EFL Instruction and Assessment with Portfolios:
A Case Study in Taiwan

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Bio Data
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Abstract
As the reform movements continue to sweep across the educational landscape in Taiwan, educators and practitioners are exploring and attempting new and innovative practices in the classroom. Of all non-traditional approaches to instruction and assessment, portfolio use seems to show the greatest promise in enhancing diverse dimensions of learning and developing multiple intelligences as well as promoting learner autonomy. This study aimed to investigate and evaluate the implementation of a portfolio system at secondary English classrooms in Taiwan and to discuss emerging problems and approaches hereto. Participants included two classes of seventh graders and their English teachers. Significantly, the study found that students favored the portfolio system, considering the learning tasks conducive to their learning, and portfolios to be good tools to examine their learning process and improve their learning methods. Teachers’ observations also confirmed that students benefited from the portfolio system in terms of the development of English use and confidence, learning ownership, versatile talents, and critical thinking. Implementation barriers mainly resulted from the traditional testing culture. Strategies of professional collaboration and curriculum modification were made to address identified problems. Given that the traditional notion of assessment holds sway, widespread use of portfolio assessment is out of the question for Taiwan. Findings of this study recommend that portfolios be better used as pedagogical tools.
Keywords: Portfolios, EFL Instruction and Assessment, Alternative Assessment

1. Introduction

As reform movements continue to sweep the educational landscape in Taiwan, educators and practitioners explore and attempt innovative practices in classrooms. Highlighted in this wave of reform is the implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum from elementary through junior high levels. This plan emphasizes coherence of instructional goals and materials across levels, and demands pedagogical innovation and multiple approaches to assessment. Most important, teachers are required to weave assessment into instruction and provide chances for students to utilize evaluation skills as a learning task. Of all non-traditional approaches to instruction and assessment, portfolio use, aligned with theories of constructivism and multiple intelligences (Chang, 2001; Dai, 2003), seems to show the greatest promise in enhancing diverse dimensions of learning and developing multiple intelligences as well as promoting learner autonomy. Proponents deem its use as congruent with their teaching aims and beliefs about learning (e.g., Belanoff & Dickson, 1991; Cole & Struyk, 1997; Gardner, 1983, 1991; Lockledge, 1997; Newman & Smolen, 1993, Valencia, 1990; Yancey, 1992), touting such a process as a means of empowering students to become active learners and decision makers in their own learning. As Gottlieb (1995) puts it, portfolios “serve as a guide for students in making choices and in demonstrating how they reason, create, strategize, and reflect” (p. 12). In short, in pedagogy the assembly of a portfolio is
regarded as conducive to students’ multiple intelligences, self-reflection, critical thought, learning responsibility, plus content area skills and knowledge.

Research evidence also suggests portfolios as a potent device to gauge students’ effort, achievement, improvement, and self-evaluation (e.g. Chen, 1999, 2000; Far & Tone, 1994; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Hsieh et al., 2000; Newman & Smolen, 1993; Smolen et al., 1995). Hamp-Lyons (1994) labels portfolio an excellent pedagogical tool interweaving assessment with instruction: it provides chances to integrate more forms of evaluation into teaching, such that evaluation will become “a less threatening and more supportive activity” (p. 54) to learners. Moya and O’Malley (1994) claim portfolios can be used as a systematic assessment tool in instructional planning and student evaluation. Matching assessment to teaching and supplying a profile of students’ learning and growth in multiple domains or skills, portfolios are thus recommended as an alternative to standardized testing and all problems found with such testing.

Currently the body of literature related to a portfolio approach to instruction and assessment is growing in Taiwan. Documented studies include the fields of teacher education, web-based learning, writing, sciences, and English learning. Nonetheless, relatively little is known about EFL portfolio use. Chen (1999, 2000) asked her EFL university students to compile writing portfolios; significantly, they stated the task made them better learners, readers, and writers, and was conducive to their personal growth and learning reflection. Hsieh, Lu, and Yeh (2000) implemented portfolio assessment in a sixth grade EFL classroom and found these valid tools for elevating students’ learning.
Chang and Chang (2003) integrated multiple intelligences with portfolio assessment in a seventh grade English class in comparison with a traditional class and detected significant differences in student achievement test performance, learning motivation, and classroom climate. Only Chen’s study described how portfolios are collected, used and evaluated, along with tasks demanded, plus pedagogy and assessment in curriculum.

The mandate for the Grade 1-9 Curriculum in Taiwan has made the policy of innovative pedagogy and multiple approaches to assessment a prickly issue. When it comes to the subject of English at junior high level, the issue becomes even thornier. Driven chiefly by nationwide standardized tests, junior high EFL classrooms remain unchanged. Oftentimes students, drilled by tests and quizzes, give up learning or pass standardized tests without “authentic and communicative” competence acquired. EFL scholars in Taiwan (Shih et al., 2001) have made great efforts toward setting guidelines and recommended strategies and techniques to facilitate change in classroom practices. However, these guidelines, in need of field-testing do not seem to help much. As with assorted dishes in the cafeteria, tempting and nutritious, it takes time to try them in combination. Teachers strained by heavy workload and limited time for class preparation will very likely fall back on “old but convenient” practices. One survey conducted by Kang Hsuan Education Magazine (Central Daily News, Jan. 17, 2002) showed most teachers highly confused about implementing the Grade 1-9 Curriculum: (1) top concerns were extra time for class preparation and assessment practices; (2) over 760 (86%) stated they knew not how to conduct “multidimensional assessment” and still used paper-and-pencil tests to evaluate students’ learning. Facing waves of new
measures in education, apparently, many teachers cling to old practices and do not attempt anything unfamiliar. Now what they need most is a feasible model: a portfolio combining multiple approaches to instruction and assessment, plus (most important of all), one that motivates students and improves their learning.

The aim of this study was to investigate the implementation of a portfolio system in junior high EFL classrooms in Taiwan and examine its effect on student learning. It was hoped to set up a feasible portfolio model and offer suggestions for classroom practice and policy making. Specifically, the following questions were addressed in the study:

1. What are students’ perceptions of the portfolio system?
2. What are teachers’ observations of its effect on student learning?
3. What are the problems emerging during the implementation process?
4. What are the approaches adopted to tackle the problems?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Subjects were from intact classes at two schools in southern Taiwan, one with 16 female and 17 male students, the other 42 girls. All were seventh graders, having learned English formally for one year in elementary school. Teachers (here designated MW & CY) of said classes were trained in a Masters program of English education on use of portfolios to facilitate instruction and assessment and improve student learning. Schools where they taught had never adopted portfolio assessment in English classes.
2.2. Implementation of a portfolio system

Junior high schools in Taiwan began executing the Grade 1-9 Curriculum as of 2002. Texts and/or teaching materials are no longer unified, but chosen, adapted, and/or developed by the teachers. Schools of classes participating happened to select the same EFL books, with course and pedagogical procedures designed based on a school calendar and text content. A portfolio system, implemented over two semesters (fall 2002 to spring 2003) and modified after practice, is outlined in Table 1. It includes several components: (1) learning domains—cognitive, social, affective, and meta-cognitive; (2) language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing; (3) assessment formats—teacher, peer and self-assessment. Also, proposed and conducted as classroom evolution, the system mixes elements of portfolio and traditional assessment.

Table 1. A portfolio system for EFL 7th grade students in Taiwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Learning Task/Activity</th>
<th>Assessment--Task</th>
<th>Assessment--Format</th>
<th>Portfolio Evidence</th>
<th>Weight of Grading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive, Meta-cognitive</td>
<td>Listening and Speaking</td>
<td>Speaking-recording (each unit)</td>
<td>Teacher, peer and self-assessments</td>
<td>Audio-tapes, listening evaluation sheet, story script, storytelling group evaluation sheet, weekly reflection.</td>
<td>15% (speaking-recording, 5%; listening and evaluating, 5%; storytelling and/or group drama performance, 5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive, Meta-cognitive</td>
<td>Reading and Writing</td>
<td>Exercises in workbook (each unit)</td>
<td>Teacher, peer and self-assessments</td>
<td>Worksheets, reading sheet, student storybook</td>
<td>10% (Workbook exercises, 3%; worksheets and reading notes, 4%; storybook, 3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective, Group/Pair work</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Peer and self-evaluation</td>
<td>Peer and self-evaluation</td>
<td>5% with weekly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, Meta-</td>
<td>Cognitive Unit</td>
<td>Meta-cognitive Weekly Reflection</td>
<td>Cognitive, Meta-cognitive, Affective Portfolio</td>
<td>Cognitive Three Term Exams</td>
<td></td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair Work</td>
<td>exchange, practice and writing of dialogues (each unit)  Group work: creating group names and logos, short role-plays, dramatic performance (each unit)</td>
<td>Listening test (each unit) Unit achievement tests (each unit)</td>
<td>Shared and examined after each term exam. Exhibit and celebration of portfolios, sample portfolios chosen by students and teacher awarded (at end of semester).</td>
<td>Term examination contains: 30% listening items 70% reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>self-assessment sheet</td>
<td>Teacher assessment</td>
<td>Teacher, peer and self-assessment</td>
<td>Teacher assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>self-reflection, and semester-end peer and self-evaluation</td>
<td>List of scores and self-reflection</td>
<td>Portfolio introduction, self-introduction, and reflection</td>
<td>List of scores and self-reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10% (listening tests, 5%; unit achievement tests, 5%)</td>
<td>5% (with peer evaluation, based on learning attitude, performance, contribution, and participation)</td>
<td>10% (based on completeness, documentation, language, and design &amp; structure)</td>
<td>50% (fixed and mandated for all classes at school)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2.1. Goals and objectives

The first and foremost ability specified in the Grade 1-9 Curriculum in Taiwan is the one to develop self-awareness and potential. As to English curriculum, the goals are defined as cultivation of students’ basic English communicative ability as well as English learning interests and methods, and facilitation of students’ understanding of foreign and domestic cultures. Given such, the portfolio system of this study embraces four indispensable learning components: cognitive, affective, social and meta-cognitive. It is designed to help students use English appropriately, understand cultural differences, identify and comprehend tested points in school term examinations, assess performances of their own and peers critically and impartially, record and reflect on
learning process and growth systematically so as to realize strengths and weaknesses in learning. It also aims to help students develop an interest in English, keep a positive attitude toward learning, learn and enjoy working with peers, and hold individual accountability.

2.2.2. Pedagogical activities

This system integrates assessment with pedagogical tasks to facilitate and monitor learning and teaching. Tasks and activities of different language skills and peer and self assessments (outlined in Table 1) are combined to provide students opportunities to exercise language use, collaboration with peers, critical thinking, and self development. Since speaking and listening are often ignored in the EFL classrooms in Taiwan, they are especially emphasized in the curriculum design. For instance, students are asked to record their speech on audiotapes when a unit is finished. They may decide content of their recordings. Low achievers can simply read aloud passages of Dialogue or Reading in a lesson. High-achieving students, however, are encouraged to rewrite passages in textbooks or record their adaptations creatively—e.g. playing different roles with varied voice expressions, or adding some background music. As a follow-up to the speaking-recording task, students listen to peers’ tapes at home and yield feedback and scoring on a given evaluation form. To create “dialogic exchange” between speakers and listeners, students are required to give self-feedback on the form. Those evaluated high and showing improvement are played in class as models of oral presentation.

Another essential task in the portfolio system is portfolio compilation. Students are told about this project at the beginning of a semester and by its end are required to
finish the task to demonstrate what they have undertaken in class, showcase their achievements and favored works, and review and think how they could improve future work. To expedite compilation tasks, students are asked to share and examine “process” portfolios after each term exam in class. Guidelines for portfolio compilation are provided at the start of the semester. An exhibit and celebration of portfolios is arranged in a class meeting with an audience of teachers from other schools. Portfolios include introduction (chronicling the collection and selection period, explaining what is selected and why, noting self-reflection, and reserving space for feedback), author’s self-description (autobiography in brief), and selected works. Students are encouraged to create their own layouts of the portfolios. Peers and the teacher write their feedback on the provided introduction sheet.

2.2.3. Grading

The grading scheme of this portfolio system, including summative and formative assessments, is used to monitor and support students’ learning process and achievement, attitude and efforts. Each semester public junior high schools in Taiwan administer three achievement tests. Individual teachers of the same grade take turns constructing tests. A ratio of this summative assessment is fixed and mandated for all classes at school. What a teacher can “control” is the so-called formative assessment, 50% of the total grade. Given that the portfolio system adopts a teacher/student joint assessment model, grading criteria and standards are always made clear to students before they are involved in assessment procedures. Below are criteria for speaking and listening, reading and writing, and portfolio project.
Regarding speaking and listening tasks, those who turn in the recording of speech as required receive a perfect score of five points, this to encourage students to practice speaking every week. Evaluation criteria for recording encompass pronunciation, fluency, content, and accuracy. Assessment of storytelling or group drama is based on content, pronunciation, fluency, vividness, and timing.

As to reading and writing, each workbook exercise counts 100 points, with one point deducted for a mistake. Those who turn in exercises late risk 20-point punishment grade-wise. Worksheets and reading notes are rated from A+ (4 pointes) to D (1 point) mostly by the teacher, some combined with self-evaluation. Students’ storybooks are evaluated by both the teacher and peers in terms of content, organization, coherence and fluency, wording, grammar, and mechanics.

Portfolios are rated by both the teacher and students in light of completeness (whether the collection records varied learning activities), documentation (whether works are dated and show self-reflection), language (whether language use is clear and correct), and design/structure (whether it is organized and presented neatly). Five portfolios are awarded during the exhibit and celebration at the end of the semester.

2.3. Data collection and analysis
To ensure methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978), both qualitative and quantitative procedures for data collection and analysis were adopted in this research. Data were gleaned from interviews, classroom observations, teachers’ reflective notes, students’ portfolios, and a questionnaire survey.
The survey on students’ perspectives of the portfolio curriculum and their learning was administered by the end of the second semester. The questionnaire, provided in Chinese and containing 31 items plus an open-ended question, was tested and revised in the first semester. Each item was scored on a 5-point scale from 5 “strongly agree” through 3 “not sure” to 1 “strongly disagree.” A couple of items were reverse-scored in order to reduce response set bias. Chi square “goodness of fit” test and t-tests detected differences in students’ background and their responses to the questionnaire.

The participating teachers took reflective notes throughout this probe, and were observed and interviewed to obtain greater clarity in classroom practices and a true picture of opinions or feelings. Qualitative data including interviews, observation and reflective notes, and students’ portfolio reflections were classified and categorized by two EFL university teachers using content analysis method. Member check and independent coding were utilized to ensure the credibility of qualitative procedures.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Students’ learning attitude and achievement

Participating students, though from two schools and taught by different teachers, showed no significant difference on an independent t-test in self-ratings of learning attitude, English proficiency, and school test performance. Yet female students rated themselves significantly higher in their school test performance (Female M= 3.95, SD= 0.78, Male M= 3.375, SD= 0.885, df= 73, t= 2.55, p<.05) and assignment fulfillment (Female M= 4.19, SD= 0.89, Male Mean= 3.625, SD= 1.0878, df= 73, t= 2.12, p<.05).
As Table 2 presents, on a five-point scale students rated themselves above average in learning attitude (M= 3.70), English proficiency (M= 3.43), and test performance (M=3.83). Over 70% stated they finished assignments and learning tasks as required (M= 4.07). Significantly more disagreed that they felt nervous about school tests (M=2.60). And students somewhat consented that it was fair to use school tests to decide their English learning achievements with a mean of 3.17, though no difference among varied opinions was found by the chi-square test.

Table 2. Students’ self-rating of learning attitude and achievement (N=75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Very Poor</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. *My learning attitude is</td>
<td>12 (9)</td>
<td>48 (36)</td>
<td>39 (29)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>43.3467</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. *My English proficiency is</td>
<td>7 (5)</td>
<td>39 (29)</td>
<td>47 (35)</td>
<td>7 (5)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>66.1333</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. *My performance on the English test at school is</td>
<td>21 (28)</td>
<td>45 (34)</td>
<td>28 (16)</td>
<td>5 (4)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>24.6800</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA or A</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>SD or D</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. *I get nervous whenever I took English tests.</td>
<td>20 (15)</td>
<td>33 (25)</td>
<td>47 (35)</td>
<td>8.0000</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It is fair and reasonable to measure the effectiveness of my English learning by school tests.</td>
<td>35 (26)</td>
<td>25 (19)</td>
<td>2.4800</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. **I turned in assignments and worksheets, and finished the learning tasks as required.</td>
<td>19 (14)</td>
<td>5 (4)</td>
<td>63.4400</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SA= 5 points, strongly agree, A= four points, agree, D= 2 points, disagree, SD= 1 point, strongly disagree, *p<.05, **p<.01

3.2. Students’ perceptions

Tally of questionnaire results revealed students significantly favoring the implemented portfolio system. Table 3 illustrates the results of students’ questionnaire responses.

Table 3. Students’ responses regarding the portfolio system (N=75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA or A</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
<th>SD or D</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

SA= 5 points, strongly agree, A= four points, agree, D= 2 points, disagree, SD= 1 point, strongly disagree, *p<.05, **p<.01
1. **I was ever asked to compile my portfolio before (in the course of English or other subjects).**
   - SA: 68 (51)
   - A: 17 (13)
   - SD: 15 (11)
   - D: 40.6400
   - Mean: 3.88
   - SD: 1.13

2. **The teacher made clear to us the course objectives.**
   - SA: 91 (68)
   - A: 9 (7)
   - SD: 0 (0)
   - D: 49.6133
   - Mean: 4.45
   - SD: 0.66

3. **The teacher made clear to us the criteria for portfolio assessment.**
   - SA: 92 (69)
   - A: 5 (4)
   - SD: 3 (2)
   - D: 116.2400
   - Mean: 4.47
   - SD: 0.72

4. **Compiling and creating my portfolio is a meaningless task.**
   - SA: 0 (0)
   - A: 17 (13)
   - SD: 83 (62)
   - D: 22.3200
   - Mean: 4.44
   - SD: 0.71

5. **I selected documents regarding my learning in English listening and speaking and put them into my portfolio.**
   - SA: 84 (63)
   - A: 8 (6)
   - SD: 8 (6)
   - D: 86.6400
   - Mean: 4.25
   - SD: 0.92

6. **I selected documents regarding my learning in English reading and writing and put them into my portfolio.**
   - SA: 83 (62)
   - A: 13 (10)
   - SD: 4 (3)
   - D: 83.1200
   - Mean: 4.37
   - SD: 0.87

7. **The selection of my portfolio was based on teacher’s feedback and judgment.**
   - SA: 49 (37)
   - A: 24 (18)
   - SD: 27 (20)
   - D: 8.7200
   - Mean: 3.21
   - SD: 1.08

8. **The selection of my portfolio was based on peers’ feedback and judgment.**
   - SA: 47 (35)
   - A: 29 (22)
   - SD: 24 (18)
   - D: 6.3200
   - Mean: 3.21
   - SD: 1.02

9. **The selection of my portfolio was based on my own satisfaction.**
   - SA: 76 (57)
   - A: 16 (12)
   - SD: 8 (6)
   - D: 62.1600
   - Mean: 4.09
   - SD: 0.99

10. **In my portfolio I put the learning evidence which I feel fond or proud of for assessment.**
    - SA: 85 (64)
    - A: 9 (7)
    - SD: 5 (4)
    - D: 91.4400
    - Mean: 4.34
    - SD: 0.86

11. **I actually examined my learning process for the weekly self-assessment.**
    - SA: 63 (47)
    - A: 29 (22)
    - SD: 8 (6)
    - D: 34.1600
    - Mean: 3.81
    - SD: 0.97

12. **Peer assessment helped me learn from others’ strengths, expect others as asking myself, and develop my critical thinking ability.**
    - SA: 85 (64)
    - A: 11 (8)
    - SD: 4 (3)
    - D: 91.7600
    - Mean: 4.19
    - SD: 0.83

13. **I like participating in various learning and assessing tasks (such as oral practice recording, role-play, listening practice, worksheets, public speaking, making storybooks, peer and self-assessment etc.).**
    - SA: 71 (53)
    - A: 23 (17)
    - SD: 7 (5)
    - D: 49.9200
    - Mean: 3.95
    - SD: 0.98

14. **Because of participating in various learning and assessing tasks, I made good progress in English learning.**
    - SA: 69 (52)
    - A: 23 (17)
    - SD: 8 (6)
    - D: 46.1600
    - Mean: 3.83
    - SD: 0.95

15. **Because of participating in various learning tasks and assessment activities, I was positive about my learning achievements.**
    - SA: 76 (57)
    - A: 19 (14)
    - SD: 5 (4)
    - D: 63.4400
    - Mean: 4.01
    - SD: 0.94

16. **I preferred various learning and assessing tasks to English paper-and-pencil tests.**
    - SA: 61 (46)
    - A: 28 (21)
    - SD: 11 (8)
    - D: 29.8400
    - Mean: 3.83
    - SD: 1.11

17. I was less nervous while participating in various learning and assessing tasks than taking English paper-and-pencil tests.
    - SA: 39 (29)
    - A: 40 (30)
    - SD: 21 (16)
    - D: 4.8800
    - Mean: 3.23
    - SD: 1.13

18. **Because of various learning and assessing tasks, I enjoyed English classes and English learning.**
    - SA: 61 (46)
    - A: 29 (22)
    - SD: 9 (7)
    - D: 30.9600
    - Mean: 3.72
    - SD: 0.94

19. **Having finished all the learning and assessing tasks, I felt my confidence was boosted.**
    - SA: 67 (50)
    - A: 27 (20)
    - SD: 7 (5)
    - D: 42.0000
    - Mean: 3.84
    - SD: 0.92

20. **Having finished all the learning and assessing tasks, I felt my relationships with the group members were bettered.**
    - SA: 72 (54)
    - A: 23 (17)
    - SD: 5 (4)
    - D: 53.8400
    - Mean: 4.03
    - SD: 0.94

21. I think the single measure of English paper-and-pencil tests can assess my learning more precisely than multiple learning and assessing tasks.
    - SA: 36 (27)
    - A: 29 (22)
    - SD: 35 (26)
    - D: 0.5600
    - Mean: 3.08
    - SD: 1.18

22. **Compiling and creating my portfolio helped me little in English learning.**
    - SA: 0 (0)
    - A: 17 (13)
    - SD: 83 (62)
    - D: 22.3200
    - Mean: 4.49
    - SD: 0.71

23. **Compiling and creating my portfolio helped me perceive the process and growth of my English learning.**
    - SA: 77 (58)
    - A: 20 (15)
    - SD: 3 (2)
    - D: 68.7200
    - Mean: 4.08
    - SD: 0.80

24. **Compiling and creating my portfolio helped me understand the learning objectives of the course.**
    - SA: 83 (62)
    - A: 15 (11)
    - SD: 3 (2)
    - D: 83.7600
    - Mean: 4.19
    - SD: 0.83

25. **Compiling and creating my portfolio helped me examine and improve my learning methods.**
    - SA: 75 (56)
    - A: 20 (15)
    - SD: 5 (4)
    - D: 60.0800
    - Mean: 4.05
    - SD: 1.01

SA= strongly agree, A= agree, SD= strongly disagree, D= disagree, *p<.05, **p<.01. Numbers are rounded and sometimes less than 100 in total percentage.

*a Item reverse-scored
A great majority of students stated their teachers had clarified their learning objectives and criteria for portfolio assessment (91-92% strongly agreed or agreed). Their selection of portfolio content was mainly based on self-satisfaction (76%), then on teacher’s and/or peers’ feedback (47-49%). By creating their own portfolios, they perceived self-progress in English learning (77%), realized learning objectives of diverse stages (83%), examined their learning processes and upgraded their learning methods (75%). Most (83%) disagreed that portfolio tasks are meaningless and that compiling portfolios helped them little in English learning. The assigned learning and evaluation tasks were seen as beneficial to relationships with teammates (72%), boost their English confidence (67%), and make them fond of English learning (61%). Results of the chi square test indicated more students favoring the system and considering it conducive to English learning. The t-test results revealed no statistical differences in their attitudes towards the portfolio system between male and female students and between the two participating classes. Yet a close look at responses to Items 17 and 21 in Table 3 and Items 4 and 5 in Table 2 hints that tests might still be viewed as a dynamic measure gauging English learning achievement; students showed no strong tendency of test phobia. Significantly more students disagreed that they got nervous about taking English tests. However, means of 3.23 and 3.08 (Items 17 and 21) indicated that varied learning and assessing tasks were more likely to be valued than paper-and-pencil tests.

Table 4. Students’ questionnaire free responses (N=75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining self learning</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to expressing their opinions with scale rating, students were also asked to write freely about dis/advantages of the portfolio system on the questionnaire. Table 4 summarizes their responses. Many indicated the system was advantageous to them. Over 70% of the students noted that compiling portfolios helped immensely in self-reflection; they examined their growth by reviewing what they experienced in learning and became aware of their strengths and weaknesses. 56% identified gains specifically from sharing and giving each other feedback in various tasks. With constant practice and feedback, almost half of the students mentioned that their confidence and self-image grew. Some realized the significance of performing sundry tasks in terms of diverse/multiple language skills and learning domains in the Grade 1-9 Curriculum, thus considered multidimensional assessment in line with assorted learning objectives and inspired their versatile potentials. Unanimously, learning from doing was regarded as fun; seeing one’s own progress was viewed as joy. Students appreciated the portfolio experience very much.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutual learning between peers</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence and motivation boosted</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multidimensional development</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun and joy</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive time, cost, and effort needed</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias in peer evaluation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited effect on test performance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality related with English performance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in storage and portability</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As for negativity towards the portfolio system, five factors were identified in students’ free responses. 73% complained about work overload from assignments - i.e., inadequate time and excessive effort for assigned tasks or activities all the time. They had diverse priority lists and could not devote themselves fully to English only. A few also cited insufficient time to prepare for term exams when given tasks not directly related to tests, extra cost of assignments and portfolio compilation. Moreover, unfair evaluations are speculated to be caused by friendship marking and prejudice (or bias). 19% of the students (especially female) showed doubts about peer assessment. They questioned a few classmates might give high marks to those who are close to them or whose English is more advanced, or cast doubt on their ability to evaluate peers accurately and appropriately. In addition, a handful of students, trapped in the myth of tests, despite being aware of elevated learning attitude via weekly reflection, considered the portfolio projects had limited effect on their test performance. A few others pointed out that portfolios created by those good at English learning and in test performance often exceed those made by “poor” learners. Indeed, better proficiency and grades lead to higher achievement and motivation. It is possible owners of portfolios deemed substandard showed less interest in English learning. Also, storage and size of portfolios caused additional trouble for a couple of students. The size of their folder cannot accommodate various materials. Some materials are too big to fit into the folder. And carrying a folder back and forth from home to school was regarded as inconvenient to some students.

Students’ negative responses to the portfolio system primarily reflected that they might be overloaded by this learning style. Two explanations can be derived. First,
traditional testing decided at least half of the total grade and thus placed on the top of student priority list. Students saw the assigned tasks as not directly related to paper-and-pencil tests and believed the portfolio system caused extra burden. Secondly, the students were concerned about grades, and whether assessment procedures are fair and square mattered much to them. Broadfoot (1996) argued that students view assessment as defining what to learn and achieve, and how to allocate their time. McDowell and Sambell (1999) also observed that assessment influences how students use their time and engage in tasks that they perceive as necessary to meet the requirements. In line with their claims, this portfolio system involved double assessment of both process and product so as to motivate students in all learning tasks. As CY put it in her reflective notes (09/21/2002), “Students really like points very much. To encourage them to learn English, I think points could be used as good bonus.” But it is very possible that students felt stressed and heavily burdened when assessed and evaluated throughout the system.

3.3. Teachers’ observations

The process to create portfolios has been suggested as favorable to student learning in self-reflection, critical thinking, learning responsibility, and multiple intelligences (Blanoff & Dickson, 1991; Cole & Struyk, 1997; Gardner, 1983, 1991; Lockledge, 1997; Newman & Smolen, 1993, Valencia, 1990; Yancey, 1992). A content analysis of teachers’ reflective notes, interviews, classroom observations, and students’ portfolios scrutinized recurring themes and particular events/acts in students’ learning. The findings indicated teachers’ observations in support that students benefited from the
portfolio system in terms of development of English confidence, learning ownership, versatile talents, and critical thinking.

3.3.1. English confidence and use increasing

Students were given many opportunities to use the four language skills via peer and group work. In addition to those English tasks, CY noted how her students used more English in reflection and evaluation, though allowed to use Chinese (CY, Reflection, 03/07/2003). Several low test-performing boys in MW’s class also improved learning behavior because of the increased language use and constructive feedback (MW, Observation, 4/26/2003, Interview, 06/11/2003). They had gained confidence and made progress in English learning after work in groups, received positive feedback from peers, and performed better in storytelling and English role-play. These students increasingly showed interest in classroom activities and paid greater attention to assignments. Such change indicated that traditional paper-and-pencil mode of assessment might have killed youths’ interest in learning and self-confidence and image at school.

3.3.2. Learning ownership acquired

Cole, Ryan, and Kick (1995) argue that “the most desired outcome of portfolio construction is to have students assume learning responsibility and develop a desire to do their best work” (p. 16). A few girls of CY’s class, making further attempts to revise their works after the class, shared and exhibited storybooks and portfolios (CY, Observation, 04/30/2003, Interview, 06/18/2003). Seeing others’ superior efforts, they aimed higher and desired to better their projects. Similar cases were also found in MW’s class.
Rei used PPT to show her story and Dan used his own pictures to attract the audience’s attention. They demonstrated their story so successful that Lily and Zoe asked for a second chance to show their story before the final. Both of them did not remember their lines well and looked at their script now and then. They wanted to do a good job like Rei and Dan did. (MW, Reflection, 06/07/2003)

This self-rewarding behavior suggested students assuming learning responsibility. In addition, a close look at students’ portfolios revealed how content, arrangement, and selection criteria mainly based on their own satisfaction, then on the teacher’s and peers’ feedback, also indicated students’ having acquired learning ownership.

### 3.3.3. Other talents developed

Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences alerted us to the fact that students’ learning is best measured in authentic and varied contexts. In diverse learning and assessing tasks, English was indeed used as a means to develop and demonstrate students’ talent - e.g., acting, drawing, arts, organization, music and teamwork. Both teachers were pleasantly amazed at their students’ English performances and creativity in various tasks.

I was surprised to see that students have got stage property, costume, and even background music ready. They have also arranged which group should come on the stage first…. They all did a wonderful job. I felt so amazed that some low-achieving students are natural actors. (MW, Reflection, 10/20/2002)

I found that most of the students did a good job on the portfolios. They download beautiful pictures or draw by themselves. Their covers pages and self-introduction have their own specific characteristics. (CY, Reflection, 11/01/2002)
3.3.4. Critical thinking promoted

In a portfolio system, students are enmeshed in constant reflection and critical inquiries by self and peer assessments. On the weekly reflection sheet, they were granted channels to examine themselves and peers, and reveal their confusion. During portfolio construction, they went back to review and reflect on what they had done and wrote feedback to themselves and peers. By way of these evaluative tasks, their voice was heard and critical thinking promoted. For instance, CY observed,

Taking at a look at the peer evaluation forms of tape recording, I found that the raters become better in terms of making responses to the speaker. They know better how to encourage the speakers and how to use words to describe the advantages and disadvantages. Some of them also imitated the words I used to evaluate the tape. Also, some of them tried to use English to express their opinions….As to their weekly self-reflection, most of them talked about their learning problems or achievements, and believed they would do better next time. Some even provided suggestions to make the class more interesting and meaningful. (CY, Reflection, 03/07/2003)

The portfolio system that intended to profile student achievement in multiple dimensions indeed furnished opportunities to develop self-assurance, ownership, and critical thinking, as claimed by Genesee & Upshur (1996), Brown (2004), Brown & Hudson (1998), and Weigle (2002), along with multiple intelligences, proposed by Gardner (1983).

3.3.5. Portfolio exceptions

An examination of students’ portfolios (75 in total for the second semester) revealed that the contents of students’ portfolios were mostly selected and designed according to
personal preference, suggesting students’ ownership and active participation. All their portfolios had fascinating covers and good self-introductions. Art was integrated in their portfolio presentations very much. Of those 75, 63 students (84%) went back to review and reflect on what they had done and wrote feedback to themselves and peers “seriously.” Their feedback on the portfolio reflective sheet was more than words or phrases such as “good,” “OK,” “not bad,” and “I don’t know.” All students considered that they did well on portfolio construction and gave themselves a grade above B+. Their portfolios indeed chronicled their “colorful” English learning experiences in the class and mostly led them to look for future improvement. For example, one student stated,

My favorite part of my portfolio is the introducing of myself. I think that part is pretty cool! I like it! I also like the content of my speech. Because I really work hard on that….I like the book made from Emily and me. We did a good job! My writing isn’t very good, so I have to read more books, learn more words, and practice more. I should study hard on grammar. That’ll help to improve my writing. When I’m in the 8th grade, we’ll listen to Studio Classroom. It’s harder than Let’s Talk in English. That will help to improve my English too.” (Y22)

Another student perceived her growth in the process of portfolio compilation, articulating,

This portfolio is about my growth. Good or bad, it is a record of mine in this semester. My story is not as funny and creative as others. I still need to work harder on writing. But my speaking improves. I love drama and work with my group members very much. I learned a lot from them. (Y05)

However, not every student was as cooperative as expected in portfolio tasks. Some put all of their works in a folder, not organized and reflected as required. Their portfolios were not presented as showcases of their learning achievements, but more
like fragments of what they had done and where they had traveled in learning. Teachers stated these portfolios were no different from daily folders, though students all treasured their portfolios by the end of the semester. In assumption of their negligence, teachers opined that more support and guidance for such students in using portfolios to examine and improve learning ought to be provided (CY & MW, Interview, 06/18/2003). Another possible explanation: some students did not perceive the immediate effect of portfolio as tests did to them, thus ignoring its significance. They could not spare more time for the task when they were obsessed by final exams.

3.4. Emerging problems

Teachers’ constant reflection and dialogue with study partners facilitated implementation of the portfolio system by locating and tackling problems emerging during the process. These snags were found concerning teachers’ frustrations and confusions, coded into five themes: confrontation with traditional testing, difficulty with a heterogeneous class, heed to students’ complaints, anxiety about professional insufficiency, and speculation of worksheet overuse.

3.4.1. Confrontation with traditional testing

The greatest obstacle teachers encountered was a menace of value and belief deeply rooted in traditional testing culture. MW showed concern about the prevailing testing culture and misuse of test results. She had been striving to keep a balance of testing versus performance-based assessment. Encouragingly, the portfolio system adopted did not fail her and her students. Still, she felt powerless and “lost” when colleagues used students’ test results to define teaching efficiency and students’ efforts in learning:
The students took the second term exam this Tuesday and Wednesday. Last week, their homeroom teacher reminded me that our average score had to be the highest this time. He told me that he was afraid that the students’ English score would let him down because there were fewer tests or quizzes than he expected. He asked me to test them more often. But it was too late for me to quiz them more. I was worried that the homeroom teacher’s nightmare would come true. Right after the exam, the homeroom teachers of the other two level-A classes asked me how well my students did on the English exam. I was not only worried but also nervous about my students’ average score because of their concern. Fortunately, it turned out that my students won this English battle. But strange to say, I was not happy...

Is average score everything? How can we let numbers be our nightmares?... how can we evaluate students mainly by paper-and-pencil tests? Though it is important to get good grades, it is even more important to enjoy learning…. I heard that the English teacher of another level-A class was so angry at some students who didn’t spell the words right so that she hit them on the palms... [When] the learning atmosphere becomes weird and nervous or even hostile, how can we allow the average score to hurt our teaching and learning? (MW, Reflection, 05/17/2003)

Teachers experimenting with innovative assessment procedures exposed themselves to questions and even “blame” from the traditional camp. Traditionally, Chinese schooling is confined to standards - national, regional, and school-wide - and thus is knowledge measured by standardized tests. It is widely assumed that the quality of teaching is demonstrated through and by students’ test scores. As Klenowski (2002) puts it, “When the portfolios are implemented, the prevailing understanding of the nature and purpose of assessment sometimes militates against their success…attitudes of students and teachers are difficult to change in institutions and contexts where traditional conceptions of assessment use, such as for measuring learning, dominate” (p. 79). Mabry (1999) also argues that any new system implemented in an old and
3.4.2. Difficulties with heterogeneous classes

CY and MW depicted a massive discrepancy in students’ English proficiency, although the classes were classified as "high-achieving" by their performance on a screening test of Chinese and Math. They had trouble in designing suitable tasks for all students and were not sure if unified standards should be applied to all at first, since those with English proficiency always scored higher in performance-based assessment. This was very frustrating to those less proficient and weak in English, while perhaps equally or even more capable in other subjects (CY & MW, Interview, 11/04/2002; MW, Reflection, 12/07/2002). The following excerpt shows teachers’ concern about how to design learning tasks and build up students’ learning confidence in a heterogeneous class.

Some of the students have been learning English for six years. However, some have been learning for only one year. These high achievers may give pressure to those lower achievers more or less, so some students become afraid of speaking English in front of the class. What kind of assignment should I give them to raise the lower achievers’ confidence but not to bore the high achievers to death? (CY, Reflection, 11/16/2002)

It was then decided to award additional credits to those showing effort and progress in a portfolio system. Such decision corresponded to Brown’s (2004) argument
that small weights allocated to improvement, behavior, effort, and motivation despite their subjectivity. This will not mask strong achievement in the course but can mean stark difference in a student’s final grade. Then again, to cope with the challenges teachers face in a heterogeneous class, cooperative learning strategy was adopted to create opportunities for peer coaching and assessment. Self-reflection and assessment were requested, such that students had a say in their learning attitude and improvement.

3.4.3. Heeding students’ complaints

The teachers paid heed to students’ complaints in using new pedagogical practices. Major concerns of students centered on doubts about peer assessment and more practice in test taking. Some students had suspicions about trustworthiness of peer assessment (CY, Reflection, 10/05/2002, 10/26/2002, 03/07/2003). The weight percentages of teacher and peer evaluation were modified to adjust for discrepancies in scoring, but some students remained dissatisfied. It was observed that such concerns all came from female students, who were found to self-rate higher in learning achievement (test and assignment) than male students. It was speculated that they were more sensitive to grading and felt concerned about friendship markings. Such speculation merits further investigation.

In addition to concerns about peer assessment, several high achieving students expressed a preference for traditional paper tests and asked for more practice in testing (MW, Reflection, 12/07/2002). With a dim view of credibility of worksheets, collaborative learning or assessing tasks, a couple of students even showed willingness to take a very difficult but discriminating test (Y28, Y42, Portfolio Reflection). Student
complaints echoed their negative free responses to the questionnaires. Peer assessment was considered a less reliable measure than paper-and-pencil testing, the common and familiar practice. Rating themselves high in test performance (Table 2), students leaned toward a testing mode they excelled in. But this was contradictory to what teachers intended to achieve in the portfolio system - measuring student learning in diverse domains through multiple methods. As old habits die hard, so are old mindsets hard and fast. Students already “standardized” in a testing culture faced confusion while experiencing new practices in the classroom; however, doubts caused difficulties in implementation.

### 3.4.4. Anxiety over professional deficiencies

Teachers devoted appreciable time and energy to making the portfolio system possible. Yet they felt nervous and uneasy about whether they had sufficient knowledge and skills in certain assigned jobs (CY, Reflection, 11/23/2002; MW, Reflection, 03/15/2003). For example, CY remarked confusedly,

> It’s really a tiring and confusing job to evaluate students’ English writing. I am very moved because most of the students worked very hard to finish their article…However, there are a lot of grammatical mistakes, no matter in vocabulary or sentence patterns. I wonder whether I should correct all the mistakes. If I do, I’m worried whether so many mistakes will discourage their willingness in writing. If I don’t, I wonder which mistakes I should correct and which I should skip. Most important of all, what are the criteria of giving them points? Some of the articles, without good content, have correct and easy sentence patterns; some of them, with good content, have a lot of grammatical mistakes. Which part shall I focus on? (CY, Reflection, 11/23/2002)
Throughout this study, teachers also engaged themselves in critical reflection. According to Dewey (1904), reflective teachers are freed from engaging in impulsive or routine action. Posner (1985) argues, “Reflective teaching will allow [the teacher] to act in deliberate and intentional ways, to devise new ways of teaching rather than being a slave to tradition, and to interpret new experiences from a fresh perspective” (p. 20). But while reflecting in the act of carrying out a new task, teachers might feel nervous and worried about their insufficiency in professional knowledge and skills. Such anxiety was surely considered a factor; all the same, it compelled them to move forward in professional development too.

3.4.5. Speculation about worksheet overuse

In their reflective notes, participating teachers showed skepticism about whether worksheets were a means to an end or an end themselves. They perceived a serious side effect of educational reforms. Worksheets were adopted for “presentation and demonstration,” not for “improvement” when the Grade 1-9 Curriculum was being implemented. Both teachers speculated that worksheets were given far more than what students should and could undertake, noting potential danger in their attempt to change - i.e., too much effort might be required of students. They stated,

The students are very busy this week…there are a lot of activities in school. Also, this week is our theme week, for Grade 1-9 Curriculum. The students have to write several worksheets and have performances in the ceremony. Many of them complained to me that there are too many worksheets. In the English subject, there’s also a worksheet…I wonder whether the worksheet is really helpful to the students in English learning or it is just used to carry out a task in a perfunctory manner. (CY, Reflection, 12/21/2002)
There have been a lot of activities since the new semester: our school has been on the TV news and the newspaper for several times. Though Nora has helped me a lot, I still cannot find time to listen to students’ tapes… I have to confess that now I am the one who delay the homework assignment… Sometimes I would ask myself why so many worksheets or activities for this class. Is it because this is a portfolio project or because the students use the new version textbook? And my answer is both. (MW, Reflection, 03/15/2003)

3.5. Approaches to problems
Throughout the study, emerging problems were observed and examined due to frequent reflections and professional conversations. Two approaches were adopted to tackle problems: seeking and creating a support network and adjusting and modifying the strategy and/or design. It should be noted that some problems were not and may not be resolved in the near future, but the adopted approaches were found potential and promising.

3.5.1. Seeking and creating a support network
Sustained professional support can overcome difficulties in various stages of an innovative attempt (Chen, 2002, 2003; Su, 2002). During the study, teachers had to battle a “gigantic testing monster” while their own teaching performances were still being evaluated by students’ test scores at school. Lasting change in teachers’ behavior occurs only when they, bonded as a group, are able to reflect on everyday teaching practices, identify their pedagogical problems, and take action to work out solutions
(Chen, 2003). A support network was formed gradually during the process. At first, this was a support group of three people (two teachers and a university researcher), making reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for-action together (taxonomy of Killion and Todnem, 1991). Then it was developed into a network that collaborated and nurtured itself in professional growth. The activities carried out in the support network are as follows:

1. Reading related literature
2. Reflection in, on, and for action
3. Workshops and seminars
4. Frequent dialogues with research partners about problems, issues, and solutions
5. Attending and supporting tasks of English performance
6. Sharing with colleagues and administrators (principal and dean) need for additional strategies and procedures to assess student learning and the misuse of test scores
7. Inviting interested teachers for classroom observation and idea exchange
8. School-based study group for English teachers

These activities were not conducted in a linear or fixed order, but Numbers 1 to 5 served as dynamic power for this action research. They helped teachers to reconstruct knowledge of portfolio use, consolidate beliefs in action, and reduce menaces or difficulties throughout the study. Numbers 6, 7, and 8 developed as an extension of efforts in professional collaboration.

### 3.5.2. Adjusting and modifying designs and strategies

Teachers modified course designs based on students’ concerns and requests. Regarding students’ doubts about peer assessment, specifics of rubrics and examples were crucial scaffolds for students. The teachers provided guidance and modeling procedures in peer
evaluation with care and detailed instruction. In addition, students’ assessment performances were evaluated to ensure the quality of student assessment. Davies (2000) claimed that students took caution in comparing, contrasting, and evaluating peers’ work when their assessment performances were being evaluated. Ballantyne, Hughes, & Mylonas (2002) noted how quality and quantity of student assessment comments increased when more marks were allocated for student assessment performance. By virtue of teachers’ careful guidance and assistance as well as regular practice, students were becoming more skillful and confident in the evaluation task (CY & MW, Interview, 06/18/2003). They wrote “wonderful comments” (MW, Reflection, 12/29/2002) and even imitated evaluative feedback from the teacher (CY, 03/07/2003). Regarding the case of some female students still clouded with friendship markings, perhaps further investigation about whether such doubts about peer assessment are void or whether students’ self-examination helps amend or modify errors of peer assessment is needed.

Moreover, during the study, adjustment in design for learning tasks was done incessantly to accommodate change in school schedule and students’ needs. Teachers perhaps aimed too high in learning goals to take heed of some low-achieving students’ struggles and frustrations. Some tasks might be too challenging and frustrating at the outset. Both of them reflected that they should demand small group tasks first, then individual projects. Groups provide a more comfortable and safe context for challenging tasks. Students unsure or uncomfortable about doing a task alone were allowed to work with partners (CY & MW, Interview, 06/18/2003).
4. Conclusion

Several findings can be summarized from the present study. First, students who participated in this investigation significantly favored a portfolio system. They considered the learning tasks conducive to learning and portfolios to be good tools for examining learning processes and augmenting learning methods. Second, the teachers’ observations also confirmed that students benefited from the portfolio system in terms of the development of English use and confidence, learning ownership, versatile talents, and critical thinking. Third, content of student portfolios was mostly chosen and designed in accordance with personal preference, suggesting student ownership and active participation. Fourth, implementation barriers mainly resulted from confrontation with the traditional testing culture, difficulties with heterogeneous classes, heeding students’ complains, anxiety over professional deficiencies, and speculation about worksheet overuse.

Overall, this study corroborated findings of previous studies in Taiwan (Chen, 1999, 2000; Hsieh, 2000) that portfolios are a dynamic device to facilitate learning and ownership development. Nevertheless, confusion and doubt emerged and lingered during its implementation process, and the development of portfolio pedagogy was constantly inhibited by the prevailing understanding of assessment purpose and procedures in Taiwan. With sustained professional support and collaboration plus continued curriculum modification, the portfolio implementation ended as a success.

This study suggests that at the moment, when the traditional notion of assessment holds sway, widespread use of portfolio assessment, especially on the secondary level,
is out of the question for Taiwan. Large-scale portfolio use indeed addresses assessment for high-stakes decision making, not for learning improvement. Research indicates large-scale portfolio assessment’s problems arising from lack of validity and/or reliability, difficulty in technicality and administration, and mis-conceptualization (see Klenowski, 2002 for detailed discussion). Dudley (2001) warns, “Use of portfolios to assess distorts the concept and weakens its effectiveness” (p. 19). She argues student portfolios are not about assessment, but about achievement, reflection, and celebration. Klenowski (2002) also maintains that the effect of portfolio pedagogy is limited when we emphasize verification of work in portfolios. Supporting their claims, findings from this study lead us to recommend that portfolios be better used as pedagogical tools.

References


