

## Folio Thinking to Consolidate Learner-Centered Pedagogy in Foreign Language Classrooms

التفكير الورقي لتعزيز البيداغوجيا المتمحورة على المتعلم في أقسام اللغة الأجنبية

Toufik Bouakel<sup>1</sup> \*

Chlef University, Algeria

Email: [toufikenglais@gmail.com](mailto:toufikenglais@gmail.com)

Received 26/04/2024 Accepted: 11/05/2024 Published: 01/06/2024

### Abstract:

Education in the constructivist theory is no longer restricted to what is acquired in the classrooms. Personal experiences have become an integral part of learning, and the latter might be extended outside the educational setting. These experiences may create spaces that enable learners to go back to their previous achievements so as to assess themselves. So, the mechanisms of documenting and organising the learning outcomes are practiced under a habit of mind named folio thinking. This innovative pedagogy is underused in Algerian universities, more specifically in the language classrooms despite the fact that there are several strategies that help embodying it. In action, this may be tackled from both learning and assessment perspectives where learners need to have some skills that are the crux of folio thinking. This paper strives to give an accessible overview to folio thinking process. Also, it advocates the adoption of adequate learning and assessment tools that nurture students' folio thinking skills.

**Key words:** Assessment; Constructivist Theory; Folio Thinking; Language Classrooms; Learning.

### ملخص:

التعلم في حضم نظرية البناء المعرفي لم يعد يقتصر على ما يتم تعلمه في الأقسام بل أصبحت التجارب الشخصية جزءاً لا يتجزأ من التعلم ، ويمكن توسيع نطاق التعلم خارج الإطار التعليمي. يمكن لهذه التجارب أن تخلق مساحة تسمح للمتعلمين بالعودة إلى إنجازاتهم السابقة لتقييم أنفسهم. وبالتالي ، تمارس آليات التوثيق وتنظيم نتائج التعلم في إطار ما يسمى بالتفكير الورقي . هذه البيداغوجيا المبتكرة ، التفكير الورقي ، غير مستغلة في الجامعات الجزائرية بالخصوص أقسام تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية على الرغم من وجود العديد من الاستراتيجيات التي تشجع على تجسيدها. ، يمكن تجسيد هذا من باب التعليم و التقييم بحيث يجب أن يكون لدى المتعلمين مهارات معينة تشكل الأساس للتفكير الورقي . يحاول هذا المقال تقديم نظرة عامة يمكن الوصول إليها عن عملية التفكير في الورقة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يدعو إلى استخدام التقييم القائم على الأداء كطريقة تساعد على تحسين مهارات التفكير في الورقي.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التقييم ; نظرية البناء المعرفي ; التفكير الورقي ; أقسام اللغة; التعلم .

### 1. Introduction

\* Corresponding Author Toufik Bouakel

Foreign language teaching-learning is progressing and language practitioners need to use different tasks inside the classrooms as investigative procedures that demonstrate the extent to which the teaching-learning process is going effective and which aspects need change and innovation. Several methods such as tests, observations, and interviews...etc, can be used implicitly or explicitly by teachers to investigate both the teach-ability and learn-ability inside classes. Some refer to these as evaluation or assessment tools, and others refer to them as exploratory tasks used for professional development. So, all that cannot be assessed would be hard to improve. In classrooms, teachers use the aforementioned tools either in formal and informal ways. The first way where there is a systematic planning by the teacher in observance to time and place, and the second way where the teacher gives unplanned remarks and evaluative statements about certain aspect of the process (Brown, 2004) .

The pedagogy of foreign language education is supposed to be learner-centered meaning that learners should not rely heavily on teachers in terms of learning, assessment, and other pedagogical aspects. Scientifically proved, the traditional ways of learning and assessment, such as conferencing and testing, may not give a realistic account of learners' performances and such tools and practices are teacher-based and can be considered a passive reproduction of all that has been delivered by the teachers, handouts, and other resources far from a real output. From a metacognitive perspective, this does not give the language learner an opportunity to improve his/her reflection by drawing personal decisions through relating the past and the present learning experiences. Engaging in such process is being known as folio thinking. It is considered as a newly introduced concept that fits perfectly with the nature of language learning and assessment. Importantly, the objective of fostering this pedagogical approach is to increase learners' involvement and to be more responsible about their progress. In this situation, foreign language teachers are agents of folio thinking by providing the necessary theoretical, affective and methodological underpinnings. It has been remarked is that this process is quasi absent in foreign language classes despite the calls for life-long learning or experience-based learning. What is more, many practitioners ignore it at all because constructivism researchers have highlighted experience-based learning without referring thematically to folio thinking. Therefore, any foreign language practitioner may ask the following questions:

- 1- What is folio thinking?
- 2- What are the pedagogical tasks and tools that consolidate students' folio thinking skills?

Such pertinent questions are the main concern of the current paper, and some pedagogical tools that can be used for learning and assessment, such as portfolios, diaries and journals seem to be the case in point of this paper to gain insightful perspective about the practice of folio thinking.

## **2. Language Learning and Assessment**

Learning and assessment are very important aspects that should be tailored according to learners' needs. The two concepts have seen further elaborations with the succession of theories and approaches and the issue of centeredness is focal point in any attempt to innovation. In foreign language classroom, the adoption of innovative trends tends to prove that learner-centeredness that goes through problem solving relies, to a great deal, on various effective strategies tools that consider most learners' performances and reflective skills. By cause and effect, the so-called constructivist learning or learning by experience are claimed to be a sine-qua non owing to the fact that it requires students' to learn by doing even outside the classrooms in which they should be involved

in learning and assessment as active participants in response to the requirements of modern education which tries to enhance the autonomous skills.

Learning autonomy has recently been the subject of intense debates in foreign language circles. A great number of questions have been put as far as the concept of learning autonomy is concerned and its innumerable definitions, different understandings and interpretations among educationalists. Said in a clear way, learning autonomy is first learner-centered and refers to learners who are able to study on their own inside and outside the educational settings. Teacher's role, in this line of reasoning, is no longer supposed to transmit knowledge, but he/she create possibilities for producing knowledge.

Diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning within language classrooms is determined by the adequacy of evaluation or assessment, considering the fact that the latter is the most frequently used term. These procedures used by both teachers and learners, are referred to as assessment and testing, coming under the banner of evaluation. The extant literature of measurement in language emphasised assessment over testing and this due to the fact that testing and tests are only components of the covering concept of assessment. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p.35) defines assessment as "*the systematic approach to collecting information and making inferences about the ability of a student or the quality or success of a teaching course on the basis of various sources of evidence. Assessment may be done by test, interview, questionnaire, observation, etc*". It follows from this definition that assessment draws a lot on collecting information and making inferences, but collecting information can be done via hearsays, casual observations or rumors and this may not be considered assessment. Bachman and Palmer (2010, p. 20) have scrutinised two major qualities systematicity and substansive grounding that make assessment dissimilar from other ways to gather information in education. The first is systematicity denoting that assessment is developed and designed in accordance with a set of quality standards such as reliability, practicality and validity that enhance its usefulness. Substansive grounding which is the second quality denotes that assessment is directly focused to a certain area of learning.

### 3. Folio Thinking as a Process

Regardless of the field of education it belongs, one of the main tenets of the socio-constructivist theory in education is to foster the learner to be experiential by engaging in personal experience to deduce the learning input and output. This needs to be instilled over the educational career even in more advanced levels, notably university. One can say that experiential learning is a kind of life-long learning since it is not confined to the classroom.

Necessarily, education should emanate from a solid theoretical basis, adequate designs and effective learning assessment tools to systematise this experiential learning. So, an obvious starting point in any attempt to define folio thinking is to consider experience-based learning because it is its basic postulate. Folio thinking is considered as a process since it entails a set of meta-cognitive skills, namely exploring and collecting experiences, reflecting on the collected learning evidence and envisioning the future progress established under what has been experienced over a period of time. According to Gero and Lindeman (2005, p.96), Folio thinking is "*a pedagogical approach which is designed to enhance self-awareness by enabling students to make their knowledge explicit and visible for themselves as well as for others*". It follows from this definition that what might be experienced by the learners in the real-life situations, inside and outside the educational settings could be meaningfully connected with their learning in order to make it outright and shared with peers, instructors and administrators. One of the best ways to foster folio thinking is to engage learners in self-assessment activities, such as compiling portfolios.

## **Folio Thinking in Foreign Language Teaching: Choices and Responsibilities**

**Bouakel Toufik**

---

In this vein, it is worth recognising that folio thinking is not only restricted to portfolio implementation as the name denotes. It pertains to all that can be experienced and documented by the individual learner taking several tools that relate the past and present collected artifacts. Learners need to have special higher-order skills, mainly reflection, that enables them to launch evaluative statements by looking back to the past and present experiences. Simply put, engagement in folio thinking pedagogy may emphasise integration, synthesis, and self-understanding for the part of learners.

Folio thinking process hinges upon critical thinking skills, namely self-reflection, critical analysis, and critical evaluation through which students, either for the purposes of learning and assessment, make use logical reasoning to maintain a sense of reliability and validity. As a matter of fact, problem-solving situations or past learning experiences cannot be done without engaging in reflective mindset. In this vein, it can be said that folio thinking does not improve only students' metacognition, but thinking reasonably and logically may improve their affective or non-linguistic data of learning such as attitudes and motivation. Since this process entails cognitive, meta-cognitive, and affective skills, it can be named as folio competence.

Regarding constructivism perspective, learning relates to personal knowledge construction and observation, life-long learning and learning autonomy. It is not passively recovered through extrinsic mechanisms. Within the contexts of learning and assessment, educationalists seek to reflect the constructivist features. Learners are likely to be involved in the folio thinking process through alternative assessment activities, specifically portfolios. However, it should be recognised that this process is not only restricted to developing portfolios, as the name denotes. Though difficult to define, folio thinking pertains to all that can be experienced and documented by learners using several tools, such as diaries, journals, and inventories. The learner needs to have special higher-order skills, namely collection, connection, reflection, and evaluation that enable him/her to launch evaluative decisions by looking back at past and present experiences. The latter calls into question whether foreign language students are, by having the afore-stated skills, are ready to engage actively in this habit of mind.. Constant connectivity helps the folio thinker to make formative decisions.

### **4. Portfolio Strongly Associated Folio Thinking**

Portfolios are getting widely endorsed by learners and professionals for different purposes. To define a portfolio, one needs to be aware about the rationale behind its use; whether it is used as learning tool and strategy or as an assessment procedure. Through the extant literature, portfolios have been defined differently because this tool is versatile being used for educational and professional purposes. Even in the educational context, it might be adapted and adopted as a learning tool or assessment tool. A portfolio can be defined as a tool through which a student can gather artifacts for the sake of learning and evaluation.

For an effective implementation, portfolios need to be typified with two main specifications: feedback and purpose. For the former specification, teachers may discuss with learners the practical issues of the portfolio through timely feedbacks and information. For the second specification, purpose refers to the fact that the portfolio can be formal or informal in terms of techniques, can be used for summative and formative purposes, and used for evaluating linguistic and non-linguistic skills. In light of the given definition, one may notice that the assessment process is not only limited to the teachers, but also learners need to be meta-cognitively involved and prepared through setting goals, revising and connecting the collected work, and reflecting on the available results.

with learners the practical issues of the portfolio through timely feedbacks and information. For the second specification, comprehensiveness refers to the fact that the portfolio can be formal or informal in terms of techniques, can be used for summative and formative purposes, and used for evaluating linguistic non-linguistic skills. In light of the given definition, one can notice that the assessment process is not only limited to the teachers, but also learners need to be meta-cognitively involved and prepared through setting goals, revising and connecting the collected work, and reflecting on the available results.

### **5. Learning and Assessment in Language Classrooms: A Situation Analysis**

As agents aspiring forever to qualitative teaching, foreign language professionals seek adequate curricula and course designs and appropriate evaluative patterns and methods that are complementary and indispensable for advancing the field. It is important to this vein, that innovation is proposed for the purpose of developing some abilities in the learner. It means when a new idea is taken into consideration, the learner becomes the centre of interest in theory before practice in terms of what the implemented innovation, for instance, aims at developing in the learners. From an autonomy perspective, what matters most is how to consolidate the meta-cognitive abilities of the learners inside and outside the classrooms. The idea is to go beyond involvement in the classroom activities where the learners routinely follow the different traditional receptive and productive skills. The major problem with our learners now is they do not accept their own responsibility to manage their learning because they become accustomed with the teachers' centeredness. Folio thinking, as innovation in case, arrives in foreign language pedagogy, and can be developed from learning and assessment perspectives.

In terms of learning, this aspect is influenced by teaching style, tools and strategies; materials; and variables. The status quo situation dictates that the major learning problems are beyond the conduct of learners. For instance, traditional lecturing seems to be a source of demotivation and the adopted learning tools tackles merely students' cognitive level. Also, strategies do not increase learners' motivation for further efforts outside the classrooms. Since folio thinking draws heavily on reflection, there is unfortunately a quasi-absence of reflective tasks, especially in terms of productive skills. For example, reflective writing strives to describe, analyse, and interpret data about specific experiences, so it is more personal than other types of writing. It is a kind of life-long learning where learning is no longer confined to educational setting.

In terms of assessment, the most common used tool in the Algerian context is testing where students used to be examined in a standardised manner. Regardless of the skill or the module being examined, the focus is to integrate language use and usage except few modular frameworks, such as grammar and phonetics where the fundamental objective is to test certain systemic knowledge of language. In other modular frameworks, achievements are productive by excellence, and they need to be evaluated in accordance with assessment tools that take into account the communicative criteria. For instance, the subject of written comprehension and expression is supposed to have a formative profile through which the learner should go back to the previous written pieces in order to connect the present writing assignments to reflect on and compare them on a critical basis. This might be done effectively through documenting data via different tools that have a folio profiles, such as portfolios, journals or diaries. Subjects that have a cultural profile such as literature and civilisation are assessed through standardised testing, despite the fact that these modules need communicative criteria that are commensurate with the nature of acquired information. It can be said that the heavy reliance on the teach-to-test approach keeps learners as passive participants in the assessment process and does not give them the opportunity to make use their personal skills and experiences commensurate with the nature of acquired information.

# **Folio Thinking in Foreign Language Teaching: Choices and Responsibilities**

## **Bouakel Toufik**

---

It can be said that the heavy reliance on the teach-to-test approach keeps learners as passive participants in the assessment process and does not give them the opportunity to make use their personal skills and experiences. Folio thinking process requires other alternatives, such as interviews, journals, or diaries that dictate a kind of active participation on the part of students. These tools are performance-based through which learners can perform, connect, reflect on/upon, and self-assess outcomes.

### **6. Folio Thinking Pedagogy**

Despite the fact that folio thinking is a new concept in the didactics of foreign languages, it is stepping little by little in the western world because it integrates learners' personal experiences into their daily learning. The concept draws heavily on autonomy. As for the foreign language learners, they are recommended to assess their progress through engaging actively in self and peer assessment that can be collaboratively practiced. They should be put in a supportive environment to enable learners giving their best. As a matter of fact, assessment contributes to effective management of teaching-learning process. In this vein, foreign language teachers have further responsibilities and choices that make folio thinking attainable in action.

#### **6.1 Feedback Providers**

Feedback, either delivered via oral or written forms, makes the crux of the teaching profession. Feedbacks are launched by instructors as evaluative statements about learners' performances and achievements, what makes them serving up fundamentally for assessment purpose. It is wrongly perceived that feedback may be only attributed to correcting errors. In the assessment context, folio thinking is confined to portfolio implementation and this necessitates communication or mutual responses between teachers and learners. Since portfolio implementation embodies learner-based pedagogy, teachers' primary task hinges upon giving guidelines and instructions that help learners getting familiar with this pedagogy.

The rationale behind providing feedbacks is not only to improve the students' work and the achievements, but also feedback needs to serve up abundantly the learner per se. In this issue, the learner's work is considered as source or resource for gaining solid evidence about his or her profile. Necessarily, the teacher should be sensitive for which kinds of feedback are likely to be appropriate. Sensitively enough, providing positive feedback about folio thinking may get students actively engaged and the vice versa. Feedback, in case hold positive on the part of the teachers, can be considered as a lever of change for stubborn pedagogies.

#### **6.2 Motivators**

Motivation is a crucial determinant to get folio thinking successfully done, especially on the part of the teachers. Importantly, motivation, whether intrinsically or extrinsically sought, is one of the key aspects of successful language learning. Teachers are responsible for teaching the curriculum rather than doing motivational roles. Indeed, the former cannot be realised if the latter is ignored (Dörnyei, 2001, p.27). In the Algerian context, motivation is a topical issue in English language education in all the educational cycles without excluding any level. Different situation analyses have been frequently asserted the fact that the lack of motivation is a sliding barrier to the success of English language education. Starting from this point, and in the light of folio thinking within assessment framework, teachers need to work diligently to involve students in folio thinking by setting incentives, either instrumental or integrative. Concretely enough, integrating assessment and technology may be seen as a driving motive to turn students to be folio thinkers. In this sense, electronic portfolio seems to be the

appropriate tool not only to motivate learners, but also extend the scope of learning outside the classroom walls. Thus, boosting efficacy in terms of motivational thinking is crucially recommended for foreign language practitioners.

### 6.3 Enablers

Sometimes it is highly complicated to get students involved in certain learning situations and this due to many considerations such as ambiguity, attitudes or complexity. Here, the chief common point is the matter how teachers can save like such situations. By virtue of necessity, the teacher should be an enabler. Explained in other way, the enabler teacher is participative in the sense that he can augment learners' self-confidence through sharing the keys to enable them self-direct the different learning tasks (Scrivener, 2005). Regarding the nature of folio thinking, it is highly complicated to engage EFL students, notably those of 1<sup>st</sup> cycle, in assessment activities depending on higher-order skills. The enablement sense in language classrooms and suffice it to say it is not an easy task and only highly competent teachers because enablement is to get learners involved via three main aspects: the subject matter mainly represented in knowledge; the methodological basis that makes up any learning construct; and the behavioural data that accompany any learning situation (Scrivener, 2005).

### 6.4 Prompter

Semantically speaking, it would seem reasonable to say that being prompter is not different from being enabler, but in action prompting is more empathetic than enabling. In its broadest sense, the teacher prompts learners in difficult situations by providing instructions, and solutions, creating the supporting environment, and supplying moral help. It is said that prompt is done with discretion and not adamantly initiated (Harmer, 2001, p. 60). From a folio thinking standpoint, it is highly difficult to get students engaged in learning and assessment through the portfolios, diaries or journals, that's why; it is the teachers' responsibility to supply the due encouragement. Regarding the nature of the aforementioned tasks and tools, students lack unavoidably certainty of choosing the methodology or the content of tasks and tools, and this may influence their commitment and lessen persistence.

## 7. Tools to Promote Folio Thinking

It is worth mentioning that portfolio is not the only learning or assessment tool that goes with folio thinking. Other technically sophisticated forms that fit into folio thinking are diaries and journals. In light of the latter, it can be said that the usability of journals is versatile by which students can compile a variety of data (linguistic and non-linguistic data) as journals can adapted and adopted for learning and evaluation purposes. In terms of personal experiences, journals compiling may enable students to inspect material introduced in the classroom and students are personally given an opportunity to examine their own self-development. Based upon this, decisions about learning is likely to be taken by dating back to the past performances as the reference point. The same thing can said about compiling a diary. The latter is seen as an autobiographic narrative written by language learners usually including all what has been delivered inside and outside the classroom, and teachers as assessors, consider diaries as a rich source and resource to determine learners' beliefs and feelings (Pavlenko, 2007, p.165). It is worth mentioning that diaries and journals are used for different purposes as assessment tools, learning tools, and research tools.

## 8. Conclusion

The fundamental objective behind consolidating learners' folio thinking skills is to encourage autonomy in learning and to keep a sense of life-long learning. Despite the extant literature did not tackle the concept into utmost importance, due to its novelty, learning and assessment have been seen in this paper as having a twofold aim: to increase students' responsibility of

---

assessment, this by intensifying performances; to enable learners to be folio thinkers through reflecting upon their experiences. On the part of learners, the folio thinking pedagogical approach requires them to be more experiential, adopting a ‘learning by doing’ belief formally and informally (Huber & Reynolds, 2014). On the part of the teachers, one can ensure that involving learners in folio thinking pedagogy is not an easy task, and this due obviously to the cognitive and the meta-cognitive requirements that might be explored and met by special learning and assessment methods. In the Algerian educational context, folio thinking seems to be a very difficult challenge because learning and assessment remain far from the reflective expectations. In other words, they are not performance-based and this puts learners’ meta-cognition always under scrutiny. Experience-based learning should be encouraged from the very beginning levels such as middle school education to make it familiar.

Away from the enduring hardships and the prospects, this paper tried to keep the lines open to wider conceptions and enquiries that may tackle the methodological and practical implications of this innovative pedagogy, without disregarding that teachers and learners, as active participants in the teaching-learning process, need to play new role specifications to instill folio thinking skills.

### List of References

- Bachman, L. F & Palmer, A. (2010). *Language assessment in practice: Developing language assessments and justifying their use in the real world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blakely, Barbara, and Susan B. Pagnac. 2012. “Pausing in the Whirlwind: A Campus Place-Based Curriculum in a Multimodal Foundation Communication Course.” *Journal of Writing Program Administration*. 35(2): 11–37.
- Brown, D.H. (2004). *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*. New York: Longman
- Dörnyei, D. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge : CUP.
- Everhard, C.J & Murphy, L (2015). *Assessment and autonomy in language learning*. London: Palgrave Mcmillan
- Gero, J & Lindmann, U. (2005). *Human Behaviour in Design*. Melbourne: Key center of design computing and cognition
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of Language Teaching* 3rd (Ed). Essex: Longman.
- Huber, J & Reynolds, C (2014). *Developing intercultural competence through education*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Pavlencko, A. (2007). Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(2), 163-1
- Rea Dickins, P. & Germaine, K. (1992). *Evaluation* In C.N Candlin, H.G Widdowsson (eds) *Language Teaching: A scheme for teacher education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scrivener, J. (2005 ). *Learning teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.
- Walker. A & White .G. (2013). *Technology enhanced language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.