



## The Collaborative Portfolio: Exploring Reading Skills Through Peer Tutoring

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### Abstract

Our research emerges as an alternative to adopt the use of portfolios in EFL Licenciatura programs. As tutors in a peer-tutoring university project, we explored tutees' English reading skills as they used a collaborative portfolio with us, their tutors, during their free time. As a result of this research, we determined that the portfolio emerged as a "planner for tutees' reading skills", allowing them to establish objectives for boosting their comprehensive skills. Furthermore, the portfolio became an "enhancer of collaborative roles" between tutees and tutors. Finally, the portfolio allowed tutees to explore their own reading skills by supplying them with reading experiences.

**Key words:** Portfolios, peer tutoring in EFL, reading skills in EFL, collaborative learning, tutor, tutee, university tutorial sessions.

### Resumen

Nuestra investigación surge como una alternativa para adoptar el uso de portafolios en los programas de Licenciatura en inglés como lengua extranjera. Como tutores en un proyecto de asesoría universitaria entre pares, exploramos, las habilidades de lectura de inglés de nuestros consejeros, mientras ellos empleaban un portafolio colaborativo con nosotros, en su tiempo libre. Como resultado de esta investigación, se determinó que el portafolio se convirtió en un "planificador de habilidades de actividades de lectura", que les permitió a los estudiantes tutorados establecer objetivos con el fin de reforzar las habilidades de comprensión lectora. Por otra parte, el portafolio se convirtió en un "motivador de roles colaborativos" entre los tutorados y tutores. Por último, el portafolio permitió a los tutorados explorar

sus propias destrezas de lectura contribuyendo sus experiencias lectoras.

**Palabras clave:** Portafolio, tutoría entre pares, habilidad lectora, aprendizaje colaborativo, tutor, estudiante tutorado, tutoría universitaria.

## **Introduction**

Nowadays the great dilemma in education is to find appropriate strategies to successfully involve students in the learning process. This quest for new strategies demands time and research from teachers. Portfolios can be considered among the options teachers have at their disposal to involve students in meaningful learning processes. Portfolios can provide opportunities for students' to become involved in different English practice tasks and reflections when they work on their own, with a teacher or a a tutor.

In the case of this study, portfolios were used between tutors and tutees in a university context. The research sought to explore alternative learning strategies used with first semesters EFL student-teachers who took advantage of the tutorial spaces provided in a reasearch group. While working as tutors, we, the researchers, had firsthand experience in the tutorial work and we became interested in investigating the way in which tutees learnt a foreign language. Specifically, we wanted to examine how tutorial materials, or portfolios in this case, could be used to support tutees foreign language reading. As tutors we had seen that tutees needed didactic resources which

contributed to their learning efficiency and encouraged their independent study. Moreover, we observed that reading was not an activity students were very familiar with due to their lack of motivation or just the lack of guidance in how to employ appropriate reading strategies.

Bearing in mind the previous considerations, this study's guiding question examines what the role of a collaborative portfolio is in exploring tutees' reading skills in peer tutoring. Specifically, the study sought to determine what the use of a collaborative portfolio tells us about tutees' reading skills development and how tutees and tutors 'collaborative work by means of a portfolio support tutees' reading skills. In the following section, we continue by reviewing the literature associated with the main concepts that guided our study.

## **Tutoring at University Settings**

In our perspective a tutorial is a self-learning space supported by a tutor where people learn new skills by using a step-by-step process that ensures progress through levels of difficulty and understanding. This space is often times structured within a tutoring model which follows a logical sequence in order to enhance an individuals'

learning opportunities. The previous concept considers pivotal features in these interactions, namely, the guidance (Álvarez, 2004), personalized and self-directed orientation in the learning process (Viáfara & Ariza, 2008).

Tutoring models have been present since the beginning of academic history. Rodríguez (2004) reviews three common models for tutoring: academic, personal development and professional development models. The first one is strictly concerned with the academic progress of students. The role of the tutor is to guide students as they complete specific course work or assignments. The second one is focused on students' backgrounds and their personal and career development needs: the "personal development model." It seeks to support students' talents and potential to face life challenges. Finally the last one is designed to make sure students acquire the appropriate professional training necessary to enter the job market.

The roles tutors performed in this study involved the three previous tutoring models. The roles of tutors implied responsibility and commitment to guide the tutorials, being a support for tutees concerning their academic work, and offering advice regarding personal issues and their future professional lives. Tutors also motivated their tutees, encouraging them to make progress in their learning process. Tutees were responsible for their attendance and commitment to the group. So each participant contributed to the group through their respective roles.

According to Rodríguez (2004), tutoring is a critical component of university training.

Rodríguez (2004) also identifies several qualitative elements of tutoring:

- A tutor can foster and facilitate the intellectual, emotional and social development of the student. Tutors can motivate students to continue their course work and explore other learning opportunities within their fields of study.
- Tutoring can be personalized and in this way the attention that students receive is tailored to the student's individual learning style and preferences.
- Tutoring can provide better access to appropriate educational resources and professional mentors that might otherwise be unavailable to an individual student.

Moreover, in the case of this study, another feature worth highlighting regarding university tutoring was its interactive character, though. The tutor, who was in certain ways more experienced than the tutee, guided the tutoring process by contributing and supporting, with new learning skills, the tutee's engagement in tutoring led the tutor to grow at various academic and personal levels.

The interactive character of university tutoring is associated with what is known as peer tutoring. According to Mynard & Almarzouqi (2006) peer tutoring is the reflection of an action taken by learners in order to help each other. In this space, a tutor (experienced learner) takes charge of another learner (tutee), giving him/her some tutorials, extra classes or scheduled time to monitor the pupil's performance in a specific area or subject.

Another aspect we would like to remark on, in relation to peer tutoring, is that within this approach, learners are capable of assuming a position of independence and self-regulation. And when they work cooperatively; they can become aware of the responsibility they have, for their own learning when being supported by others (Beasley, 1997).

Velandia (2007), states that a tutor has to increase the confidence of the tutees. They help them learn autonomously and assure that effective learning takes place. It means that the tutor has to help the tutees to find a course in which they can work on their own based on the principles of a tutorial session which consists of giving solutions to immediate needs.

### **The Role of Portfolios in Peer Work and Tutorials**

In this study, tutees used portfolios to organize, plan, reflect upon and potentiate their learning while they collaborated with their tutors. Portfolios are defined as collections of samples of students' work throughout a specific period of time. Portfolios emerge as a strategic tool to analyze and track the process of learning. Cristancho (2003) mentions that portfolios are tools to promote engagement on significant learning through reflection. Castro (2002) refers to portfolios as an authentic tool to promote students' autonomous work.

Portfolios can also contribute to create a collaborative relationship between learners and others acting in the capacity of guides (Valls, 2008). In the case of tutors and tutees, this pedagogical tool can foster

negotiation between these participants concerning its organization, evaluation and content, among others. In their description of pedagogical experiences employing portfolios at the university level, Viáfara and López (2011) remark that their success in introducing these tools into their teaching practices involved, not only the collaborative attitudes their students and they adopted to make decisions about portfolio use, but also the cooperative work they engaged in with other faculty. Portfolios not only contribute to the collaborative nature of peer-tutoring, they can also enhance the independent learning that university tutoring allegedly buttresses. Klenowski (2000) describes a portfolio as "a work that involves personal engagement with important learning processes and an opportunity for the learner to achieve a personal unique accomplishment." By preparing a resourceful, flexible and purposeful guide to know how to employ portfolios and enhancing metacognitive strategies, teachers or learners' instructors can foster students' discipline to engage themselves in autonomous learning (Viáfara & López, 2011).

### **The Reading Process and the Reading Strategies**

Reading is an ability that has become one of the most important factors contributing to success in many fields today. Two essential conditions necessary for reading to become a meaningful process are, first, readers' development of a like for it and second, readers' involvement in a communicative experience through the reading experience. Goodman (1967) argues that the reading process has to do more with a social practice

in which there are three agents involved: a reader, a context and a text. In that sense, reading is defined as an interactive process in which readers must develop certain cognitive skills build meanings. According to (Cook, 1993), when using reading skills, readers can grasp the meaning in writing, building comprehension and independence. Writing implies more than a mechanical process of decoding and transcription. This process involves understanding, examination and analysis of writing, generating genuine comprehension and one's own insights as a reader.

When readers work in grasping the meaning of a text, they employ a myriad of strategies or styles. Among them, Pugh (1978) and Gardner (1979) list "receptive reading" which involves a quick reading of the text to search for information and "reflective reading" in which readers, not only engage in becoming informed about issues of their interest, but also reflect upon the content of the text. Likewise, two additional and widely known strategies are "skimming", in which readers move quickly through the text in order to identify main, and "scanning", which might be more time intensive because readers must look for specific information.

In addition, strategies also include "underlining", defined by Feathers (2004) as an initial tactic used by readers to monitor and assess the information. Asking questions encourages readers' ability to dig into the text in order to build more substantial understanding. Another strategy identified by Erten & Williams (2008) is dictionary use. This tactic helps readers to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

## Research Design

During our experience in the tutorials program, we looked for an appropriate type of research for our project. We finally decided to follow the principles of qualitative research. According to Dick (1992), qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. Moreover, qualitative researchers' aim is to gather an in depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. Since we wanted to focus our project on educational context, we considered the environment of tutorial spaces could be investigated by means of this approach; in doing so, we could explore more about tutees and the way in which they behave in tutorials in relation to our topics of interest.

### Context, population and participants

This project was carried out at a public university located in the center of Colombia. Participants belonged to The Modern Languages Program in the faculty of education at this university. They attended tutorial sessions provided by tutors associated with a research group called RETELE. The group has implemented a tutorial model to support student's autonomous English learning in the Modern Languages Program (Viáfara & Ariza, 2008, Ariza & Viáfara, 2009). This model consists of the three basic tutorial function models. The first one is formed by three principles: supporting the development of skills and knowledge in the foreign language, encouraging tutees' growth at the personal

and academic level, and enhancing their development of learning-how-to-learn strategies. The second component proposes a way in which tutorial sessions can be carried out to promote self-learning. The third aspect reveals the ideal profile of tutors.

The four participants were first and third semester tutees. They were new to the tutorial program and they were between 18 and 22 years old. Regarding their English level, they were beginners. They had different personality types and were willing to take advantage of extra opportunities when offered. They were in an intermediate socioeconomic level and came from different regions of Colombia.

The tutors and researchers were also students in the Modern Languages Program. When they implemented this study, they were in 10<sup>th</sup> semester which is the programs last semester. They had been part of the tutoring program associated with RETELE group for three semesters. One of the tutors was born in Bucaramanga and the other in Cucuta.

### Data Gathering and Analysis

To obtain the information, we employed different instruments: interviews, audio-video recording, surveys, journals (by tutors and tutees) and students' artifacts that were part of their portfolios. These instruments enabled us to gather the information we needed to conduct an in depth study of the phenomena we were interested in.

**Interviews.** For our research we used semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these

interviews was to access interviewee's perceptions by asking questions concerning their perceptions about the role of portfolios in their reading strategies development and in their collaboration with tutors during tutorial sessions. We audio and video recorded most of the interviews; in the cases of audio, we used a small tape recorder to interview and in the case of video, we used a digital camera. We captured six interviews with each tutee. These interviews were done every two weeks and according to the tutorials' schedule.

**Surveys.** Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, L. L. (2011) refers to field notes as a sense-making activity wherein researchers write down important issues. We, as tutors, employed this technique to gather information about what was happening in the tutorial sessions. The information gathered included tutees' reactions when they were reading or gestures they made and comments they made about the reading workshops. These notes were taken during or at the end of every tutorial session.

**Students' artifacts: the portfolio.** The portfolio was developed by tutees with their tutors' support during a five month period. The portfolio was used to collect evidence and at the same time to evidence tutees' level of achievement in reading skills. Thus, each section of the portfolio provided information we needed to answer to our main question. The portfolio included all the activities tutees did during this research study: reading activities, journals and personal improvement plans (PIP's). Concerning reading activities, the portfolio contained nine reading workshops designed to support their development of this skill. The

workshops were conducted once every two weeks. Each one of the workshops consisted of four practices; these practices were distributed in pre, during and after reading activities and one practice was focused on a collaborative practice in which the tutor and tutee worked together on a specific task according to a reading text. In addition, the workshops included a reading tip which was expected to help them reflect upon this skill and generate ideas about how to use the reading strategies.

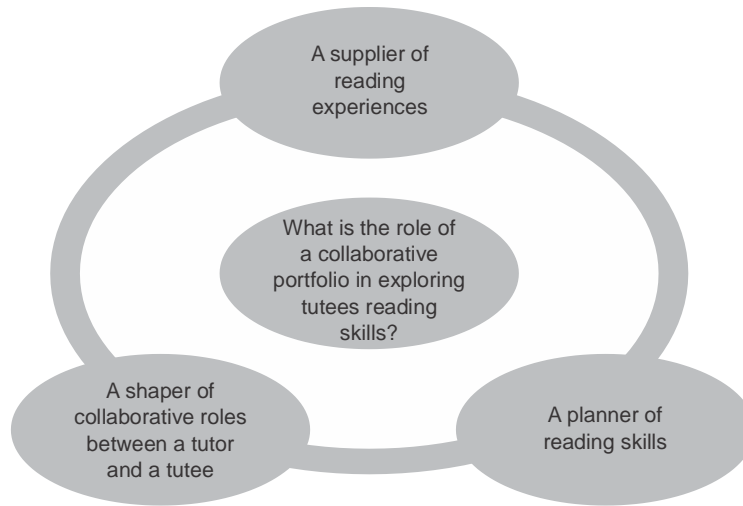
Another section of the portfolio was the journal. Stevens and Cooper (2009) refer to a journal as evidence of a thought process and a very valuable tool of reflection. In these journals, tutees reflected upon the portfolio process, the reading process and their collaboration. Also the tutors wrote journals to record all the events and experiences they had when having tutorials. They shared insights with their tutees about their impressions regarding tutors' learning and their own learning experiences during the tutorial.

The personal improvement plan was a section in which, according to the tutee's needs, we negotiate and agree upon objectives to work on in the sessions and in weekly activities in order for tutees to practice and reinforce any topic they felt they needed help with.

## Data Analysis

To analyze this data we used grounded theory, according to Morse, (as cited in Oktay, 2012, p.14) grounded theory is a reflective process upon the information researchers have gathered. By means of this technique data can be conceptualized and a theory to explain findings can be built. Thus for selecting and identifying information we employed color-coding so we could identify patterns and assigned a different color to similar patterns. We used this technique as we searched for information in the various instruments which answered each sub-question.

We started by analyzing the interviews. Then, by means of the same procedure, we continued with the surveys. We selected the outstanding information and by means of colors we codified the information obtained. Finally, we analyzed the tutors' journals and students the portfolios (students' artifacts) and also read the tutees' journals. Once we had the codification, which was employed to effectively reduce the quantity of information we would be analyzing, we compared all the codified information and then we categorized it into groups. In order to do this, we repeated the process until we established the final categories and subcategories which are exhibited in the figure below.

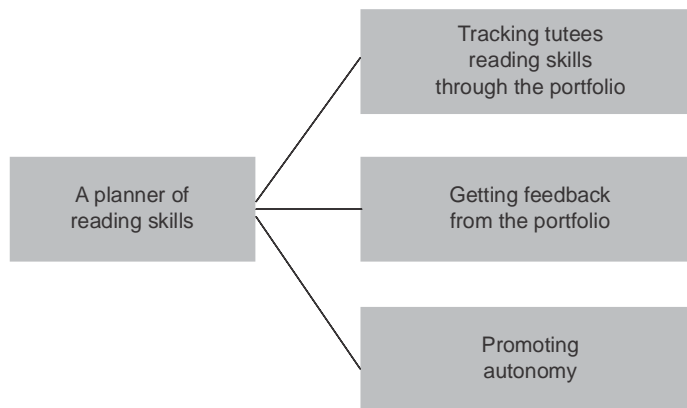


**Graph 1:** Categories established to answer the research questions

### The collaborative portfolio: a planner of reading skills

Through the process of analyzing data, most of the information pointed to the way in which the portfolio acted as an instrument that guided students to become involved in

reading activities. This category responds to the sub question: What does the use of a collaborative portfolio tell us about tutees' reading skills development? Figure 3 represents the sub-categories we identified as part of this first category.



**Graph 2.** The Collaborative Portfolio: A Planner of Reading Skills



When working with the portfolio, as participants mentioned in the interviews, students were guided to propose some goals for the week. For instance, one of the most common reading goals tutees proposed to work on during the week was to look for several readings of their interest or articles or magazines and to look for new words, expressions and so on. They told us they enjoyed learning experience. Likewise, the process described before is related to the section included in the portfolio aptly named Personal Improvement Plan (PIP). In the following section, we included some tutees' interview responses and their testimonies about how they had used the portfolio in their learning process related to reading skills:

*Trazándome o poniéndome pequeños retos semanales los cuales trato de cumplir*  
*I established short weekly aims and I tried to reach those. (Fuji, Interview, October, 2010).*

*Si uno va a planear el objetivo en el PIP, por ejemplo, "conocer más vocabulario" entonces en la lectura lo primero que hago es hojear, hojear. La analizó e infiero que es lo que he aprendido en este portafolio. (if I am going to plan the objective in the PIP for instance, to know more vocabulary, so then the right thing I do while reading is skimming. I analyze and interpret what I have learnt by means of the portfolio) (Samy, Interview September, 2010).*

In figure 2, showed above, we can see that from this first category other relevant sub-categories emerged.

**Subcategory 1: tracking tutees' reading skills through the portfolio.** Some of the issues we discovered were how the portfolio guided and helped tutors and tutees' themselves to monitor tutees' reading in their English process from the beginning until the end of the project. During this monitoring, it was evident that the tutees were acquiring, step by step, new reading skills using the portfolio as a support. The following includes comments we obtained from the tutees discussing this issue:

*He tenido tiempo para revisar mi portafolio a medida que pasaron todos los talleres, me doy cuenta que si es una buena estrategia, por ejemplo saque un libro de la biblioteca, y en este libro aplique lo que había visto en el portafolio. (Along tutorial I have had time to work in my portfolio, I realize it is a good strategy, for example I am reading a book and I am applying what I saw in the portfolio). (Candy, Interview, November, 2009)*

As tutors we noted how tutees took advantage of the reading strategies they were provided in the portfolio to improve their reading skills.

**Subcategory 2: getting feedback from the portfolio.** In this project the concept of reflection was taken by tutees as self-evaluation or the thinking generated from feedback. This process of reflection was a constant issue while working with the portfolio; tutees used the portfolio, taking into account each new reading experience they encountered after a tutorial session, to reflect on their reading process as well as sharing with their tutors their experiences while registering up all this information by means

of journals. Oftentimes, in the tutorial sessions, they told us about how, through the portfolio, they received feedback about their reading process and how much they thought they had improved:

*Mis escritos como reflexiones, me han servido porque hoy me doy cuenta de todo el proceso... Por ejemplo al leer veo y digo interesante la forma en que he mejorado... (My writings as reflections have supported me, I can follow all my process... for instance when reading I can observe how I have improved).* (Tutees' journal, Fuji, October, 2009)

Subcategory 3: promoting autonomy through portfolio planning. One part of the portfolio was the planning of some weekly goals set in the personal improvement plan (PIP). In doing so, students could organize their learning experiences and reinforce their English reading process. Apparently, this led students to work autonomously through their comprehension of texts. In this regard they commented:

*Es importante reconocer la importancia del trabajo autónomo y es por eso que gracias a la planeación de objetivos del portafolio uno se da cuenta cuán importante es practicar, tomar consciencia de la capacidad que uno puede tener (it is important to realize the relevance of the autonomous work so then planning objectives in the portfolio we noticed how practicing is a purposeful aim and we become aware of the skills we may have).* (Candy, Survey, May, 2009).

In addition, we perceived what might be some

evolution in students' self-determination when working with the portfolio. At the very beginning of this process, students came to tutorials with low motivation towards reading; however, through the tutorials students increased their interest in reading which led them to start reading by themselves.

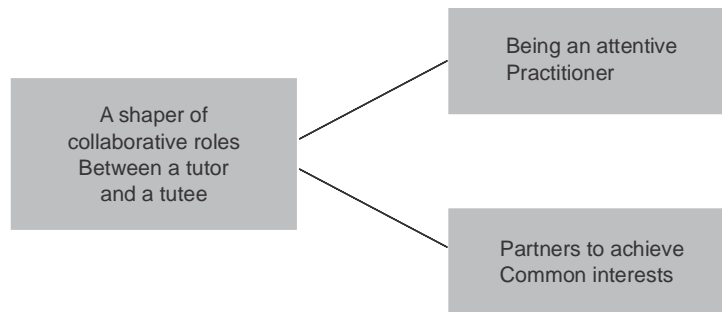
For instance, we posted a question in which, half way through the study, we asked a tutee (Sultan) about his reading process. At that point, we had evidenced through tutorials and interviews that tutees had begun to develop positive regard for reading. The following question was posed to Sultan once we observed he was reading a book on his own in the university library:

*Tutor: ¿Qué lo motivó a leer el hombre elefante? (what was your motivation to read the elephant man?)*

*Sultán: "Primero que todo para aprender mucho más, aprender vocabulario, lo hice también para tratar de profundizar más en el trabajo que estoy haciendo... como segundo para ver si lo que veía en el portafolio me servía para... me motivo eso y la lectura" (first of all I am doing it to learn much more, to learn vocabulary, I also did it because I wanted to enhance my efforts, secondly, I am doing it to see if the work that I was doing with the portfolio had really supported me... it motivated me and the reading too)* (Interview, May, 2009, Sultan ).

Next, we will discuss the role that the portfolio had in relation to the tutees and tutors' collaborative work. Figure 3 includes the sub-categories which are part of this second set of findings.

*Category 2: a shaper of collaborative roles*



**Graph 3.** The Portfolio as a Shaper of Collaborative Roles

Another important aspect we established by working with the portfolio was the way in which the portfolio brought tutors and tutees together in order to work on achieving some goals associated with the tutees' reading process. This subcategory serves as a response to the subquestion: How do tutees and tutors work collaboratively by means of a portfolio to support tutees' reading skills development?

We used the word "shaper", to define the portfolio's role, meaning that this pedagogical tool "gave form" to tutees and tutors' roles. Bearing in mind the previous statement, we needed to focus on the fact that both the tutors and the tutees had duties concerning the development of the sessions. For instance, the tutors provided a range of options for the tutees to consider and decide which of these choices were the most suitable for their process while tutees knew they had to be attentive and participate in discussing those options with tutors, in order to increase their chances of learning.

Various types of collaboration emerged as mediated by the portfolio. The evidence of

this is seen from the very beginning when they developed the portfolios together. Next we have a tutor's comment which demonstrates the role the tutee adopted at certain times.

*Elaborando el portafolio fue algo interesante ya que cada uno, dio su granito de arena, por ejemplo a mi no me gusta la decoracion y eso, pera a ella ( the tuttee) si, asi que ella aporto la creatividad y yo la organizaci3n... (creating the portfolio was something very interesting since we both collaborated, for instance i do not like decorating but the tutee does, so she decorated the portfolio and i help to organize it). (Tutor's journal, November, 2009).*

Subcategory 1: being attentive practitioners. Talking about the collaborative roles played in this process, we wanted to emphasize what tutees considered an important role they played as they became involved with their tutor and the portfolio. This is seen in the following remark in response to a question about how they had worked together, both

tutor and tutee, to build the portfolio; Candy commented:

*“Pues con la ayuda que me brinda Jorge (her tutor) he podido descubrir habilidades y fortalezas que pensé no tener” (so then with the support Jorge has given me I have been able to discover new skills that I thought I did not have) (Candy, Survey, April 2009).*

Being attentive practitioners, means that, while the tutees were working with the activities proposed in the portfolio and taking into account the tutors' advice, they became aware of key aspects in their learning process.

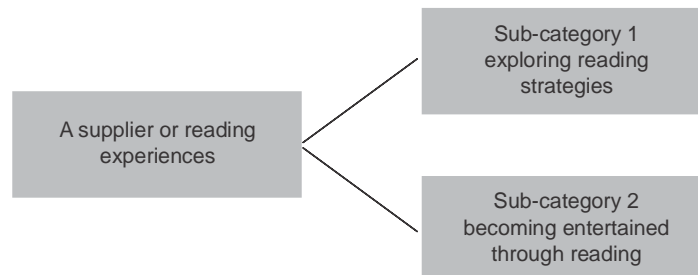
Subcategory 2: partners to achieve common interests: Data collected reveals that collaboration and friendship were key issues in tutoring sections. The main objective we had in common was that the tutees could explore reading skills through the portfolio. The portfolio allowed us to be more in contact with the tutees. This interaction created by the portfolio, throughout the different reading workshops, generated an environment of confidence. For instance,

tutees seemed to ask questions spontaneously or felt comfortable bringing expressing doubts in the tutorial sessions; they regarded us a guides but also as peers.

*Desde un principio los dos hemos sido muy responsables con nuestro trabajo, estamos trabajando colectivamente, nos colaboramos el uno al otro (from the beginning, we both have been very responsible with our work, we have been working collaboratively, we collaborate with each other) (Sultan, Interview May 2009).*

The concept of collaboration is also seen in the elaboration of the workshops since both tutors and tutees work together in developing some activities. We as tutors supported tutees by guiding them in their reading process, working together in the personal improvement plan and motivating them to enhance their reading skills through the portfolio.

In the upcoming pages, we will discuss the last category (see Figure 4) concerning the role the portfolio had in relation to the tutees' reading skills.



**Graph 4.** The Portfolio as a Supplier of Reading Experiences

Category 3: a supplier of reading experiences. A Supplier of reading experiences refers to the opportunities that the portfolio provided tutees to become acquainted with and practice reading strategies. This category attempts to answer the subquestion about how tutees' reading skill development can be tracked by the portfolio.

At the beginning tutees engaged texts through their interpretation skills, imagination and creativity. With this portfolio experience, they incorporated reading strategies that facilitated their reading understanding into their already existing repertoire. Working with their reading workshops, tutees could gain expertise in comprehending written texts. In addition, we noticed how through the portfolio and the reading workshops tutees gained insights into their own reading skills. Next, we have some of their comments:

*Las diferentes actividades como subrayar, encontrar las diferentes ideas principales... nos ayudan a que realicemos mejor el proceso de lectura" (the different activities like underlining, extracting the main idea... they help us to create a better reading process.)* (Fuji, Survey, June 2009).

*Cuando empecé con este proceso y con el primer taller de lectura que hice, me di cuenta que tenía algunas habilidades pero que tal vez me faltaba despertar más mi interés por la lectura y comprometerme más con ello" (when I started with this process, and with the first reading workshop I attended, I realized I had some skills and that I needed to motivate myself to read and to be more committed to it).* (Candy, Survey, June 2009).

Subcategory 1: exploring reading strategies in tutees. At this point of the data analysis, we established a first sub category in relation to how reading strategies were used by tutees during tutoring by means of the portfolio. During the tutorial sessions, we taught them reading tips which they could use in the workshops. Although we noticed that they already knew some of them, they did not know the names of the ones they were employing. At the end of sessions, they always gave us their own opinion about the strategy and the impact it had on their reading process.

In addition we noticed how through the implementation of these reading strategies the tutorial work was becoming more effective; developing the reading workshops, the portfolio was connected with the personal improvement plan (PIP) since the tutees used it to establish goals.

Another section of the portfolio named "tutees' entry reflection" reveal how tutees reflected on the reading process and how the implementation of these reading strategies enhanced the process.

One of the most common strategies tutees used while reading, was related to *getting a global idea from a text*; tutees thought of reading as extracting the main ideas of the content to have a global comprehension of a text. Here we have, two tutees responses to questions in relation to a reading about a story:

*Hice como una lectura global del texto y logre comprender (I used a global reading of the text and I was able to understand)* (Sultan, Journal, June 2009).

*Primero ver la lectura, y tratar de analizar de que se trata, por lo menos hay nos dan claves y uno va armando sus ideas y trata de construir (first scan the reading and try to analyze what the text is about, sometimes clues are provided by the text then we structure different ideas and try to build)* (Sultan, Journal, June 2009).

Tutees also used other reading strategies, such as *re-reading, contextualization and activation of previous knowledge* which they considered useful for understanding a text. Concerning these strategies they expressed: *“Cuando voy a leer pues leo una vez, y a la segunda o tercera entiendo el texto.”* (When I am going to read I read it over once, after the second or third reading I can understand the text). (Candy, Journal, June, 2009).

In addition, tutees reflected upon their use of strategies, for instance *skimming and scanning strategies*: They said: *“He aprendido sobre el skimming y el scanning, esto me sirvió para saber en profundidad de una lectura”* (I have learnt about skimming and scanning, it has helped me to deepen my understanding of the reading). (Sammy, Interview, June, 2009).

Now, we would like to explore the second subcategory which has to do with the tutees level of comfort with working on the reading activities during the tutorial sections.

Subcategory 2: becoming entertained through reading: Tutees found reading to be not only a cognitive activity which required discipline, but also an entertaining way in which they enjoy themselves and cultivate a attitude of inquiry. Through the different workshops, we came to realize how the

tutees enjoyed their practice in the reading workshops and in this sense they improved in the process.

For instance, in one of the last workshops we prepared for tutees, we asked them about their impressions about reading, up to this point, they commented: *“Tuve la oportunidad de conocer más de la lectura y hacer de este un hobby para todos los días”* (I had the chance to interact more with the reading and to make it a daily activity). (Fuji, Interview, June, 2009).

Another important aspect of this point is that reading also became for tutees and, we would say for us too, a learning experience and a way to develop our mental creativity: *“Entonces uno empieza a imaginarse la historia, uno se va metiendo en la historia, uno dice esta lectura está buenísima, y despertar la creatividad mental y el interés”* (then we imagine the story, we start going through the text, and we said... this reading is good and it increases our mental creativity and interest.) (Samy, Interview, June, 2009).

Taking into account the last tutee comments we observed the way in which the portfolio, the reading workshops and the collaboration helped tutees explore their reading skills.

## Conclusions and Implications

One of the main roles of the portfolio was as a motivator for tutees' to engage in the reading process. In every single tutorial in which we worked with the portfolio, tutees told us about the impact that the portfolio had had on them. Motivation is an issue we want to highlight. We could see that throughout this process when the tutees felt motivated to

read, they did not perceive the learning process to be monotonous and they were encouraged to be more autonomous.

The portfolio also served as a framework for the design and planning of different activities in which they expressed interest. This allowed them to seek out different strategies to strengthen this communicative skill. In addition, through planning, tutees could track their reading process and be monitored by their tutors. After each tutorial session, they received feedback from the tutors. We as tutors are convinced that preparing a plan for the tutoring activities and allowing our students to develop a plan, as well as sharing with our students about our learning experiences, helped us all to remain focused on the learning.

In addition to being a motivator and a planner, the portfolio brought together the tutor and the tutee through their collaborative work. In this case, we defined the portfolio as a “shaper of participants` roles”. The portfolio helped tutors and tutees to establish some functions in their cooperative interaction. Tutees learned to be responsible for the tasks they committed to develop in tutorials, but most importantly tutees learned how to work in a team with their tutors and find the support and the role model they needed to enrich the reading process.

The last role we observed in the portfolio relates to how this tool led tutees to develop various mechanisms for confronting the text comprehension process. In the different reading worksheets, interviews and observation data we collected, we noticed that tutees explored different reading strategies such as: scanning, skimming,

making inferences and underlining. In many cases, tutees were not aware of their use of these mechanisms. During this process, they became familiar with them. As a result of the familiarization with these strategies, their reading process was enhanced and their interest in reading increased in such a way that at the end of the process with the portfolio they enjoyed reading while adopting new reading habits.

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