

From the Other Side of the Desk: Sixth Graders' Views on Portfolio Assessment

Hoyeol Ryu

Hankyong National University

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Portfolio assessment has been widely recognized as providing solutions to the problems traditional tests fail to deal with adequately. It enables the teacher to assess students' English proficiency development more validly and reliably through the examination of their portfolios. In addition, it helps students develop their cognitive strategies which are critical to empowering themselves and growing as autonomous learners. However, despite these advantages, it is complex and difficult to implement in practice. Keeping these advantages and disadvantages in mind, this study examined how sixth graders perceived portfolio assessment and its implementing procedures. The result of this study reveals that, although the teacher planned and prepared portfolio assessment elaboratively, her students went through a considerable amount of difficulties during the assessment. However, it was shown that their satisfaction level with the assessment was high enough to seriously consider it as a legitimate evaluation instrument for their English proficiency development. Besides, this study confirms its positive instructional effects. The benefits of the assessment revealed in the study include the growth of students' confidence in learning English and reduced text anxiety, particularly for low-level students.

[language testing method/portfolio assessment/portfolio assessment
procedure/learners' perceptions on portfolio assessment/언어 평가
방법/포트폴리오 평가/포트폴리오 평가 절차/학습자의 평가에 대한 인식]

I. INTRODUCTION

The traditional language tests have been widely recognized as having critical limit in evaluating students' abilities fairly and reliably (Delett, Barnhardt, & Kevorkian, 2001; Statman, 1998). Since students' discrete knowledge is evaluated

only a few times, they are critically limited in examining students' language learning process. Further, despite the traditional belief about their reliability, many studies reported that they are very limited in achieving the reliability (Pierce, 1992; Statman, 1998). As a consequence of these realizations, portfolio assessment has emerged as an alternative option to replace them. It integrates the assessment of students' academic progress into the instructional process and monitors students' progress throughout the semester, providing the teacher with a better position to assess the students fairly and reliably. Furthermore, it can be utilized as a tool to empower students and become independent learners, in terms that they collect and select artifacts that can document their progress in learning English (Gottlieb, 1995; Hirvela, 1997; McNamara, & Deane, 1995; Padilla, Aninao, & Sung, 1996; Smolen, Newman, Wathen, & Lee, 1995).

This study intends to examine how six graders perceive portfolio assessment as well as to identify what really happen during the assessment for its successful introduction to the classroom. Since portfolio assessment is a joint venture between the teacher and her students, their perception on the assessment plays a critical role in its implementation. They should be given legitimate voice to speak up on how they are taught and assessed in the assessment. Further, they are entitled to control how their learning efforts are assessed throughout the whole process of the assessment. To accommodate the changes necessary to introduce the assessment to the classroom, the teacher sometimes needs to sit on the chair opposite side of the desk. The identification of the problems of the assessment is really expected to provide invaluable information for its successful implementation as well as the development of new testing methods that overcome the problems that traditional testing methods have generated.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Definition and Features of Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio assessment has emerged as a representative example of alternative assessment. Myeon-Seon Kim and Seok-Woo Kim (2001) defined portfolio assessment as a method to evaluate students' academic progress through collecting artifacts of their learning during a course of study. Gottlieb (1995) also mentioned that portfolio was an assessment tool to "offer the opportunity for students of any age, from kindergarten to adult, to showcase their

accomplishments in any language and through multiple means" (p. 12). Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian (2001) defined portfolios as those which provide teachers with a portrait of what students know and can do, enable them to look at students' progress from different perspectives, encourage students to reflect on and participate in learning, and link assessment with learning. In addition to these basic features of portfolio assessment, Padilla et al. (1996) argued that students' portfolios could be utilized for documenting certain language abilities that standardized tests fail to measure. In portfolio assessment, students' communication efforts in second language can be audio- or video-taped, and it enables the teacher to accurately locate students' communicative abilities which are not disclosed in standardized tests. The studies above all stressed the characteristic of portfolio assessment as a more valid measure of documenting students' English proficiency development.

Instead of solely looking at portfolio assessment as an evaluation tool, it has been viewed as serving instructional functions as well. Adams and Hamm (1992) stated this function of portfolio assessment as follows:

Portfolio can be used as a tool in the classroom to bring students together, to discuss ideas, and to provide evidence of understanding and the way to apply it. Through critical analysis of their work—and of their peers—students gain insight into other ways of looking at a problem. (p. 103)

Portfolio assessment helps students monitor and reflect upon their own study and become autonomous learners. Smolen et al. (1995) emphasized students' decision-making and active participation in learning as the major advantages of portfolio assessment. While students are required to collect works and determine what need to be included in the portfolios, they are provided with opportunities to build a sense of empowerment and ownership in learning. Smolen et al. (1995) viewed goal-setting as a helpful strategy for students to control their learning. When students set their learning goals, they have to critically examine their current level of language proficiency and judge it against the standard imposed by the teacher. Gottlieb (1995) viewed that students' perceptions, interpretations, and strategies utilized in acquiring new knowledge lied in the center of the assessment.

Portfolio assessment also helps students develop their cognitive strategies. McNamara and Deane (1995) listed the following advantages of portfolio assessment in terms of developing students' cognitive awareness in learning: 1)

it enables them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, 2) it documents their progress in learning, 3) it enables them to identify effective learning strategies and materials, 4) they become aware of language learning contexts that work best for them, and 5) they can establish goals for future independent learning. These advantages come from the fact that students are allowed to plan and participate in the assessment. Unless there is room for them to participate in the assessment, it merely becomes another form of traditional teacher-directed tests. In his emphasis on self-assessment, Little (2005) maintained that shared responsibilities and privileges with the teacher in the assessment enable students to direct and reflect upon their learning. Further, Santos (1997) stressed that students were consistently asked to use and monitor their cognitive strategies throughout the assessment. In his explanation, students are asked not only to select artifacts that documents their learning activities, but to provide reflective analysis on them.

2. Portfolio Assessment Procedure

Portfolio assessment procedure is usually divided into three phases of planning, implementing, and evaluation. However, the division is slightly different by each researcher. Myeon-Seon Kim and Seok-Woo Kim (2001) introduced portfolio assessment procedure studies in their study. Among them, Hill and Ruptic (1994) and Eun-Kyong Sung (1999) are worth noting. Hill and Ruptic divided portfolio assessment into three phases of collecting, assessing, and reporting. The teacher collects resource materials and students' sample works and records their performance in the classroom during the collecting phase. During the assessing phase, the teacher summarizes students' works, assigns values to them, and has her students reflect on their works. Finally, during the reporting phase, the teacher re-organizes and interprets students' portfolios and reports the results of the assessment to students and their parents.

Eun-Kyong Sung (1999) presented a complex model of portfolio assessment. She divided the procedure into five stages of advance discussion, collection, selection, analysis, and report and utilization. In the first stage, the teacher and her students determine the purpose of the assessment, the relevant curriculum and concrete instructional goals, available resources for the assessment, and appropriate learning activities for the assessment. In the second and third phase, students collect the artifacts that show their learning activities and select among them those which show their academic progress with consultation with the teacher or

other students. In the fourth stage, the students analyze the portfolios with assistance from the teacher. In the final stage, they complete the assessment process by developing the evaluation criteria and assessment report collaboratively. Sung's study clearly shows the point that portfolio assessment should be elaborated throughout the implementing process and a collaborative work between the teacher and her students.

Like Eun-Kyong Sung's study (1999), Delett et al. (2001) placed sufficient emphasis on the planning stage. In the study, the teacher and her students are collaboratively asked to define the assessment purpose, determine portfolio outcomes, match classroom tasks to the outcomes, establish the criteria for assessment, and determine the portfolio organization before students begin to collect artifacts. In this stage of the assessment, audience for the portfolio, instructional goals, and individual students' learning needs should be clearly identified and articulated. The emphasis on the planning stage well shows the necessity of the teacher's preparedness for implementing the assessment.

Introduction of portfolio assessment to a second language classroom has been reported in some studies (Baak, 1997; Jae-Mun Hwang, 1999; Yeon-Hwa Jeon, 2003; Padilla et al., 1996). Baak (1997) introduced portfolio assessment into her ESL composition class in which students were required to include four writing samples which they thought well showed their ESL composition abilities progress. As the first step of the assessment, they were required to write a timed impromptu essay on the first day of the course which showed the teacher their initial ESL composition abilities. Likewise, they were required to write a timed impromptu essay on the last day to determine how much progress they had made during the course. The other two essays were selected of the five essays they wrote during the course. The selected essays were included in the portfolios with their original outlines, rough drafts, peer comments, and final copies that showed the writing processes clearly. One notable feature in Baak's portfolio assessment is that students were required to include a self-reflective cover letter in the portfolio that demonstrated the consciousness of their writing strengths and weaknesses.

Padilla et al. (1996) explained how portfolio assessment was implemented in elementary and high school foreign language programs. As the first step, the teachers and portfolio assessment experts had an initial discussion early in the school year, discussing ways to collect the artifacts that could prove the students' progress across all four language skills. Then, case students who represent each level of foreign language proficiency in each class were selected to help the

teachers preview what the expected outcomes would be like. While students were collecting the artifacts, they were instructed to consider the purpose and audience of their portfolios. In addition, the students were instructed to add the table of content and annotation notes to the portfolio which helped the teacher understand the portfolios. After the portfolios were collected, the teacher reviewed them to determine whether the artifacts were appropriate to document students' language growth and compared the collected portfolios with her initial plan of the assessment. Padilla et al. seemed to place more emphasis on assessing the students' language growth rather than utilizing the portfolios for instructional purposes.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

1. Portfolio Assessment Procedure

An elementary school teacher in a rural area of Gyeonggi Province, was contacted and requested to participate in this study by the researcher of this study. The participant was teaching only English to third to sixth graders at the time of data collection. She had taught elementary school students English for six and half years. She mentioned that she had been trained how to implement portfolio assessment during her in-service teacher training program and was aware of the benefits of the assessment. Before the semester began, there were three two-hour training sessions for the teacher to get acquainted with the underlying principles of portfolio assessment and its procedures. Once the semester began, there were regular weekly meetings to check the progress of the assessment and discuss the problems occurred during its implementation. The weekly meeting continued throughout the semester. After the semester, three follow-up meetings were held to discuss the grading of the students' portfolios and the problems identified during the grading process.

Portfolio assessment was conducted for one of the teacher's sixth-grade English classes during the spring semester of 2007. There were 28 students in the class who were taught English two class hours a week. There were 13 male and 15 female students in the class. The teacher told that, since the school was located in a rural area, most students were offered less opportunities to study English outside the classroom than their peers in big cities. However, they were highly

motivated to learn English and kept up with her English instruction well from the beginning of their English learning. Since it was their first experience to be assessed through portfolio, the teacher carefully planned and extensively prepared for implementing the assessment. In order to guide her students throughout the process, the purpose of the assessment was carefully established and shared with the students. Although the students were only sixth graders, they were encouraged to review the goals prepared by the teacher and participate in the process of adapting them to their learning needs and interests. Teacher's instructional goals were also made explicit and shared with the students. In addition, they were encouraged to establish their own learning goals. To help them establish their own learning goals, each student was provided with consultation time with the teacher which lasted about ten to twenty minutes. Since portfolio assessment was new to the students, it was critical to explain its procedures in detail and invite their opinions and thoughts about the procedures at the initial stage of the assessment. As a way of introducing the assessment, the teacher prepared a model portfolio and showed it to the students with the explanation of its organization and content. The model was prepared based on the suggestions by Delett et al. (2001) and adapted to the teacher's English classes.

Once the planning and introductory phase of portfolio assessment were completed, the teacher provided English lessons based on the established instructional goals and students began to collect artifacts for their portfolios. Unlike traditional testing methods, the students' works that document their learning of English took various forms in the assessment. Their journal logs, self-assessment logs, peer comments, audio and video files, writings and other things that showed their working on learning English were collected. For the convenience of storing the artifacts in the classroom, the teacher prepared large boxes in which the student stored their artifacts. In addition, digital voice recorders and a digital camcorder were employed to record the students' learning activities. Once the students' learning activities were recorded, they were stored in the teacher's computer files. Later, they were allowed to access the files and download them for their portfolios. During the collection phase, what can be the artifacts and how they can be collected and selected to become the entries of the portfolio were explained and discussed with the students repeatedly.

Once all of the artifacts were collected or even while the students were collecting them, they were asked to consider what should be included as entries of the final portfolio and what should be excluded. Smolen et al. (1995) explain this selection process by using the terms of working and showcase portfolio. All

of collected artifacts are stored in working portfolio first and selected to be entire of showcase portfolio. An obvious principle for selecting the entries is whether artifacts show a clear progress in their English proficiency. Another point to consider is whether the artifacts overlap with others in terms of languages and tasks. In the study, if there was evident overlap, all of the overlapped artifacts except for one were excluded. The teacher told the students that the showcase portfolio must display their progress of English proficiency clearly and systematically. Along with self-assessment, selection of the artifacts turned out to be a main feature of portfolio assessment that helped the students develop a sense of empowerment and ownership as autonomous English learners in this study.

Another important element of portfolio assessment that needs to be introduced and discussed with students is the importance of identifying constructs the teacher wants to measure. McKay (2006) stressed the importance of identifying constructs in assessment. The teacher should determine what she wants to assess from their portfolios at the planning stage of the assessment. The criteria should be also shared and discussed with the students. In the study, the teacher held a discussion with the students regarding what she wanted to measure through their portfolios and invited their opinions at the initial stage of the assessment. She also brought the initial edition of the criteria to the classroom and explained them to the students with the rationales behind them. Then the students were encouraged to modify teacher's criteria and establish their own. The student's involvement in setting the criteria turned out to enable them to establish the criteria that more accurately reflected their English learning needs and interests in the study.

2. Survey and Interviews on Students' View on Portfolio Assessment

During the last class of the semester, the students' thoughts and impressions on portfolio assessment were surveyed by employing the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of twelve questions that asked them questions regarding their impressions and thoughts on portfolio assessment and its procedures. The questionnaire employed Lickert scale, in which the respondents were asked to mark the degree of their agreement with the given statement from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The first question asked them whether they understood what the teacher wanted to achieve through the assessment. The second, third,

and fifth question asked whether they were provided enough opportunities to understand the assessment through active discussion and explicit explanation of the assessment by the teacher. The questions were of importance in that, unless the goals and implementing procedures were explicitly shared with the students, it would be impossible to gain the expected benefits of the assessment. The fourth question asked the helpfulness of the assessment to achieving the instructional goals. The sixth question asked the respondents' opinions about the difficulty to implement the assessment in the classroom. The seventh question asked the degree of their understanding the assessment criteria. When we consider the fact that assessment criteria has not been explicitly shared with the students in traditional classrooms as well as they can play a guide role in their learning of English, their answers to this question could provide a clue to understand how they practiced the assessment. The eighth and tenth question asked the difficulty to follow the assessment procedure. The ninth question asked the students whether the assessment is a valid measurement for their English proficiency. The eleventh question sought for an answer to whether the teacher's comment to their portfolios was helpful to diagnose their English proficiency levels. And the last question asked whether the grading of their portfolios was fair and the assessment could be employed as an assessment tool for their English proficiency development. Their answers were statistically analyzed by using one-sample t-test, which shows whether the mean of obtained scores are different from the assumed mean. In this study, the assumed mean was set at three points which shows neither agreement nor disagreement with the given statement. The questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

During the semester, three students representing high, average, and low level of English proficiency in the classroom were asked to have an interview with the author under the permission of the teacher and their parents. The interview with each student lasted about fifteen minutes. The interviews were conducted three times for each student with the progress of the assessment. The first interviews were conducted at the end of the third week, the second one at the end of the seventh week, and the last one a week after the semester. Before the interview, they were instructed that the interview did not have any relationship with the grades they would get and their honest replies to the questions would be highly appreciated. The interviews enabled the author to examine how the students' thoughts had changed as the assessment had progressed. They were questioned mainly on the progress of their portfolio assessment and their opinions and evaluations on the assessment. The author of this study was able to gain in-depth

understanding of how the students felt and thought about the assessment in comparison with traditional testing methods. The interviewed students were very active and collaborative in providing invaluable information on how they had understood the assessment as well as how their assessment had been progressing.

Table 1
Survey on Students' Thoughts on Portfolio Assessment

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I understand the goals of the assessment clearly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. The instructional goals are clearly explained by the teacher. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. There is sufficient discussion regarding the implementation of the assessment in advance. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I think the assessment is helpful to achieving the instructional goals. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I have sufficient discussion with the teacher to accommodate my learning needs and interests in the assessment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. The assessment procedure is too complicate to implement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I understand the assessing criteria clearly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I can collect the artifacts easily. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. The artifacts reflect my progress in English proficiency accurately. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I understand the way how to effectively select the artifacts clearly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. The teacher's comments on your portfolio clearly tell your weaknesses and strengths of English abilities? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. My English abilities are fairly assessed in the assessment? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Note. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

IV. RESULTS

1. Survey Results

The students admitted that the assessment was rigorously implemented by the teacher. The statistical significance of the students' answers to the second and third question clearly indicates that the teacher was very enthusiastic about sharing the underpinnings of the assessment with her students. 19 out of 28 students replied that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the fact that the instructor provided them with opportunities to understand the assessment and its procedures through discussion or explicit explanation. The students' answers to the fifth question seems in line with those to the second and third question. To the

fifth question, only five students answered negatively, implying that the teacher was very eager for accommodating the students' needs and interests in the assessment. The accommodation of their learning needs and interests led to their satisfaction with the assessment which is shown in their answers to the eleventh and last question. The overall results of the survey are summarized in Table 2.

Despite the teacher's rigorous effort to introduce the assessment into the classroom, the students' answers to the first question shows that many of them were not sure of the purpose of the assessment even when the assessment was completed. This result seems in part attributed to the characteristic of portfolio assessment in which assessment is totally integrated into instructional process. Further, in their answers to the sixth question, the students felt that the assessment procedure was still complicate to follow. This result seems in part attributed to the fact that the assessment was totally new to them. The evidence of their uncomfortable feeling in practicing the assessment could be confirmed in their answers to the eighth and tenth question in which many of them expressed a concern for collecting and selecting artifacts for their portfolios. Since the collection and selection of the artifacts lie at the center of the assessment, it clearly seems that they went through a considerable amount of difficulties during the assessment.

Table 2.
Results of the Survey

| Question No. | Frequency of each response | | | | | M | t |
|--------------|----------------------------|----|---|----|---|------|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | |
| 1 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 12 | 3 | 3.25 | 1.331 |
| 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 15 | 4 | 3.61 | 3.117* |
| 3 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 14 | 5 | 3.57 | 2.661* |
| 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 17 | 3 | 3.82 | 3.968* |
| 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 19 | 3 | 3.64 | 2.588* |
| 6 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 5 | 3.18 | 0.667 |
| 7 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 2.64 | -1.508 |
| 8 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 11 | 4 | 3.25 | 1.045 |
| 9 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 14 | 4 | 3.46 | 2.045 |
| 10 | 4 | 10 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 2.79 | -0.923 |
| 11 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 14 | 7 | 3.75 | 3.379* |
| 12 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 14 | 3 | 3.50 | 2.553* |

* $p < .05$.

Contrary to their answers that they had gone through many difficulties in

practicing portfolio assessment, they evaluated the assessment favorably. For example, the students answer the most favorably to the fourth question. There were only three students who responded negatively to the question. This result can be interpreted as the students were aware of the fact that assessment was integrated into instructional process in portfolio assessment, and this greatly helped them achieve their learning goals. This can be attributed to the fact that, unlike traditional tests, they were required to monitor and record their learning of English throughout the whole process of the assessment. Further they answered that the teacher's comments on their portfolios greatly helped them identify their weaknesses and strengths in their English skills. They seemed to highly enjoy and appreciate the teacher's comments to their portfolios that were more concrete and detailed compared to the comments they are likely to encounter in traditional tests. Contrary to the initial concern that they would negatively respond to the fairness of the assessment in evaluating their English proficiency development, favorable statistical significance was observed in the answers to the last question. This result can be interpreted as their effort to learn English was not evaluated only a few times during the semester, but the teacher evaluated all of the documents included in their portfolios which were collected and selected throughout the semester. If this is the case, elementary school students seem to prefer a evaluation method in which they are given sufficient opportunities to show their abilities rather than the traditional summative evaluation methods in which their opportunities are limited. However, the major problem of the assessment in this study seems that the students were unsure of the value of the assessment as a valid evaluation instrument. This can be well shown in their answers to the seventh and ninth question. They were unsure of how their portfolios would be evaluated and what they needed to do to show their progress in learning English effectively. In the study, it turned out that the teacher should have emphasized that activities the students would experience had not only instructional purposes but also purposes for evaluating their English proficiency development.

2. Interview Results

The interviews with the students also provided invaluable insight toward the students' perceptions on portfolio assessment and what need more attention in introducing the assessment to the classroom. Although the results of the survey enable the researcher to discover many unknown and invaluable information

regarding evaluating elementary school students' English proficiency development and introducing portfolio assessment into the classroom, there are still missing parts for the complete understanding of the introduction of an innovative evaluation method such as portfolio assessment into the classroom. The interview with the students undoubtedly helped the researcher discover the missing parts and unearth invaluable information about how they perceived the assessment and what need to be done in introducing the assessment. In the interview with one of the best students in the class, she described the difficulty in the selection of the artifacts as follows:

At first, I was very confused about portfolio assessment. Simply it was new to me and all of the students in the class. Initially I thought it was just keeping all the homeworks I would do during the semester. Partly I was correct, but partly I was wrong too. Among the works I had collected, I had to select what best showed my progress in English proficiency. The selection was the most difficult part of the assessment because I knew that the teacher would evaluate my English proficiency based on the works in my portfolio.

At the beginning of the interview, she pointed out the confusion portfolio assessment brought to her. She said that she failed to understand the assessment initially, but she began to understand the assessment correctly as her experience with it increased. This point was well shown in her remark, "Partly I was correct, but partly I was wrong too." In agreement with the result of the survey, she also pointed out the difficulty in selecting the artifacts for her portfolio. The selection process is at the core of portfolio assessment. Through the selection process, students are able to develop abilities to think independently and develop as autonomous learners. However, at the same time, this study shows that it is the most difficult part of the assessment. The teacher should have been aware of the difficulty her students would experience during selecting the artifacts and provided adequate instruction on how to select them in order to show their English proficiency development clearly and effectively.

Another student who was an average student in the class in terms of English proficiency development commented positively on the assessment. He reported that portfolio assessment had helped him improve his English proficiency. However, he complained about the burden of collecting the artifacts as well as the validity of the assessment.

I think portfolio assessment is different from other testing methods. It helped me aware of my progress in English proficiency. It clearly showed me what I am good at and what I need more. However, I sometimes felt lost because I had to collect and store too many things. Some of them were definitely unnecessary and useless. I sometimes felt that I repeated useless works which were not related to improving my English speaking skills. I want the assessment to be simple and easy to follow. I also have a doubt on how the teacher can judge my English speaking ability by simply looking at my portfolio. Nonetheless, I learned a lot from the assessment.

The interviewee reported that the assessment had helped him trace his English ability development as well as identify his strengths and weaknesses. However, he made negative comments on collecting the artifacts for assessing his English proficiency. He said that he had to collect too many artifacts some of whom were unnecessary or useless. This complaint seemed to come from his inadequate understanding of the underlying principles of the assessment. He should have understood that the selection of the artifacts is at the core of the assessments, as well as a large number of proofs to document his English proficiency should be accumulated for the selection. He also cast doubt on the validity of the assessment as an assessment instrument.

The last student's English proficiency development was below average in the class. Despite the difficulties to follow the procedure of the assessment, he clearly said that it had been interesting to practice the assessment throughout the semester and had helped him greatly improve his English skills and study English harder than before.

I struggled most of the time in English classes during the semester. However, portfolio assessment is different from other tests I have ever taken. I had nothing to do in those tests except for receiving poor scores. But, in the portfolio assessment, I had something to do to improve my English scores and that worked perfectly. I am very proud of myself and think I can do better next time.

Although the student was below average in terms of his English skills in the class, he gained confidence through actively participating in the assessment process. As he admitted, he had had nothing to do to break the chain of low

scores in traditional tests. However, portfolio assessment gave him an opportunity to regain confidence as an English learner and learned an important lesson that he must be active in learning process. Although his comment was rather unexpected, it probably documents the helpfulness of portfolio assessment to low achieving students in traditional English tests. The assessment surely seemed to play the role of a booster in his learning of English.

Overall, two major problems among the interviewed students emerged; the difficulty of selecting the artifacts and the students' negative viewpoints on the assessment as a valid assessment instrument. The two problems seemed to come from their inadequate understanding of the assessment and the lack of instruction and discussion on them. Probably the teacher put too much emphasis on the general introduction of the assessment and its implementing procedures, neglecting the point that it is intended to assess English proficiency development in more valid and reliable ways. As a result of this, the students seemed to have a sense that their activities were mainly for helping them improve their English proficiency without the awareness that they were being assessed through their portfolios.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The result of the survey documents the elementary school students' reactions to portfolio assessment. First of all, the students highly regarded their teacher's effort to introduce portfolio assessment into their classroom. They replied statistically favorably to the second, third, and fifth question. Despite these careful, extensive works from the teacher, the students seemed to struggle to follow the procedure. They replied that they had had hard time to collect and select the artifacts for their portfolios. When it is considered that the collection and selection are at the core of the assessment, they seemed to have hard time to practice the assessment. Their struggle with the assessment is evidently shown in their responses to the six, eighth, and tenth question. Further, their understanding of the assessment as an evaluation instrument seemed rather limited. Their answers to the first and seventh question showed their limited understanding of the assessment clearly. However, their satisfaction level with the assessment is high enough to suggest their preference of portfolio assessment over traditional testing methods. They replied favorably to the fourth, eleventh, and twelfth question. They replied that portfolio assessment was helpful to their learning of English as

well as it was a valid and fair measurement for their English proficiency development.

The interviews with the students confirmed the results of the survey. The high-level and average student pointed out the difficulties of following the procedure of the assessment. However, all of them acknowledged the value of the assessment as a new, interesting instruction and evaluation method. Particularly it is worth noting that the low scorer in traditional English tests came to be attracted to portfolio assessment. This might be attributed to the fact that, unlike the traditional tests, he did not feel intensive test anxiety and did not have to cram in portfolio assessment. Regarding this positive effect of portfolio assessment to low-achieving students, further extensive research efforts seem to be needed in order to extend our understanding of portfolio assessment.

Some problems of portfolio assessment emerged from this study. One problem is that many students misunderstood it as instructional practices. This seemed unavoidable to the students for two reasons. The first reason is that they had not been acquainted with the new testing method. Unlike the traditional testing methods, it continued throughout the semester, so they were unaware that their learning behaviors were being evaluated. Further, either the unclear assessment criteria or the lack of the explanation and discussion of the criteria seemed to contribute to this problem. The other problem, the difficulty in selecting the appropriate artifacts could be resolved with presenting concrete examples and extensive training on how to document their progress of English proficiency adequately.

A point worth discussion is that assessment is inseparable from instruction in portfolio assessment. Whenever students practice English skills, they have to think about ways how to document their progress in learning English. Eventually, they have to handle two things simultaneously. This imposes considerable cognitive loads on students. They have to develop sufficient cognitive strategies to endure and get accustomed to this pressure. In this light, teacher's effort and time for planning the assessment is inevitable. From the beginning of the assessment, students should have a feeling that they are well guided by the teacher and be comfortable with the assessment activities. Besides, they should have a clear sense of what they are doing in the assessment. They are learning English and documenting their progress in English proficiency for themselves.

Another point is that portfolio assessment is not a single-directional assessment in which students are simply asked to take teacher-directed tests, but a dual-directional assessment in which the teacher and her students interact with

each other to share ideas and opinions about the assessment. Although the teacher is mainly responsible for the assessment, her students should also be asked to take certain responsibilities for the assessment. The relationship between the teacher and her students is cooperative, not subordinate. In his study of European Language Portfolio, Little (2005) emphasized the importance of this shared responsibilities and privileges in developing student's second language development. In this light, the teacher's responsibility should be limited to creating cooperative atmospheres for communicating ideas and opinions with students. On the other hand, students need to understand that active participation in the assessment is critical to their success in the assessment. Self-assessment and the selection of the artifacts are therefore critically important in the assessment. Students need to utilize such opportunities to build ownership as English learners during the assessment.

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Hoyeol Ryu

Department of English, Hankyong National University

67 Sukjung-dong, Anseong, Gyeonggi-do 456-749

Tel: (031) 670-5312/ H.P.:018-242-1405

Email: hoyeol@hknu.ac.kr

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