I followed Seidman (2006), (as cited in Saldaña, 2009) who recommends to examine the most relevant portions of the corpus (p. 15). After a third examination of the codes, I eliminated those that I considered irrelevant for my research purposes, and renamed some of them. Finally, I classified the categories into three different themes. In the next lines, I will present the main findings of my research and the interpretations.

Findings and Interpretations

Potentiality of Portfolios for Teaching-Learning Practices

The usefulness of the portfolio at different levels is one of the most important findings of this action research. Data showed that the portfolio can be a useful instrument for students to monitor their learning processes, to self-assess, to improve their performance and reflect on their future practices.

Regarding the monitoring of a process, George (2005) emphasizes the usefulness of the portfolio to monitor the comprehension and acquisition of knowledge. Evidence of this can be found in my journal in which I registered a conversation carried out with my cooperating teacher; he believes that the portfolio is an excellent tool for monitoring processes. This statement is consistent with what he expressed in the interview; he said that portfolios allow students to monitor their own learning process.

The data also showed that the portfolio helps students to self-assess their performance. I found this evidence in my journal in which I registered my cooperating teacher's comments about portfolios: "The portfolio is an excellent tool for self-assessment". In the focus group, student B affirmed:¹ "It helped me to learn more, to know that we must be constantly

¹ The interviews were conducted in Spanish. The information provided in the paper was translated by the author.

strengthening our weaknesses in the specific knowledge, make more efforts, be more disciplined, and do with our students what we would have liked teachers to do with us”.

The study also showed that the portfolio is useful for improving students’ performance. Evidence of this can be found in my journal, the interview to my cooperating teacher and one interview to a student. For example, as I found registered in my journal, my cooperating teacher said, “In the portfolio students have the opportunity to know their skills and weaknesses in order to take actions and improve those aspects they find more problematic”. I found his words very consistent with what he expressed in the interview: “The students can optimize their teaching practice. This tool not only compiles part of the activities, but also helps them to see what they are doing right, what can be improved and all the possible scopes in the development of class activities”.

One of the most important uses of the portfolio is related to the possibility that preservice teachers have to reflect on their future teaching practices. As stated by different authors, the portfolio is a reflection tool by nature. For example, Weiser (1997) states that reflection is part of revision because students examine their outcomes related to their own reflections of something they have done (p. 296). Evidence of this can be found in many excerpts of the students’ interviews. For example, student A affirms, “one starts acquiring those abilities. First, one checks the grade and the Basic Learning Rights, then one starts thinking about the guidelines, and starts to orientate, restructure and create the right way. For example, I was thinking of my students, decide what information is important for them, how I can modify it to implement it in the portfolio”. Similarly, student B affirms that the portfolio is a way to organize ourselves, and not only helps us to organize the class but also to know how to get closer to the students.

Moreover, my cooperating teacher confirms this result in the interview. He expressed, “I could say that the portfolio, in addition of being a tool for the evaluation process, is an effective tool for reflection”. In the same line he affirms, “The reflection is about how the development of all activities occurs in terms of improvement. It has a record of how these activities have been carried out and allows them to reflect on those that could be developed, either with difficulties or strengths”. Finally, he confirms the potential of the portfolio for reflection in teaching practices when he states that the portfolio permits students to reflect on their own previous reflections for improving their teaching practices. To sum up, I found the portfolio is very useful for students to monitor their own learning processes, to self-assess, to improve their performance, and to reflect on teaching practices.

However, the data also showed that there are different concerns about the use of portfolios. For example, I found that most of students had not previously worked with portfolios and their ideas about portfolios differed. Evidence of this was found in my journal when I wrote about students’ comments regarding the use and implementation of the portfolio: “students asked me how we were going to use the portfolio and the guidelines for the creation of it”. In the same way, student C expressed that it was the first time she worked with the portfolio, “Although it was my first time using the portfolio, I found it very useful”.

The results also showed that some students think the portfolio is an instrument just for storage their works as one of the students expressed, “I consider that it is not a strategy that propose us new methodologies, it is just a space for saving files, it is like a desktop folder”. On the other hand, my cooperating teacher’s idea of the portfolios is very linked to Paulson et al. (1991), which describes portfolios as a tool to encourage self-directed learning, enlarge the view of what is learned, foster learning about learning, demonstrate progress towards identified outcomes, provide a way for students to value themselves as learners. Evidence of

this can be found in affirmations as “it is an instrument for collecting activities as they plan”, “this tool not only collects students works but also help students identified what their weaknesses are, and what can be improved; it serves a tool for reflection”.

I found something interesting in relation to my own previous and final ideas about the impact of the portfolio as a reflection tool for students. As expressed in my first entries in the journal, the portfolio was limited to save students’ works: “At the beginning of the project I thought that a portfolio was just a tool for saving information or students’ work”. In the same way, when the process began I changed completely my way of thinking. The main evidence is revealed in the same page of the journal, “I changed my mind and I found that if this tool is used properly, teachers and students could take advantage of all possibilities it offers”.

Moreover, the data showed that my concerns about teaching practices interfered positively in the development of the portfolio. As I expressed in my journal “for me, it is crucial that the students could “*understand*” the new content because it will be determinant for the creation of the non-authentic material”. This perspective helped students to understand the content and develop a good material. Evidence of this is expressed by student 3, “I took as main tool my notebook notes, videos observation and the material offered by my teacher”.

It is important to highlight that due to the pandemic of Covid-19, the Colombian government decided to decree a national quarantine. The students went into vacation for more than one month and it took also two months to restart the classes. As a consequence, teachers had to implement virtual classes and teach through an application called Zoom. For this reason, we decided to work on e-portfolio.

Some limitations were found in the implementations of the e-portfolio. One of them was confirmed in my journal, “Many students do not have access to a computer most of the time”. There was also a significant reduction on students’ class attendance; thirteen students

attended the first class, eleven students in the second one, ten students in third one, and six students attended the penultimate class. Another limitation found was the access to internet connection and a place where students could be comfortable. As expressed by student 5, “Teacher, I could not attend the class because I had problems with my internet” and social factor as expressed by student 6, “sometimes it is hard for me to submit the homework on time because I have to take care of my child”.

Portfolios in Virtual Environments

Data revealed that the virtual environments are effective in the development of the portfolio. Evidence is this was found in several students’ reflections in which they expressed that they found no difference in working though virtual means. Moreover, some students highlighted that working through virtual means permits them a good interaction with the teacher and the content. The data also showed that students found favorable working via virtual environments. For example, Student B commented that working through virtual environments allows students to interact with their classmates, the teacher and the content. Additionally, data showed that virtual environments allow students to explore new tools. Evidence of this was found in the interview to the students where students B affirms that developing the portfolio by virtual means helped her to explore new tools.

Although data showed that virtual environments are effective in the development of the portfolio, teachers accompaniment is needed for having good results. Evidence of this was expressed in the interviews to 3 students. They expressed that when having troubles understanding something or having difficulties to do something, they had the chance to ask for help to the teacher. They also appreciated the fact that the teacher was available every moment to help them. They also thanked the teacher for the accompaniment received in the contingency.

Another important finding showed that the construction of an e-portfolio strengthens the use of ICT's. Basken (2008) defines e-portfolios as a way to generate learning as well as document learning (p. A30). I confirmed this postulate in some students' reflections and the interviews; student B expressed, "by creating the portfolio, I learned to use different virtual resources". Moreover, student D expressed in the reflection, "we use the ICT's thinking on the current tendency and social networks". Finally, student C said that by creating the portfolio, she learned to use virtual platforms that she had never used.

Finally, data also showed important findings concerning the use of the portfolio to foster professional development. One of them is that the use of the portfolio allow students to think on their teaching related actions. Peacock (1997) affirms that non-authentic texts are especially designed for language learning purposes, and this material is adapted, simplified or written keeping in mind the proficiency level of learners. Evidence of this can be found when the students adapted their previous knowledge to be taught. Some students expressed that the use of the portfolio helped them to think about their students' learning styles, adapting the material according to their ages and finding out for didactic resources that facilitate them their teaching practices. Moreover, student B affirmed that the portfolio made her aware of her teaching procedures. Finally, the cooperating teacher expressed that the portfolio becomes a kind of "roadmap, where students save the materials and activities collected that allow teachers to confront what they have done with their new knowledge acquired"

Conclusions

In conclusion, the portfolio is an effective tool for students to reflect on their teaching practices. I think that if it is well-guided by the teacher, students could develop awareness of its use and educational communities could implement it with multiple purposes. For the implementation, schools should take into account that the accompaniment is essential since it

provides the necessary guidance to students, allowing them to know its uses and to get over the difficulties found in this process. The data showed that if this aspect is taken into account, students not only learn how to reflect on their teaching practices, but also they learn to manipulate the ICT's and foster their professional development.

Above all, due to the reflective nature of the portfolio, it is crucial for the researcher to be aware of what pedagogical aspect he or she wants to focus in the use of the portfolio. This will initially facilitate the starting point of the project and it will make students aware of the objectives of the research; as a result, they may accept it and take it as own.

Further research on this topic could cover different scenarios and audience. The advantages of working with portfolios is that it permits adaptability to the context and the educative communities possibilities. Researcher could take advantage of all possibilities that it offers.

Reflection

This process was a meaningful stage in my career. I learned a lot not only from my students, but also from my cooperating teacher, the coordinator and the educative community. Although I had had micro-practices at some schools in my city, this was the first time I was confronted to have autonomy of my own teaching process. I will remember those students who facilitated my work, but also I will remember those students who demanded me to give my best. In a professional level, I confirmed many of my principles in Education. I also realized that teaching is not only to transmit knowledge, but also to captivate our students, make them aware of their freedom and prepare them to be good citizens. The most important aspect found in this process was that I could face all my fears.

From the beginning I expressed that this experience was going to be challenging for me because of the school context. Teaching in an outstanding institution allowed me to give

my best and I made a big effort to develop my project. Furthermore, the worldwide emergency allowed me to deal with new pedagogical resources and challenges. At the end, it allowed me to know that our globalized world demands new ways to teach and learn.

My recommendation for those students who are going to start their practicum is to make a good reading of the context where the research will take place. Paying attention to students 'needs, possibilities and limitations is crucial for identifying a good strategy to implement with the students.

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Appendix A

Interview to students

1. ¿Cómo le ayudó la construcción del portafolio en estos tres aspectos?:
 - A. La creación del material de enseñanza
 - B. La reflexión sobre sus prácticas
 - C. La autoevaluación de su desempeño
2. ¿Cómo evalúa la efectividad del portafolio para la reflexión de sus prácticas de enseñanza?
3. ¿Usted cree que la construcción sistemática de un portafolio le puede ayudar a mejorar su desempeño como futuro profesor?
4. ¿Cómo cree que este proyecto se puede implementar de una mejor manera?
5. ¿Qué recomendaría al profesor en un futuro estudio?
6. ¿Creen que el proyecto hubiera sido más claro, más fácil de entender, más efectivo si lo hubiéramos hecho en modalidad presencial?

Appendix B



Actividades de finalización
Completa la siguiente secuencia

Comparative adjectives.



- Giraffes are _____ horses.
(tall)
- Elephants are _____ cows.
(big)
- Giraffes are _____ snakes.
(beautiful)
- Sheep are _____ goats.
(fat)
- Snakes are _____ hens.
(dangerous)
- Cows are _____ lions.
(slow)
- Horses are _____ giraffes.
(loud)