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Assessment Portfolios in an Intensive English Writing Program:
Opportunities and Challenges

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ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIOS IN AN INTENSIVE ENGLISH WRITING PROGRAM:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

by

Shafiqah Anwar Abdulaziz Fakir

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

The University of Memphis

May 2010

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents

Saada Fakir and Anwar Fakir

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deep appreciation will always remain to my committee chair, Dr. Charles Hall, for his unending patience, assistance, and encouragement in the writing of this dissertation. I will always remain indebted to Dr. Hall for believing in me, and encouraging me to apply to the University of Memphis.

My sincere thanks go to my esteemed dissertation committee members, Dr. Teresa Dalle, Dr. Emily Thrush, and Dr. Verner Mitchell, for their insightful feedback and comments. I would also like to thank all my professors at the University of Memphis whose courses have contributed to my academic achievements.

I would like to thank Ms. Lisa Goins, Director of the Intensive English Program, who provided me with all the support that I needed to complete this project, and was always there whenever I needed her assistance, both professionally and personally. I would like to acknowledge the instructors and students who participated in this study. I deeply appreciate their time and input. And, for their moral support, I would like to thank my colleagues and friends at the Intensive English Program: Cheri, Marilyn, Nina, Carol, Daniel, Terry, Becky, Clare, Lorraine, Richelle, Suzanne, and Gunta.

Sincere thanks to Ms. Sabrina Faber, the former country director in Yemen, for encouraging me to look for educational opportunities in the United States.

I am also thankful to my friends both in Memphis and Yemen, among whom I would like to acknowledge, Xiaowei Yan and Ahlam, who despite their busy schedules always had time for me. I would like to express my deep gratitude to my parents who provided me love, prayers, and support. Also, I wish to thank my brother, Abdul Aziz Fakir, and my relatives in Yemen.

ABSTRACT

Fakir, Shafiq Anwar. Ph.D. The University of Memphis. May 2010.
Assessment Portfolios in an Intensive English Writing Program: Opportunities and Challenges. Major Professor: Dr. Charles Hall.

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the opportunities and challenges that the use of the assessment portfolio offered to both instructors and students as they used it for the first time in the writing class of an intensive English program (IEP) in the United States. Although much work has been done on portfolios in L1 and other contexts, almost nothing had been done within IEPs. Therefore, this dissertation provides novel information about portfolios in an important language learning environment.

This study spanned over a period of 40-weeks. Data from four instructors and 17 students were collected through multiple semi-structured interviews. Additional data were collected from a group of 37 students through a written survey questionnaire to find the extent to which their opinions matched that of the interviewed students. Other data sources included interview with the IEP director, IEP director's follow-up meetings with the instructors, faculty meetings, informal conversations with the instructors, and students' portfolios.

Results obtained from the instructors revealed that the assessment portfolio offered them various opportunities. For example, the portfolio served as a repository tool, documented students' learning, helped instructors monitor students' writing progress, and demonstrated students' efforts. The portfolio allowed students to reflect on their progress as writers, and provided a record of their writing performance across different levels. Students' keeping the portfolios organized, finding class time for

portfolio management, and determining the reliability of students' self-assessment were among some of the concerns that the instructors mentioned.

Analysis of the students' data revealed that most of the students saw the portfolio as a repository, organizational, and learning tool that provided them with an opportunity for monitoring their progress. Some students, however, appeared indifferent to the portfolio. Some students also felt uncomfortable assessing themselves and preferred their instructors' assessment. All students liked the analytical rubrics used to score their writings. The 37 students' responses on the written survey were mostly consistent with those collected from the interviewed students.

Findings from this study, whether in the form of opportunities and/or concerns, can better inform the planning and implementing of the assessment portfolio in an IEP.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Assessment Portfolio

An assessment portfolio reflects specific learning goals and contains a selective collection of students' work, student self-assessment, and teacher assessment that is used to demonstrate students' progress and/or achievements over time. Teachers and students, together, select the portfolio entries which are then evaluated based on predetermined criteria such as rubrics, checklists, and/or rating scales (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 37).

For assessment purposes, assessment portfolios are more effective than other types of portfolios, viz. showcase and collections portfolios. However, at the classroom level, assessment portfolios are not used as widely as showcase and collections portfolios. One of the reasons may be that teachers have not received guidance on "how to plan portfolios as assessment management systems" (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 37).

This research project is an attempt to shed light on the use of the assessment portfolio at the classroom level in an Intensive English Program (IEP) in the United States. Based on its definition and available literature, the following study begins by first designing an assessment portfolio for classroom use, then introducing it to the instructors, and investigating the opportunities and/or challenges that surface as instructors and students start using the assessment portfolio for the first time in their writing classes at this particular IEP. When implementing the portfolio, Tierney, Carter, and Desai (1991) state that there is no one right way to do so (p. vii); therefore, such an inquiry can help come up with an assessment tool in ways that are more meaningful and appropriate to IEP's instructional mode in general and to this IEP, in particular.

Background to the Study

Studies on portfolios have shed light on their use in various educational settings; however, most of those studies have been conducted in the first language contexts. Studies that have focused on ESL contexts, such as K-12 and college composition classes, are few. Moreover, a review of the literature (see chapter 3) yielded no information of the use of the portfolio among ESL students within American intensive English program (IEP) contexts.

What distinguishes an IEP from other academic settings, such as K-12 or college composition classes, is that students enrolled in this type of a program have different needs for learning English. ESL students in an IEP need English to accomplish (usually short term) goals, such as pass the TOEFL exam, go to an American university, find better job opportunities in their home country or the US, and/or communicate with native speakers in the host country, among others.

In addition, an IEP provides students with language instruction within a relaxed atmosphere, away from the stress of high stake standardized tests, such as those required by (ESL) students in K-12 classes. IEP students, like ESL students in other contexts, however, come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The age of students in an IEP ranges between teenagers to adults and many of these ESL students might not have encountered assessment portfolios, before.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing use of the portfolio, in 1987, when researchers started collecting information on portfolios in language arts classroom, “little information and virtually no research on the topic” was found (Tierney et al., as cited in O’Malley &

Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 34). What was found was that teachers showed interest in portfolios but lacked adequate knowledge on implementing portfolios systematically in their classrooms (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 34).

Moreover, surveys of literature published on portfolios reveal that most of the studies on portfolio assessment have been conducted within first language contexts, and document experiences of teachers teaching within those contexts. For example, Hirvela and Pierson (2000) state that portfolios appear to be popular among elementary, secondary, and college teachers in the L1 context (p. 105). Similarly, Weigle (2002) in *Assessing Writing* points out that “most of the available literature on portfolio assessment comes from first language contexts...” (p. 198).

Though some studies such as that of O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) have focused on the value of the portfolio to ESL students within the K-12 contexts, there is still a need for more investigation of the use of the portfolio among the ESL population in other academic settings, such as the intensive English Program. Spalding (2002) encourages research in different contexts when she claims that “we need to study the effect of educational reform in many contexts (e.g., classrooms, departments, schools, districts, communities) and from the perspectives of many stakeholders (e.g., teachers, students, administrators, parents)” (p. 133).

As this pilot project introduces the assessment portfolio to the IEP at this specific IEP, that is, the Intensive English for Internationals (IEI) at the University of Memphis, it attempts to tease out instructors' attitudes as they incorporate and experiment with a new methodological instrument as well as to identify the issues of concern and/or interest that arise. Such an investigation is necessary since according to

Stark (1996) literature and studies show that not much has been done in “evaluating awareness, reactions and feelings of educators who use or may plan to use portfolios” (p. 2).

In addition, this project explores a group of students’ attitudes toward the portfolio. Understanding students’ views is essential since Hirvela and Sweetland (2005) point out that there is lack in research that explores student responses to portfolios and add that “the focus, instead, has been on the portfolios produced by the students and what they reveal about students’ progress as writers, as well as portfolios’ performance as a tool for assessing writing ability” (p. 194).

The participants’ (teachers and students) personal experiences with the portfolio, documented in this project, can reveal valuable information that can inform instruction in the writing class as well as benefit IEI’s writing curriculum. By means of the data obtained through the interviews, this study contributes detailed perspectives of 4 instructors and 17 ESL students on the introduction of the portfolio in an Intensive English program.

Further data obtained from a group of 37 students enrolled at IEI during this study help validate the data obtained from the interviewed group of students. Overall, this study seeks to contribute to the literature on (assessment) portfolios.

Purpose of the Study

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to investigate ESL instructors’ and students’ evolving attitudes and reactions toward the assessment portfolio as they implement it for the first time in their writing class. The project has four specific goals.

The first goal is to design an assessment portfolio and introduce it to the instructors to use in their writing class. The second goal is to monitor the instructors' evolving attitudes as they implemented the portfolio. The third goal is to uncover the opinions of a group of 17 students on the introduction of the portfolio. The fourth and final goal of the study is to find whether a larger population of students enrolled at IEI shared the views of the interviewed group.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it contributes valuable insights to the knowledge and understanding of portfolios within an Intensive English program context, particularly since there is dearth of research on portfolios within this context. It is also hoped that this study will make significant contributions to better understanding instructors' perspectives on portfolios since teachers play a central role in the educational system and often have to make crucial instructional decisions inside the classroom. Hearing in their voices the benefits and/or hurdles that they encounter as they experiment with assessment portfolios helps in finding ways of better addressing those issues.

A further significance of the study lies in its attempt at exploring ESL students' attitudes toward portfolios. According to Genzel (n.d.), "nearly 100,000 students come to the US to study English each year." Students are significant stakeholders in the teaching and assessing process; therefore, finding out about their views and attitudes toward portfolios can help us understand better the role that portfolios can play in an IEP program.

Findings and results from this study aim to provide suggestions and insights on how to effectively design and implement a portfolio assessment system particular to the IEI context for the teaching and assessing of writing.

Research Questions

Instructors

- Prior to using the portfolio, what beliefs and/or concerns do the instructors have about the assessment portfolio at this specific Intensive English Program?
- As instructors start using the assessment portfolio, what opportunities and/or challenges arise?
- After using the portfolio a few sessions, what are the instructors' final perceptions of the assessment portfolio? How do they view the portfolio as an instructional and assessment tool? What further benefits and/or issues of concern emerge?

Students

- How useful or challenging do ESL students find the assessment portfolio?
- To what extent does the larger population of ESL students enrolled in IEI share the portfolio perceptions of the students who were interviewed?

Methodology

The portfolio project spanned over a period of 40 weeks. Interviews with both instructors and students comprised the most significant method of data collection. This qualitative approach to data collection was chosen because it provides in depth information that cannot be easily achieved by quantitative measures. Another major data source was the written survey questionnaire completed by 37 students. Students' responses on the survey were reported in number and percentage. Other data sources

were the following: students' written questionnaire, interview with the IEI director, IEI director's follow up meetings with the instructors involved in this project, faculty meetings, informal conversations with the instructors, and the students' portfolios.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 states the background, significance, purpose, research questions, and methodology of the study. Chapter 2 situates the portfolio within the academic settings and discusses its implications as an assessment tool, its benefits and drawbacks, the value of self-assessment, and the relation of portfolio to the process approach of teaching writing. Chapter 3 discusses the research methods used in this study. Chapter 4 presents in detail the measures and steps that the researcher took when implementing the portfolio in the Intensive English Program at the intensive English for Internationals (IEI). Chapters 5 and 6 analyze the data obtained from instructors and students respectively, and discuss the findings of this study in an attempt to provide answers to the research questions formulated in this chapter. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes by summarizing the results, concluding, and presenting pedagogical implications, limitations of this research, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the literature review chapter is to present a foreground to chapter 4, which deals with designing the assessment portfolio for IEI, and to serve as a framework to better understand and interpret the findings of this research project, which are discussed in detail in chapters 5 and 6. It will be noted, in this chapter, that due to the popularity of the portfolio in the first language (L1) contexts, a significant body of research on portfolios has focused on its use within L1 academic settings.

Further, it will be seen that although some studies have advocated the use of the portfolio with the ESL population in contexts such as K-12 and college composition, there seems to be lack of information that deals with the implementation of the portfolio with the ESL group within the American Intensive English Programs (IEP). Also, it is worth mentioning that while reviewing the literature, one of the concerns that emerged was related to the use of the word portfolio. In most of the sources, the word ‘portfolio’ was not always preceded by an adjective, such as showcase or collections or assessment portfolio; therefore, the word portfolio was used as it appeared in those texts.

The following chapter begins with definitions of the (assessment) portfolio, then presents specific examples of portfolio use and benefits within different educational settings, and moves on to look at guidelines on portfolio implementation. The chapter further focuses on grading issues, the pedagogical implication of self-assessment, and issues of concerns related to portfolios. In conclusion, the chapter briefly discusses the correlation between the portfolio and the process approach to teaching writing.

The Portfolio

Tierney et al. (1991) define the portfolio as “systematic collections by students and teachers that could help both consider effort, improvement, processes, and achievement across a diverse range of texts that were read or written” (p. x). According to Richard-Amato (1996) the portfolio is “much more than simply a manila folder used to collect data for summative evaluation; it is an evolving thing that grows as the students grow and develop in the language learning process” (p. 103). Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991) provide the following definition of what constitutes a portfolio:

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student’s efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection. (p. 60)

Brindley (2003) points out that the portfolio is particularly useful in demonstrating students’ effort and progress over a period of time (p. 318). These definitions reveal that the portfolio is not an arbitrary collection of materials but rather a well organized, systematic collection of students’ work intended to provide a more comprehensive picture of their achievement, and over a period of time.

However, as there are several different types of portfolios, it is significant to realize the differences between these portfolios. Students’ work simply placed in a folder may be called a portfolio, for this reason, O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) group portfolios into three basic categories: showcase, collections, and assessment portfolios. Showcase and collections portfolios are more common than assessment portfolios. A showcase portfolio demonstrates students’ best work; however, the drawback is that in doing so it leaves out the process behind the students’ final products and fails to illustrate their learning growth. Collections portfolios contain all of students’ work and cannot be

used for assessment purposes since they have not been planned or organized for a specific purpose. Portfolios which are simply a collection of students' work do not serve the assessment purpose (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

Assessment portfolios, which are the focus of this research study, contain an organized body of items such as students' work, students' self-assessment, and teacher assessment with the purpose of demonstrating their growth over a period of time (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996, p. 37). Likewise, Montgomery and Wiley (2008) state that a portfolio becomes portfolio assessment "when the assessment purpose is defined, criteria for portfolio contents are determined, and criteria for assessing the collection of works are identified and used to make judgment about performance" (p. 7). Gottlieb (2000) states that an assessment portfolio has a specified purpose, the collection is systematic and part of it may be determined by the student, and finally, the portfolio entries should demonstrate students' growth and accomplishment over a period of time. A portfolio designed for assessment purposes aims "to monitor and enhance students' classroom performance" (Shaklee, Barbour, Ambrose, & Hansford, 1997, p. 26).

The Beginnings

Portfolios first emerged in the field of photography and architecture among professionals who used to keep records of their best works to show to others (Genesee & Upshur, 1996, p. 99). In fine arts and creative writing departments, portfolios served as a display for students' best work (Lombardi, 2008; O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996).

The origin of portfolios in the field of writing dates back to the mid-1980s, when Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff decided to experiment with portfolios in the composition class at Stony Brook (Lombardi, 2008, p.7). Elbow and Belanoff (1991) felt that the

holistic scoring method used to assess students' performance on their exit exams (a single-impromptu essay) failed to provide a valid picture of students' writing proficiency. Moreover, the exit exam undermined the process approach to teaching writing for it provided no evidence of the process itself, such as drafting, peer responses, and discussion of the issue, which forms an integral part of teaching writing (p. 5).

At Michigan University, Condon and Hamp-Lyons (1991) reported a similar concern and decided to replace the fifty-minute impromptu essay that was used to assess students' exit from the English Composition Board's Writing Practicum with a portfolio-based assessment. The authors felt that the impromptu essay at the end of the practicum failed to assess students' writing skill or progress. The problem with the impromptu exit exam was that it treated the teaching of writing as a product, and failed to provide any revision opportunities, so students resisted such teaching strategies. The introduction of the portfolio system to the writing program provided various benefits. For one, portfolios linked assessment with instruction for they created interaction among instructors who tried to reach consensus on aspects of the program. Second, as instructors read portfolios to make crucial decisions about other instructors' students, they needed to know not only what the instructors taught but also how they taught. Third, portfolio assessment made students realize the value of multiple drafts which the impromptu exit exam failed to do (Condon & Hamp-Lyons, 1991).

Along the same lines, Roemer, Schultz, and Durst (1991), directors of freshman English at the University of Cincinnati also considered portfolios as an alternative to the timed Exit Exams in their freshman program. They believed that "students, who need remediation, need it at the beginning, not at the end of their experience" (p. 457). As

Roemer et al. (1991) began implementing portfolios in their composition classes, their pilot study focused on exploring different groups of teachers' perceptions toward portfolios. The authors hoped that insights from their study would help them design and implement a portfolio evaluation that can fit into their Freshman English program. Their study yielded interesting results, for instance, among other benefits, they realized that the portfolio assessment "promoted high standards and consistency among teachers..., became a powerful teacher training and professional development tool" (pp. 466-468). Portfolios seemed to provide a better picture of students' developing progress in their writing than the Exit Exam did.

At the University of Alaska Southeast, Wauters (1991) states that the university decided to adopt the idea of portfolio assessment because, as the author indicates, "while encouraging students to develop a wider range of writing strengths, portfolio assessment would allow [them] to evaluate higher-order concerns such as reasoning, analysis of readings, and library research techniques as well as organizational and syntactical skills" (p. 62). In addition, a further advantage of the portfolio was that it encouraged high performance standards in writing for students to demonstrate their skills as well as for the faculty who teach those skills (p. 62).

Apparently, discontent with the impromptu type of writing assessment triggered educators in the college writing programs to question its validity as an assessment tool and consider the portfolio-based assessment as a possible solution. As a result, the portfolio assessment emerged as an "alternative approach to writing assessment that can allow broader inferences about writing ability than are possible with single-shot approaches to evaluating writing, both in the individual classroom and on a larger scale"

(Weigle, 2002, p. 197). This may be summed in Hart's (1994) words that whereas a test provides a snapshot of students "achievement at a particular time and place, a portfolio documents learning over time" (p. 24).

Benefits

The opportunities that the portfolio offered to the college writing programs also helped to establish it as a promising instructional and assessment instrument within the school system. Considering the number of students and the tasks they had to complete in their classroom, some teachers saw a change to a portfolio system as extra burden. School teachers' anecdotes give further insights into how they responded and dealt with the portfolio. Newkirk (1992), for example, reports that when he learned that he had to create and maintain a writing portfolio in his class, he showed no enthusiasm at the idea. However, as the process evolved, he soon discovered that what had started as a folder in which students saved their writings soon became a portfolio, an instructional and assessment tool. As the portfolio process progressed, Newkirk describes his experience as one in which "the students and I could become partners in learning and that learning is what we in school are always about" (p. 38).

Similarly, D'Aoust (1992) presents the experience of a group of school teachers who began the project of portfolios in their classroom with skepticism and questions. The teachers' initial impression of portfolios was that of a folder but as they embarked on the portfolio project in their schools, they realized that the portfolio was more than a folder—a portfolio could be a collection of students' best work, or work in process, or both. Although the teachers had numerous outcomes that they hoped to accomplish through portfolios, they gradually learned an important lesson in the process that "initial

work with portfolios should begin simply” (p. 41). Starting simply also provided the opportunity of working and creating new goals and purpose in collaboration with students (p. 42).

Freeman and Freeman’s (1998) portfolio project experience with Dos Palos California teachers in a bilingual school showed that the teachers could clearly see students’ growth as language learners and also realize the kinds of activities that worked best with their students. In Freeman and Freeman’s words:

Teachers involved in the portfolio project found that they had more complete information on their students than they had in the past, using report cards and standardized test scores. They felt confident about making recommendations and were amazed at how much they had learned about their own teaching. (p. 260)

The authors clearly point out that the portfolio provides rich information on students’ progress than a report card does.

Research conducted by Garcia and his colleagues (1994), mentioned in Freeman and Freeman (1998), revealed that portfolios tend to be rich in information. The authors provided two groups of instructors with information about students they did not know. The first group was given traditional assessment information, such as “standardized test scores, the results of the BSM, a writing assessment, a report on a reading conference, and anecdotal records from the previous teacher” (p. 261). The second group of teachers, in addition to the materials mentioned, was also given each student’s portfolio which included “a miscue analysis of oral reading, story retelling entries from a personal reading journal, and interactive written journals” (p. 261). Results showed that the first group of teachers, who did not have the portfolio, required additional information about the students and could not recommend specific instructional plans; on the other hand, the second group, with the portfolio, was able to design instructional strategies for these

students similar to those made by the instructors who had previously taught those students (pp. 261-262). Murphy and Smith (1992) echo a similar benefit to that cited by Freeman and Freeman when they state that portfolios “give us profiles of student writers, of teaching, and of curriculum...[and] make visible what gets lost when students, like teachers, move relentlessly from assignment to assignment” (pp. 50-51).

In addition to the above mentioned benefits, the portfolio can also help in building students’ affective factors, such as their sense of authority, motivation, and self-esteem. Hirvela and Pierson (2000) note that literature on portfolios often mentions that as students reflect on their writing process while doing self-assessment activities they develop a sense of authority with time. As students feel involved in the work they produce, this can increase their motivation (p. 109). Richard-Amato’s (1996) experience showed that the portfolio helps students feel pleased, and sometimes surprised, to see the improvement they make in their work (p. 103). The presence of such concrete evidence that focuses on students’ progress toward their goals can help develop their self-esteem and sustain their motivation for learning, perhaps for a period of time.

The opportunities that the portfolios provided such as focusing on what students can do rather than what they cannot do suggested they can be particularly useful when teaching students with limited English proficiency (Hart, 1994, p.24). Further, Gottlieb (2000) sees that ESL students can benefit from the portfolios which tend to be “criterion-referenced” meaning a student’s performance is compared to the extent to which he/she has met the classroom goals rather than being compared to a norm group of students (p. 97). Gottlieb mentions further advantages for ESL learners:

- a) Showcase their accomplishments
- b) Assume responsibility for their learning
- c) Demonstrate originality and creativity
- d) Reason and think critically
- e) Make choices
- f) Have a voice in decision making (p. 97)

Along the same line, Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) observed that the portfolio is particularly useful for nonnative English speaking students because it provides a broader picture of the students' ability and because it replaces the timed writing which "has long been claimed to be particularly discriminatory against nonnative writers" (p. 61).

To sum up, the positive outcomes that emerged from using the portfolio within the college writing programs and schools demonstrated that the portfolio is a promising effective instructional instrument that provides various opportunities to both instructors and students. The portfolio encourages revision, provides a more comprehensive picture of students' writing skill, allows reflection on their ongoing progress, and acts as a repository for students' work. Proponents of portfolio assessment see the portfolio as an excellent means of integrating both instructions and assessment. The portfolio provides a record of students' achievement and it is thought to be "more effective than the traditional assessment methods—those that are associated with report cards and letter grades" (Wortham, Barbour, & Desjean-Perrotta, 1998, p.7).

Implementation

Although in theory, the different types of portfolios are distinct, in practice, they tend to overlap (Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997, p. 1; Montgomery & Wiley, 2008, p.23).

Therefore, it is possible for students to keep more than one portfolio:

Some teachers choose to keep two portfolios on each student. One is a working portfolio in which the student keeps all his or her work. Once a week or every two weeks, students and the teacher review the working portfolio and select specific pieces of work to move into the assessment portfolio. (Shaklee et al., 1997, p. 78)

Danielson and Abrutyn suggest (1997) that whichever type of portfolio educators choose to employ, they should be clear about their goals, the purpose for using the portfolio, and the intended audience (p. 1). When planning a portfolio system, the first step is to decide on the portfolio purpose(s). O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) identify the following potential portfolio purposes in classrooms:

- To encourage student self-evaluation
- To monitor student progress
- To assess student performance relative to curriculum objectives
- To showcase students products
- To communicate student performance to parents
- To maintain a continuous record of student performance from one grade to the next. (p. 46)

The portfolio may be oriented toward achieving one, more, or all of the above mentioned purposes and it depends on what the program wants to accomplish through the portfolio. For example, teachers at Mt. Diablo High School (California) decided that the overall purpose of the portfolio was to “investigate and rethink their teaching and curriculum” and to motivate students to become engaged in learning (Murphy & Underwood, 2000, p. 24).

After identifying the portfolio purpose(s), the next step is to clarify to the students what materials should go into their portfolios. The items to be included need to be aligned with the classroom objectives and portfolio purpose. Danielson and Abrutyn (1997) state that when the purpose of the assessment portfolio is to document students' learning and the extent to which they have met the curriculum outcomes, the items in the portfolio must be designed to elicit the specified goals. For example, if the curriculum specifies students' learning of persuasive, narrative, and descriptive writing, then the portfolio will include entries of these types of writing (Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997, p.4).

The authors further add, “It is the assessment task that brings the curriculum outcomes to life, only by specifying precisely what students must do and *how well they must do it* do these statements of learning have meaning” (p. 5).

Further, Brown (2004) suggests that to receive the maximum benefit both teacher and student self-assessment should be included, and in some contexts peer-assessment or small group conferences can also be used (*student self-assessment is discussed in a separate section*). In the portfolio system, teachers also need to set classroom time aside for the portfolio and schedule time for review and conferencing (Brown 2004).

Conferencing with students, using their portfolios can help them realize their strengths and areas that require improvement, and can be very encouraging (Richard-Amato, 1996, p. 103). Genesee and Upshur (1996) suggest these questions to help facilitate conferencing with students when discussing a completed work from their portfolio or classroom assignment:

- What do you like about this work?
- What do you think you did well?
- How does it show improvement from previous work? Can you show me the improvement?
- Did you have any difficulties with this piece of work? Can you show me where you had difficulty? What did you do to overcome it?
- What strategies did you use to figure out the meaning of words you could not read? Or What did you do when you did not know a word that you wanted to write?
- Are there things about this work you do not like? Are there things you would like to improve?
- When you are reading and come across a word or something you do not understand, what do you do? Or when you are writing and you have difficulty writing what you want, what do you do? (p. 110)

Such questions can give “students a sense of ownership and involvement in assessment and learning that are difficult to achieve otherwise” (Genesee and Upshur, 1996, p. 110).

Physically, any of the following can act as containers for portfolio items: manila folder, hanging folders, two-pocket folders, expanding (accordion) folder, boxes, or ring Binders (Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997, pp. 59-60). Other issues to consider when designing a portfolio system is finding an appropriate place to store the portfolios—a place where the portfolio is easily accessible to both students and instructors (Genesee &Upshur, 1996).

Finally, after the portfolio has been completed, usually at the end of the term, instructors need to provide students with a final summative assessment (washback) in the form of a holistic grade or numerical score (Brown 2004). When grading a portfolio, a number of issues need to be considered; to shed more light on this issue, the next section deals with this topic in more detail.

Grading Issues

Weigle (2002) states that scoring the portfolio can be more complex than scoring a timed writing due to the richness of the information contained in the portfolio (p. 217). Therefore, some suggest that the portfolios should not be graded. Others recommend that a grade be assigned to the portfolio as a whole rather than each piece of writing (Cohen, 1994, pp. 337-338).

Whether to grade the portfolio or not? When to grade the portfolio? How to grade the portfolio? These are questions that continue to be a debated. Danielson and Abrutyn (1997) point out that “portfolio evaluation and portfolio grading presents a thorny question for many educators” (p. 48). The authors proposing that the grading practices could be left to the philosophy and policies of the school and district suggest the following guidelines:

- Assign grades only to items in assessment portfolios.
- Evaluate items in an assessment portfolio against clear criteria using. If possible, a scoring guide or rubric which the students themselves have helped to create.
- Establish clear guidelines for students about their work with the portfolio as a whole.
- Establish clear guidelines for evaluating assessment portfolios as a whole for completeness and organization. (pp. 49-50)

Delaying the grading until the end of the term is something that researchers have suggested. For instance, Huot (1994) states “Portfolios...are widely recognized as having intrinsic pedagogical value, since they allow composing over time and delay evaluation until a student is ready to choose and or revise her best work” (p. 329).

Similarly, Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) note that delayed evaluation is a strength of the portfolio as it gives students opportunities to reflect on, revise, and select their writing before grading occurs. This increases students’ motivation for revising and holds them accountable for their own learning (pp. 34-36). In other words, without the opportunity of delayed grading the process of revision can become a meaningless task.

Research has shown that once students receive their grades, then they do not have much incentive to improve their papers and consider the instructor’s suggestions. Therefore, delaying grading can motivate students to improve their papers, release them from the pressure of receiving grades, even if for a short time, and also reduce the dominant image of the teacher-as-evaluator by consolidating the role of teacher as instructor (Weiser, 1992, 1994). At Purdue University, for example Weiser (1992) mentions, a single grade is assigned to the portfolio submitted at the end of the semester. The students turn in the portfolio containing all their work produced during the semester which is not graded then; however, at the end of the term they meet with their instructors and select four of their writings to revise them extensively, and then submit them for

grading. The portfolio counts toward 70% of the overall grade, whereas, the remaining 30% is based on other activities (pp. 90-91). For this reason, the portfolio served “primarily an instructional purpose and only secondarily an evaluative one” (p. 93).

Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters (1992 as cited in Herman, Gearhart, &Aschbacher, 1996), suggest the following characteristics for what constitutes a good scoring criteria:

- sensitive to instruction and assessment purposes
- keyed to important, developmentally appropriate student outcomes that reflect current conceptions of excellence
- meaningful and credible to teachers, students, and parents
- clearly communicated
- fair and unbiased (p. 35)

Analytic and/or holistic rubrics can be used to score the portfolio (Weigle 2002, p. 220). Holistic rubric assesses performance across multiple criteria as an integrated whole. For instance, when holistically assessing a student’s performance, the teacher assesses the extent to which the student meets the descriptions on the rubric and gives an overall score that reflects the range of that performance level. Hamp-Lyons (1990) states, “Holistic reading is based on the view that there are inherent qualities of written text which are greater than the sum of the text’s countable element...” (p. 79).

On the other hand, the analytic rubric separates levels of performance and assesses the writers’ performance for each criterion. Each element of a students’ writing is scored separately, for example, a separate score is put on content, organization, cohesion, register, vocabulary, grammar, or mechanics (Weigle, 2002). Analytic scoring may be more useful for classroom assessment aimed at providing students with feedback for improvement since it communicates students’ performance across different categories

(Herman et al., 1996, p. 39). For large-scale assessment, a holistic scale may be better than an analytic scale.

In essence, whatever grading method instructors decide to use to evaluate the portfolio, they need to clearly communicate to their students the criteria for scoring, determine what sort of scoring scale will be used, and determine how scores will be reported.

Student Self-Assessment

As mentioned earlier, assessment portfolio also engages students in self-assessment (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Self assessment requires the students to “step back from a work or product or process, reflect on the approach taken, analyze what went well and why, and suggest modifications to be used in subsequent performance” (Montgomery & Wiley, 2008, p.8). Self-assessment or self-reflection has been identified as a significant component of the portfolio process. Portfolios provide student writers the opportunity for reflection on their progress (Camp, 1992, p. 61). Murphy (1994) claims that for many teachers, who used portfolios, reflection happens to be the most significant learning opportunity that portfolios provide (p. 147). Self-reflection “enables a writer to celebrate her or his strengths as well as identify areas to be developed” (D'Aoust, 1992, p. 43).

Self-assessment engages students in higher level of thinking (Johnson, Mims-Cox, & Doyle-Nichols, 2006). Mills-Courts and Amiran (1991) report that research on cognitive development advocates the importance of activities such as self-assessment which help students reflect on the success or failure of their learning (p. 103). The authors state “the more students are aware of their own learning processes, the more

likely they are to establish goals for their education and the more deeply *engaged* they are in those processes” (p. 103). Porter and Cleland (1995), for instance, state, “Whenever we are involved in learning, reflexivity is a part of the process. This is often an unconscious part.... The portfolio helps to bring what we have learned about learning to a conscious level” (pp. 133-138).

In his paper presented at the 2006 TESOL, Liang identified the following benefits of self-assessment: “It gives learners greater control over their learning, enhances students’ awareness of the learning process, promotes autonomous learning, and alleviates the assessment burden of the teacher.” Porter and Cleland (1995) consider portfolios as a learning strategy which offers learners the opportunity of reflecting on their progress as well as it allows them to

- examine their learning process
- take responsibility for their own learning
- see “gaps” in their learning
- determine strategies that support their learning
- celebrate risk taking and inquiry
- set goals for future experiences
- see changes and development over time (p. 36)

Paulson and Paulson (1994) classify self-assessment into four types:

- Documentation—students talk (and write) about why they selected a specific item for the portfolio.
- Comparison—students compare two or three specific items in the portfolio and talk about similarities and differences. It is more interpretive than documentation.
- Integration— students talk about the entire portfolio and what it tells in an overall sense.
- Presentation— students talk about their portfolio from the perspectives of others who are reviewing their portfolio. Student-led conferences are among the activities are effective in involving students in this kind of self-reflection. (p. 5)

Brindley (2003) recommends the use of self-assessment at the beginning of a course as a way to involve students to become aware of their language learning goals and become independent learners (p. 320). In 1996, Sunstein and Cheville (as cited in Sunstein, 2000) surveyed a group of 42 teachers and compiled a list of questions that these teachers used to help their students achieve a “reflective stance” in a portfolio classroom.

As it appears, the questions had different focuses or aims:

Questions aimed at generalizing about learning over time:

1. What do you know that you didn't know before?
2. What can you do that you couldn't do before?
3. What do you do that you couldn't do before?

Alan Purves, SUNY Albany

1. How are your writing and your composing processes different now than they were when you began compiling this portfolio?
2. Which class activities (journal writing, peer response groups, revision, etc.) have affected your writing and your composing process this semester, and what effects have they had?

Jeff Sommers, Miami University of Ohio

Questions that require careful analysis of the writings students have chosen to showcase

1. If you were to choose one piece of work that represents your best effort, what would you choose?
2. Why is it a significant effort?
3. When you revise your work, what lenses do you use to determine what to change?

Sally Hampton, New Standards Managing Director
1992-1995 ELA Portfolio Project

1. Why have you chosen these specific pieces for your portfolio?
2. What makes these pieces interesting to you?
3. What surprises you about your work?
4. What would you do different?

Brian Huot, University of Louisville

1. What do you want people to learn about you from reading your portfolio?
2. Show me where or how they would learn those things from looking at your work.
3. What's something that you've been working to improve? Trace your growth in that area through the collection of your work.

Eunice Green, Harvard PACE

Making personal connections between themselves, their understanding of curriculum standards, and the artifacts they've collected.

1. How many pieces of writing did you finish this semester? What genres are represented among these pieces?
2. What's the most important or useful information about conventions of written English you've learned this semester?
3. What will you try to do in your writing in the future?

Nancie Arell, Center for Teaching and Learning, Edgecomb, Maine

1. After looking over all your artifacts, what is missing?
2. What connections exist between your artifacts in your portfolio? Explain the connections.

Lora Wolf, Keokuk High School, Iowa

Asking critical questions

- What is different in your portfolio now than six months ago?
Jane Hansen, University of New Hampshire
- If you think of your work according to "level of difficult" what you would choose as hardest and why? Please describe what you were trying to do, even if you did not achieve it.

Judy Fueyo, Pennsylvania State University

Questions to encourage students to view and articulate their work in relationship to a set of standards

- What should I know as a reader about this piece that will help me understand your thinking and work? What would you do next to this piece to have it "tell your story" even more clearly?
Linda Carstens, San Diego Unified School Dist.
- If you are reflecting for personal reasons about your work, do you have a life or a school career pattern into which these reflections fit! If you are trying to show someone else something about your reflections, how will you make these reflections visible and meaningful for the other person?
Miles Myers, executive director, NCTE
- What do you want your work to say (to others) about you? What does your work say about you? What are the differences?
Sara Jordan, SUNY Albany
- What things can you show me about your learning that I would otherwise not know about?

Tom Romano, Miami University of Ohio

1. Look over the curriculum guidelines for all students at your "level." Find places in your portfolio that illustrates that you've accomplished each guideline. Mark them with Post-it Notes, and then explain how they all work together.

2. How do the contents of your portfolio meet the six objectives for this course?

Bonnie Sunstein, University of Iowa

(Sunstein, 2000, pp. 8-12)

Besides using questions to help students assess their progress, other forms that encourage students to keep track of their progress include dialogue journals, learning logs, self-assessment of interests and writing awareness, and checklists of writing (Valdez Pierce & O'Malley, 1992).

Benefits of Student Self-Assessment to Instructors

Students' self-reflection or self-assessment questions can provide useful information to teachers who have either first language learners or second language learners. However, reflective questions used with ESL learners can be particularly useful to shed light on and understand their "unconscious cultural learning" (Murphy, 1994, p.149). On a similar note, Yancey (1992) states:

Portfolios may also help teachers better understand the relationship between metacognitive work to formally assigned work. Having students gloss and narrate their own texts and their own histories as writers will enable teachers to see the role that self-awareness plays in the fostering of literacy. This is a new area of exploration, but a promising one. (p. 113)

According to Yancey, then, the portfolio, with its self-assessment component has the potentials of providing the instructor with valuable insights on the needs of their students.

Student self-assessment also provides teachers the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching. For instance, Murphy and Smith (1992) claim that students may not seem aware of what makes their writing successful; therefore, by asking students to reflect on their writing, teachers can "learn what students think they know. Then, as teachers, we can think what has been taught" (p. 54). Reflections can show teachers about their teaching approaches and classroom curriculum and portfolios can inform instruction and

curriculum (p. 57). The authors assert that “Although portfolio assessment in diverse forms and for various purposes is still emerging, its potential is uniformly rich, and at least some of its implications can be articulated” (p. 58).

Concerns Related to Self-Assessment

Certain issues of concern associated with self-assessment are related to students’, especially ESL students, unfamiliarity with this type of tasks. Liang (2006) sees that the drawback of self assessment might stem from the fact that students might not be familiar with the assessment criteria and procedures and feel uncomfortable reporting their own weaknesses. Brindley (2003) suggests that teachers help students realize the significance of self-assessment, its aim, and its benefit to them as language learners (p. 320).

(ESL) Writing

Conventional approaches to teaching writing focused more on the product than the process of writing. Writing was viewed more as following a linear path during which writers move from one discrete stage to another, that is, prewriting, writing, and rewriting activities. Students’ final product was evaluated and not much attention was given to the process involved in producing the piece.

In the 1970s, the focus shifted from the written product to the actual process of writing. Findings showed that the process of writing involves more than analyzing and imitating rhetorical models. It involves not only writing but also prewriting and rewriting, with all of them being interdependent. Students are taught writing strategies such as “planning, drafting, revising, and editing their work, recognizing that the practice of these overlapping parts of the writing process enables students to produce better final papers” (Weiser, 1992, p. 100) .

Cohen (1994) points out that the process approach “puts emphasis on an incubation period, in which the written piece takes shape. The writer’s awareness of writing processes is heightened, and ideally, the work comes to a teacher for appraisal only at the point when the writer is satisfied with the result,” and after the writing has gone through stages of self assessment and peer assessment (p. 305). In a process approach, writers are not expected to produce a polished piece of writing from the first attempt (Weiser, 1992, p.100). Murphy (1994) explains that “because portfolios accommodate and encourage process, they are more in line with what we know about good instructional practices in the teaching of writing” (p. 146).

Hirvela and Sweetland (2005), in their case study of two L2 writers, observed, “At a time when the process approach to writing instruction continues to dominate, a formatively oriented classroom portfolio pedagogy, in which students are encouraged to reflect frequently on their progress as writers, could be seen as reinforcing the emphasis on process” (p. 207). Along the same lines, Huot (1994) states:

Portfolio assessment rejects the assumption that writing ability can be inferred from a single piece composed in response to a common topic. Instead, portfolios contain multiple pieces of writing on different and often disparate topics, allowing the importance of using full range of writing produced in multiple drafts through revision. (p. 328)

The portfolio assessment promises to be a “natural extension of our emphasis on process, reflecting that writing can always be made better and that writers can always improve” (Weiser, 1992, p. 100). Such views demonstrate that the portfolio aligns with the process approach to teaching writing. To show their writing processes, students can include products as well as biographies explaining how they progressed in their writing or they can turn in works in progress and suggestions for revision. Students’ drafts can enable teachers know when to help their students (Murphy, 1994, p.146). It is to be noted,

however, although revision can occur in classrooms where portfolios are not employed, the presence of the portfolio “itself tends to encourage students to revise because it suggests that writing occurs over time, not in a single sitting, just as the portfolio itself grows over time and cannot be created in a single sitting” (Sommers, 1991, p. 154).

Concerns Related to Portfolios

Wortham et al. (1998) present the following concerns and questions that teachers new to the idea of using portfolios have: how time consuming is portfolio-based assessment for the teachers? How is portfolio-based assessment different? What should go into portfolios? How much should go into portfolios? How to assess the portfolio? And, finally, what should be done with the collected materials? (pp. 9-10). Montgomery and Wiley (2008) mention the following disadvantages of portfolios:

- Teachers must plan for long term instruction that includes authentic tasks, rubrics, and self-assessment tools.
- Portfolios are time-consuming for students to assemble.
- Portfolios are time-consuming for teachers to guide and provide feedback.
- Unfocused instruction and/or ill-defined tasks lead to low reliability for evaluations in portfolio assessment. (p. 9)

Time seems to be a major concern to those involved in the portfolio program. For instance, Shaklee et al. (1997) also state that “the design and implementation of a sound portfolio assessment system takes times—time to learn, time to practice, and time to implement” (p. 143). Similarly, Johnson et al. (2006) mention that “major institutional challenges to portfolio development include time, resources, commitment, and the design and implementation of agreed-upon rubrics for scoring work. The portfolio process is labor intensive compared to scoring a multiple-choice exam” (p. 10). On the brighter side, Montgomery and Wiley (2008) suggest that the time-consuming issue can be resolved as teachers and students become familiar with the portfolio process (p. 9).

Another issue of concern related to portfolio is that there is no one way of designing portfolios (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). Callahan (1995) says despite the fact that portfolios continue to gain popularity:

However, even a cursory review of recent literature reveals that no consensus exists as to how portfolios should look, what they should contain, how they should be read, or who should assess them. Furthermore, although there is general agreement that portfolios are a potentially rich form of evaluation, opinions differ as to whether they can function best in pedagogy, individualized assessment, program evaluation, curriculum development, large scale testing or for several purposes simultaneously. (p. 118)

Along the same line, Weigle (2002) mentions that since the portfolio is being used in so many settings, "there is wide variation in terms of how portfolios are assembled, evaluated, and used" (p. 198). This indicates that portfolios can be specific to the classroom and/or contexts in which they are implemented. For this reason, it is useful to explore different contexts in order to reach to some sort of consensus as to the design of a portfolio particular to that context. Johnson et al. (2006) referring to other research state that "there is extensive literature to inform and shape our knowledge of portfolio use, portfolio contents, and portfolio development, but there is limited information about institutional issues related to portfolio development and evaluation (p. 4).

Furthermore, when the portfolio purpose is not clearly defined there is a fear that it would end up with an overwhelming amount of information (Brown, 2004). Genesee and Upshur (1996) warn against including anything that students wish to prevent portfolios from becoming mere "junk drawers" of student work (p. 101). A situation such as this can leave teachers in a dilemma of what to make of the information. Therefore, when implementing the portfolio, to prevent the portfolio from becoming a random collection of information, the instructor needs to provide the students with clear

guidelines and arrange periodic portfolio review to provide feedback (Brown, 2004, p. 257).

In portfolio assessment the question “whose work is it” comes into play as this challenges the validity and fairness of the portfolio. Herman et al. (1996) claim that “one reason for thinking that portfolios may overestimate individual performance for some students comes from portfolios’ very strength: They are integrated with instruction, and in good classroom instruction, students often get support in planning, drafting, and revising their writing” (pp. 51-52). The authors mention three dilemmas that might raise a concern for validity and fairness for the teacher or an outside rater: first, students who receive assistance from their teachers, peers, parents or others, does that make their work better when assessed? In this light, what does the portfolio tell us about the ability of the students? Second, if some students receive more help than others, then is one group of students at more advantage than the other? Third, if the portfolio contains work that is collaborative, then how can a rater judge that student’s ability based on collaborative work? (pp. 52-53). In essence, such questions and concerns need to be taken into consideration when designing and implementing the portfolio.

Also, there are possibilities that portfolios may not produce the intended positive impact. For instance, Spalding and Cummins (1998) conducted a survey on freshmen at the University of Kentucky to find out what they thought about the state mandated law to maintain a writing portfolio as part of educational reform during the senior year of high school. The authors found that (21.6%) of the students felt that the portfolio was not useful because “it took too much time.” (16.2%) thought that the portfolio was “a waste of time.” The students’ responses showed that they viewed the portfolio as an imposition

from their teachers, who in turn were under pressure from the state. It is to be noted that (16.9%) saw that portfolios helped to develop their writing skill and prepare them for college (p. 182).

Despite the concerns mentioned, Montgomery and Wiley (2008) have a positive attitude toward the portfolio as they claim that “although the disadvantages of portfolio assessment are to be taken seriously, they are not so daunting that they cannot be overcome by careful planning and a willingness to embrace change” (p. 10).

In sum, the survey of literature on the portfolio in this chapter focused on highlighting the portfolio use, its benefits, and issues of concerns. The review revealed that not much study or research has been done to explore the portfolio use within an intensive English program. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on exploring ESL instructors and students’ perspective toward assessment portfolio in an IEP, mainly the opportunities and/or challenges that arise as a result of incorporating the assessment portfolio. The literature review chapter also helps to better understand the following chapters: chapter 4 which provides a detailed report of the portfolio implementation project at IEI, and chapters 5 and 6 which discuss ESL teachers’ attitudes and students’ opinions on portfolios, respectively.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate ESL instructors' and students' perceptions toward the implementation of assessment portfolios in the writing class at an American IEP. The research questions underpinning this study are

- Prior to using the portfolio, what beliefs and/or concerns do the instructors have about the assessment portfolio at this specific Intensive English Program?
- As instructors start using the portfolio, what opportunities and/or challenges arise?
- After using the portfolio a few sessions, what are the instructors' final perceptions of the portfolio? How do they view the portfolio as an instructional and assessment tool? What further benefits and/or issues of concern emerge?
- How useful and/or challenging do ESL students find the assessment portfolio?
- To what extent does the larger population of ESL students enrolled in IEI share the portfolio perceptions of the students who were interviewed?

In this chapter, I will discuss the approach used in the present study to provide answers to the research questions posed above. This chapter is divided into seven sections: context of the study, participants, research design, data collection, data analysis, and reporting findings.

Context of the Study

The context of this study spanned over a period of 40 weeks (spring 1, spring 2, summer, fall 1, and fall 2 sessions) of the year 2009 at the Intensive English for Internationals Program (IEI) at the University of Memphis. Each session lasts for eight

weeks. IEI consists of seven levels of instruction, from beginning to advanced. The program offers five 8-week sessions during the academic year with starting dates in January, March, June, August, and October. Full-time students study 23 hours per week (<http://iei.memphis.edu>). Most students at IEI come from their home countries to take an intensive English course; the reasons for taking the ESL classes vary. New students at IEI are placed in appropriate levels through placements tests.

Writing skills are taught along with reading skills by the same instructor. Although each of the two skills has its separately stated objectives and teaching materials, a holistic grade is given at the end of the session. The Reading/Writing class meets for two hours on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and for an hour and half on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Instructors usually spend the first half of class on the reading skill, and the second half on the writing skill.

Research Participants

The research participants were the four instructors, AK, BE, HS, and SM teaching levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively, 17 students enrolled in levels 3 and 5, and an additional 37 IEI students. The researcher read out the IRB letter of consent (Appendix I1) to all participants prior to the interviews, and had copies of the letter available for those who needed one for their personal records. Both groups of participants, instructors and students, in this study were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Instructors

Table 1 shows one of the instructors is male and three are female. The total number of teaching years varies from 6 to 18; whereas, the number of years teaching at IEI ranges from 9 to 2.5. BE and AK were the instructors teaching levels 3 and 5 during

the first session of 2009 (spring 1 / eight weeks); SM and HS were the instructors teaching levels 4 and 6 during the second session (spring 2 / eight weeks). This meant that the students had different instructors for each session.

Table 1

Instructors' Information

Name	Male (M) Female (F)	Teaching Experience	Years at IEI	Current Level Teaching
BE	F	18 years	9 years	3
AK	M	10 years	7 years	5
SM	F	6 years	5 years	4
HS	F	15 years	2.5 years	6

Students

All the student participants in this study were selected as a “*sample of convenience*” which is defined as those participants who the researcher can have easy access to (McKay, 2006, p. 37). Data from the student participants were collected over two phases.

Tables 2 and 3 provide demographic information about the 17 students involved in the first phase of the data collection: name, gender, country, language, length of stay in the US, level started at IEI, and educational background. Students came from diverse cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds and were of different age groups and had different reasons for taking an intensive English course. At the time when the study

was conducted, the number of students enrolled in Level 3 Reading/Writing class was 11, and in Level 5, the number was 8. The researcher was able to include 10 of the 11 students in level 3 and 7 out of the 8 students enrolled in level 5, that is 17 students total.

As shown in Table 2, student participants from level 3 consisted of 4 male and 6 female students. In terms of country of origin, 4 students came from South Korea, 1 each from Mali, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela, Thailand, and Turkey. Length of stay in the US ranged from those who had recently arrived to those who have been here for 10 months. The level at which they started their English as a Second Language (ESL) course ranged between foundation to the current level 3.

Table 2

Level 3 Student Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Student		Country	Language	Length of stay in the US	Level started at IEI	Education
	Male (M)	Female (F)					
Chin-Ho	M		S. Korea	Korean	5 months	1	Completed high school
Dae-Hoe	M		S. Korea	Korean	10 months	foundation	Completed university
Chung-Hee	M		S. Korea	Korean	9 months	1	Sophomore (Korea)

(Table continues)

Table 2 (Continued)

Level 3 Student Participants' Demographic Information

Chin-Sun	F	S. Korea	Korea	5 months	1	Completed high school
Jamil	M	Mali	French	3 months	2	Completed high school
Natalia	F	Dominican	Spanish	2 years	1	Completed high school
Paula	F	Colombia	Spanish	6 months	1	Completed university
Ana	F	Venezuela	Spanish	2 months	3	Completed university
Oy	F	Thailand	Thai	1 week	3	Completed university
Esra	F	Turkey	Turkish	5 months	1	Completed high school

Table 3 indicated that the number of students who participated in this research from level 5 consisted of 6 male students and 1 female student. In terms of country of origin, 2 students came from South Korea, and 1 each from India, Venezuela, Taiwan, China, and Mali. Length of stay in the US ranged from those who had recently arrived to sixteen months. The level at which they started their ESL course ranged between foundation to the current level 5.

Table 3

Level 5 Student Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Student		Country	Language	Length of stay in the US	Level started at IEI	Education
	Male (M)	Female (F)					
Ahmed	M		Mali	French	16 months	1	High school
Lee	M		China	Chinese	8 months	3	Undergraduate
Sam	M		Taiwan	Chinese	6 months	4	High school
Hyun-Ki	M		S. Korea	Korean	7 months	2	High school
Ross	M		S. Korea	Korean	3 months	3	Undergraduate
Sham	M		India	Hindi	8 months	4	Engineer
Elisa	F		Venezuela	Spanish	2 days	5	High school

Generalization is not feasible; however, the participants involved in this study can be considered as representatives of the population of L2 students commonly found in the intensive English program at IEI.

The student participants from whom data were collected during the second phase of this study had maintained a portfolio for one session or more. Data were collected by means of a written survey questionnaire (see Appendix G4). Forty-two students completed and returned the written questionnaire. There were 23 female and 19 male. The questionnaires were delivered to the students by their classroom teacher and returned

to the researcher after completion. Five of the questionnaires were discredited due to significant inconsistency in the responses. It is worth mentioning that the idea for involving more students in the study came from Angel's unpublished dissertation (2008) which focused on students' perception toward learning portfolios at a two-year vocational community college. After interviewing seven students using both open-ended and semi-structured approach, Angel (2008) used a survey approach to collect further data from a larger full time population of students to determine the extent to which the interviewed students' perspectives corresponded with the broader populations' attitude toward the portfolio. This study also employs a similar approach.

Research Design

The main source of data collection for this study was through interviews, which is a qualitative method. According to MacKey and Gass (2005), "...the term qualitative research can be taken to refer to research that is based on descriptive data that does not make (regular) use of statistical procedures" (p. 162). Mackey and Gass state that qualitative data usually includes thick description, natural and holistic representation, few participants, emic perspectives, cyclical and open-ended process, possible ideological orientation, and research questions that tend to be general and opened ended (pp. 162-164).

Interviews seemed an appropriate procedure for garnering answers to the questions posed in this research as they "allow researchers to investigate phenomenon that are not directly observable, such as learners' self-reported perceptions or attitudes" (MacKey & Gass, 2005, p. 173). For the purpose of this study, the instructors/students interview followed a semi-structured format due to its nature of flexibility as it allows the

researcher to use a predetermined set of questions and at the same time it provides the opportunity to obtain further information by asking follow-up questions (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 173).

One of the drawbacks of interviews, however, involves the researcher's subjectivity in recording and interpreting data. To bring certain reliability to the data obtained from the interviews, the researcher requested the IEI director to sit in during one of the interviews with the instructors. The IEI director acted as an outside objective observer during the interview. Appendix H1 shows the email response that the researcher received from the director after the interview.

A limitation of qualitative data is also that its results cannot be generalized to other populations. To add further credibility to my findings, data were also obtained by means of written survey questionnaires from a larger population of students enrolled at IEI. The purpose of this procedure was to add further credibility and determine the extent to which the attitudes of the interviewed students were shared by those of the larger group (see Angel, 2008). Data from the larger group were gathered through a written questionnaire which consisted of close-ended statements. The survey approach was used because it helps to "obtain a snapshot of conditions, attitudes, and/or events at a single point in time" (Nunan, 1992, p. 140). To ensure reliability to the questionnaire, I followed McKay's (2006) suggestion and included items that asked similar questions using different forms to bring out any inconsistency (internal inconsistency) in the participants' responses (p. 41). For example:

- I like keeping a portfolio
- I did not like keeping a portfolio

Data Collection

The overall data collection spanned over a period of 40 weeks. Questions used in the interview were generated from different sources: the literature review, unpublished dissertations (Angel, 2008; Liu, 2003; Norman, 1998), and research paper (Stark, 1996). Statements for the written survey questionnaire were mostly generated from the data collected and analyzed from the 17 students' interviews.

Instructors

Through multiple interviewing (see Appendices E1, E2, and E3), I attempted to ensure better reliability of the collected data and its interpretation. Instructors were provided with a copy of the questions to familiarize them with the content prior to the interviews. All of the interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed.

Instructors BE and AK, teaching levels 3 and 5 respectively, were interviewed twice in Spring 1(2009)—at the beginning and toward the end of the spring 1 session. After BE's and AK's third attempt with the portfolio, I interviewed the instructors one more time. The average amount of time spent interviewing the two instructors was 102 minutes (refer to Table 4).

Table 4

Time Spent Interviewing Levels 3 and 5 Instructors

Interview	Spring 1	Spring 1	Summer	Total
Name	Length of interview in minutes (m)			
BE	18	30	48	096 m
AK	16	30	61	107 m

Similarly, during spring 2, instructors SM and HS, were interviewed twice, at the beginning and end of the session. After the instructors' third attempt with the portfolio (fall 1), I interviewed the instructors again. The average amount of time spent interviewing the two instructors was 73 minutes (refer to Table 5).

Table 5

Time Spent Interviewing Levels 4 and 6 Instructors

Interview	Spring 2	Spring 2	Fall 1	Total
Name	Length of interview in minutes			
SM	13	32	34	79 m
HS	09	30	27	66 m

Further data were collected during the sessions (spring 1 and spring 2) when the IEI director formally met with the instructors and researcher to follow-up the portfolio progress (refer to table 6). The meeting was recorded.

Table 6

IEI Director's Follow-Up Meetings with Instructors: Time and Sessions

Name	Faculty Meeting
BE	56 minutes (spring 1, 2009)
AK	
SM	52 minutes (spring 2, 2009)
HS	

Data were also collected during the summer session faculty meeting (2009) when the researcher was allowed to follow up with the instructors involved in this study.

Table 7

Faculty Meeting: Length of Time

	Time
Summer Faculty Meeting	29 minutes

Informal conversations with the instructors throughout the portfolio project were another source of data.

IEI Director

In the summer session, data were collected from the IEI director by means of an interview to get the administrative point of view on the portfolio.

Table 8

Time Spent Interviewing IEI Director

Name	Interview
IEI Director	38 minutes

Students: Phase 1

The students interviewed in this study were enrolled in BE's level 3 and AK's level 5 reading/writing class during spring 1. In spring 2, almost all of the students moved to the next level and were in SM's level 4 and HS's level 6.

On the first day of spring 1 session, the researcher collected demographic information (see Appendix G1) from the students enrolled in levels 3 and 5, and scheduled appointments for the first interview (Appendix G2). The purpose of the first interview was to ask for any clarifications regarding the demographic information they had provided as well as to learn about their initial thoughts on the portfolio. The interview was semi-structured in nature and recorded on a digital recorder.

At the beginning of the next Spring 2 session, after the students had had experience with the portfolios in their writing class, I interviewed the students and reviewed with them their portfolio contents. Generally, during both interviews, I asked students for clarification on any answers that they provided or probed for further information. I even contacted the student interviewees by email for parts of the interview that needed further clarification. Tables 8 and 9 provide a summary of the number of interviews with the students and the length of time spent during each interview.

Table 9

Time Spent Interviewing Students

Interview	spring 1 (beginning) Time	spring 2 (beginning) Time	Total Time
Name	Length of interview in minutes (m)		
Chin-Ho	17	31	48 m
Dae-Hoo	25	41	66 m
Chung-Hee	19	21	40 m
Chin-Sun	19	35	54 m
Jamil	16	36	52 m
Natalia	13	33	46 m
Paula	33	42	75 m
Ana	19	27	46 m
Oy	16	34	50 m
Esra	21	42	63 m

Table 10

Time Spent Interviewing Students

Interview	spring 1 (beginning) Time	spring 2 (beginning) Time	Total Time
Name	Length of interview in minutes (m)		
Ahmed	23	32	55 m
Lee	24	53	77 m
Sam	16	35	51 m
Hyun-Ki	33	46	79 m
Ross	06	33	39 m
Sham	08	21	29 m
Elisa	08	27	35 m

Students: Phase II

During phase 2, data were collected by means of a written survey questionnaire from a total of 42 ESL students. The students were from levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 at IEI. The questionnaire, in this study, consisted of closed-ended statements (see Appendix G4). Students were asked to select and check one of five categories: always (100%), usually (80%), sometimes (50%), occasionally (20%), never (0%), and I do not understand the question. Five of the questionnaires were discredited. Before administering the survey, I had tested the questionnaire with a small number of IEI students to fix any ambiguities in the questionnaire.

Data Coding, Analysis, and Interpretation

Instructors' and Students' Interviews

The first step in data analysis was to transcribe all the interviews which I did personally to ensure accuracy. Second, the transcribed interviews were analyzed by means of coding, that is looking for patterns pertinent to the research questions. MacKey and Gass (2005) state that “in qualitative research, coding is usually grounded in the data” (p.241). Hence, the framework for analyzing the data in this study consisted of closely examining the instructors’/students’ interview transcripts and hand coding the data by identifying, categorizing, and labeling patterns and themes pertinent to the research questions. The semi-structured feature of the interviews made this process easier.

Students' Written Survey

The written survey questionnaires were analyzed by reporting the frequency of students’ responses to the items on the questionnaire. For example, I counted how many students responded to each survey statement with ‘always (100%)’, ‘usually (80%)’ and so on. When analyzing the written survey, I discredited five questionnaires because they contained inconsistent responses. For example:

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence.
2. I like keeping the portfolio.		✓				
7. I do not like keeping the portfolio.		✓				

Reporting Findings

In chapters 4 and 5, I organized and reported the participants' (instructors and students) interview responses by means of a cross case analysis, which according to McKay (2006), "involves organizing the responses of several interviewees according to the topic raised in the interviews" (p. 57). This method is appropriate when the researcher wants to "highlight particular aspects of [the] research topic" (p. 57).

I presented students' quotes from the interviews as transcribed, that is, I did not edit students' quotes for grammar. When reporting students' responses on the written questionnaire, I displayed the data in both number (n) and percentage (%) in a tabulated format, followed by a brief explanation of the results. The tables were placed alongside with the findings from the interviewed students to make it easier to highlight the degree to which the interviewed students agree with the surveyed group. When reporting the findings from the survey questionnaire, I left out those items which were included to test

the internal consistency of the responses (see Appendix G4 for a complete list of the survey items and students' responses to all the items).

Through the use of multiple forms of data collection method and sources, I attempted to triangulate the data to enhance the validity and credibility of this study and its findings so as to get a broader picture of instructors' and students' perception and attitudes toward the portfolio.

CHAPTER 4: IMPLEMENTING THE PORTFOLIO AT IEI

Getting Started with the Portfolio

After considerable thought, I planned the Intensive English for Internationals (IEI) version of the assessment portfolio. The attempt was focused on making the portfolio an integral part of the classroom instruction, rather than a separate component.

Herman et al. (1996) suggest that a good portfolio assessment calls for preparation in advance and continuous reflections on a number of questions:

1. What is the assessment purpose?
2. What tasks should be included in the portfolio collection?
3. What standards and criteria will be applied?
4. How will consistency in scoring or judgment be assured?
5. Are the results valid for the intended purpose?
6. How are the results used? (p. 29)

Valdez Pierce and Gottlieb (1994), cited in O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996), recommend guidelines for instructors starting with the portfolio to help them use the assessment information in making decisions about students' progress. These steps include the following:

- Setting a purpose
- Matching contents to purpose
- Setting criteria [for judging student work]
- Setting standards of performance
- Getting students and parents involved (p. 46)

Questions and suggestions, such as the above, served as the base for planning the portfolio for the IEI context. Other sources I referred to for guidance included Brown (2004), Danielson and Abrutyn (1997), and the literature review in chapter 2.

Danielson and Abrutyn (1997) and O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) advise starting small when implementing portfolios by selecting a single class or subject to avoid getting overwhelmed. Keeping this suggestion in mind, the portfolio was initially

introduced into two writing classes, levels 3 and 5, during spring 1 (2009). The aim was to gradually move to levels 4 and 6 over spring 2 (2009) and finally levels 1 and 2 over the summer session (2009).

Before starting the portfolio project at each level, I interviewed the instructors to find out more about their general understanding of portfolios. After the first round of interviews, the instructors were given broad guidelines that provided them with some background information on the assessment portfolio, its purpose, and the benefits of self-assessment.

In what follows, I explain in detail the procedures that involved the implementation of the portfolio project at IEI and which spanned over a period of 40 weeks: spring 1, spring 2, summer, fall 1, and fall 2.

Phase 1: Putting the Handouts Together

Objectives of the Writing Class

The first step in implementing the assessment portfolio at IEI was to determine the teaching objectives of the writing class. Therefore, based on the general objectives stated in the IEI curriculum, I explicitly spelled out the objectives for levels 3 and 5 and provided each instructor with a copy for them to provide any suggestions or feedback. The following is an example of level 3 writing objectives (see Appendix B2 for level 5 objectives):

Level 3 Writing emphasizes planning and composing different types of paragraphs:

- Narrative paragraph
- Opinion paragraph
- Definition paragraph

Students will learn to

- write a clear title for the paragraph,
- formulate a clear topic sentence for the paragraph,
- write supporting sentences to develop the topic sentence,
- write a concluding sentence for the paragraph,
- organize your ideas logically and coherently,
- write clear and grammatically correct paragraphs, and
- use a variety of sentence patterns and vocabulary appropriate for the assignment.

After the ‘objectives’ handout was approved by the instructors, the second step was to specify the desired goals we wanted to achieve by implementing the portfolio at IEI as well as the contents of the portfolio.

Portfolio Purpose

At IEI, the portfolio is oriented toward classroom use and its general purpose is to document students’ progress in writing different types of paragraphs and essays in English. During the interview, the IEI director stated:

The portfolio can help our program be more holistic about how we are going about our evaluation of the students. If we did this across the board, it would give us some uniformity and some structure to enable us to move the students from one level to another and all basically be on the same page of what we are trying to get the students to accomplish. We would have something in hand, visible of what the students had done and so it would be an ongoing record for them. It would help us better to manage the whole system of evaluation and of moving them up through the different levels.

Further specific aims of the portfolio were identified with help from the IEI director:

- To document students’ writing ability
- To monitor students’ writing progress

- To reflect classroom instruction and goals
- To modify instruction based on students' performance in the writing class
- To develop students' reflective ability
- To maintain a continuous record of student writing performance from one session to the next

Portfolio Contents

Once the portfolio purpose(s) was identified, the next step was to match the portfolio contents to the purpose. Since the main goal was to document students' learning and see the extent to which they have mastered the curriculum objectives, we, the IEI director and researcher, decided that the portfolios will contain everything that demonstrates students' efforts toward achieving their learning goals, such as their rough drafts, final paper, peer assessment, self-assessment, and instructors' scoring rubrics. This way, the portfolio entries will document students' progress and improvement toward the goals identified and stated above. I asked the director if it might be possible to allow students to select the materials to be included in the portfolio; however, as she noted:

I think we are limited with the amount of time that we have in each session. The students do not have a semester's worth of materials to pull from. They have got eight weeks and so that would limit the range of choices that the students would have.

Hence, we decided to include all three paragraphs and/or essays as well as the drafts that the students produced in their classes.

Portfolio Guidelines

Once the teaching objectives, portfolio purpose, and entries had been determined, I wrote down guidelines for the students and teachers on the materials to be included in

the portfolio. The following statement from the portfolio purpose handout specifies the instructor's purpose of the portfolio for level 3:

My goal this session is to implement portfolios in the writing class. The portfolio should help you keep track of your writing as well as reflect on your writing progress. I think it is important that you see not only your final products but also the effort behind them, i.e. the process.

We will be learning different types of writing paragraphs this session, narrative, opinion, definition paragraphs, as well as simple summarizing.

You'll place your first, second, final draft, self-assessment, and scoring rubrics in the portfolio to show how much your writing has improved, and the extent to which you have met the objectives of this class.

Your drafts should be clearly dated.

Student Self-Assessment

According to O'Malley and Valdez Pierce's (1996) definition of the assessment portfolio, student self-assessment is an essential component; therefore, I put together the self-assessment questions to guide students evaluate their writing skill against the work they produced in their writing class. This activity was also meant to help students develop their reflective ability, which was one of the identified goals of using the portfolio at IEI.

Two types of self-assessment were designed—one which required students to identify their writing skills based on a 5-point scale (Appendix C1 and C2), and one which required them to respond to open-ended questions (see Appendix C3 for examples). The first type was more structured and the second was open-ended questions.

Rubrics for Scoring Students' Writing

To evaluate students' writing skill, I provided instructors with examples of analytical scoring rubrics appropriate for the levels. The rubrics were designed based on samples found in Brown (2004) and Weigle (2002). The instructors then revised and

modified those rubrics to suit their classroom needs and teaching (see Appendices D1 and D2 for examples).

Phase 2: Implementing the Portfolio in Levels 3 and 5

Spring 1 Session (2009)

8-Weeks

Week 1: on the first day of classes, I went to levels 3 and 5 writing classes and explained the purpose of the portfolios and objectives of the writing class as well as requested the students to cooperate in the research. The students were provided with pocket folders and names tags as well as copies of the portfolio purpose and writing objectives which they placed in their folders. Next, I asked the students to assess their writing ability at the beginning of the session and place the assessment in their portfolios. I suggested that the instructors look at the students' self-assessment.

Weeks 2 and 3: on the second week of classes, I requested the instructors to remind the students about the portfolio purpose and classroom objectives. During an informal follow-up with the instructors on the third week, I learned that they had introduced the scoring rubric to the students and provided them with a copy that would be used to analytically assess their writing assignments.

BE (an instructor) decided to use the rubric to assess both students' drafts and final paper. AK (also an instructor) decided that he would provide the same rubric to students for peer assessment and also use it to assess their final paper. After AK used the rubric to assess students' first writing task, he realized that for the second assignment, he needed to modify the rubric. So, he asked me to revise some categories of the rubric. I returned the rubric after doing the necessary revisions.

Week 4: on the fourth week, AK allowed me to look through the Level 5 set of portfolios which contained their first assignment drafts and final paper. There were total eight portfolios. I looked through the seven students' portfolios that were part of this research. A cursory glance at the portfolios revealed the following:

Ross	Portfolio was organized with the drafts, and final draft clearly dated and all the other handouts viz. portfolio purpose, class objectives, and self-assessment.
Elisa	Portfolio was organized with the drafts, and final draft clearly dated and all the other handouts viz. portfolio purpose, class objectives, and self-assessment.
Sham	Handouts viz. portfolio purpose, class objectives, and self-assessment were missing
Hyun-Ki	Handouts viz. portfolio purpose, class objectives, and self-assessment were missing
Jamil	Initial rough drafts were missing
Leo	Portfolio contained materials irrelevant to the writing class
Sam	Portfolio contained materials irrelevant to the writing class

It became apparent that what I had thought was explicit instruction needed to be even more explicit. Then, I prepared a checklist for the students to help them be better organized. The following is a sample:

Student Checklist

- Place the portfolio purpose, L5 objectives, and self-assessment handouts on the right pocket of the portfolio.
- Place all the drafts of the first writing assignment on the left side.
- Make sure that you clearly date all your drafts or label them as Draft One, Draft Two, etc.
- Organize drafts as following: the first draft at the bottom, second draft in the middle, and final draft on the top.

- Staple, clip, (or follow your instructor's suggestion) all your first writing assignment drafts.
- Remove any materials from the portfolio that are not related to the 'Level 5 writing objectives'.

The checklist was also provided to the other instructor, BE, and both instructors were requested to go through the list with their students and help students clean up their portfolios.

During this week, I provided the instructors with the second self-assessment handouts. During an informal follow-up, BE told me that she had a conference with her students and also showed me some of her students' drafts. I noticed that BE had collected the students' drafts and suggested that BE place the collected drafts inside students' portfolios so that she could monitor their portfolios as well as its organization. BE also informed the researcher that she reminded students about the necessity of keeping the portfolios organized and that she would do on spot checking of their portfolios the following day.

Week 5: this week marked the IEI director's follow-up meeting with the instructors using the portfolio in their writing class. I was invited to sit in and allowed to tape the informal meeting. During this week, I also had a formal follow-up interview with instructor AK. The interview was taped and later transcribed. Storing the portfolios in a place where they could be accessible to both students and instructors was an issue of concern that emerged during the follow-up meeting.

Addressing the portfolio storage concern, we decided that once a session was over, students would transfer their portfolio contents to a binder which was stored in a

room at the IEI office and was also available to both students and teachers who wanted to look through the portfolios. Students who were completing their English language course at IEI and leaving would be reminded to pick up their binders.

Week 6: instructors had completed working with their students' second writing assignment. As was decided during the meeting with the IEI director, instructors teaching levels 3 and 5 would meet with the instructors teaching levels 4 and 6 so that the latter could look through the portfolios and get an idea of who their potential students would be prior to the start of the new session. I sent out an email reminder to the instructors, BE and AK, as well as to SM and HS so the latter could sit with the former and briefly go through the students' portfolios. BE went through the portfolios with SM; AK went through the portfolio with HS. During this week, I also interviewed BE.

Week 7: I provided the instructors with the self-assessment handouts for the following week. I suggested that, after students self-assess, the instructors look through them and place them in the portfolios.

Week 8 (final week of classes): we finally had a sample of students' portfolios that documented students' progress and provided a picture of students' learning to the next level instructor. The portfolios contained students' drafts, final papers, self-assessment, teachers' scoring rubrics, and peer assessments if available.

Phase 3: Implementing the Portfolio in Levels 4 and 6

Spring 2 Session (2009)

8-Weeks

The students who completed levels 3 and 5 and moved to levels 4 and 6 had already experienced maintaining a portfolio. However, the instructors teaching these

levels were new to it. Therefore, I repeated the same steps mentioned above with the new instructors, SM and HS, teaching Levels 4 and 6. One addition this time was the end of session portfolio content check list, which I asked instructors to modify according to their classroom needs and assignments. The following is an example:

Portfolio Content Checklist

Put a check mark (✓) next to the contents that are inside your portfolio.

Portfolio purpose	_____
Writing objectives	_____
Self-assessment	_____
Assignment 1	
• Drafts	
• Final draft	
• Scoring rubric	_____
Assignment 2	
• Drafts	
• Final draft	
• Scoring rubric	_____
Self-assessment 2	_____
Assignment 3	
• Drafts	
• Final paper	
• Scoring rubric	_____
Self-assessment 3	_____

Organization

My assignments are clearly dated	_____
Each assignment's drafts, final paper, scoring rubric are stapled together.	_____

As I worked with the instructors, SM and HS, who were new to the portfolio, I continued following up informally with instructors BE and AK teaching levels 3 and 5.

Phase 4: Implementing the Portfolio in Levels 1 and 2

Summer Session (2009)

8-Weeks

By the summer session, students in levels 3, 4, 5, and 6, who were taught by instructors BE, SM, AK, and HS had a portfolio requirement in their classes. I continued following up with these instructors during this session and provided them with a handout summarizing the purpose of the portfolio to serve as a reminder of the goals and objectives of the portfolio.

In the summer session, levels 1 and 2 did not have a portfolio requirement yet; therefore, I worked with the two teachers, MD and QN, new to the portfolio. I repeated the same steps with the instructors that I had with the other four instructors. It is to be noted that MD and QN were not part of the data collection.

During the summer session faculty meeting, I recommended using the portfolio interactively with the students and scheduling conferencing so that the various components, viz. students' written pieces, their self-assessment, and teacher's rubrics could be tied together to illustrate students' learning and progress. The IEI director also encouraged the instructors by sending out the following email:

Dear Reading/Writing Teachers,

Shafiqah has given you guidelines to follow for the portfolios. Please follow these guidelines as much as you can within the context of your classes. Obviously things will work differently for level 1 than they would for level 6. Two of the guidelines are important for making sure that the portfolios are used for assessment rather than simply as a collection:

1. *At the beginning of each session, be sure to read through the portfolios of all students who had been in the preceding class level. Make notes of improvements and reoccurring issues that you may see and use this information to help you personalize your instruction within the context of your level's particular goals and objectives.*
2. *Go through the portfolios in a conference format with each of your students at least once toward the middle or second half of the session. Help the students to recognize improvements and on-going issues with their writing.*

If you have questions, continue to work with Shafiqah as your resource. I would like for all of us to discuss our progress sometime before we finish in July.

Thank you for your willingness to work with Shafiqah on this. I think it is a useful tool for us as we seek to continually improve our teaching. You all are great!

Thanks,

.....

Further, I suggested to HS, level 6/7 instructor, that since most of her students had been using the portfolio for the past three sessions, they write a letter of evaluation by reflecting on their writings over the previous sessions and assess their progress. The following questions from Genesee and Upshur (1996) were provided to help them:

- What do you notice about your earlier work?
- How do you think your writing changed?
- What do you know now that you didn't know before?
- At what points did you discover something new about writing?
- How do the changes you see in your writing affect the way you see yourself as a writer?
- Are there pieces you have changed your mind about—that you liked before, but don't like now, or didn't like before but do like now? If so, which ones? What made you change your mind?
- In what ways do these pieces illustrate what you can do as a writer? (p. 110)

Examples of their responses are provided in chapter 6.

Toward the end of this session, I interviewed AK one more time to get an overview and a final reflection of his experience with the portfolio over the previous sessions.

Phase 5: Portfolios Finally Instituted Across all IEI Levels

Fall 1 Session (2009)

8-Weeks

By fall 1, all the students who had a portfolio in the previous level moved to the next level with their portfolios. I continued following up with the instructors. I interviewed BE for the third time to get an overview of her experience with the portfolio over the past few sessions.

Fall 2 Session (2009)

8-Weeks

By fall 2, I interviewed each SM and HS for the third time to get an overview of their experience with the portfolio. That was the final step of my data collection from the instructors. In the next chapter, I present and discuss results obtained from the interviews with the four instructors, BE, AK, SM, and HS, conducted at different times of the portfolio project.

CHAPTER 5: ESL INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIO

The first major purpose of this study was monitoring and reporting instructors' evolving perception and attitude toward the assessment portfolio in the intensive English program. The data for this chapter were generated from two sources: the semi-structured interviews and the summer faculty meeting.

In this section, I have presented the results based on the patterns and categories that emerged from the data collected during the first, second, and third round of interviews as well as from the data gathered during the meetings. In essence, this section attempts to provide answers to the first three research questions formulated at the beginning of this dissertation:

- Prior to using the portfolio, what beliefs and/or concerns do the instructors have about the assessment portfolio at this specific Intensive English Program?
- As instructors start using the portfolio, what opportunities and/or challenges arise?
- After using the portfolio a few sessions, what are the instructors' final perceptions of the portfolio? How do they view the portfolio as an instructional and assessment tool? What further benefits and/or issues of concern emerge?

The Beginning

Process Approach to Writing

All four teachers stated that they used the process approach to teaching writing, during which they required their students to write at least two drafts before turning in

their final paper for a final evaluation. The different stages of writing were supported with feedback and comments from the instructor and peers.

When asked how the instructors assessed their students' progress, that is how they could tell their students were progressing, AK said that his assessment of the writing was "subjective" and HS stated that her evaluation was "not really organized enough." BE mentioned that she followed the rubrics; SM, too, stated that she used the rubrics and added that "I don't know that I am really that good at assessing objectively their progress." To score students' final paper, BE and SM used an analytic rubric; AK and HS did not. All the four instructors had some form of conferencing with their students to talk about their writing performance and address their needs.

Portfolios at IEI

AK, during the first round of interviews, stated that the use of the portfolio seems "ideal" within the program at IEI "because of the structure that all of the teachers try to follow, you have a clear progression of skills that they have to go through from level to level, and so a well used portfolio will help them see, both teachers and students, if they are meeting the goals in that level."

Previous Experience with the Portfolio

AK had some experience with the showcase portfolio when he taught in Peru, where students were required to save samples of their best work in a portfolio pertaining to all of their classes. In the previous sessions, BE had asked her students to collect and save their writing assignments in a portfolio at the end of each session.

Instructors HS and SM had never used the portfolio, before. When asked what they knew about the portfolio, HS thought of the portfolio as a folder in which students

put their work; similarly, SM saw the portfolio as something that stays with the students and in which they save their writing samples to see their progress.

The portfolio as an assessment tool was going to be a new experience for all the four instructors.

Potential Value of the Portfolio

AK foresaw using the assessment portfolio as “very effective for seeing from beginning to end the process that the students are using.” He further elaborated that “it also helps the students be aware of their own progress, especially, if you can keep that portfolio overtime and be able to look back more than an eight-week period, more than a sixteen-week period, and be able to say, ‘wow, I have gone from here to there,’ so for motivation it can be helpful.” The portfolio can help students see how well they are meeting the goals of the class.

BE, HS, and SM stated that the portfolio would provide an opportunity for monitoring students’ writing progress. For instance, BE stated that the portfolio can serve as a learning tool and help students see their weaknesses. HS said that the portfolio “should be able to help you see the process.” SM, admitting that she did not have a clear vision of the portfolio usage, said she assumed that “it would be easy to see their [students] progress if you had a portfolio.”

The instructors mentioned further opportunities that the portfolio might provide. BE stated that the portfolio would help teachers be more structured and find more about their students. HS expressed that at times she had students come to level 6 with serious writing problems. During informal conversations with teachers, who had had those students, HS would learn that the students had those problems in those levels, too;

therefore, the instructor felt that the portfolio “will help us zero in on those things so they don’t get to level 6 with the same problems...the portfolio will help us catch some things and work on them sooner.”

Concerns

When asked what challenges the instructors thought they would have to deal with when using the portfolio in their class, three of the teachers mentioned organization as an issue of concern. For example, AK felt that he was not very organized and he might not emphasize the need for being organized. He suggested that for the portfolio to be successful, he would have to devote a certain amount of classroom time, which he feared might be an issue. The instructor stated that if he could see the benefit then he would be more likely to pay more attention to it and make the portfolio part of his instruction.

SM gave a similar statement and said that maintaining the portfolio in an organized way might require some extra work. BE, on the other hand, said that the portfolio would help her be more organized. HS, however, said that she did not have adequate information on the portfolio to comment on any problems that she might come across. The instructor had heard that the portfolio was a lot of work; however, she did not understand the reason for the portfolio to be more work for the teacher. The apparent concern that stemmed during the first round of the interviews was related to the class time and the extra work needed for maintaining the portfolio.

Student Self-Assessment: Benefits and Concerns

Except AK, none of the other three teachers had used self-assessment in their class. AK pointed out that he used student self-assessment, sometimes, during the mid-session and believed “when self-assessment is combined with the goals of the assignment

it can be very useful.” HS stated that she encouraged her students to reflect on their writings but she had not used formal tools for self-assessment. The instructor said that if students could do self-assessment that meant that they understood “what’s right and wrong” about their writing components. Instructors, BE and SM, said, at that point, they did not have any opinion about self-assessment but would like to use it.

First Follow-Up

In spring 1 (2009), BE and AK started using the assessment portfolio in levels 3 and 5, respectively. Throughout the session, I followed up with the two instructors both formally and informally. It is to be noted that these instructors’ students were the ones involved in the first phase of data collection (*see the next chapter*).

In spring 2 (2009), that is the following session, instructors SM and HS started using the portfolio in levels 4 and 6 with the students who moved to their classes from levels 3 and 5, respectively. During this session, I worked with these two instructors as they started using the assessment portfolio.

The next section reports the results of the data obtained from the four participating instructors, during both spring 1 and spring 2. The discussion is organized based on the themes that emerged.

It’s Going Well

As the first session (spring 1) progressed, I met with AK and BE to follow-up on how their portfolio experience was evolving. At that point, instructors had already started to get a better vision of the portfolio and its purpose in the classroom. The instructors did not express any major concern at that point. For example, AK pointed out:

It is better now. I think that at first, like the first two weeks, I was kind of struggling with how I was going to incorporate it into my concept of the class, and I think that I have a much better idea of how it is going to work and is working with the class and likewise, I think, the students have a better idea of how it can help them.

BE, sharing her colleague's opinion, said:

It has been an interesting trip down the road because I am finding, always finding, new things I need to add to, new forms that I have to use like an explanation of what's exactly that I want...it is going okay. I am a little concerned with some of them keeping things that I want in the folder and keeping them in order.

HS stated:

I feel like it is going well. Again, over the seven weeks of thinking of ideas and ways for the portfolio to help the students, I think portfolios are wonderful to teachers but I think they need to be wonderful to the students, too. The idea of looking back at your work and being able to see what things direct you well and what things you have a problem in, so you can really focus on those. This should be an important issue for the students as well so that they are looking at the portfolio as a help to them.

The instructors' responses showed that the use of the portfolio seemed to be going well for them. In addition, it became apparent that they had started thinking critically about the portfolio and exploring ways to incorporate it more effectively within their classroom context. SM summed her seven week experience with the portfolio as "I think it is good. I am happy with it."

Portfolio: Value

Portfolio as a Repository Tool

BE commented that the portfolio served as a repository tool for storing students' work in one place for the students "to look and see," and added that she never collected the drafts, and realized that it was a good idea to do so for it allows students to see their progress. Along the same line, SM stated that the portfolio helped in keeping everything together.

Portfolio as a Mirror of Students' Efforts

AK noted that some of the portfolios contained more drafts than what students were asked to do, which reflected the work that those students had put in, and as a result “their end product was much cleaner grammatically, and it was obvious.” HS, too, mentioned that some students gave her more drafts than she had asked for. In this sense, the portfolio served to demonstrate students’ willingness in applying more effort.

Portfolio as a Tool for Monitoring Learning and Progress

AK pointed out that the portfolio offered the opportunity of “detailed identification of strengths and weaknesses.” HS stated that before using the portfolio she always asked her students to write several drafts; however, the portfolio provided her an opportunity of looking at students’ drafts in relation to their final paper. In the instructor’s words, the portfolio “is helpful to see the process, how [the students] are working through this, to get to where they are.” HS explained that the portfolio contained all the process in one place which allowed her to look through the whole process at one sitting when finally grading students’ essays. Prior to using the portfolio, the instructor said that she looked through their outlines, rough drafts, at different times and made comments but then never saw them again. With 5 to 12 students, she did not remember “all the things I told them and to see how they corrected those or what they did with them.” The instructor pointed out that she could have done what she had mentioned without a portfolio but never thought about doing it until she had the portfolio which consolidated and made possible looking at that process.

Portfolio as a Documentation of Learning

BE stated that the portfolio worked as a “proof” and “evidence” for both the students and instructor of what the students were doing in the class.

Portfolio as a Tool for Reflecting and Learning

A further advantage of the portfolio that AK mentioned was that it allowed students to reflect on the process, so that students could “go back and say: where did this break down? At what point was I not able to support my ideas clearly?” Similarly, HS seemed convinced that the portfolio could help students to look “back at [their] work and be able to see what things direct [them] well in and what things do [they] have problems in so [they] can really focus on those.” As a result, in order to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses, the instructor encouraged her students to reflect on their previous writings in the portfolio when working on the new one.

Portfolio: Concerns

Students’ Perception of the Portfolio

The instructors seemed unsure as to whether the students realized the portfolio’s benefits. For example, AK said, “I still have the sense that I am trying to, kind of, sell the idea of the portfolio to the students. Some of them really have not seen the value yet, and may be they won’t, I don’t know.” BE also mentioned a similar concern but added that as the students move to the next level, the portfolio benefits would become more obvious to them. HS expressed a concern similar to AK’s and BE’s, “I think portfolios are wonderful to teachers but I think they need to be wonderful to the students, too.”

Keeping the Portfolio Organized

BE reiterated her previously mentioned concern related to ensuring that students maintain their portfolios in an organized manner. She stated that her concern was “with some of them [the students], keeping things that I want in the folder and keeping them in order.” AK, also, shared a similar concern. HS, however, stated that she did not experience any significant problems since most of the students moving to her class had used the portfolio in their previous level, “so they sort of understood the organization and that they don’t have external papers from other classes or assignments, so that has been good.”

Grading

SM’s concern was related to the final grade that she gave to the writing pieces. The instructor felt that the grade did not project a true picture of students’ writing performance since the students received help from the instructor during the writing process. She stated, “Think of any test you take, if you have somebody there with you telling you, ‘no that’s not right, try again.’ That’s going to be a different grade.”

Student Self-Assessment: Benefits

Self-Assessment Raises Consciousness

AK found self-assessment “valuable” and “important” and explained that it is much easier to work with a writer who is self-aware than “a writer who is just writing based on *it sounds good, it feels good, or I think it is right.*” Students who are conscious of their strengths and weaknesses are easier to instruct, AK added. To raise students’ awareness of the value of self-assessment, for instance, AK explicitly asked students for the benefits that the self-assessment offered to them. The positive impact of self-

assessment that HS mentioned was that some students told her that “they realized they weren’t doing as good as they had thought” which made HS feel that it “made an impression on a few people,” which the instructor thought was a good thing.

Self-Assessment as a Teaching Tool

Instructor AK had a positive attitude toward self-assessment and stated:

Self-assessment will help me make sure that the students feel that they are meeting the goals that I have asked them to meet so they think, *I can write a classification essay, I can write a cause and effect essay, I can write a reaction essay*. By the end, if they say *I agree, I agree, I agree*, then it shows me not only that they have done it, but they are aware that we have covered it in class. It shows their confidence in it, too. So, again, I don’t want to see someone say *disagree* but at least I know at the end of the term that the student recognizes that I have attempted this but was unsuccessful.

BE saw self-assessment as “very good,” and explained that it gave her insight into how students perceive themselves. The instructor stated, “I would have never realized [that] Jamil [was having trouble] with the transitions. I thought I had gone through some of that. And I hadn’t. So, there are areas they would say ‘I need more work on this’ and I may not have given them room to work on that. It helps me a lot. I hope they like it.”

SM said that the self-assessment is good as a teaching tool for “it reinforces all the things that they need to be paying attention to every time they write, spelling, commas, organization, so forth,” as it allows students to set goals and decide the areas they need to work on, such as “I need to work on mechanics, I need to work on word choice, so forth.”

Student Self-Assessment: Concerns

Question of Reliability

BE expressed a concern with the first self-assessment, done at the beginning of the session. She found that some students tended to overestimate their abilities; however,

when they assessed themselves the second time, there was some change in their perception. On the other hand, the instructor mentioned that other students were “unduly hard on themselves because they have no confidence.”

HS, however, found the first one helpful, but the second one “I am not so sure how helpful it was because I felt that everyone just checked through it agree or strongly agree.” Therefore, she suggested asking students to assess themselves twice during the session at the beginning and end. Like BE, HS noticed that some students tended to give themselves a higher assessment. The instructor expressed that perhaps the difficulty that students found when assessing their abilities may be because it is a new (western) concept or may be the students put the things that they thought the teacher wanted to hear; therefore, the instructor suggested that since most of the students had not done self-assessment before, in this light, more time should be devoted to exploring and understanding the potentials of self-assessment.

SM, too, mentioned that with the close structured self-assessment, students tended to give themselves a higher evaluation, which did not change much in the next self-assessment. SM did not feel that the self-assessment provided her with any new information about her students’ ability for she already was aware of their needs.

Second Follow-Up

Portfolio: Opportunities

Portfolios as a Record

During the summer faculty meeting, I further followed up with the instructors. At that point, HS mentioned that the portfolios she had received from her upcoming students gave her an idea of her students’ writing ability. The instructor looked at different

aspects of the students' writing, such as grammar, structure, and essay organization. Such information helped the instructor decide what types of essays or research papers she would do with them during the session.

AK, too, looked at his new students' portfolios. The instructor looked at how comfortable the students were with expanding on the topic. Such information helped him know his students better. As a result, during the drafting process, the instructor addressed his students' individual needs. AK said that such information did not change his classroom teaching but informed better his interaction with individual students.

SM, however, was not so sure whether the portfolio entries provided a valid picture of the students' writing performance since the students, usually, received lots of help and guidance from the instructor when writing the assignment. Another faculty member suggested that the presence of students' drafts could help add validity to the portfolio entries and give a better picture of students' writing performance and the help they had received.

Interactive Use of the Portfolio

At a previous time, as a researcher, I had suggested that instructors explore ways to interactively use the portfolio. HS stated that she had a conference with her students when she got the first self-assessment and first assignment. The instructor mentioned that she used the 'instructors' comment section' on the self-assessment to respond to her students' self-assessment. For example, where the students had checked "not sure" or "yes", HS wrote comments such as, "yes, that's a weak point, or yes, I can see progress." BE, also, said that she did conferencing with her students using their portfolios.

Portfolio: Concerns

Organization

During the faculty meeting, AK expressed that although the students, who moved to his class, had used the portfolio for two sessions, he was surprised to see how unorganized some of the portfolios were. The instructor had expected the students to be more organized but when some of them turned in their portfolios, the portfolios were either incomplete or contained irrelevant materials. The instructor concluded that probably some of the students needed more handholding than he thought they did. Therefore, he suggested spending some class time reviewing the importance of organization. BE mentioned that in level 3 she usually supervised her students' portfolio entries and helped them keep the portfolio clean and organized.

Student Image Projection

AK raised an interesting concern whether the portfolio could lead the instructor to form some sort of prejudice about the upcoming students.

Final Follow-Up

The purpose of the final follow-up interviews conducted toward the end of the project was to get a more comprehensive picture of the instructors' experience with the portfolio during the previous sessions. Some themes were reiterated, whereas other new ones emerged during the interviews.

Attitudes and Perceptions

Instructors were asked to reflect over their perception and use of the portfolio over the three sessions. AK said:

I think at the end of the first session, I was, maybe, a little bit resentful in having to use it and then I would say with the third group when they came in having used the portfolio for two sessions and they expressed that they thought it was valuable that definitely helped my attitude a little bit.

On asking why he felt resentment, the instructor explained that “Well, there are terms where you just don’t have enough time and if you feel that you have to add something else that you weren’t doing before, even if you see its value, you tend to feel resentful.”

On the other hand, BE mentioned that the change was mostly in the scoring rubric and stated that “the rubric is a work in progress.” Otherwise, her use of the portfolio was still the same. BE reminded that she was for the portfolio since the beginning because it lets “teachers find out as much as we can about our students, to give our students the information, and then pass up the information to the next teacher.”

HS pointed out that the portfolio has made her more aware of her students’ writing process. The instructor said that the portfolio “is more useful than I thought it was going to be.” Initially, the instructor thought of the portfolio as more of an organizational tool that helps students to keep all their work in one place. However, as she incorporated the portfolio in her writing class, over the sessions, she realized that the portfolio had more benefits than just being a repository or an organizational tool.

SM mentioned that her use of the portfolio had not changed much. However, like AK and HS, SM’s attitude toward the portfolio had changed somewhat as she said, “I think that I see some of the elements of it in a more favorable light— like the self-assessment as a teaching tool, and especially the rubric.”

Portfolios as an Instructional Tool

When instructors were asked to share their view of the portfolio as an instructional tool, AK said that the portfolio served as an instrument for helping students

learn from their mistakes by showing them how their “mistakes are being evaluated or how their strengths are being evaluated.” The instructor added that if students just looked at their final score, they will not be able to use the portfolio, effectively. BE pointed out that the portfolio documented the instruction that the students had received in their previous levels.

HS felt that using the portfolio as an instructional tool effectively was work in progress for her. The instructor, reflecting on her use of the portfolio, stated that at first when she had started using the portfolio she asked her students to put in mainly their drafts, and final paper; however, when she noticed that students had problems with organizing their ideas, she began looking at students’ outlines and required them to include the outlines in their portfolios. Later, she realized that when the students were not provided with specific topics for their essays, they faced a problem coming up with one. Therefore, HS required her students to include their brainstorming as well in the portfolio. The instructor said, “Having all these pieces of the process together has helped me, I think, and it is something I want to work on using better.” SM, too, stated that the most value of the portfolio was in its use as an instructional tool—the different portfolio entries, such as the objectives and self-assessment made the students realize “what we are going to do, these are the elements that we are looking for in a paragraph, vocabulary that has to be a certain level, etc.”

Portfolios as an Assessment Tool

Instructors were further asked to share their attitude toward the portfolio as an assessment tool. AK said that “it is helpful to balance the subjective observation with the more objective rubrics.” The presence of students’ work in one place from the start of

the term toward the end made the process of assessment easier, according to the instructor. Prior to using the portfolio, AK's assessment of students' writing was both formative and summative—the portfolio helped in better informing the instructor's assessment.

BE, also, stated that the portfolio was a good assessment tool. When further asked whether her assessment was summative or formative prior to using the portfolio, the instructor said it was “kind of both” and added that the portfolio, however, made the assessment “much more organized.”

Prior to using the portfolio, HS's assessment had also been formative meaning that she was aware that her students were making progress or having difficulties in certain areas. However, this did not affect the final evaluation. With the portfolio, the instructor stated:

It is a little more compelling because you have this portfolio sitting there and you have all their essays right there to look at, whereas before they just took their essays and they were in their notebooks I didn't go back and look at things. Over the terms, the students sort of blurred to each other so having that portfolio there makes it easier to do a summative assessment. Looking at things as they go along and saying they made progress here and you know so it is not just a grade here, a grade here, a grade here.

The portfolio helped the instructor assess her students' writing performance both formatively and summatively.

SM mentioned that the rubrics helped in assessing her students' writing performance. The instructor mentioned that before she started using the portfolio her assessment was “probably more summative,” and added that “the portfolio is more of the formative.” The instructor further clarified that her approach to teaching writing was the same, which required students to write drafts guided with feedback from the instructor and peers. However, the portfolio with the rubric made assessment more formal.

Validity of the Portfolio as an Assessment Tool

Brindley (2003) asserts that in any type of assessment, the two most significant qualities are validity and reliability (p. 310). Therefore, I deemed it necessary to ask the instructors' opinion about the validity and reliability of the portfolio. A valid assessment is one that yields the information that the instructor wants to measure; reliability, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which the assessment provides consistent results when it is repeated. AK considered the portfolio as accurate and explained that this can be achieved:

If you have done the work ahead of time saying these are the objectives for the class, these are the ways we are going to attempt to reach those goals, these are the rubrics or indicators you are going to use, so if you start that way at the beginning with that then it can be very valid because by the end you can say, yes, you did this or you didn't do this and it is easy for the students to understand at that point.

BE, too, thought that the portfolio is a valid method of assessment and pointed that the rubric with all the categories that she wanted to measure, explicitly spelled out, helped make the assessment valid. HS also perceived the portfolio as a valid form of assessment of what the students are doing in the class. SM felt the portfolio was valid since "you're watching them produce it, correct it, and all that."

Reliability of the Portfolio as an Assessment Tool

In terms of reliability, AK stated that it could be reliable but it depended on the instructors' communicating the same significance of the portfolio to the students:

I think as long as all the teachers have the same page, the same wavelength for its use and/or encouraging the students to be aware of how they are using the portfolio, its organization, I think it can be very helpful. But, if there are gaps where you have one teacher who doesn't think of it as important, doesn't place emphasis on it, then when you get a new student, the portfolio, really, isn't representative of who they are and so there needs to be a continuity in any program that's going to use it. I think, within an individual class, it is very reliable

and so for a teacher that is using it being aware of it as a tool for assessment, feedback, improvement, they can be very reliable. Like I said in a program it depends on everyone using it in a similar fashion.

BE agreed that the portfolio would be reliable if the assessor looked at each piece of writing that they turned in from the beginning to the end.

HS felt that the portfolio was reliable as an assessment tool for it gave the picture of the students' progress because the students "are really not aware we are looking at the process. They are used to us looking at the finished product and so I think you can see very realistically if they do brainstorming, you can see it and you get a better understanding of how things are working." The instructor stated that, as she had all the students' work together, she could see a little bit better about helping and "in the long run that is going to make for a better assessment of being able to see the whole thought process and understand how they are doing that." SM thought that it could be reliable since it contains students' writing process. However, she still maintained that summing up the students' writing skill with a holistic grade might not be a reliable representative of their writing skill since students receive help from the teacher and peers while working on their writing assignment.

Portfolio: Benefits

Portfolio as a Tool for Reflection

AK reiterated a point he had made during the second interview that the portfolio allowed students to "go back and look at progress." HS also mentioned that one of the benefits of the portfolio lay in its providing the students with the ability to look back.

Portfolio as a Motivational Tool

AK also maintained that the portfolio served as a "motivational tool," for example, "when you come across a student who is saying, you know, I can't do it or I am

not making any progress, let's look what you were doing two months ago and see if you are making progress. And, I will guarantee you that they will immediately recognize errors, recognize their writings had a different level than they were." HS said that students have often made comments in the last assessment that they could really see a difference and appreciated its being helpful to see their progress.

Portfolio as a Tool for Learning and Monitoring Progress

In addition, AK said that the portfolio can help in "identifying the relationship between grammatical errors. It is very helpful because you can see repeated patterns of grammatical errors." Also, AK added that "you can see students who are willing to take chances because you have a collection. You can know the students that are not just doing the minimum but taking chances trying out new things even if they fail, I think, that's what we want to encourage our students to do."

BE continued to maintain that the portfolio was valuable in that it has "everything of my students in an area and they can see it, and I can see where they started and where they're ending, and it goes up to the next teacher, and they can take it with them.... The portfolio can show what the teachers are doing...because we all have our different ways of doing things."

SM also agreed that since the portfolio held everything together it provided her with an opportunity to watch her students' process, the progress. The portfolio also enabled students to see their own progress. HS saw that the portfolio provided her with information about her new students who moved from the previous level. She looked through her students' portfolio to get an idea of their needs. The instructor mentioned that the presence of a body of work helps seeing "some things where they are not

progressing like they should and you can push them a little bit in that area. I wasn't able to do that because I didn't have that information."

Decisions the Portfolio Helped Make

As I was interested in knowing whether the portfolio helped in making any classroom decisions, I directly asked the instructors that question. AK explained:

Well, I guess there have been a couple of students who have had problems either with attendance or attitude and I think both of these students that I am thinking of were very strong writers and so it kind of allowed me to look at the student outside of his attitude and look strictly at the students' writing ability, I think it is easy to confuse those two things in the classroom and in assessment saying because the student doesn't care here she doesn't deserve as good of a grade which if they are doing quality work.... The quality of the portfolio is that you can separate the students' writing from everything else that is going on. So, if you wanted to isolate that aspect of the student, it is easier to do it through using a portfolio.

BE said that the portfolio helped her decide "what specific areas need to be stressed like transition words. A lot of time in the past I would say you need a transition word and although I would put them on the board and say what transition words were I didn't have an instrument that specifically showed the student I was measuring that and that's very important in level 3 because they start learning to put those in, so that's an area." SM saw the rubrics helped in making grading decisions. HS stated that the portfolio helped her make "basically practical decisions" and explained:

If I look at the portfolio of the incoming students and I look at the level of their essays I can say this is not a class I want to do research paper with or citations. This is a class that needs to work on organization, this is a class that needs to work on sentence structure, or just brainstorming getting ideas and finding details for them so I think it helps the instruction.

Helpful Items in the Portfolio

AK found the self-assessment much helpful than he expected and explained, "It is nice to be able to see at different points how the students look at and think of their ability,

of their progress, and I have recently discovered how I can take advantage of that in making comments back to them after seeing their self-assessment.” He also found the rubrics valuable. Other items in the portfolio such as the statement of purpose, objectives, did not make much difference as he incorporated those in his teaching. BE also found the students’ self-assessment and scoring rubrics helpful. In addition, BE found saving the rough drafts in the students’ portfolios useful. HS found all the items in the portfolio as helpful, and elaborated:

I think, for me, just having the body of students’ work all in one place is something that I find the most valuable. So often, I think that the assessment is kind of perfunctory. They are doing it but they not really thinking about it or they don’t understand the questions adequately. So I have had some good letters that were written at the end and that seemed to be helpful. You know this student actually took time to think about the portfolio and had an idea of it and had some good comments, seemed to have sort of positive reflection of it. Now, that’s a good thing. That feedback is really well thought out. That’s very helpful.

SM, as well, found the rubrics and self-assessment as helpful items. However, even before using the portfolio she used to encourage her students to put their drafts together.

Portfolio: Concerns

Concern with Portfolio Success

An important concern that emerged was related to the success of the portfolio. According to AK, the success of the portfolio depended on the teachers who are using it to have a “similar concept of its value and give it a similar amount of importance in their instruction because if they feel like it is a burden, even if they don’t say it directly, the students are going to feel it and it is going to be reflected in the way it is treated and what they do with it.” BE, also, expressed the concern that the portfolio should continue to be used across the levels, “if it doesn’t continue, then what’s the point?”

Concerns with Students' Attitude

BE still had a concern she had mentioned earlier as to whether the students understood the benefit of the portfolio.

Concerns with Portfolio Organization

AK expressed that the only concern about the portfolio was students' keeping it organized. At that point, most of the students he had in level 5, were already familiar with the portfolio, however, organization still remained an issue.

Portfolio as More but Necessary Work

When asked if the instructors found the portfolios as more work, AK said that "I'd say more work but it is necessary work." BE also said that she did not perceive the portfolio as a great deal of work and added that "it is work but not more than what I would be doing." SM, too, saw the portfolio a little bit more work as the instructor has to make sure that students do self-assessment and keep their portfolio organized. HS, however, did not perceive maintaining the portfolio as any additional work.

Portfolios and Prejudice

AK reiterated an earlier concern related to the portfolio that is running into a risk of forming certain prejudices. For example, if a student has a problem in some way or another, then the teacher seeing the portfolio before the class starts may not give the student the same chances or opportunities. On the other hand, the instructor mentioned that it could go the other way, where the instructor might "see that as a challenge and say I am going to work extra with this student."

Student Self-Assessment: Benefits and Concerns

AK expressed a concern regarding the validity of self-assessment as some students did not think carefully when assessing their writing abilities. However, the instructor saw that self-assessment can be helpful in boosting students' realization of their accomplishments:

Well being more honest, I think that by doing self-assessment at the beginning it reinforces the goals for the term and so at each point they can say, 'oh yeah! This is another thing I have done so I have accomplished this' and so I think again to help them realize that there is progress going on, the self-assessment helps.

BE expressed a concern related to a difficulty in making students state specific goals on their self-assessment that they need to work on to improve their writing skill. In other words, the goals that the students wrote on their self-assessment were mostly general. BE further mentioned that when doing self-assessment, "The average ones tend to down grade themselves."

SM preferred the responses that students wrote on the self-assessment about the things they need to work on; however, she did not see any value of the information that the students checked on the close-ended self-assessment statements regarding the things they can or cannot do. The instructor stated, "For them [student] to say yes, I am good, no, I am not good, yes, I need help with this one, I don't really see the value in that," and felt that a lot of that information was self-evident. SM used the structured self-assessment as a teaching tool to emphasize the skills that the students needed to develop. HS stated that most of the times students' self-assessment did not match their writing quality and explained:

A lot of times, they strongly agree with everything. They can write everything, they can organize, they can come up with a topic, and it is clearly not the case, or, on the other extreme, they would say they disagree with everything, they can't do this, they can't do that, when they were doing just fine. I think somewhere in that

assessment maybe this is parallel, but I don't know. When I have the students do peer editing it just never seems to work and then when I have asked them about it, they say 'oh well, I just don't feel adequate to, you know, tell someone else what to do,' so I think there's some of that in the self-assessment.

HS shared the experience of one student who in his final self-assessment letter wrote about how much better his writing was; however, when the instructor read the letter she noticed that he had the same grammar mistakes and sentence structures, but "he was obviously much more confident about the way he was writing, so I guess that's a good thing."

Closing Comments

Instructor AK supported the use of the portfolio in the IEI program stating that "it helps teachers be better evaluators." However, during the interview, the instructor admitted that although he did see the value of the portfolio, "I don't know if at this point it is valuable enough," and mentioned that if it were a free environment, he did not know if he would use a portfolio or not, or if he would initially start with a portfolio.

Regarding this point, the instructor explained "I do think that the portfolio helps identify those issues and it is up to the teacher to have the energy and be willing to make the effort to point it out to the students rather than just waiting until the end of the term and giving a final grade and then saying well you need to improve this." SM expressed that the rubric and self-assessment has helped her become a better teacher as it provided her with an opportunity of breaking up the different elements related to the writing skill. However, "other aspect of what is in the portfolio we were already doing."

On the other hand, BE appeared more enthusiastic about the portfolio and stated that she would still use the portfolio even if it were not required by the program, "I still want to make sure I am covering all basics, I am doing what it is that the students need,

and I want to be more structured.” Since using the portfolio had been a new experience for HS, the instructor said that exploring its potentials was a work in progress for her, which she hopes would get better with time.

CHAPTER 6: ESL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIO

The previous chapter focused on the instructors' experience with the assessment portfolio. The discussion, in this chapter, focuses on ESL students' perceptions toward the assessment portfolio and its various contents. The research questions are

- How useful and/or challenging do the interviewed ESL students find the assessment portfolio and its various contents: objectives, self-assessment, and rubrics?
- To what extent does the larger population of ESL students enrolled in IEI during fall 2 (2009) share the perceptions of the students who were interviewed?

Data for the first question were collected through interviewing 17 ESL students enrolled in levels 3 and 5. The 17 participating students started using the portfolio for the first time in IEI during spring 1 (2009) session. Responses from 2 of the 17 students (Dae-Ho and Chung-Hee) for the most part were irrelevant and/or incomprehensible; for this reason, the discussion focuses on responses from the 15 students. Appendices G2 and G3 contain the complete list of the questions.

In fall 2 (2009), further data from 37 students were collected for the second question by means of a written survey questionnaire consisting of closed ended questions. The purpose, here, was to shed more light on the extent to which the larger group of students shared the perspectives of the students who were interviewed. Most of the statements for the written questionnaire were generated from the interview results obtained during the phase I of data collection (Appendix G4 contains the complete written survey used in this study). As mentioned earlier, I was inspired to include a

larger sample of students, in addition to the interviewed group, by Angel's (2008) unpublished dissertation.

The two research questions guided the analysis and presentation of the data. The research findings in this chapter are organized into two phases: phase I presents the results collected from the students who were interviewed during spring 1 and 2 (2009) and phase II reports the results obtained from the written survey administered to the 37 students in fall 2 (2009).

Objectives

Phase I

According to the definition I have used, the assessment portfolio has a specific purpose, and its contents are organized to show growth and progress toward the identified classroom objectives. Therefore, when students were provided with the folders which would serve as their portfolios, they were given two handouts, one stating the portfolio purpose (see Appendices A1 and A2) and the other stating the objectives of the writing class (see Appendices B1 and B2). The purpose of the 'objectives' handout was to communicate to the students the main goals of the writing class on the first day, and to act as a check list for students to refer to and match their learning against the classroom objectives.

As I interviewed the students and reviewed their portfolios, I realized that Sam's portfolio was the only one which did not have the 'objectives' handout. All the other 14 students found the physical presence of the objective handout helpful; 6 of the students said that they had read the handout more than once during the session.

The students realized that the objectives handout was different from the syllabus which the instructors provided because the former explicitly communicated the goals of the writing class. When asked directly if they found the objectives handout useful, most of the students said “Yes.” Some offered additional explanation, for instance, Lee said: “I think it helped me know how to learn and what is the class about.” Ross explained, “This is specific. It was kind of comfortable during the session because I knew what we are gonna do.” According to Chin-Hoe, “When I read this, I know what I’m gonna do. What I’m gonna learn.” Hyun-Ki said, “It helped me to remind what goal is.”

Students’ responses indicated that some of them read the handout more than once, and used it as a guideline to check whether they met the classroom goals and/or to what extent. Others read it only on the first day because they did not deem reading it as necessary since they were learning the stated objectives in the class. In essence, the objectives handout helped set the scene for the portfolio project by explicitly spelling out the objectives of the class of which almost all of the participating students seemed aware.

Phase II

Statement 1 on the questionnaire asked about how helpful the students found the ‘objectives handout.’

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don’t understand the sentence./ No response
1. Having a handout stating the objectives of the writing class is helpful.	10n 27.0%	19n 51.4%	04n 10.8%	--	--	04n 10.8%

More than three quarters of the students 29 (78.4%) found the objectives' handout always or usually helpful, 4(10.8%) found it sometimes helpful, whereas 4(10.8%) did not respond or stated that they did not understand the statement.

Portfolio: Opportunities

In general, the students' responses indicated a positive attitude toward the portfolio. The data discussed in this section have been categorized into the following six themes: general attitude, portfolios as a repository tool, portfolios as an organizational tool, portfolios for building self-esteem, portfolios as a tool for monitoring learning and progress, and issues of concern related to portfolios.

General Attitude

Phase I

When asked whether the portfolio was helpful, one student, Hyun-Ki, in level 5, said it would have been helpful if he had had a portfolio from lower levels. Natalia felt that the portfolio was useful, as it provided her with an opportunity to save her assignments and monitor her improvement; however, she said, "The problem is that I never do that. So, the problem is not with the portfolio that it is not good, the problem is [that it is] not useful for me because I didn't use it." Paula shared Natalia's attitude toward the portfolio stating that it was helpful for students who looked back on their mistakes when working on new assignments. Twelve of the students responded that they found keeping a portfolio helpful.

Phase II

Statements 2, 5, and 6 on the questionnaire dealt with students' attitude toward the portfolio.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. No response
2. I like keeping the portfolio.	17n 45.9%	14n 37.8%	04n 10.8%	02n 5.4%	--	--

Most of the students 31(83.7%) said that they always or usually liked keeping the portfolio, 4(10.8%) reported that they sometimes liked keeping the portfolio, only 2(5.4%) indicated that they occasionally liked doing so, and none of the students responded with never.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or no response
5. Keeping a portfolio has been useful.	16n 43.2%	15n 40.5%	03n 8.1%	03n 8.1%	--	--

In terms of usefulness, a majority of the students 31(83.7%) found the portfolio always or usually useful, 3(8.1%) found it sometimes useful, whereas the other 3(8.1%) found it occasionally useful.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or no response
6. Portfolios are an important part of the writing class.	09n 24.3%	17n 45.9%	08n 21.6%	03n 8.1%	--	--

As to the portfolio's importance in the writing class, most of the respondents 26(70.2%) reported that they always or usually thought of the portfolio as an important part of the writing class, 8(21.6%) said that they sometimes did, and 3(8.1%) reported that they occasionally did.

Portfolios as a Repository Tool

Phase I

It was essential to find out whether students had a clear understanding of what a portfolio was. So, during the interview, they were asked to provide their own definition of the portfolio. Nine of the students viewed the portfolio as a folder where they can keep their work organized. For example, Esra said, "This portfolio is a folder." Natalia stated, "A portfolio is a thing where you can keep paper like homework, paper that you don't want to lose." According to Oy, the portfolio is "the kind of thing where you can keep the information from the past until present until now—what did you do at that time until now." Similarly, Elisa pointed out, "It is a case to save your papers."

Some of the students provided an interesting simile for the portfolio. For example, Ross described the portfolio as, "It is my history. When I look through portfolio, maybe, I will be able to know about myself." For Chin-Sun, the portfolio was "like memory stick...USB. I can keep my paragraphs." These responses resonated Paulson and Paulson's (1994) view of the portfolio that "A portfolio tells a story; it is a story of learning. A portfolio contains anything that helps tell that story" (p. 2).

As a follow-up to students' view of the portfolio as a folder, I asked them the difference between a personal folder and a portfolio. Three of the students stated that, in a personal folder, they would keep anything and everything. For instance, Chin-Hoe

pointed out that in a personal folder, “I will keep everything like writing, grammar, and vocabulary.” Similarly, Ana said, “This is used only for writing. You cannot use [it] for another thing.”

Oy and Hyun-Ki saw the presence of self-assessment as an element that distinguished the portfolio from a personal folder. Sam and Lee stated that portfolios can be shown to others, whereas folders tend to be more personal. Elisa, Chin-Sun, and Esra said that the portfolio forced the student to keep everything. Three of the students, Ross, Paula, and Natalia, did not see any difference between a personal folder and a portfolio. Jamil stated that the teacher graded the portfolio and pointed the students’ mistakes, which was not possible with the personal folder.

Generally, most of the students understood that the portfolio was more than simply a folder; the former had to be more systematic and organized, whereas the latter was more personal. Such a distinction meant that the portfolio project was on the right track since according to its definition, the portfolio is more than a folder, and contains students’ work over a period of time with the aim of demonstrating their growth and achievement of specific goals (Richard-Amato, 1996).

Phase II

Statements 4 and 8 addressed students’ opinion of the portfolio as a repository tool.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don’t understand the sentence. or no response
4. The portfolio helps me	22n 59.5%	12n 32.4%	03n 8.1%	--	--	--

keep my writing papers together.						
----------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

Nearly all of the students 34(91.9%) said that the portfolio always or usually helped them keep their writing papers together, and a small number of students 3(8.1%) stated that they sometimes found it helpful.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
8. The portfolio is more structured than a personal folder.	07n 18.9%	12n 32.4%	14n 37.8%	03n 8.1%	01n 2.7%	--

About half of the students 19(51.3%) indicated that the portfolio was always or usually more structured than a personal folder, 14(37.8%) said that it was sometimes more structured, 3(8.1%) reported that it was occasionally more structured, and 1(2.7%) stated it was never more structured.

Portfolios as an Organizational Tool

Phase I

In my first round of interviews, I had asked students if they were familiar with the process approach to writing in their home countries, explaining that this approach required them to write multiple drafts. Most of the responses indicated that the teaching of writing in their respective countries is either neglected or product based. Students explained that teaching of English focuses mostly on the teaching of grammar. The

following table summarizes students' response during the first round of interviews to whether writing is taught using a process approach or not.

Table 11

Summary of Students' Responses to the Approach Used when Teaching Writing in their Home Countries

Student	Country	Did teachers in your home country ask you to write drafts before checking your final paper?
Chin-Ho	S. Korea	Does not remember
Dae-Hoo	S. Korea	No
Chin-Sun	S. Korea	No
Chung-Hee	S. Korea	No
Hyun-Ki	S. Korea	No
Ross	S. Korea	No
Ana	Venezuela	No
Elisa	Venezuela	No
Jamil	Mali	No
Ahmed	Mali	No
Paula	Colombia	Yes
Lee	China	No
Natalia	Dominican	Yes
Oy	Thailand	No
Sam	Taiwan	No
Esra	Turkey	Yes
Sham	India	No

The table demonstrates that most of the students came from an academic context where the process approach was not implemented; therefore, this meant that they needed extra

help in staying organized so that they can incorporate the different stages of the process approach when working on their final draft.

It appeared that some students, in the following study, did not take advantage of this approach, which is followed by all the four instructors, AK, BE, HS, and SM. However, the portfolio made them realize the importance of drafts. Sam, for instance, said, “By keeping this portfolio I have a habit to organize my papers. In the past, when I had a lot of paper I would just throw them away, now I will collect them and put them in one place.” He further added that since he threw away his drafts, “sometimes my final draft is so different from the previous one. It is like a new essay.” Similarly, Esra mentioned that in the previous level when she did not have a portfolio, she lost her drafts. She sheepishly admitted, “I know I must not lose it but I lost. So, I can’t see what I did wrong or how can I use the word.” Sam and Esra were not the only ones who lost or misplaced their papers. When I asked Lee what difference the portfolio made, he explained, “I threw it,” by “it” meaning the drafts but now he said, “I have to keep it. That’s the difference.” Therefore, if students fail to make use of their brainstorming, outlining, drafting, teachers’ and peers’ feedback, when revising their papers, then the process approach might not achieve its desired results.

One student, Ross, however, did not see that the portfolio helped him be organized because he said that he saved all his drafts on the computer, which was sort of a portfolio for him. What could not be inferred from his response was that the portfolio drafts had feedback from his instructor and peers, whereas the saved drafts on his computer did not.

From the above responses, it can be concluded that the portfolio served not only as a repository tool in which students collected and saved their writing materials but it also helped them stay organized, and take advantage of the process approach. In brief, the portfolio reinforced the process approach and as Elisa rightly pointed out, it “forces you to keep in organized work.”

Phase II

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
9. The portfolio helps me keep my drafts organized.	17n 45.9%	15n 40.5%	04n 10.8%	--	01n 2.7%	--

Most of the students 32(86.4%) stated that the portfolio helped them keep their drafts organized, 4(10.8%) responded as it sometimes did, and just 1(2.7%) student indicated that it never did.

Portfolios as a Tool for Building Affective Factors

Phase I

Analyzing students' responses revealed that the portfolio contributed toward developing their self-esteem, a factor so crucial in language learning as Nikolic and Cabaj (2000) note that when students see they are achieving their goals, then their “motivation increases and is sustained over a period of time” (p. 197). This was obvious in Ana's response when she explicitly pointed out that she was able to see her progress:

I think it [the portfolio] is great because when I was in the last paragraph, my teacher gave the portfolio and I look inside and what I was writing and how much I can advance and looking in my last paragraph and I say, ‘oh, I was very bad,

now I am good, ' better than in my first paragraph because I sentence, sentence, sentence, and the last one was with controlling, more controlled and with connector...

Other students expressed a similar attitude toward the process of maintaining a portfolio.

The following are some examples:

Lee: Happy! Because, you know, my level is improve.

Sam: I think it helped me to improve...

Ahmed: I think it helped me a lot.

Oy: Good part of the portfolio is just improvement of yourself.

Chin-Sun: I feel proud of myself.

The words "improve/improvement" appeared in most of the responses indicating that as students maintained their work together, they could realize their growth as writers. The portfolio made students appreciate their improvement as writers by allowing them to look back and see the difference between their earlier writing paragraphs and those that were created later. Such a realization is particularly important for students in an intensive English program where one of their goals for learning the language is to improve and develop their English language proficiency.

Further, the portfolio helped build students' self-confidence. For instance, Chin-Sun mentioned that she threw away her drafts and kept the book, but the portfolio made her realize the importance of saving and reading her drafts. She further added, "Because now when I was reading the paragraph just low level. I can write the paragraph better than this now." As the portfolio provided a comprehensive picture of students' progress, they could know what and how much their skill has developed and such realizations can help sustain their motivation and build their confidence.

Phase II

Statement 12 and 14, more specifically, addressed whether seeing progress in the writing class contributed to increasing students' self-motivation and confidence.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
12. Seeing my progress in the writing class increases my self-motivation.	10n 27.0%	15n 40.5%	11n 29.7%	01n 2.7%	--	--

25(67.5%) responded that it always or usually did, 11(29.7%) said that it sometimes did, and only 1(2.7%) said that it occasionally did.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or no response
14. Creating the portfolio helps build my self-confidence.	10n 27.0%	09n 24.3%	13n 35.1%	03n 8.1%	02n 5.4%	--

Almost half of the students 19(51.3%) indicated that the portfolio helped build their self-confidence, 13(35.1%) responded that it sometimes did, 3(8.1%) stated that it occasionally did, and 2(5.4%) said it did not.

Portfolio as a Tool for Monitoring Learning and Progress

Phase I

When asked if the portfolio helped them monitor their progress, Ana answered positively and explained, “Because in each one of your writing you can see in my last paragraph. I check back and I was very bad in my first paragraph, but now I am good.” Similarly, Jamil thought that the portfolio, “really...really changed [the way he wrote] because, like I said, if I make some errors, the teacher show me and I won’t do that again. So, I think that’s why. I can read again and see.”

Most of the students considered the opportunity of looking back, and seeing their errors, and then fixing them as useful. The portfolio, then, appeared to serve the purpose for which it was employed in the program: to promote reflection and learning. Oy stated, “As I told you, we can look back, sometimes, I saw we have same mistakes, same same mistakes, such as grammar. I can spend more time to study and be careful about some points that I always have this mistake, again, again, again, and again.” Sam pointed out, “By checking portfolio, I can find out mistakes I made, I will try my best not to do the same type of mistake in the future.” The portfolio encouraged students to monitor their progress, look back, draw comparisons between different pieces, and fill in the gaps in their learning, because as Elisa pointed out, the portfolio “is visual and you can look.”

Phase II

Statements 10 and 22 addressed students’ opinion of the portfolio as a tool for facilitating revision of their drafts.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
10. Having all my papers in one place helps me know what I need to do to improve my writing.	15n 40.5%	18n 48.6%	03n 8.1%	--	--	01n 2.7%
22. Having the portfolio helps me find the areas I need to improve in my writing.	14n 37.8%	12n 32.4%	10n 27.0%	--	--	01n 2.7%

On an average, more than three quarters of the students 29.5(79.7%) said that having their papers in one place helped them know what they needed to do to improve their writing, 6.5(17.6%) said that it sometimes did, and just 1(2.7%) either did not understand the response or did not respond.

Statements 3, 11, 15, 16, 19, and 23 focused on finding out students' perception of the portfolio as a tool for monitoring their own progress.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
3. The portfolio helps me see if my writing is getting better or worse.	16n 43.2%	14n 37.8%	03n 8.1%	01n 2.7%	02n 5.4%	01n 2.7%

Most of the students 30(81.1%) stated that the portfolio always or usually helped them see if their writing was getting better or worse, 3(8.1%) said that it sometimes did, just 1(2.7%) said it occasionally did, and only 2(5.4%) said it never did.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
11. The portfolio helps me see my progress.	17n 45.9%	16n 43.2%	--	04n 10.8%	--	--
15. The portfolio is a good tool to show my progress in writing	20n 54.1%	12n 32.4%	04n 10.8%	01n 2.7%	--	--
16. The portfolio is a good tool to show my growth in writing in different levels in IEL.	21n 56.8%	10n 27.0%	04n 10.8%	02n 5.4%	--	--
19. The portfolio helps me see how well I am doing in my writing.	16n 43.2%	16n 43.2%	04n 10.8%	01n 2.7%	--	--
23. The portfolio is a good tool to show my progress in writing over time.	14n 37.8%	18n 48.6%	04n 10.8%	01n 2.7%	--	--

On an average, a majority of the students 32(86.5%) stated that the portfolio always or usually helped them see their progress, a few 3(8.6%) said that it sometime did, and 2(4.9%) stated that it occasionally did.

Item 18 asked whether the students saw the portfolio as a tool for documenting their learning.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
18. The portfolio helps me see what I am learning in the class.	20n 54.1%	10n 27.0%	07n 18.9%	--	--	--

Most of the students 30(81.1%) responded that the portfolio helped them see what they were learning in the class, and the rest of the students 7(27.0%) said that the portfolio sometimes did so.

Portfolio: Concerns

Phase I

Not many issues of concern about the portfolios came up during the interviews. None of the students said that they experienced any difficulty maintaining a portfolio. In their opinion, there was nothing difficult about keeping a portfolio, “you just keep it,” some of them said. The following are some of their responses:

Elisa: No. I have always been organized with my papers, so it was very good for me.

Chin-Hoe: I don't think it is difficult.

Chin-Sun: No difficult. I have never thinking about difficult portfolio.

Sham: No problem.

Ahmed: No problem.

One student, Hyun-Ki, felt that the 8-week session was too short for him to realize his improvement and thought that the “portfolio should be done in a lower level. In my case, I hadn’t a portfolio before level 5. I don’t know why I had to do portfolio in level 5.” His response held the implication that the portfolio would help students better when used at the start of their enrollment in the IEI program, for this reason he did not find the portfolio helpful. Since that was his last session at IEI, he wondered why the portfolio had not been introduced earlier.

An interesting point of concern was brought up by one of the two students, Dae-Ho, whose answers otherwise were mostly irrelevant. When asked what he thought about the portfolio moving up with him to the next level, Dae-Ho said, “No. I show my teacher new character—new image.” He was the only one who said, “I am afraid if she [next level teacher] see!” When asked what he was afraid of, he replied, “Just afraid.” He, apparently, feared losing face and making a negative impression on his new teacher who would see his mistakes in his portfolio.

Phase II

Statements 17 and 21 addressed certain issues related to maintaining the portfolio.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don’t understand the sentence./ no response
17. Keeping my portfolio organized takes up a lot of my time.	06n 16.2%	03n 8.1%	11n 29.7%	09n 24.3%	08n 21.6%	--

In terms of time needed to keep the portfolio organized, some of the students 9(24.3%) said that it always or usually took up a lot of their time, 11(29.7%) students stated that it sometimes took a lot of time, and less than half 17(45.9%) responded that it occasionally or never took up a lot of their time.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence./ no response
21. Keeping my portfolio organized is difficult.	--	04n 10.8%	08n 21.6%	14n 37.8%	09n 24.3%	02n 5.4%

A few students 4(10.8%) reported that keeping their portfolio organized was difficult, 8(21.6%) said that it was sometimes difficult to keep their portfolio organized, and more than half 23(62.1%) said keeping their portfolio organized was occasionally or never difficult.

Student Self-assessment: Benefits

Phase I

As the assessment portfolio provides students an opportunity to self-assess, students were asked to assess their progress four times during the eight-week session. The first three assessments consisted of items which required students to check their ability based on what they can or cannot do (see Appendices C1 and C2). The format of the fourth self-assessment was opened ended questions (Appendix C3), which required students to identify their best writing, and then respond to questions related to that piece. As I reviewed the portfolios with the students, I asked them to reflect on their first three self-assessment tasks and describe their thoughts. The following are examples from Ana:

The first time:

When I did this, I thought that I didn't know a lot of things that I will work on this, and at that time I didn't understand what's the meaning but when we finished and you [researcher] give us this again, yea I can understand that something that we work on.

The second time

Better because I learned during the two first weeks I learned and when I read this again I for example in narrative paragraph I understood that a lot of thing we learn in two weeks, each one of week.

The third time

Maybe it was better because everything was good. I agree with almost everything because in the class I learned and I knew there is some things that I have to work more and more to finish and understand completely.

A similar response can be found in Oy's reflection:

The first time

At the beginning, just check. Just read the question. Just be honest. I agree or disagree.

The second time

Feel better. First time I had three point that I don't understand because I don't know what is the narrative, what is the opinion, what is the definition. The second time I study two types of paragraphs so that means I improved my writing. I can understand what is that, something like that.

Third Time

Still better... I don't know how to explain but still better.... Actually we just write and turn it [assignments] to the teacher. We don't know what is good or what is bad. You just write to do your assignment. It is finished for that time. But if you have self-assessment you can know, 'oh, this part I improve this. I can do this.' Something like that. You can know improvement of yourself.

However, not all students felt that their progress was linear; for example, Paula stated that when she did the self-assessment the third time she felt that it "was so bad because in the second paper I put 'agree' in this question and in the third one I put 'somewhat agree'".

Whether the progress was linear or not, the above responses show that by assessing their writing ability at different times during the session, students were becoming more conscious of their learning process. Self-assessment helped glue together the writing objectives, classroom instruction, and the writing assignments. Activities which encourage students to look back and reflect on their classroom objectives and skills can help them become more conscious of their learning, take control of their own learning, and become independent learners (Mills-Courts and Amiran, 1991; Porter and Cleland, 1995).

When students were asked directly what they gained from doing self-assessment, 12 of the students expressed that self-assessment helped them realize the progress in their writing ability. For example, Sam said, “I gained confidence or I think even more. Sometimes people can’t see their improvement during their progressing but by doing self-assessment we find we are growing our English ability. Then, I will feel happy to see I am growing. So I have the power to do much better things in the future.” The following are responses from other students:

Elisa: Confirming myself. I said yes I have learned this. I need more with this. I need to practice more. Take note of what you need to improve...I wrote in another paper what I need to improve or what I didn’t understand to look up on the Internet or something

Ross: I have confidence because I know now about me, about my essay skill; how I am improving my English skills. I gained confidence.

Chin-Sun: I can realize how many improve my ability, like this, by myself, I can realize my ability.

Chin-Hoe: I can get my correct position what is my strength what is my weakness and I can understand.

Phase II

Statements 28 and 29 asked students whether self-assessment served as a tool for monitoring their progress as a writer.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
28. Self assessment helps me know about my strengths and weaknesses as a writer.	17n 45.9%	15n 40.5%	05n 13.5%	--	--	--

Most of the students 32(86.4%) said that self-assessment helped them know about their strengths and weaknesses as a writer, and 5(13.5%) stated it sometimes did.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
29. Self- assessment makes me aware of my learning process.	15n 40.5%	17n 45.9%	05n 13.5%	--	--	--

A majority of the students 32(86.4%) reported that self-assessment made them aware of their learning process, and 5(13.5%) said that it sometimes did.

Goal Setting

In addition to helping students identify their strengths and weaknesses in writing, self-assessment also required students to set goals for themselves that they intend to work on in the coming sessions.

Most of the goals were quite general:

Ross: I hope I can write essays more effectively.

Ahmed: I will spend more time for writing to improve my writing.

Some goals were a bit more specific:

Hyun-Ki: Writing more organizly and getting used to complex sentences, especially when I talk.

Goal setting could encourage students to become more responsible language learners.

Student Self-assessment: Concerns

Phase I

Some students agreed that they found self-assessment useful, but expressed that they did not like it. Lee stated, "I think this paper [self-assessment] can help me but I don't like to do it." Paula felt that the only benefit of self-assessment was to compare the results to see how much the writer has improved but she did not take the time to look through her self-assessment and reflect.

Natalia stressed that she was indifferent to self-assessment because she thought "I am not getting anything." She preferred someone else assess her. Hyun-Ki expressed a similar concern when he stated, "I just follow the seniors' evaluation like the teacher or professor. I am not sure if I can evaluate myself correctly or not so there's a problem to me." His concern stemmed from the fear that he was not evaluating himself correctly.

Hyun-Ki admitted the usefulness of self-assessment but added, “If the result [teacher’s score] was different from the real result I felt just confused.” His confusion was the result of inconsistency between the things that he thought he could do and the score he received from the instructor. Sam expressed a similar concern to Hyun-Ki’s in a slightly different manner. He stated that self-assessment helped him gain self-confidence, but

I think I felt a little bit disappointed because we are doing self-assessment and I tried to tell teacher my thoughts and what did I do in my essay and what did I learn and what I wanted to improve, but I didn’t see the teacher’s response so I don’t know if I am correct or not. Should I do something? Did I improve in teacher’s opinion? Did I do a good job or bad job?

In contrast, Elisa felt pleased with herself when she saw consistency between her self-assessment and her instructor’s evaluation.

Some students in this study looked up to the teacher as the authority figure and evaluator. For this group of students, it was hard to take control of their own assessment; they preferred to rely on an outside figure for evaluation. Students’ responses revealed that on one hand there was a group of students who felt content with their self-assessment and improvement. On the other, some students valued and waited for direct feedback from their teachers; their self-assessment remained incomplete without the instructors’ assurance.

In terms of difficulty, since most of the students had done the self-assessment for the first time, when asked if they faced any difficulty while assessing their writing ability, 11 out of the 15 students said, they did not. The other 4 further explained that it was difficult at first but later it got easier. The difficulty arose from not understanding certain key words when they did it the first time. But, as they learned to write their paragraphs

and essays in the class, they could recognize those words when they did their self-assessment again.

To sum up, the participants' responses demonstrated that even though some of them either did not like doing it or were just indifferent, most of them realized the role that self-assessment played in raising their awareness about their writing skill. Students understood the purpose and value of self-assessment as an activity that raises their consciousness level regarding their strengths as writers and areas that need improvement. In this sense, it can be said that self-assessment appeared to have achieved its purpose; nevertheless, some students still needed feedback from the instructors not only on their writing but also on their self-assessment.

Phase II

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence./ no response
27. Self- assessment is useful.	14n 37.8%	15n 40.5%	07n 18.9%	--	--	01n 2.7%

Most of the students 29(78.3%) said they always or usually thought self-assessment was useful, 7(18.9%) stated that they sometimes thought it was useful, and 1(2.7%) did not respond.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence./ no response
30. I am always honest in my self- assessment.	15n 40.5%	17n 45.9%	5n 13.5%	--	--	--

Most of the students 32(86.4%) responded that they were always honest when doing self-assessment, and 5(13.5%) answered that they sometimes were.

Sentences 31 and 32 dealt with concerns related to self-assessment.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence / no response
31. Doing self- assessment is difficult.	05n 13.5%	06n 16.2%	14n 37.8%	08n 21.6%	04n 10.8%	--

11(29.7%) reported that doing self-assessment was always or usually difficult, 14(37.8%) said that it sometimes was, 8(21.6%) indicated that it occasionally was, and 4(10.8%) reported that it was never difficult.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence / no response
32. I prefer that the teacher assess me.	07n 18.9%	11n 29.7%	15n 40.5%	02n 5.4%	01n 2.7%	01n 2.7%

Less than half of the students 18(48.6%) reported they always or usually preferred that the teacher assessed them, 15(40.5%) stated that they sometimes preferred that the teacher assessed them, 2(5.4%) said that they occasionally preferred that the teacher did so, 1(2.7%) pointed out that s/he never preferred that the teacher did so, and 1(2.7%) did not respond.

Scoring Rubrics

Phase I

All the students agreed that the analytic rubrics that the instructors used to evaluate their writings helped in providing them with detailed feedback on their writing.

The following are some comments from the students on the rubric:

Chin Sun: I can understand what part the mistake. What did I mistake.

Ahmed: If everything is clear they are gonna give you a six but if your introduction has little you can have 5 if your introduction is good. If it doesn't have enough of idea they can give you 4.

Esra: I can see what can I do it, for example, this one I have to pay attention at organization. When I see it, oh, yea, I have to pay attention.

Ana: They are good because you can check what is your best. I don't know how to explain in English but you can see strength...she [the teacher] called each and said you are here, you did good but here you have to improve more because you have this weakness and you need work on this...

The rubric served not only as a scoring tool, but it was also an instructional tool that indicated to the students their strengths and weakness.

Phase II

Statements 33 and 34 asked students' view of the scoring rubrics that the teachers used to score their writings.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence / no response
33. The rubrics, which the teacher uses to score my writings, make the grading system clear.	13n 35.1%	23n 62.2%	--	--	--	01n 2.7%

Almost all of the students 36(97.3%) said that the rubrics made scoring clear. Only 1(2.7%) stated that s/he did not understand the statement.

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence./ no response
34. The scoring rubrics, which the teachers use, help me know my strengths and weaknesses as a writer.	16n 43.2%	19n 51.4%	--	01n 2.7%	--	01n 2.7%

Nearly all of the students 35(94.6%) indicated that they always or usually thought that the scoring rubric helped them know their strengths and weaknesses as writers. Just 1(2.7%) said it occasionally did, and only 1(2.7%) stated that s/he did not understand the sentence.

Closing Comments for Phases I and II

The phase I data obtained from the students during the first attempt with the portfolio project (spring 1 and spring 2) provided valuable insights into how the portfolio was being perceived by the students. Students' responses to the portfolio, and its various other contents, such as the objectives, drafts, self-assessment, and scoring rubric demonstrated that it helped in enhancing their learning. Since students are significant stakeholders in the teaching/learning process, their opinions matter, and their suggestions were taken into consideration as I worked with the instructors during the following sessions: summer, fall 1, and fall 2.

I made some changes to the portfolio with the hope to make it better. For example, some students expressed that they needed more choices on the self-assessment scale. I reorganized the previous categories agree, somewhat agree, disagree, and I don't understand the statement to strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and I don't understand the statement (see Appendices C1 and C2). Furthermore, though some students said assessing themselves four times during the session was okay, others suggested fewer self-assessment since 8-week was a short period to see much improvement. Because of this, and the fact that self-assessment would be done across all levels, and the fear that students might get bored, I suggested that students assess themselves 2-3 times during the session or as the instructor sees appropriate.

Instructors in this study mentioned that they often communicated with the students about their progress at different points of the session. However, since some students stated they needed feedback on their self assessment so that they can know if their self-assessment truly reflected their progress, I suggested that instructors use the

portfolio interactively and schedule formal conferencing in their writing class to help the students realize how well they are doing and what areas they need to improve on.

Conferencing with students can also help prevent the self-assessment from becoming a mechanical activity since students will feel that their self-assessment is being taken seriously by their teachers.

A further change was made in the summer session (2009). We (the researcher and classroom instructor, HS) asked the students in levels 6, most of them had had a portfolio for two sessions or more, to write a letter assessing their progress over the previous sessions. The following are samples of what students wrote in their self-assessment letters:

Student 1:

The portfolio helped me a lot to improve writing. From the beginning, I did not really like using the portfolio following the instructor's structure. I had used my own portfolio for long time and I knew how to organize my papers follow each class. I did not separate writing papers and other papers, so my writing did not improve very much. I never looked over my papers to find what I was weak or strong in writing. After using the portfolio, my writing improved every essay. I knew how to look back the papers and found out what I need to improve. I wrote one essay, looked back, changed and edited it. The portfolio was really useful for my study.

Student 2:

Since I began to use portfolio to help with my writing, I have written several essays. Now when I look over what I wrote, I feel I have changed a lot.

In my earlier essays, the main problem is that my writing is too dry—words are simple and are used too many times in one paragraph, sentence structure is almost the same. As I learnt more grammar and vocabulary, my papers became more interesting and colorful. I feel that I write better than before.

As I look over former work, I noticed one more thing: I am trying to write as an American way. I used to write whatever I want although sometimes my situation seems better than some students. My paragraphs weren't concentrated enough on one topic. So far I know that I have to focus on one thing in one paragraph.

Although sometimes it is hard since there is not so much idea, I will still follow that way.

Generally speaking, portfolio is a good thing for all the students, not only because they can have chance to have to look over their papers, but their work will be more organized as well.

Overall, the portfolio experience appeared to be a positive project since most of the students welcomed it. Implementing the assessment portfolios at IEI served the pragmatic purpose of assisting ESL students in realizing their progress, reflecting on their growth, maintaining their motivation, and building their self confidence. However, this is just the beginning, and there are many areas that require further refinement and investigation.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Findings, Conclusion, Teaching Implications, Recommendations, and Limitations

This study was to investigate ESL instructors' and students' attitude toward the assessment portfolio as they started using it for the first time in an intensive English program in the United States. In Chapter 2, a review of the literature on portfolios showed that though the portfolio has been used in contexts such as schools and college first-language composition classes not much has been published on the use of the portfolio in an intensive English program for second-language learners. The research questions underpinning this dissertation are the following:

Instructors

- Prior to using the portfolio, what beliefs and/or concerns do the instructors have about the assessment portfolio at this specific Intensive English Program?
- As instructors start using the portfolio, what opportunities and/or challenges arise?
- After using the portfolio a few sessions, what are the instructors' final perceptions of the portfolio? How do they view the portfolio as an instructional and assessment tool? What further benefits and/or issues of concern emerge?

Students

- How useful and/or challenging do ESL students find assessment portfolio?
- To what extent does the larger population of ESL students enrolled in IEI share the portfolio perceptions of the students who were interviewed?

The data for this study were collected over a period of 40 weeks and came from various sources: instructors' interviews, students' interviews, and students' written questionnaire.

Additional data were collected from faculty meeting, IEI director, and students' portfolios.

The following chapter begins with answers and discussion to the above stated research questions. The discussion is followed by four more sections: conclusion, teaching implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

Research Findings and Discussion

Instructors Interviews

Research Question 1

Prior to using the portfolio, what beliefs and/or concerns do instructors have about the assessment portfolio at this specific Intensive English Program?

At the outset of the portfolio project, that is, spring 1 (2009), the instructors' responses indicated that all the four instructors had some idea of the portfolio. Instructor AK had had some experience with the showcase portfolio when teaching in Peru, and instructor BE had used the collections portfolio during the previous sessions at IEI. On the other hand, although instructors HS and SM had never used a portfolio, they had some general understanding of it as a tool for collecting students' work to monitor their progress. Based on that knowledge, the instructors anticipated that the portfolio could provide them with the opportunity of monitoring their students' progress in the writing class. Commenting on self-assessment, three of the instructors, BE, HS, and SM, stated that it was going to be a new experience. The major concern about implementing the portfolio that the instructors expressed was how much class time it would take to maintain it in an organized manner.

Research Question 2

As instructors start using the portfolio, what opportunities and/or challenges arise?

After five weeks of using the portfolio, all four instructors began by saying that it was going well. At that point, the instructors had more to say about the opportunities the portfolio provided. AK and HS pointed out that the optional inclusion of additional drafts (more than the ones required) in the portfolio demonstrated the efforts that the students had put into their writing. This extra effort may reveal the motivation of those students willing to put in the extra work. AK and HS also stated that the portfolio provided the instructors an opportunity for monitoring their students' learning and progress. Instructor BE stated that the portfolio served as a tool for documenting students' learning. These observations tend to be significant in the teaching/learning process. The portfolio can bridge the gap between teaching and learning and demonstrate to both instructors and students how much learning has taken place; additionally as Murphy and Smith (1992) state, the portfolio "make[s] visible what gets lost when students, like teachers, move relentlessly from assignment to assignment" (p. 51). In addition, instructors AK and HS indicated that the presence of students' writing entries in one location made it convenient for the students to reflect on their process. The portfolio, in this sense, worked as a framework that promoted students to look backward as they moved forward in their learning to write endeavors.

A concern that instructors AK, BE, and HS voiced was whether the students seemed aware of the benefits that the portfolio provided them with. As apparent from the discussion of the students' data in chapter 6, most of the students realized the value of the portfolio and thought it was a good idea. Another concern that instructors AK and BE

expressed was related to students' ability to maintain the portfolio in an organized manner. However, HS did not have this concern. Interestingly enough, almost none of the interviewed students saw organization of the portfolio as an issue of concern, and only a few on the questionnaire stated that they did.

Also, among the concerns that emerged was instructor SM's question whether the grades that the students received on their final papers reflected their actual writing performance since they receive help from the teacher and peers. The question as to whose work it is came into play here. The portfolio seemed to be an effective tool for resolving this issue. First, instructors who receive portfolios from the incoming students could go through the students' drafts as well as their final writing assignment to see the amount of help and support the writer had received during the drafting process. Second, instructors could better estimate the actual validity of the grade to the drafting and revising process. In this light, students' final writing grade would involve a sum of the process and product of their learning to write attempts.

As instructors were formally using self-assessment for the first time in the writing class, their insight on this tool was significant for this research. Instructors realized that self-assessment presented certain benefits to the students. AK and HS said that when students assess their writing ability, this process could make them conscious of their own learning efforts. On a similar note, AK stated that doing self-assessment could help students realize that they are meeting their writing objectives. SM mentioned that self-assessment could act as a tool for reinforcing the skills students need to pay attention to and for helping them set goals for themselves. In addition, BE stated that self-assessment could provide valuable information to the instructor, as well. For example, when students

state on their self-assessment the areas they have problems with, the instructor could provide the necessary help to those students. In essence, all the instructors saw some kind of value in letting students do self-assessment.

The question of self-assessment's reliability was raised. Instructors were concerned to what degree students' self-assessment reflected a realistic picture of their writing abilities. For example, when assessing themselves, some students tended to either underestimate or overestimate their writing abilities. On this point, the instructors' concern matched with that of the students'. An analysis of the students' data revealed a mixed feeling toward self-assessment. Some liked doing it; whereas, others shied away from it and expressed that they could not accurately assess their abilities and needed assurance from their instructor that their self-assessment reflected their true writing abilities. It is worth mentioning that the presence of the analytical rubric which explicitly spelled out different areas on which students' writing was evaluated did not seem to send that message to the students—they needed to 'hear' it from their instructors.

Research Question 3

After using the portfolio a few sessions, what are the instructors' final perceptions of the portfolio? How do they view the portfolio as an instructional and assessment tool? What further benefits and/or issues of concern emerge?

After a few sessions of using the portfolio, I asked instructors to reflect on their experience. Instructors AK, HS, and SM revealed that they found the portfolio to be more useful than they had previously anticipated. In fact, instructor AK admitted that he had felt resentment at first but later changed his attitude. On the other hand, instructor BE, who had always been for the portfolio, did not change her attitude. During this

round of interviews, instructors AK and HS had received portfolios of their incoming students. The instructors stated that the presence of the portfolios was helpful in giving them insights into the students' writing abilities and needs.

Regarding the items that the instructors found most useful, SM said the rubrics and AK stated students' self-assessment and the scoring rubrics. BE, too, found self-assessment and rubrics helpful and added drafts to her list of helpful items. HS found all the different entries helpful.

Instructors' responses also indicated that the portfolio facilitated and/or affected certain instructional decisions. For example, AK mentioned that the portfolio allowed him be more objective when evaluating students' writing and separate factors such as students' in class attitude and/or attendance. BE said that the portfolio helped her address some specific needs of her students and SM found the scoring rubrics helpful in making grading decision. HS used the portfolios of her incoming students to make decisions about the types of essays or research papers she would teach her students and added that using the portfolio more effectively as an instructional tool was still work in progress for her. All four instructors AK, BE, HS, and SM, continued to maintain that the portfolio served as a tool to monitor students' learning and progress.

From the instructors' point of view, the portfolio also provided benefits to the students. Most of those opportunities the instructors had mentioned during the previous interview. For instance, AK and HS pointed out that the portfolio engaged students in reflection, the ability to look back. AK and HS also mentioned that the portfolio made students realize their progress in writing, and such a realization can build their motivational factors

It became apparent that the assessment portfolio offered numerous benefits as an instructional tool to both students and instructors. Therefore, I asked the instructors' opinion of the portfolio as an assessment tool, meaning the use of the portfolio as a medium for collecting information about the students' performance in the class. AK found the portfolio helpful in better informing his assessment, BE and HS said that the portfolio made their assessment more organized, and SM stated it made it more formal. In this sense, the presence of a body of students' work in one place provided a better and more comprehensive view of students' writing skill.

All the instructors felt that the portfolio was a valid form of assessment. In other words, according to the instructors, the portfolio gave the information that they wanted to measure, viz. the extent to which students were mastering the writing class objectives in a particular level. As to its reliability, the instructors agreed that the portfolio was reliable in that it provided consistent results when repeated. However, two of the instructors added that its reliability depended on the importance that all the instructors placed across the levels. Thus, the reliability of the portfolio is at stake if equal emphasis is not placed on its value and the opportunities it offers across the levels. Instructors reiterated their concern with students' keeping the portfolio in an orderly organized manner. Finally, in terms of whether the portfolio seemed extra work, some instructors saw it as a little bit more work, but necessary work.

Overall, instructors' attitude toward the portfolio appeared to be a positive one. However, regarding self-assessment, though instructors felt that it was a useful tool to the students, they still questioned its reliability in presenting students' accurate picture of their writing abilities, a concern also shared by students.

Students

Research Question 4

How useful and/or challenging do ESL students find assessment portfolio?

Objectives

Most of the students found the ‘objectives’ handout useful for matching their learning outcomes against the explicitly stated writing objectives on the handout.

Portfolio

Many students, out of habit, keep a folder in which they store their work. Therefore, the students’ initial interpretation of the portfolio was that of a folder in which they saved their work. However, when directly asked whether the portfolio that the teacher required them to keep was similar to their personal folders, most of the students indicated that it was different. The portfolio was more organized. Some students said that self-assessment distinguished the portfolio from a folder. The realization that the portfolio was more than a repository tool indicated that the portfolio project was on its right track.

Further, as instructors encouraged students to maintain the portfolio in an organized manner, some students realized the value of saving their drafts, and incorporating the feedback they had received from their instructor and peers when revising their papers. In this sense, the portfolio aligned with the process approach to teaching writing. Most of the students revealed that they were not familiar with the process approach to writing in their home country where they had received their initial English language instruction; therefore, this meant that they need guidance from the instructor at least during the early stages of their enrollment of how to effectively use

strategies associated with the process approach, such as brainstorming, outlining, planning, drafting, writing, revising, rewriting, incorporating peer and instructor feedback, and finally editing paper before turning it for final evaluation. By encouraging students to keep their body of work together, the portfolio made it possible for students to make better use of the process approach to teaching writing. This benefit had been addressed by Murphy (1994) who explained that “because portfolios accommodate and encourage process, they are more in line with what we know about good instructional practices in the teaching of writing” (p. 146).

In addition, most of the students stated that they could see their improvement and progress. Besides making students feel elated about their accomplishment, such a realization can build and sustain their motivation. Students also expressed that the portfolio allowed them to look back on their errors and fix them. In this sense, the portfolio provided the students with reflection and learning opportunities. The instructors had mentioned a similar benefit of the portfolio for the students. Finally, in terms of concern, the students did not mention any major concern related to the portfolios.

Self-Assessment

Students showed a mixed feeling toward self-assessment. Some of them admitted that it was useful, and helped them feel more confident about their writing skill, as well as made them realize the areas they needed to work on; others showed a concern as to whether their self-assessment reflected their actual writing abilities, and therefore needed some form of feedback from their instructor on their self-assessment.

Scoring Rubrics

All the students found the analytical scoring rubric that the instructor used to score their writing useful as it gave them insights into their strengths and the areas they needed to work on.

Research Question 5

To what extent does the larger population of ESL students enrolled in IEI share the portfolio perceptions of the students who were interviewed?

Objectives

Like the interviewed group of students, most of the students who completed the written survey stated that they found the objectives handout helpful.

Portfolio

In terms of attitude, similar to the interviewed group, most of the students on the written questionnaire stated that they liked keeping the portfolio and found it useful, and thought of the portfolio as an important part of the writing class. The larger group, too, agreed that the portfolio served as a repository and organizational tool. However, whereas most of the interviewed students realized a difference between a portfolio and a personal folder, only about half of the students in the larger group responded that the portfolio was always or usually more structured than a personal folder. Just like the interviewed group, most of the students responded that the portfolio helped document their learning and monitor their progress as writers.

Most of the interviewed students stated that the portfolio helped them see “improvement,” which in turn made them feel “happy.” Such a positive feeling could be taken as a driving force, a motivator for students to do better and boost their confidence.

On the questionnaire, when students were asked if seeing progress in the writing class increased their self-motivation, more than half of the students responded that it always or usually did. On a similar note, only half of the students said creating the portfolio always or usually helped build their self-confidence. To better build students' affective factors, instructors could use the portfolio to highlight the areas that these students can do well and help them set goals for future improvement.

None of the students in the interviewed group expressed any concern regarding any time constraints or difficulty in keeping the portfolios organized. On the written questionnaire, only a few students said that keeping the portfolio takes up a lot of their time, and keeping it organized is difficult.

Self-Assessment

Like the interviewed group, most of the students on the questionnaire felt that self-assessment helped them see and/or monitor progress. In terms of usefulness, most of the interviewed students found it useful but some of them indicated that, although they thought it was useful, they did not like doing it or rather preferred their instructor's assessment. This response was consistent with the responses on the survey, where most of the students said they found self-assessment useful, but about half of them stated that they preferred the instructor assess them.

Rubrics

As in the interviewed group, almost all of the students said that the rubrics made grading clearer and helped students know their strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusion

Overall, analysis of the instructors' data showed that the purposes for which the portfolio in IEI had been implemented were being achieved to a large extent, viz.:

- To document students' writing ability
- To monitor students' writing progress
- To reflect classroom instruction and goals
- To modify instruction based on students' performance in the writing class
- To develop students' reflective ability
- To maintain a continuous record of student writing performance from one session to the next

All the instructors agreed that the portfolio provided various instructional/learning opportunities to the teachers and students, such as monitoring students' progress, documenting students' learning, helping students become aware of their learning process, and maintaining a record of their students' progress across the levels. Instructors AK, BE, HS and SM, who had never used an assessment portfolio before, provided their insights on the portfolio revealing their growing awareness of the portfolio and the opportunities that it offers. However, although instructor AK stated various valuable benefits of the portfolio, it seemed that he still held some doubts about the portfolio.

On the other hand, most of the students perceived the portfolio as a tool that complemented their learning to write endeavors. For example, the portfolio encouraged them save their drafts in an orderly organized manner, stressed revision, allowed them to reflect and correct, demonstrated their growth as writers, and built their motivation.

The benefits that the portfolio yielded to the instructors and students in the intensive English program context conforms with the findings on portfolios in other academic contexts, such as those discussed in the literature review chapter of this dissertation. In the case of self-assessment, however, this study revealed that despite the

value and usefulness of self-assessment realized by both students and instructors, the question of its reliability remained a concern for both groups.

Teaching Implications for IEI

Weigle (2002) asserts that within the global community, as writing continues to become a significant skill, so does the need for effective instruction in teaching writing in both second- and foreign language contexts, which, in turn, calls for, “valid and reliable ways to test writing ability, both for classroom use and as a predictor of future professional or academic success” (p. 1). Therefore, in light of the research findings, in this section I attempt to provide certain teaching implications that might be useful for the IEI context.

The intensive program is extremely time sensitive as the sessions tend to be shorter than in normal post-secondary contexts. However, to reap maximum benefits of the portfolio, the dynamic and interactive use of the portfolio can better help students. Using the portfolio to conference with the students at least once during the session can help students see the whole picture of their progress. This can also help build students’ motivation and confidence, factors significant for success in language learning.

Conferencing can have several other benefits. Besides providing students with oral feedback on what went well, and what did not, conferencing can prevent the process of keeping a portfolio and doing self-assessment from becoming a mechanical activity. In addition, instructors can use the conferencing time to provide students with feedback regarding students’ perception of themselves as writers and provide the necessary instructional support and guidance. Conferencing with students needs to be planned beforehand as Genesee and Upshur (1996) state that “[u]sing portfolios interactively and

collaboratively does not happen automatically but requires conscious and systematic planning by teachers” (p. 103).

Furthermore, in IEI classes, during a particular session, a teacher might have returning students who had already used a portfolio in their previous level as well as new students placed by means of the placement test who probably had never used a portfolio. In a situation such as this, one of the instructors suggested pairing students who already have begun a portfolio with those who have not, and asking the students to explain the concept of the portfolio to the new students. Such activities can promote students feel ownership of their portfolio.

Since one of the identified goals of implementing the portfolio in IEI is to monitor students’ writing progress, placing some grading value on the revision and drafting stages can make students more accountable during these stages. In addition, to motivate students to maintain the portfolio in an organized manner, a habit that can run across all the levels in IEI, instructors can also put certain points on the physical completion and organization of the portfolio.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the experience of ESL instructors’ and students’ perspectives on the portfolio within one intensive English program in the United States. Therefore, generalization of the results to other contexts and population may not be appropriate. Further the small sample size of the instructor participants in this study was another limiting factor.

A further constraint was that some students, especially those in Level 3, had limited proficiency in English when expressing certain complicated thoughts and views

on portfolios during the interview. This factor could also have affected the accuracy of responses when completing the written survey. As the researcher was not present during the completion of the survey, there was no way to tell what kind of difficulties the students faced when completing the survey.

As the researcher was also an instructor in the intensive English program, she knew some of the students personally; therefore, some students might want to give the answers that they think the researcher wanted to hear instead of what they really thought or believed. Finally, the researcher's subjectivity in analyzing and interpreting the qualitative data needs to be taken into consideration as yet another limiting factor.

Recommendation for Future Research

This study is limited to an ESL intensive English program in the United States. Data from the present study showed that both instructors and students perceived various educational values in the use of the portfolio. Further research should be conducted within the various EFL contexts, such as in my home country (Yemen), where the concept of the portfolio is new. Although researchers could begin with the research questions I have investigated, the difference between the EFL and ESL contexts might lead researchers to explore different areas and topics than those found in the ESL context.

The students involved in this study had maintained the portfolio for either one session or two. However, time might make a difference in students' evolving perception of the portfolio. Further research could employ students who maintained a portfolio for three sessions or more. During these sessions, the researcher could conduct a more comprehensive follow up with the students at the end of each session to obtain their

views of the portfolio in contributing to their growth as writers in an ESL after each session.

This study involved only four instructors' perception of the portfolio. Including the views of a larger group of instructors may yield different or additional insights on the portfolio. Further, a quantitative investigation and analysis of the instructors' view of the portfolio can help validate research on this topic.

Finally, different types of students might be focus of the research. Do portfolios only work for motivated students or for all types of students regardless of their degree of literacy in both in their own language, for example?

Clearly, there is much research that can help us understand how portfolios can be used to help students learn to write more effectively. That goal alone justifies continued work on this topic.

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Appendix A1

Level 3: Portfolio Purpose

My goal this session is to implement portfolios in the writing class. The portfolio should help you keep track of your writing as well as reflect on your writing progress. I think it is important that you to see not only your final products but also the effort behind them, i.e. the process.

We will be learning different types of writing paragraphs this session: narrative, opinion, definition paragraphs.

You'll place your first, second, final drafts, self-assessment, and scoring rubrics in your portfolios to show how much your writing has improved, and the extent to which you have met the objectives of this class.

Your drafts should be clearly dated.

Appendix A2

Level 5: Portfolio Purpose

My goal this session is to implement portfolios in the writing class. The portfolio should help you keep track of your writing as well as reflect on your writing progress. I think it is important that you see not only your final products but also the effort behind them, i.e. the process.

We will be learning different types of essays this session: classification, reaction, and cause/effect.

You'll place your first, second, final draft, self assessment, and scoring rubrics in your portfolio to show how much your writing has improved, and the extent to which you have met the objectives of this class.

Your drafts should be clearly dated.

Appendix B1

Level 3: Writing Objectives

Objectives

Level 3 Writing emphasizes planning and composing different types of paragraphs:

- Narrative paragraph
- Opinion paragraph
- Definition paragraph

You will learn to

- write a clear title for the paragraph
- formulate a clear topic sentence for the paragraph
- write supporting sentences to develop the topic sentence
- write a concluding sentence for the paragraph
- organize your ideas logically and coherently
- write clear and grammatically correct paragraphs
- use a variety of sentence patterns and vocabulary appropriate for the assignment

Appendix B2

Level 5: Writing Objectives

Objectives

Level 5 Writing emphasizes planning and composing different types of multiple-paragraph essays:

- Classification essay
- Reaction essay
- Cause/Effect essay

You will learn how to...

- write a clear title for the essay
- write an introduction with a clear thesis statement
- effectively use a hook in the introduction
- write supporting paragraphs to develop the main idea (thesis statement)
- write a clear conclusion
- organize your ideas logically and coherently
- write clear and grammatically correct essays
- use a variety of sentence patterns and vocabulary appropriate for the assignment

Appendix C1

Level 3: Student Self-Assessment

Name:

Date:

Purpose of this activity is to reflect on what you do well when writing in English and what you want to do better.

Week 1	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't understand the statement
Paragraph Topic					
I can choose topics for my paragraphs that match the type of paragraph assigned					
Types of Paragraphs					
I can write a narrative paragraph.					
I can write an opinion paragraph.					
I can write a definition paragraph.					
When writing a paragraph....					
Purpose and Organization					
I can write a title for my paragraph.					
I can state my topic sentence clearly.					
I can write supporting sentences related to my topic sentence					
I can organize my thoughts logically and clearly.					
I can write a concluding sentence.					
I can use transitions correctly between sentences.					
Word/Sentence Use					
I can write complete sentences.					
I can write different types of sentences: simple, complex, and compound.					
I can use the correct tense most of the time.					
I do not make many grammatical mistakes.					
I use the right words to express my ideas most of the time.					
Mechanics/Format					
I use periods at the end of sentences.					
I use commas correctly.					
I use capitals to start sentences.					
I capitalize names of people and places.					
I spell all the words correctly.					
I indent paragraphs.					

Student's Goal: I should work more on _____

Instructor's Comments _____

Appendix C2

Level 5: Students Self-Assessment

Name:

Date:

Purpose of this activity is to reflect on what you do well when writing in English and what you want to do

Week 1	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I don't understand the statement
Essay Topic					
I can choose topics for my essay that correspond with the type of essay assigned.					
Types of essays					
I can write a classification essay.					
I can write a reaction essay.					
I can write a cause/effect essay.					

When writing an essay....

Purpose and Organization					
I can write a title for my essay.					
I can write a clear introductory paragraph.					
I can use a hook in my introduction.					
I can state my thesis statement clearly in the introduction.					
I can write supporting paragraphs related to my thesis statement.					
I can organize my ideas in a coherent way.					
I can use transitions correctly between sentences and paragraphs.					
I can write a conclusion paragraph.					
Word/Sentence Use					
I can write different types of sentences: simple, complex, and compound.					
My essay has few or no grammatical errors, such as in articles, prepositions, tense, run-on, and fragments.					
I can use the right words to express my ideas most of the time.					
Mechanics/Format					
I use punctuation marks correctly.					
I capitalize correctly.					
I spell all the words correctly.					
I indent paragraphs.					

Student's Goal: I should work more on _____

Instructor's Comments _____

Appendix C3

Levels 3 and 5: Student Self-Assessment

Week 8

Please answer the following questions:

- Which one is your best writing for this session?
- Why do you think that is your best writing?
- What do you like about this piece?
- What did you learn this semester in the writing class?
- What do you think you need to improve in your writing?
- What are your goals for next session?

Appendix D1

Level 3: Rubric for Assessing Students' Writing

Title	
Title is original and reflects the topic of the paragraph. Content words are capitalized and function words are lower case.	4
Title is appropriate but it partially reflects the topic of the paragraph. It contains no or some capitalization errors.	3
Title is a complete sentence with a period.	2
Title does not reflect topic of the paragraph.	1
Topic Sentence	
Topic sentence is clear and correctly placed; it is restated in the closing sentence.	4
Topic sentence is clear but incorrectly placed; it is restated in the closing sentences.	3
Topic sentence is unclear or incorrectly placed; it is restated in the closing sentence.	2
Topic sentence is vague; it is not restated in the closing sentence.	1
Supporting Sentences	
Effectively organized in logical and creative manner; relate back to the main idea.	4
Strong order and structure; relate back to the main idea.	3
Attempts at organization.	2
Disorganized and hard to follow or inadequate supporting details.	1
Word Choice	
Precise carefully chosen vocabulary.	4
Appropriate vocabulary.	3
Simple vocabulary.	2
Limited range of words or misused words or inappropriate vocabulary.	1
Grammar	
Minor grammatical errors that do not interfere with meaning.	4
Few grammatical errors that do not interfere with meaning.	3
Some errors that may interfere with meaning.	2
Too many distracting errors that make the text difficult to read.	1
Punctuation	
Minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.	4
Few errors that do not interfere with meaning.	3
Some errors that may interfere with meaning.	2
Too many distracting errors that make the text difficult to read.	1

? - ? = A/A-

? - ? = B/B-

? - ? = C/C-

? - ? = D

? - ? = F

Appendix D2

Level 5: Rubric for Assessing Students' Writing

TITLE	
Title is original and reflects the topic of the paragraph. Content words are capitalized and function words are lower case.	3
Title is appropriate but it partially reflects the topic of the paragraph. Content words are capitalized and function words are lower case.	2
Title partially reflects the topic of the paragraph. Incorrect capitalization.	1
THESIS FOCUS	
Thesis is clear and perfectly matches the writing task.	3
Thesis is clear and closely matches the writing task.	2
Thesis is fairly clear and matches the writing task.	1
ORGANIZATION	
Introduction	
Introduction is well developed, engaging, and smoothly leads to the body; contains an effective hook and detailed background information.	6
Introduction creates interest but may lack some evidence; some ideas may not be fully developed.	5
Introduction is acceptable	4
Mediocre or scant introduction; underdeveloped	3
Shaky or minimally recognized introduction.	2
Absence of a clear introduction.	1
Body	
Well-developed supporting paragraphs; directly related to the thesis; concrete and detailed ideas presented in a clear sequence; transitional expressions used effectively.	6
Supporting paragraphs are directly related to the thesis but one may lack details; some transitional expressions may be misused or absent.	5
Addresses the topic clearly but shows some digressions; misuses some transitional expressions; some ideas are not fully developed.	4
Usually addresses topic but shows digressions; repetition of ideas; limited specific reasons or ideas; transitional expressions may be used incorrectly.	3
Hard to follow—does not address the topic effectively and shows many digressions; repetition of ideas; supporting details may be general or irrelevant; absence of transitional expressions;	2
Impossible to follow—shows many digressions; lacks organization; does not reflect academic writing; no apparent effort to consider the topic carefully.	1
Conclusion	
Conclusion effectively wraps up and goes beyond restating the thesis.	6
Conclusion effectively summarizes topics.	5
Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	4
Mediocre or scant conclusion.	3
Shaky or minimally recognizable conclusion.	2
Absence of conclusion.	1
LANGUAGE AND MECHANICS	
Correct use of grammar.	6
Practically perfect: no errors in spelling, punctuation and/or capitalization.	6
Minor grammatical errors that do not interfere with meaning.	5
Few errors in spelling, punctuation and/or capitalization that don't affect meaning.	5
Makes many errors in language structure but they do not impair meaning.	4
Obvious, but minor errors that don't affect meaning.	4
Many grammatical errors, such as shifting from one tense to another, misusing articles and prepositions.	3
Grammatical errors may interfere with textual meaning. Obvious, distracting errors that may affect meaning.	3
Numerous grammatical errors that make the text difficult to read.	2
Many obvious, distracting spelling, punctuation and/or capitalization errors; needs editing.	2
Severe grammar problems that affects meaning; reader cannot understand what the writer wants to say.	1
Many serious errors that make it difficult to understand; misspells even simple words and misuses punctuation marks and/or capitalization.	1

30 -25 = A/A-

24 -20 = B/B-

19 -15 = C/C-

14 -10 = D

9 -1 = F

Appendix E1

First Round Interview Questions for Instructors

Week 1

1. Have you taken an assessment course? Or- have you ever had any kind of formal training in assessment? Was it useful? Why or why not?
2. What language skills do you teach?
3. In your writing class, do you do any timed writing tasks? How often? Purpose?
4. What are the objectives of Level (3 or 5) writing class?
5. What is the purpose of timed writing?
6. Though reading and writing have different stated objectives and teaching materials, teachers place a single holistic grade for the reading/writing class combined, how do students know what they have made on their writing?
7. Do you approach the teaching of writing as work in process? How many drafts do you require your students to usually write before they submit their final piece?
8. How do you evaluate your students' writing? In other words, how can you tell whether students are making progress in their writing?
9. What do you evaluate?
10. What scoring tools do you use? Do you use any kind of rubrics in your writing class? How do you use them? When do you use them?
11. Have you ever used portfolios in your writing class?
12. What do you know about portfolios?
13. What is your understanding of assessment portfolios?
14. State any advantages of using portfolios.
15. What problems do you foresee if you used portfolios in your classroom?
16. From what you know about portfolios, would you like to use them in your writing class?
17. Do you ever have one-on-one conference with your students and discuss their writings? What questions do you ask?
18. Have you ever used any self-assessment activities, for example, do you ask your students to reflect on their strengths and areas that need improvement, in your writing class?

19. Do you think such activities are/would be useful? Would you like to use students' self-assessment activities in your writing class?
20. This is the first time that you have tangible evidence about students' performance in their previous level, what do you think about it? What will you do with this information? How are you going the portfolio information?

Appendix E2

Follow-Up Interview Questions for Instructors

1. Prior to using portfolios, was your assessment summative (culminating assessment for a unit, grade level, or course of study providing a status report on mastery or degree of proficiency according to identified learning outcomes), formative (ongoing diagnostic assessment providing information to guide instruction) or both?
2. How are you assessing your students' performance in the writing class right now?
3. It has been four weeks since you started using portfolios, how is it going for you?
4. How are you using assessment portfolios in class?
5. Have your students turned any portfolio assignments? How many?
6. What benefits, if any, do you see of using portfolios at this stage?
7. What problems, if any, are you facing at this stage?
8. What suggestions do you have on tackling on these issues?
9. What do you think your students think about portfolios?
10. What are the grading criteria for portfolios? How are you grading your students' assignments?
11. How do you find the self-reflection activities?
12. How are you using them?
13. How do your students find the self-reflection activities?
14. Where do you store the portfolios? Do you keep them? Do the students keep them? Do you have a space especially for them? If students are keeping them, are they being responsible and organized?
15. Do you ever take the time to emphasize the importance of writing in English to your students and where and when that would help them?
16. How did you use the portfolio content / information for any instructional purposes?

Appendix E3

Final Follow-Up Interview Questions for Instructors

Semi Structured Interview

The Portfolio:

1. What do you exactly do with the portfolio during the session?
2. How has your use of portfolios changed throughout the last three sessions?
3. Has your perception of portfolio changed?
4. What do you think of portfolios as an instructional tool?
5. What do you think of portfolios as an assessment tool?
6. Prior to using portfolios, was your assessment summative (culminating assessment for a unit, grade level, or course of study providing a status report on mastery or degree of proficiency according to identified learning outcomes), formative (ongoing diagnostic assessment providing information to guide instruction) or both?
7. How reliable do you find portfolios as an assessment tool?
8. How valid to you find portfolios as an assessment tool?
9. In what ways has the portfolio changed your ideas about teaching and learning to write?
10. What problems have arisen as a result of your using portfolios? What have you found to be a barrier to portfolio implementation?
11. What have the benefits been? Do you think your students realized the benefits of portfolios? Have the benefits been more than the drawbacks?
12. What do you feel are the strengths and/or weaknesses of using portfolio assessment in the classroom?
13. What kind of decisions did the portfolio help you make?
14. Have you ever had plagiarism issues in your writing class?
15. How do you see portfolios and plagiarism?
16. Did you do any timed writing?
17. Would you like to continue using portfolios in your writing class? If no, why? If yes, what changes, if any, will you make to portfolios?

18. Do you think your students liked the idea of portfolios? Did they face any problems? What kind?
19. Do you think using portfolios has improved students' writing?
20. Having a portfolio has it in any way changed the way you teach? The way you assess? Do you feel your instructional/assessment practices have changed as a result of portfolios?
21. Do you feel portfolios can adequately report progress to students?
22. Do you perceive the portfolio as more work?
23. What items in the portfolio are most helpful to you?

Self Assessment / Grading

24. Did you notice any change in students' self-reflection activities through the session? How?
25. Did their self-assessment always match with the quality of their writing?
Please explain.
26. In what ways do you think that the students have benefited from 'self assessment' activities?
27. Did you have any one-on-one conferencing with the students to discuss their progress?
28. How did you grade your students' portfolios?
29. Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix F1

Interview Questions for IEI Director

During my interview with the IEI director, I laid out certain issues related to portfolio assessment and requested her input on those issues:

- What made you encourage the idea of implementing portfolios in the writing class, at IEI? What does the administration hope to achieve by encouraging assessment portfolios in the writing class?
- Selection: Students get to choose their work to be included in the portfolio, would this be possible?
- Evaluation: Portfolio also encourages delayed grading? How possible do you see this?
- In terms of validity, how valid do you see the portfolio as an assessment tool?
- In terms of reliability, how do you see the portfolio?
- In addition to using portfolios to boost student involvement in learning, teachers can use them to plan instruction that is responsive to students' needs. This can be achieved through reviewing students' portfolios with them or privately and keeping a record of areas that require additional attention. One way maybe through planning conferences. Do you have suggestions on how to encourage teachers to use portfolios interactively in their teaching?
- Some teachers do timed-writing others do not...would you like to see some consistency in this?
- There isn't any summative grading so far the portfolio...would you like this to stay so, or would you like to see teachers place a summative grade on students' portfolios?
- The portfolio contents vary from one level to another, do you intend to have some consistency about what to include?
- Once my project is over, how are you going to follow up with the teachers?

Appendix G1

Form for Students' Demographic and Personal Information

Week 1: Levels 3 and 5

Data collected from this survey will be used for completion of my doctoral degree in using portfolio assessment in teaching writing to students at IEI. The information gathered will be used for research on portfolio assessment. The purpose of this study is to investigate how helpful and useful portfolio assessment is in teaching and assessing writing. There are no risks or benefits to you from participating in this research. If you do not wish to participate, you may simply return the blank survey or stop at anytime, with no penalty to yourself. If you choose to participate, completion and return of the survey indicates your consent to participate in this survey.

Student Demographic Information Sheet (to be completed by students before the first interview)

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Gender _____
4. Country / Nationality _____
5. First Language _____
6. Educational background _____
7. How long have you been in the US? _____
8. How long have you been studying at IEI? _____
9. Reasons for taking an ESL course at IEI _____
10. Where did you study English before coming to IEI? _____
11. How long did you study English before coming to IEI? _____
12. Did you learn how to write in English before coming to IEI? _____
13. Where? _____
14. Do you enjoy writing in your native language? _____
15. Do you enjoy writing in English? _____
16. Will learning to write in English help you with your future goals? _____

Appendix G2

First Round Interview Questions for Students

Spring 1

Levels 3 and 5

- At which level did you start studying at IEI?
- Are you taught how to write paragraphs and essays in your native language?
How?
- In your previous schooling in your home country, how did your teacher teach you writing in English? For example, did you choose the topic you wanted to write about? Did you write several drafts before you turned in your final paper?
- Is this the first time that you are going to learn how to write a paragraph or essay in English?
- How often do you need to write in English outside the classroom?
- What types of writings do you do?
- How is learning to write in English going to help you in the future?
- Do you find writing in English easy or difficult?
- If difficult, why? What kind of difficulties do you find when writing in English?
- How do you know that you're improving in your writing skill?
- Your teacher is going to use portfolios in the writing class. Did you ever have anything like this in your writing class before? Have you ever heard anything about portfolios from other students?
- Would you like your teacher to use portfolios as a way of teaching and assessing your writing?
- After you complete the assignment, do you ever reflect on your writings, for example think about the strengths and areas of improvement in your writing?
- Is this the first time that you did a self assessment activity? How did you find it? What did you think about it? Would you like your teacher to use such activities?

Appendix G3

Follow-Up Interviews Questions for Students

Spring 2
Levels 3 and 5

1. Can you tell me what's in your portfolio?
2. How has your writing class this time been different from your previous writing classes in IEI?
3. How has your writing class been similar to your previous writing class in IEI?
4. Having a copy of the objectives in your portfolio, how did you find this? Have you ever had anything like this before?
5. What is self assessment?
6. Have you ever done self assessment before this level that is level (3) or (5)?
7. Doing a self assessment at the beginning of the session, how did you find this?
8. Doing a self assessment at the middle of the session, how did you find this?
9. Doing a self assessment at the end of the session, how did you find this?
10. What did you think about self assessment?
11. How did you feel about self assessment?
12. What do you think you gain from self- assessment?
13. What kind of difficulties did you find when doing the self assessment?
14. What is your understanding of portfolios now? What is a portfolio?
15. How did you find keeping an assessment portfolio?
16. Do you think keeping an assessment portfolio has been helpful? If yes, how?
If no, why?
17. Do portfolios help you monitor how your writing skill has developed or improved? How?
18. What is good about keeping a portfolio?
19. What is difficult about keeping a portfolio?
20. Has keeping a portfolio changed the way you write?
21. What concerns or questions do you have about keeping a portfolio?

22. Can you describe your general impressions of portfolios? You overall impression about portfolios?
23. How useful has it been keeping your drafts and final paper of each assignment together?
24. Would you like your next level teacher to continue using portfolios? Why so?
25. Do you have any suggestions for your teachers who use portfolios?
26. How did you find using rubrics to assess your classmate's drafts?
27. How did you find your teachers using rubrics?
28. Do you have any suggestions for your instructs about using rubrics?
29. How did you know that you were improving in your writing class, this time?

Appendix G4

The Complete Written Questionnaire with Students' Response

Fall 2: Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6

Data collected from this survey will be used for completion of my doctoral degree in using portfolio assessment in teaching writing to students at IEI. The information gathered will be used for research on portfolio assessment. The purpose of this study is to investigate how helpful and useful portfolio assessment is in teaching and assessing writing. There are no risks or benefits to you from participating in this research. If you do not wish to participate, you may simply return the blank survey or stop at anytime, with no penalty to yourself. If you choose to participate, completion and return of the survey indicates your consent to participate in this survey.

1. Demographic and Personal Information

Please complete the following:

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Gender _____
4. Country / Nationality _____
5. First Language _____
6. Educational background _____
7. How long have you been in the US? _____
8. At which **level** did you start studying at IEI? _____
9. In which level are you right now at IEI? _____
10. In which level at IEI did you start using the **portfolio**? _____
11. Purpose for learning English at IEI _____

2. Portfolio Content

My portfolio contains (Please check (✓) all that apply):

A copy of the purpose of portfolios	_____
A copy of the objectives	_____
Drafts of assignments	_____
Final papers	_____
Scoring rubrics	_____
Peer assessment	_____
Self-assessment	_____
Other (explain)	_____ _____

3. Student Questionnaire

Please read each statement and circle the response that most closely represents how you feel about the statement:

- Always (100%)
- Usually (80%)
- Sometimes (50%)
- Occasionally 20%
- Never (0%)
- I don't understand the sentence

Objectives

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence./ No response
1. Having a handout stating the objectives of the writing class is helpful.	10n 27.0%	19n 51.4%	04n 10.8%	--	--	04n 10.8%

Portfolio

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. No response
2. I like keeping the portfolio.	17n 45.9%	14n 37.8%	04n 10.8%	02n 5.4%	--	--
3. The portfolio helps me see if my writing is getting better or worse.	16n 43.2%	14n 37.8%	03n 8.1%	01n 2.7%	02n 5.4%	01n 2.7%
4. The portfolio helps me keep my writing papers together.	22n 59.5%	12n 32.4%	03n 8.1%	--	--	--

5. Keeping a portfolio has been useful.	16n 43.2%	15n 40.5%	03n 8.1%	03n 8.1%	--	--
6. Portfolios are an important part of the writing class.	09n 24.3%	17n 45.9%	08n 21.6%	03n 8.1%	--	--
7. I don't like keeping the portfolio.	1n 2.7%	1n 2.7%	4n 10.8%	12n 32.4%	17n 45.9%	2n 5.4%
8. The portfolio is more structured than a personal folder.	7n 18.9%	12n 32.4%	14n 37.8%	3n 8.1%	1n 2.7%	--
9. The portfolio helps me keep my drafts organized.	17n 45.9%	15n 40.5%	4n 10.8%	--	1n 2.7%	--
10. Having all my papers in one place helps me know what I need to do to improve my writing.	15n 40.5%	18n 48.6%	03n 8.1%	--	--	01n 2.7%
11. The portfolio helps me see my progress.	17n 45.9%	16n 43.2%	--	04n 10.8%	--	--
12. Seeing my progress in the writing class increases my self-motivation.	10n 27.0%	15n 40.5%	11n 29.7%	1n 2.7%	--	--
13. We don't need a portfolio in the writing class.	---	02n 5.4%	04n 10.8%	10n 27.0%	19n 51.4%	02n 5.4%
14. Creating the portfolio helps build my self-confidence.	10n 27.0%	09n 24.3%	13n 35.1%	03n 8.1%	02n 5.4%	--

15. The portfolio is a good tool to show my progress in writing	20n 54.1%	12n 32.4%	04n 10.8%	01n 2.7%	--	--
16. The portfolio is a good tool to show my growth in writing in different levels in IEI.	21n 56.8%	10n 27.0%	04n 10.8%	02n 5.4%	--	--
17. Keeping my portfolio organized takes up a lot of my time.	06n 16.2%	03n 8.1%	11n 29.7%	09n 24.3%	08n 21.6%	--
18. The portfolio helps me see what I am learning in the class.	20n 54.1%	10n 27.0%	07n 18.9%	--	--	--
19. The portfolio helps me see how well I am doing in my writing.	16n 43.2%	16n 43.2%	4n 10.8%	1n 2.7%	--	--
20. The portfolio makes revising my drafts easier.	13n 35.1%	15n 40.5%	06n 16.2%	02n 5.4%	01n 2.7%	--
21. Keeping my portfolio organized is difficult.	--	04n 10.8%	08n 21.6%	14n 37.8%	09n 24.3%	02n 5.4%
22. Having the portfolio helps me find the areas I need to improve in my writing.	14n 37.8%	12n 32.4%	10n 27.0%	--	--	01n 2.7%
23. The portfolio is a good tool to show my	14n 37.8%	18n 48.6%	04n 10.8%	01n 2.7%	--	--

progress in writing over time.						
--------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	--

Self-Assessment

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence./ missing information
24. I like doing self-assessment.	10n 27.0%	14n 37.8%	10n 27.0%	02n 5.4%	01n 2.7%	--
25. Self-assessment is not important.	01n 2.7%	02n 5.4%	05n 13.5%	13n 35.1%	15n 40.5%	01n 2.7%
26. I do not like doing self-assessment.	--	01n 2.7%	12n 32.4%	15n 40.5%	09n 24.3%	--
27. Self-assessment is useful.	14n 37.8%	15n 40.5%	07n 18.9%	--	--	01n 2.7%
28. Self assessment helps me know about my strengths and weaknesses as a writer.	17n 45.9%	15n 40.5%	05n 13.5%	--	--	--
29. Self-assessment makes me aware of my learning process.	15n 40.5%	17n 45.9%	05n 13.5%	--	--	--
30. I am always honest in my self-assessment.	15n 40.5%	17n 45.9%	05n 13.5%	--	--	--

31. Doing self-assessment is difficult.	05n 13.5%	06n 16.2%	14n 37.8%	08n 21.6%	04n 10.8%	--
32. I prefer that the teacher assess me.	07n 18.9%	11n 29.7%	15n 40.5%	02n 5.4%	01n 2.7%	01n 2.7%

Rubrics

	Always (100%)	Usually (80%)	Sometimes (50%)	Occasionally (20%)	Never (0%)	I don't understand the sentence. or missing
34. The rubrics, which the teacher uses to score my writings, make the grading system clear.	13n 35.1%	23n 62.2%	--	--	--	01n 2.7%
34. The scoring rubrics, which the teachers use, help me know my strengths and weaknesses as a writer.	16n 43.2%	19n 51.4%	--	01n 2.7%	--	01n 2.7%

Thank you for your help and participation.

Appendix H1

IEI Director's Letter

Hey Shafiq –

Thanks for letting me sit in on the interview. I have also listened to the student interviews. With the teachers, I thought you did a good job of coming across as a “resource person” for them rather than something negative. Your questions helped them to clarify what they already know about their teaching and assessment – as well as what they know about using portfolios as a form of assessment. HS was able to articulate weaknesses in her own approach to the assessment process in her classes, which is a very good starting point for beginning something new in this area. Your own demeanor came across as friendly and helpful – and the teachers really want your direct help. As a way of reminder, please do follow up with them frequently; they need detailed guidance as they go through this process for the first time. Don't be afraid of “stepping on

Appendix I1

Consent Script

This is Shafiq A. Fakir, a doctoral student at the University of Memphis, Department of English. I am conducting this research to collect data for my doctoral dissertation.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. The research results will help me design a curriculum for the Intensive English for Internationals (IEI) at the University of Memphis that incorporates assessment portfolios as an assessment tool to measure, monitor, and evaluate students' growth and performance in ESL writing.

Today you will be participating in completing a questionnaire and one-to-one interviews which will be recorded on a digital recorder and take approximately 15-20 minutes. At the end of the session, if you agree, I would like to make copies of your portfolio contents.

Your participation is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you may stop at any time. Responses will be confidential and I will assign you a pseudonym in the final write up process of my dissertation. Taking part in this interview is your agreement to participate.

Here is a copy of the consent script, and if you would like, you may keep it for your records. If you have any questions regarding the research, contact Dr. Charles Hall at charleshall@rocketmail.com. Dr. Hall is my dissertation advisor at the University of Memphis, Department of English.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the Office for Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Memphis, Administration 315, Memphis, TN 38152, or call (901) 678-5071. This Office oversees the review of the research to protect your rights and is not involved with this study.

Thank you again for your help.

Shafiq Fakir

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