



2023

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Recommended Citation

Zeng, Hongye and Thompson, Faith (2023) "Responding to Multilingual Learners' Writing Through Interactive Group Portfolios," *Journal of Response to Writing*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/vol9/iss2/8>

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Responding to Multilingual Learners' Writing Through Interactive Group Portfolios

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Writing in schools can be a challenging task for multilingual students. Too often, this student population is seen through deficit lenses as unmotivated or incapable (Davis & Museus, 2019). Educators who are not specifically trained to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students may struggle to get CLD students to begin or complete teacher-assigned writing tasks in class. One successful strategy we have found is collaborative writing, which offers learning opportunities that are both low stakes and peer mediated. Group work, however, often presents challenges for teachers, such as effectively scaffolding students to elicit rich writing, responding to individual ideas, and assessing students' writing progress, with one member often working more than others (Greiner & Collet, 2021).

In this teaching tip, we propose interactive group portfolios as a response strategy to address these challenges and to support the writing of CLD students in group work. Prior research has demonstrated the potential of portfolios for documenting students' writing progress over time and in multiple ways (Song & August, 2002). Burner (2014)

emphasized that portfolios not only make writing an ongoing learning process but also provide a space for written and oral interactions, which is important for language and content learning. Therefore, teachers can use these interactive group portfolios for themselves to track individual students' progress, identify the support students need, and make formative assessments. We model how teachers can respond to both the individual student and the group through the process below. In Appendix A, we provide a sample group writing assignment for teachers interested in implementing our portfolio system.

Context

The portfolio system is best suited for K–12 or a first-year writing context, as it supports writing development through formative assessment. It can be applied across grade levels, but educators should use their discretion to adjust appropriately for specific assignments.

Learning Outcomes/Goals

Students will receive responsive, individualized feedback through interactive group portfolios that attend to:

- English fluency
- Collaborative team skills
- General progress of writing skills

Students will be able to:

- Collaboratively work with peers
- Respond to and engage with individualized writing feedback
- Further develop their English fluency and writing skills

Course Format

The portfolio system is best suited for face-to-face instruction but can be modified for online and hybrid learning environments at the educators' discretion, as discussed in the Caveats and Alternatives section of this paper.

Teacher Preparation

Teachers should purposefully group students for the writing assignment with careful attention paid to cross-cultural communication. Groups should have a range of English proficiency and a variety of multilingual students, if possible. When providing students with choices, we suggest that students are allowed to choose a topic rather than partners, as English learners may be likely to select groups with other English learners, thus limiting cross-cultural communication.

Teachers should pre-teach collaborative skills. We suggest co-constructing, as a class, expectations and procedures for collaboration. This will set students up for successful group work and avoid the pitfall of one student carrying the team. A sample expectations chart is provided in Appendix B.

Teachers should prepare a folder, notebook, or binder as a portfolio for each student group. There should be plenty of blank pages (one per student at a minimum). There should also be pages for teachers' observational notes. We suggest dividing the portfolio into three sections: (a) space for students to share their writing artifacts (brainstorms, outlines, drafts, etc.); (b) space for teacher feedback; and (c) space for student responses to teacher feedback. You may also save room for worksheets and additional artifacts to be included in the portfolio.

Estimated Time

Portfolio maintenance will take the entire class period of every writing session, and around 15–30 minutes outside of class as well. Teachers may also want to build in time to conduct 15-minute conferences with groups based on portfolio feedback.

Procedure

Firstly, print copies of the assessment rubric (which can align with the expectation chart as shown in Appendix B), and put the rubrics in the portfolios for later use.

Secondly, take notes daily in the group portfolio. In individual students' sections of the portfolio, teachers can jot down observations of individual students and their specific needs (such as a certain writing skill they can work on or grammar support they can benefit from) in each writing session. Based on the notes in the portfolios, teachers can prepare individualized materials for students the next day. Assign and collect individual students' exit tickets after each writing session, and respond to these reflections by adjusting the coming sessions. A model exit ticket is in Appendix C.

Additionally, teachers need to engage students in giving peer feedback before the final presentation of their writing. The following procedure maps out this feedback assignment.

- Exchange drafts among different groups. Students will read other groups' collaborative writing projects and leave comments about strengths and questions. Keep peer feedback and each group's revision in their portfolios.
- End this activity by inviting students to finish two tasks:
 1. Complete the self-assessment rubric created in the first session of class and attach the rubric to their own sections of the portfolio. Each student in the group will do a self-assessment when the project ends. Students will rate themselves from 1–5 points for their performance (5 being best performance) in brainstorming, drafting, revising, and finalizing stages. Students need to specify how they will improve if they do not give themselves 5 points. If they do give themselves 5 points, they are expected to explain in writing why they deserve that grade.
 2. Leave final feedback about this writing experience on sticky notes, and attach them to the last two pages of the portfolio.
- Collect portfolios for teacher's review and self-reflection. Ask yourself descriptive questions about students: What

do I notice from students' writing? How do these writing artifacts reveal students' creative ideas, improvement in writing, and strong collaborative spirit? What are students' needs, and what support can I provide in the future?

Once complete, provide students with authentic opportunities to present their collaborative work in their school and communities through activities such as a gallery walk.

Caveats and Alternatives

If modifying this lesson to be digital, we suggest using cloud drives and creating a general folder for each group with internal folders labeled for each student in the group. Tools like Padlet (see Appendix D for an example) and Google sites can also be used to organize and present students' digital portfolios.

Teachers will play the role of facilitators by using group portfolios to observe and respond to students' collaborative behaviors and writing processes. Give students affirmation of their work in a constructive way, focusing not only on language but also on ideas, coherence, and audience awareness.

Students will have access to the portfolio, so feedback and observation notes should be considered student-facing and modified appropriately.

Organize role-driven collaboration if there are students whose English proficiency is emergent. Inviting students to discuss and determine their roles in the project based on English language proficiency and other competencies (such as searching and selecting images, organizing ideas, writing drafts, and editing) helps all students to participate confidently in the project. Write down students' roles in their portfolios and encourage them to try different roles in different sessions.

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Appendix A

Sample Collaborative Writing Project Lesson Plan: Comic Strip

As discussed in the above teaching tip, teachers will use group portfolios in each writing session to document students' progress in both writing and collaborative skills, adjusting follow-up scaffolding for students as needed.

Session	Time and Activity	Notes
<p>Session 1</p> <p>Introduce activity; vote on individual topics; read mentor texts.</p>	<p><i>5 minutes:</i> Introduce comic strip activity.</p> <p><i>10 minutes:</i> Discuss possible topics for comic strips and narrow it down to three choices as a class. Allow students to rank individual choices.</p> <p><i>45 minutes:</i> Independent (or partnered!) time to review a copy of the Sunday Comics. Provide a guided worksheet for students to note what they notice about the comics.</p>	<p>Other resources for collaborative comics activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools: Book Creator, StoryboardThat, NCTE Comics Creator, Pixton, StoryJumper • More mentor texts: https://popculture-classroom.org/

<p>Session 2</p> <p>Analyze mentor texts; work with partners to brainstorm; draft an outline.</p>	<p><i>30 minutes:</i> Lead a discussion about the comic activity from the first day. Read a comic and analyze it as a group.</p> <p>Establish key genre traits of comics, or elements students should include in their final product.</p> <p><i>10 minutes:</i> Go over the expectations chart as a class.</p> <p><i>20 minutes:</i> Allow students to meet their assigned partners and begin brainstorming based on their choice of the three topics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposefully group students based on their similar choices of writing topics. • Provide note-taking materials or worksheets for students to record their writing outlines. • Give needed support when students are brainstorming.
<p>Session 3</p> <p>Draft and give feedback.</p>	<p><i>55 minutes:</i> Provide a storyboard for each group to start drafting. Check in with each group to ensure they're working together appropriately and making progress. Note the skills of each student to monitor progress throughout the semester.</p> <p><i>5 minutes:</i> Exit ticket</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a 10-minute group conference for each writing group to check for their collaboration behaviors, writing progress, and needed support. • Give constructive feedback to each group.

<p>Session 4 Draft; revise.</p>	<p><i>55 minutes:</i> Provide materials for students to make their final product. Check in with groups to provide scaffolded support based on the previous day's conferences. Give students time to revise based on teachers' feedback.</p> <p><i>5 minutes:</i> Exit ticket</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for peer revision (exchange writing products among different groups), if time allows.
<p>Session 5 Present.</p>	<p><i>55 minutes:</i> Allow students to present their work and celebrate their completed projects! Display work and invite community members to presentations.</p> <p><i>5 minutes:</i> Exit ticket or other brief activity feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap up activity with students' feedback about all these writing experiences.

Appendix B

Sample Expectations Chart and Rubric

The expectation chart can be easily aligned to the end-of-project self-assessment rubric. Each student in the group will take one copy of this rubric and rate themselves for their performance in each writing stage. Students need to specify what they think they can improve in for future collaborative writing activities if they do not give themselves full points. If they do give themselves full points, they are expected to elaborate on their successes and why they deserve full points.

	Dos	Don'ts	How well do I meet the expectations? (1–5 points; 5 is meeting all expectations) If I'm not at 5 points now, how will I improve?
Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use respectful language in discussion (disagree, agree, clarify, rephrase, suggest). • Be a good listener (listen to everyone). • Take note of ideas • Use books and computers to search for information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy other people's ideas (plagiarism). • Talk about irrelevant topics. 	

Drafting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think and discuss before writing. • Use dictionaries and ask for language support if needed. • Be supportive of and helpful to each other. • Be brave and confident in writing. • Be unafraid to make mistakes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simply split tasks without any discussion. 	
Revising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide constructive feedback (both positive points and sincere suggestions for improvement). • Remember language accuracy, ideas, and overall coherence are all important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignore the overall coherence of the writing. • Only focus on checking grammar. 	
Finalizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud within the group to make sure everything sounds good. • Carefully proofread to check grammar, writing convention, appropriateness for targeted audiences, neatness of format, creativeness of ideas, and coherence of the overall writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit without the agreement of all group members. (It should be everyone's best work!) 	

Appendix C

Sample Exit Ticket

Name & Date: _____

What are two things you learned from your peers today? Share who.

1)

2)

What did you do well or struggle with today?

What do you expect from your group tomorrow?

Appendix D

Sample Digital Padlet Portfolio

