Implementing ePortfolio Practice into English Speech Class

徐碧雋
Pi-Ying Hsu

Department of Applied Foreign Languages
Chaoyang University of Technology

Introduction

The use of electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) in higher education has begun to receive increasing attention. Institutions such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities have focused on ePortfolios in courses, programs, learning outcomes, and student evaluation. The notable advantages of developing an ePortfolio include the depth of students’ involvement in selection of contents (Wiedmer, 1998), and a great amount of thinking that they apply to the contents (Holt, McAllister, & Ingram, 2001). Additionally, researchers confirmed that the interconnectivity of artifacts across pages in ePortfolio could promote a deeper understanding of the relationship between standards and performance, enhancing a sense of professional efficacy (Holt, et al., 2001; Pecheone, Pigg, Chung, & Souviney, 2005; Tucker, Stronge, & Gareis, 2003).

Electronic portfolios are applied in the educational settings for a variety of purposes—for evaluation/assessment, for career development, and for demonstrating
students’ learning experience and growth over time. Some emerging research suggests that ePortfolios can help students learn how to develop their identities as budding professionals (Alvarez & Moxley, 2004; Schatz & Simon, 1999; Schatz, 2004). In addition, teachers confirmed that the use of ePortfolio could help them increase their confidence in their professional practice and an overall improved sense of personal empowerment (Wiedmer, 1998). Yet less emphasis has been put on the implication of ePortfolio in oral training courses.

Teaching English Speech in a university of technology has always been a challenge. As an instructor of English Speech course, I found that many students tended more towards a static lecture style rather than toward dynamic and active participation. In addition, providing feedback and evaluation for a large-size class is quite effort and time intensive. Therefore, there is a need for change in evaluation to enhance students’ learning attitude and involve students in evaluating themselves.

This paper seeks to share the experience of implementing ePortfolio into an English Speech class.

Literature Review

ePortfolios are widely used in today’s educational institutions to foster learning and teaching (McGrath, 2005). Skiba (2005) defines ePortfolios as “virtual identity
collections (p. 246) and notes that through the collecting, reflection, and evaluating one’s individual work, an identity emerges. According to Jafari (2004, p. 40), ePortfolios act as “content-management system” that facilitates the process of collecting, sharing, presenting, and reflecting learning results through a digital medium. Yancey (2004) also indicated that an ePortfolio helps students “remediate” themselves, allowing them to use multimodal literacy to construct a relationship between technology and identity. Students are able to develop into professionals “who can make multiple connections and who create depth through multiplicity and elaboration...who can work in visual and verbal and aural modalities...” (p. 751).

The use of ePortfolios in higher education has been helpful to career development (Greenberg, 2004; Heath, 2002). Increasing research shows that the application of ePortfolios is a successful way to enhance learning experiences (Martin-Kniep, Cunningham, & Feige, 1998; Wolf & Dietz, 1998), and evaluate student learning and curricular assessment (Ramey & Hay, 2003; Ring & Foti, 2003). Specifically, ePortfolios are viewed as useful in promoting reflective practice among pre-service teachers (Avraamidou & Zembal-Saul, 2003). The literature also indicates that ePortfolios are valuable for developing teaching skills (Beck, Livne, & Bear, 2005; Hartmann, 2003; Klenowski, 2000). One of the participating teachers in Wiedmer’s (1998) study commented on the role of ePortfolio as an integral and
reflective method to enhance her professional growth:

Because of the ePortfolio, I reflect upon everything I do in the classroom. I frequently go in and change, update and add better examples. It makes me a better teacher. My mentor is now starting to collect items for an ePortfolio. I can see through my mentoring logs how much we talk about new materials and strategies and how these tie to standards and, of course, how students learn. It adds to my professionalism as a teacher. (p. 588)

ePortfolios are regarded as complementary approaches for reviewing students’ language development and academic progress. As reported in Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002), the ePortfolio assessment was received positively by the EFL learners in this study and contributed to students’ achievement. It is concluded that ePortfolio assessment is a promising teaching tool for teachers in EFL classes and can provide the ongoing evaluation of students’ growth needed for career development.

In conclusion, an ePortfolio is considered as a reflection of an individual’s work, efforts, and progress. It might be the best means to collect a sampling of the depth of students’ learning outcomes and express students’ learning attitudes, experiences, and accomplishments.

Chaoyang University of Technology created ePortfolio--an interactive
environment where students' learning progress can be recorded electronically. The goals for the introduction of ePortfolios and the implementation into the curriculum are to support inquiry-based teaching and learning, aid critical study phases, and enhance students’ employability (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Chaoyang University of Technology LMS/My ePortfolio Interface.

The purpose of this current study was to investigate whether ePortfolio practice contributes to EFL college students’ feelings of responsibility for monitoring their own learning progress in English Speech class.
Method

Fifty-six junior English majors enrolled in an English Speech courses were recruited to participate in this study. The participants’ ages ranged from 19 to 23 years old. None of the participants had received intensive English presentation training before this study. In addition, these participants reported no experience of using ePortfolio in learning activities.

The study was conducted in an English Speech classes offered in a university at the central Taiwan. English Speech was a 3-credit required course and it met during the junior year twice a week for 18 weeks in the semester.

Throughout the semester, students received instruction of delivering English speech, and practiced four types of speech (informative, persuasive, entertainment, and impromptu). These students were also trained in reflecting their own speech performance based on the Toastmaster International English Speech contest evaluation form (See Table 1). The criteria include speech development, effectiveness, speech value, body languages, voice, manner, appropriateness, and correctness.
Table 1

_Evaluation criteria for English Speech_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graded Items</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>-Begin with effective attention-getter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Preview body of speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>-Main points clear, use appropriate organizational pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Organization of facts, examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Suitability of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Cite sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice Quality</td>
<td>-Volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Range of voice (intonation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Pitch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the orientation session, the researcher explained her expectations and criteria for being a successful speaker to students. The students realized that the ePortfolio evaluation was integral part of the learning process in this class. In the fifth week of the semester, for the first time, students were asked to deliver a 2-minute short speech of introduction/welcome of a guest speaker (or a performer). Presenters
should (a) introduce the situation to which they are presenting the speaker; (b) explicitly mention the speaker by name as well as his/her title and brief background, mentioning how pleased they are that (s)he is here; (c) review briefly what the audience is expected to gain from the forthcoming presentation; and (d) then present the speaker. With this assignment, gestures and controlled movement to, from and on the podium platform enter as performance requirements.

Students and the instructor listened to the presentation and evaluated the presenter’s performance using the English Speech evaluation form. Following the presentation, oral feedback and comments were provided during the discussion session. The evaluation focused on the introduction, content, language use, voice quality, and suggestions on visual aids, gestures/postures, eye contact, facial expressions. The main purpose of the training sessions was to familiarize the students with the criteria and procedures of self-reflection. Each of the training sessions was videotaped and students could review the video clips on line (See Figure 2).
In addition to the first Welcome Speech as an orientation project, each participant completed a group presentation, an informative speech, a persuasive speech, an Entertainment speech, and an impromptu speech. Throughout the semester, the instructor served as a guide/advisor, meeting with each individual student to discuss the ePortfolio development progress.

At the end of the course, each student in *English Speech* completed the ePortfolio of her or his work across the entire semester (See Figure 3). The following items were included in the ePortfolio:
- Student’s picture
- Personal Data Form
- Precourse Self-Evaluation Form
- Grade Record Form
- Consultation Record Form
- Group Presentation Outline
- Individual Speech (final outline/ self-evaluation form/peer evaluation form/instructor evaluation form/reflection paper)
- Speech #1—Introductory/Welcome Speech (instructor evaluation form)
- Speech #2--Informative Speech (final outline/self-evaluation form/instructor evaluation form/reflection paper)
- Speech #3—Impromptu Speech (self-evaluation form/instructor evaluation form)
- Speech #4--Persuasive Speech (final outline/self-evaluation form/instructor evaluation form/reflection paper)
- PPT files of English speeches
- Video Clips of English speeches in class
By the end of the semester, a learning questionnaire was applied to investigate the students’ attitude towards their ePortfolio learning experiences in English Speech class. The participants answered the question items based on which best described their opinions related to learning in English Speech class.

**Results**

A t-test was conducted on the result of the questionnaire which was designed to investigate the students’ attitude towards their learning process before and after the ePortfolio practice in English Speech class. Table 1 showed that the mean for the posttest ($M=6.50$, $SD=1.92$) was significantly greater than the mean for the pretest.
The results indicate that the ePortfolio practice enhances students’ sense of responsibility for monitoring their own learning progress in English Speech class and they were aware of their progress in English presentation skills (See Figure 4).

Table 1

*Table 1*

* t-test results for the students’ attitude toward their learning progress in English Speech class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4. Self-reflection paper on ePortfolio.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine whether ePortfolio practice contributes to EFL college students’ feelings of responsibility for monitoring their own learning progress in English Speech class. This study provides preliminary evidence that the learning assessment can be supplemented with ePortfolio practice in the classroom setting. It is concluded that the ePortfolio practice, integrating into learning in class, offers the students an opportunity to monitor the learning progress and reflect on their learning experiences. Students have positive attitude towards their learning and great sense of
responsibility of being an active learner.

The researcher finds the other interesting conclusion concerning the educational implication. When students are invited to get involved in ePortfolio development progress, they are aware that they are in charge of their own learning progress and become active and self-regulated learners in the learning process. Additionally, students feel successful and highly-motivated when they receive on-line feedback from peers because it helps them monitor their improvement on tasks.

In view of the narrow range of the participants, the results of this current study need to be generalized with caution. Further studies can be conducted recruiting a wide range of participants in a variety of levels of English ability.
References


