Validity and reliability of portfolio assessment in pre-service teacher education

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This article concentrates on the validity and reliability of portfolio assessment as used in pre-service teacher education. It is not possible to make general pronouncements about the validity of portfolio assessment in pre-service teacher education as there are multiple portfolio applications. The validity depends on the purpose, namely the divers competencies which the course organisers wish to assess with it. Therefore, three categories of competencies and consequently three types of portfolios were distinguished in order to determine the validity of portfolio assessment. For the assessment of teaching and partnership competencies, it is argued that the validity is low due to the roundabout nature of the assessment. On the contrary, the validity of portfolio assessment for learning competencies can be high. The execution of a self-regulated learning process can be accurately assessed using portfolios. The reliability of portfolio assessment is problematic, since it is incapable of fulfilling the classic psychometric requirement of reliability. Nevertheless, provided that the necessary measures are taken, the reliability of portfolio assessment can still be brought to an acceptable level. Five measures are proposed.

Keywords: portfolio assessment; teacher education; validity; reliability; self-regulated learning; learning competencies

Introduction

An exhaustive literature study of the use of portfolios in education (Meeus, Van Petegem, and Van Looy 2006) highlighted the existence of a considerable number of reports by teachers sharing their practical experience with this tool. But relatively few scholarly studies are available yet, due to the rather recent popularity of the tool. It seems that the literature is, in effect, split down the middle with regard to the validity of portfolio assessment: roughly half the authors express serious reservations about the validity of portfolio assessment, while the other half is positive about its validity. Why is the literature so divided on this issue and who is right?

Oddly enough, both groups are right. The problem lies in a confusion regarding the concept of what portfolios actually are. In reality there is not one portfolio, but rather there are a series of different portfolio applications, each of which has its own format. The concept ‘portfolio’ has a degree of generality analogous to the concepts of ‘file’ or ‘assignment’. Statements on the validity of assignments cannot be done in any meaningful way without knowing what kind of assignment we are talking about. The same applies in the

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case of portfolios. Before we can make any meaningful judgement with regard as to its validity, we first have to specify the portfolio objectives at issue.

In pre-service teacher education, a variety of different portfolio applications is used. Methods of assessment need to be tailored to the objectives which are being pursued (Van Petegem and Vanhoof 2002). Therefore, we will focus on three categories of competencies which are the different objectives of portfolio assessment. We will look at the validity of the assessment of the respective three types of portfolios. By the validity of portfolio assessment, we mean the extent to which the teacher educator actually assesses what is the objective of the assessment by means of portfolios. Thereafter, we go on to examine the reliability of portfolio assessment in pre-service teacher education. By the reliability of portfolio assessment, we mean the extent to which extraneous influences are excluded from the assessment.

One competency is not the same as another

In teacher education, portfolios are used for the assessment of competencies needed to carry out the professional tasks of the teacher. We argue that different categories of competencies lead to substantial difference in the validity of portfolio assessment with regard to these competencies. Wolf, Lichtenstein, and Stevenson (1997) distinguish between evaluation portfolios and professional development portfolios. Evaluation portfolios are used to assess teaching performance, while professional development portfolios are focussed on the learning process and are therefore used to assess learning competencies. Following this line of reasoning, portfolios can serve two different educational purposes in teacher education: that of learning to teach and that of learning to learn.

All kinds of portfolio entries are useful for both categories. Examples are lesson plans, descriptions, observation notes, pictures, audio- and videotapes, etc. But these entries differ in function (Bird 1990). For professional development portfolios, it is desirable to select teacher’s worst work, so that it may be improved. Evaluation portfolios instead should be expected to contain a sample of the teacher’s best work, unless we suppose that a teacher can be persuaded to indict him or herself.

Teaching performance directly refers to supervision, education, expertise transfer and classroom management. The competencies required here relate to teaching situations with pupils. We simply call these teaching competencies. But teaching performance is not limited to classroom tasks. Teachers also have to be competent to deal with parents and carers, colleagues and school management or others involved in school life. The competencies required for performance of the professional tasks outside the classroom, in essence, relate to partnership. We refer to these as partnership competencies. The learning competencies of the teacher correspond to the teacher as lifelong learner, innovator and researcher. Examples of learning competencies are: skills to work independently, the ability to plan, the capacity for reflection, being able to modify one’s behaviour, etc.

The distinction between teaching competencies and partnership competencies is of value because there is a significant degree of difference between how portfolios are used for these two sorts of competencies. This can be understood by placing it in the context of the existing array of assessment tools. For the assessment of teaching competencies, teacher education can fall back on a range of methods and tools. For instance, direct observation of the student’s performance during his or her classroom work at placement is commonly known and used by teacher educators. Portfolios can fulfil a supplementary role here. For partnership competencies, direct observation is almost impossible as actually attending conversations with parents or sitting in on staff meetings in order to assess the
student’s performance usually is not an option. In this case, portfolios could play more
than a supplementary role. In fact, they could be the cornerstone of the assessment.

In conclusion, we distinguished three different categories of competencies which can
be assessed by the use of portfolios (see Table 1).

Table 1. Three categories of competencies related to professional tasks of the teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• supervisor of learning and development processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• content expert</td>
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<tr>
<td>• classroom manager</td>
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<th>Partnership competencies</th>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher as partner vis-à-vis:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• parents and caretakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• colleagues and school management</td>
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<tr>
<td>• third parties</td>
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<tr>
<th>Learning competencies</th>
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<tr>
<td>The teacher as:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• lifelong learner</td>
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<tr>
<td>• innovator</td>
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<td>• researcher</td>
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The validity of portfolio assessment for teaching competencies

Teaching competencies manifest themselves during teaching activities, usually in the
classroom. A valid portfolio assessment for teaching competencies presupposes portfolios
that are suitable to decide whether or not students are able to teach.

The methods most commonly used to assess teaching competencies are: observation
(e.g. by means of classroom visits); personal interviews (e.g. with the tutor or the students
themselves); and the evaluation of documents (e.g. lesson plans). Teacher educators have
been using a combination of these methods to assess students’ teaching competencies
for years, and it works perfectly well. So there seems no need for a new tool. However, a
criticism which students make of the existing methodology is that the teacher educator’s
evaluation is sometimes overly based on a mere handful of snapshots and does not give
sufficient weight to the progress which the student is making. Supervisors usually see their
students once per teaching practicum. Portfolios might have something to offer here.

Portfolio assessment is an indirect method of assessment. It gives the teacher educator
an impression of the student’s teaching competencies, but this impression is not obtained
directly as in the case of observation. The impression is ‘mediated’. Portfolios could allow
students to present their work in the classroom, but this raises the question of the truthful-
ness of the representation as students will focus on their teaching success (Leggett and
Bunker 2006). This poses two significant problems.

First, there is the possible dishonesty of the student’s reflections on his or her perform-
ance. It is assumed that portfolios have to include reflection: the students’ own evaluation
of their teaching competency. Students should be capable of conducting a critical appraisal
of their own performance and should be prepared to recognise their weaknesses as well as
their strengths. But the student is placed in a critical position if he or she is asked to reveal
his or her weaknesses when there is a lot at stake, in this case a teaching certificate. This
means in reality that student teachers can be penalised for revealing their weaknesses. In

Obligatory reflections from students, posed in a vulnerable situation, lead to ‘contrived collegiality’ (Orland-Barak 2005). One might equally say that there is a chance that what is really being assessed here is just the students’ ability to write what the teacher educator wants to read (Korthagen 2004). For this reason, we advocate that students should not be required to include reflection in portfolios used to assess teaching competencies. Students have to be able to limit themselves to reporting: giving a factual account of what they have done.

A second important problem regarding the validity of portfolio assessment with respect to teaching competencies is the interference which is created by the fact of it being a consciously constructed self-portrait of the student’s competencies (Wubbels, Van Tartwijk, and Brekelmans 1996). The mark that the teacher educator awards thus comes to depend not only on the teaching competency of the student, but also on how successful the student has been in representing his or her teaching competency. After all, a lot of skills are required in portfolio construction. The student’s writing skills influence how convincing the reporting ultimately is. His or her skill in using ICT and other media impact the quality of the photographic material or video recordings used (Kommer and Meeus 2001). Students who are skilled in these areas are able to unfairly dress up their achievements, while students with a more modest command of these competencies run the risk of receiving an assessment which is below their real teaching competency.

There are ways of reducing the disadvantages that this interference causes. We suggest three possibilities. First, course tutors could provide specific training to ensure that all students acquire the necessary competencies to put together portfolios which adequately reflect their teaching competencies (Tanner et al. 2000). Second, interim supervision sessions can be organised. Teacher educators can then tone down overly self-promoting compilations or offer additional help, if required. In this connection, Wolf, Whinery, and Hagerty (1995) and Davis and Honan (1998) argue for supervision meetings with small groups of students. Finally, the quality of how the picture is put together can be used as a separate assessment criterion so as to make the assessor more aware of the interference. Nevertheless, the indirect nature of portfolio assessment remains a pitfall.

So far, we have assumed a situation in which the teacher educator bases his or her evaluation of students’ teaching competencies exclusively on portfolios. It is, of course, quite a different matter when portfolios are used in addition to, for example, observations and personal interviews. In this way portfolios can be beneficial to the validity of the assessment. The teacher educator then has additional information at his or her disposal, including a better appreciation of the student’s overall progress. Nevertheless, this does raise the issue of the efficiency of portfolios for this purpose. After all, portfolios are very labour intensive, both for the students and for the assessors. The amount of materials that needs to be collected to prove the acquisition of teaching competencies is probably the cornerstone of the whole idea (Snyder, Lippincott, and Bower 1998).

In conclusion, the validity of portfolio assessment seems to be limited for teaching competencies due to the indirect nature of the assessment. For high-stake assessments, it is problematic to require students to provide reflections on their performance. These reflections may not be genuine if students run the risk of being penalised for being honest. In these cases, only factual reporting should be required. However, portfolios can make a positive contribution to the validity of the assessment of teaching competencies when used in addition to other assessment tools such as observation and personal interviews. Yet, if
this option is being considered, a cost–benefit analysis needs to be made before proceeding. The required investment in terms of time for the preparation and the assessment of portfolios should be worthwhile in relation to the additional information they are likely to provide.

The validity of portfolio assessment for partnership competencies

Partnership competencies manifest themselves during all activities which are peripheral to actual classroom teaching. These activities cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as teaching but form an integral part of the teacher’s professional tasks in and outside the school. These activities are varied but related to maintaining appropriate contacts with educational partners other than pupils. If we want to examine the validity of portfolio assessment when applied to partnership competencies, we have to ask whether portfolios are suitable to assess activities of this kind.

The same disadvantages apply to portfolio assessment for partnership competencies as apply to its use in relation to the assessment of teaching competencies. The assessment is of an indirect nature and student reflection may well not be genuine. However, when used to assess partnership competencies, portfolios can provide valuable extra information given that the possibilities of direct observation of these competencies are limited. Let us take the example of a conversation with parents or a staff meeting. Teacher educators can obtain information about the performance of the students during a conversation with parents or a staff meeting by talking to colleagues and reading over reports and other documentation, but actually attending conversations with parents or sitting in on staff meetings in order to assess the student’s performance seems neither desirable nor practical. Yet portfolios can fill this gap.

In conclusion, the validity of portfolio assessment also seems to be limited for partnership competencies by reason of the same disadvantages which are inherent in portfolio assessment of teaching competencies. However, portfolios can fill a larger gap with regard to the existing tools, given that observation of partnership activities is usually both undesirable and impractical.

The validity of portfolio assessment for learning competencies

Since the importance of lifelong learning has penetrated into teacher education courses, many courses now pay more explicit attention to learning competencies (Kelchtermans 2001). Yet there is still some way to go towards the recognition of the importance of learning competencies.

In order to clarify the distinction between teaching competencies and learning competencies we have taken inspiration from Elliott (2003), who uses Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development (1978). Let us imagine two hypothetical students who, at a particular moment in time, have the same teaching competencies (see Figure 1), but a different learning capacity, i.e. the extent to which they possess the necessary competencies to learn from and for their teaching practice. The size of the zone of proximal development is a measure of the learning capacity of the students. Now imagine that both students are confronted with a problematic teaching situation and both have access to the same supervision. Student A will be able to gain more from the learning situation than student B. Student A has a greater learning competency than student B.

Assessing learning competencies means assessing students’ capacity to execute a self-regulated learning process. Learning competencies like analysing personal teaching
strengths and weaknesses, planning and reflective thinking can be accurately assessed by portfolio assessment. Moreover, there are few tools to compete with portfolios for the assessment of learning competencies as teacher education does not usually have the means to closely observe students during a very long period. Meeus, Van Looy, and Van Petegem (2005) describe the method to be followed: the student chooses a personal learning component in consultation with the course tutors; draws up a personal learning plan; puts this plan in practice using the cycle of action and reflective thinking; and provides the necessary reporting. To discuss the validity of this type of portfolio assessment, it is important to explore what is meant by reporting, reflection and the personal learning plan in the context of portfolios.

**Reporting teaching activities**

In portfolio assessment of learning competencies, the student produces a report on his or her school activities. However, this reporting has a totally different function than it does in the case of portfolio assessment of teaching or partnership competencies. For portfolio assessment of teaching and partnership competencies, students have to use materials which allow them to show themselves at their best. This probative material is crucial to the assessment of the quality of their teaching and partnership competencies. To illustrate how this works in practice, we have included a quotation from a teacher educator during supervision relating to portfolio assessment for teaching competencies:

In the video clip I can hardly see the pupils, but I can hear a lot of noise in the background, which makes me wonder whether they are paying attention. The tutor’s report also says that you have difficulty keeping the class under control and this is not a badly behaved group. So I can’t give you a good mark for classroom control.

Portfolios as assessment tools for learning competencies take a completely different approach. A student’s learning capacity is assessed on the basis of their development, not on the basis of reporting. The students have to describe their teaching activities and the
associated context so that the teacher educator can form an impression of their development. The material is essentially informative in nature so as to enable the assessor to evaluate the student’s learning process. In this case, we would do better to talk in terms of informative rather than probative material. Students who are not as good as some of their classmates at presenting themselves in their best light will not be at a disadvantage. Furthermore, students have nothing to gain by exaggerating the positive elements in their reporting. They can represent their teaching performance honestly, including all their errors and shortcomings without being afraid of jeopardising their chances of a good grade. After all, they are being marked on their learning not their teaching, thus eliminating the most important disadvantages of the indirect nature of portfolio assessment. To illustrate how this works in practice, we again include a quotation from a teacher educator during supervision, this time relating to portfolio assessment for learning competencies:

I see on the first video clip that your class control leaves something to be desired. In your reflection, however, you say that you can see what the problems are. You have tried to make your lessons more interesting and to be more consistent in your interaction with the pupils. The last video clip shows that you haven’t quite managed this yet, but you have clearly made some improvement. This shows that you are able to learn from your teaching practice. I am therefore giving you a good mark.

Even if the informative material (in the case of portfolio assessment of learning competencies) is less crucial than the probative material (in the case of portfolio assessment of teaching competencies), it still has to meet a number of requirements in order to be useful. In the first place, it has to be relevant. It has to say something about the teaching competencies that the student wants to work on. If the student wants to work on improving his or her interpersonal contact with the pupils, there is not much point in showing a video clip of him or her giving unidirectional instruction. Secondly, the reporting has to include audiovisual aids, as sound and images enhance the written material. Thirdly, portfolios need to contain a variety of materials. The greater the variety of materials included, the more informative portfolios will be.

Using portfolio assessment for learning competencies could create the erroneous impression that the students are no longer being assessed on their teaching competency. This is still necessary, of course, but not by means of portfolios. The placement supervisor assesses the teaching competencies of the students based on teaching practicum visits, personal interviews and lesson plans. It is also important that the students have different teaching and learning assessors, as combining the two types of portfolio assessment would jeopardise the validity. The students would end up in a situation in which they might be penalised in the assessment of his or her teaching practicum for presenting honest learning processes in their portfolios.

**Reflection on the teaching activities**

Reflecting is a learning competency which can be assessed via portfolios. Reflective thinking is not a spontaneous everyday activity. The only reflective thinking which we do spontaneously is when something goes wrong or when we are worried about failing. Reflective thinking requires an investment in terms of time and effort that we are not always prepared to make. It is a process whereby the unconscious selection of spontaneous thoughts is channelled in the direction of a conscious objective while weeding out irrelevant thoughts (Gelter 2003). It is a conscious and active scholarly practice of goal-orientated and structured thinking. It is therefore a process which has to be systematically
learned. Reflective thinking is a powerful tool for successfully coming to grips, as a teacher, with the complexity of teaching situations.

Reflection can be assessed on the basis of form and content. Korthagen (1983) has developed a specific reflection cycle for teacher education courses, which is a normative model for the form that the reflective thinking should take. The cycle consists of five phases, of which three are directly related to reflective thinking: looking back on past performance; awareness of essential aspects; and the creation of alternatives (see Table 2). Reflection has to include these phases. Students must devote sufficient time to analyse their teaching activities. Moreover, they must come up with adequate alternative action strategies in order to find solutions to the problems they encounter.

Kelchtermans (2003) states that the scope of the reflection has to be sufficiently broad and deep. In terms of breadth it must cover four domains:

- Reflection on the technical domain, meaning that students should think about their instructional approach.
- Reflection on the emotional domain, which is mainly concerned with the student’s self-esteem as a teacher.
- Reflection on the political domain, which refers to issues of control, influence and power in the classroom and in the school.
- Reflection on the moral domain, which is fundamentally concerned with what is in the pupil’s best educational interests.

Reflective thinking also has to be sufficiently deep in terms of its exploration of the issues involved. Students need to be capable of going beyond the level of mere efficient functioning as teachers and to penetrate as far as the level of their underlying assumptions, values and standards. The student must examine his or her personal interpretative framework critically. This personal interpretative framework includes their professional self-image (how they see themselves as teachers) and their subjective theory of teaching (their vision of what teaching involves). Table 2 summarises the requirements for qualitative reflection in terms of form and content, which is how to arrive at an effective framework for the assessment of reflection as a learning competency.

To illustrate the categories of reflection two different written reflections of student teachers are included. An analysis is added to provide insight in the differences in reflective quality.

Table 2. Requirements for qualitative reflection in teacher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative reflection</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breadth: Four dimensions</td>
<td>Depth: Two levels</td>
<td>Three phases of the reflective thinking cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Technical</td>
<td>• Efficient and effective teaching</td>
<td>• Looking back on past performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emotional</td>
<td>• Personal interpretative framework:</td>
<td>• Awareness of essential aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political</td>
<td>• Professional self-image</td>
<td>• Creating alternative methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Moral</td>
<td>• Subjective theory of teaching</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Concerning the form of reflection we can recognise the three phases. The student looks back on her past performance and becomes aware of essential aspects like waiting too long to intervene and addressing the class as a whole. Alternatives were formulated during a conversation with the mentor. The reflection sticks to the level of efficient functioning within the technical domain (respond sooner, individual approach). A supervisor should address deep-level reflection by directing towards her personal interpretative framework. The moral, political and emotional domain could also be addressed. Compare this with the next one:

Last week I had some trouble keeping the pupils under control. It didn’t really start bad, but as the lesson wore on, the level of noise prevented me from finishing what I prepared. It crossed my mind to give a disciplinary punishment but I hesitated. My intention was never to punish as a teacher. I want the pupils to like me and that will never happen when I punish them. I’m also a little bit scared that the pupils will oppose to the punishment. How can I win this?

Concerning the form of reflection we can recognise only one phase: the student looks back at her past performance. But she doesn’t look for causes and she doesn’t formulate alternatives, except maybe a disciplinary punishment. But since we lack insight in the cause, we haven’t any guarantee that it is what needs to be done. She mentions aspects within the political domain (winning) and the emotional domain (to be scared). We have evidence of deep-level reflection as her professional self-image (want to be liked, never to punish) is under discussion. A supervisor should address better awareness and analyses before jumping to alternatives. The technical and moral domain could also be addressed.

**Personal learning plan**

Planning is also a learning competency which can be assessed via portfolios. Drawing up a personal learning plan is therefore a key element of portfolio assessment for learning competencies. Students can use their individual personal learning plan as a means of monitoring and fine-tuning their progress (Campbell et al. 2000). The personal learning plan contains a chronological list of all the activities which the students wish to carry out in order to learn. The personal learning plan also needs to take account of the reporting of the teaching activities. Collecting the necessary materials together and using media to create material requires a great deal of planning and organisation (Pleasants, Johnson, and Trent 1998).

The personal learning plan must comply with a number of requirements. First, it needs to be realistic. Learning is generally a slow process in which a large number of small steps have to be taken, whereas most students want to gallop ahead. Second, the planning has to be as comprehensive as possible. Important steps in their learning process must not be overlooked. Third, it should be used in a flexible way. Students should be able to deal with unexpected developments (see Table 3).

**Final conclusions on portfolio assessment for learning competencies**

In conclusion, portfolio assessment seems to be valid for the assessment of learning competencies, especially because there are few practical alternatives at hand. Students’ capacity to execute a self-regulated learning process can be accurately assessed by portfolio assessment. In this case, reporting does not serve as a means of assessing teaching competencies, but rather as a way of getting a more accurate impression of the student’s
learning process. Learning competencies like planning and reflective thinking are key elements of the learning process.

### The reliability of portfolios

By the reliability of assessment, we mean the extent to which extraneous influences are excluded from the assessment. A reliable assessment should give accurate measurements. Calibrated and standardised tools, such as multiple choice exams, can be relatively free from measurement errors because they allow the assessors little or no margin for interpretation. The desirability of a high reliability might, therefore, be an argument for standardising portfolios, but this is contrary to the nature of the tool. The aim of portfolios is, after all, to allow authentic learning in various contexts. Therefore, students need to be given the necessary freedom to decide for themselves which teaching activities they want to represent in their portfolios. In a nutshell: more standardisation means impoverished portfolios. It is probably impossible to obtain a 100% reliability of portfolio assessment.

However, not everything that is of value in education can be measured with complete reliability (Luken 2004). Yet there are certainly ways of improving the reliability of portfolio assessment, all of which are aimed at removing undesired influences as far as possible. We set out five such possibilities.

First, reliability is increased if a single assessment protocol is established for all assessors (Heller, Sheingold, and Myford 1998). A protocol of this kind needs to provide answers to questions such as: Are the activities to be assessed separately or only in their totality? Is assessment to be continuous or only after final submission? Are interim assessment sessions to be provided as well as final assessments? The assessors have to make clear arrangements about this. Dierick, Van de Watering, and Muijtjens (2002) call this protocol moderation, in other words, structural consultation, in this case before the assessment.

Second, the reliability of portfolios is enhanced by the use of a common interpretative framework (LeMahieu, Gitomer, and Eresh 1995). A brief checklist with the overall assessment criteria is quite simple to use. Assessment scales (e.g. from inadequate to very good) or assessment rubrics (with a description of the quality levels) can be used.

We also make a distinction between analytical and holistic marking (Mabry 1999). With analytical marking the assessor awards marks for separate elements which he or
she then adds up or averages out to arrive at a single final mark. In the case of holistic marking, the assessor awards a single (global) final mark and separate elements are not given separate marks. Different assessment criteria are still used, but only qualitative measures are applied. Research shows that analytical portfolio marking is less reliable than holistic portfolio marking (Baume and Yorke 2002). Holistic marking is, therefore, a preferable way to be used when assessing portfolios.

Inevitably, there is always a certain assessment margin. In the case of portfolios, the so-called inter-assessor reliability is by definition problematic (Carpenter and Ray 1995; Verloop and Wubbels 2000). Therefore, the expertise of the assessors needs to be fostered by training and support. At all events, portfolio assessment is always better done by a number of assessors. If there is a wide discrepancy in the assessments, consultation is indicated, which is also a form of moderation, but after the individual assessment.

The reliability of portfolios can thus be improved by:

- using a common assessment protocol (prior moderation);
- using a common checklist of assessment criteria;
- holistic marking;
- adequate training of assessors; and
- use of various assessors (retrospective moderation).

**Conclusion**

It is not possible to make general pronouncements about the validity and the reliability of portfolio assessment in teacher education. The validity of portfolio assessment depends on the competencies which the teacher educators wish to assess with it. For the assessment of teaching or partnership competencies, the validity is rather low due to the indirect nature of the assessment. It is to the student’s advantage to give a better impression of his or her performance than is really the case. Portfolios can be used for the assessment of teaching competencies as a complement to other tools. Portfolios offer advantages for partnership competencies given that direct observation is usually neither possible nor desirable.

The validity of portfolio assessment of the learning competencies is high, however. The student’s capacity to execute a self-regulated learning process can be accurately assessed using portfolio assessment. In this case, the reporting of the teaching activities is a less crucial element in comparison with portfolio assessment for teaching competencies. The students only have to give an impression of the learning process by collecting informative representations.

By definition, portfolios are incapable of fulfilling the classic psychometric requirement of reliability. Portfolios and standardisation are essentially incompatible. Nevertheless, provided that the necessary effort is made, the reliability of portfolios can still be brought to an acceptable level. The reliability of portfolios for the assessment of competencies in the teacher education thus depends on what measures are taken to ensure this. We have proposed five measures.

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