CHAPTER 6

OVERALL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides two scales to assess portfolios, an analytic and a holistic scale, which take into account the findings of the previous three chapters. It then concludes the study, and summarises the main findings in relation to the research questions.

6.1 New rating scales

It is evident from the interviews with the expert raters that there is a need to revise the draft common scale. The draft analytic scale developed in the second phase of the study is, thus, modified along the following lines:

- The descriptors are changed to suit the individual pieces in the portfolio
- The wording of the fifth dimension is changed from ‘Revision across writing’ to ‘Responsiveness to feedback’
- ‘Reflective thinking’ forms a separate dimension with the label ‘Meta-awareness’.

The analytic scale, thus, has six dimensions instead of five and each dimension has four points, from 1 to 4 (See Figure 6.1).

A. Task fulfilment and Appropriacy

4. The text relates well to given context and shows use of imagination and originality. It is fully appropriate and easily understood.

3. The text relates to given context and shows use of imagination and originality to some extent. There are few confusions of meaning and the text is largely comprehensible.
2. Some parts of the text relate to given context and may or may not show use of imagination or originality. There is some confusion of meaning and the text is comprehensible to some extent.

1. The text relates poorly to given context. It is rarely appropriate or comprehensible.

B. Cohesion and Organisation

4. The text is fully cohesive. Organisation of ideas is clear and appropriate to task.

3. The text is cohesive to a great extent though some problems may be noticed in some parts of the text. Organisation of ideas may be faulty in one or two places.

2. The text is cohesive to some extent but may lack continuity among ideas in some places. Organisation of ideas may falter in many places.

1. The text is not cohesive. Continuity between ideas is lacking in many places.
C. Grammar, Syntax and Mechanics

4. The writer demonstrates complexity of language. May exhibit minor mechanical problems.

3. The writer is largely in control of grammar and syntax. May exhibit some attempt at syntactic variety. Patterns of mispunctuation or minor mechanical errors sometimes present.

2. The writer is basically in control of grammar and syntax. Patterns of mispunctuation or mechanical errors often present, but they don’t obscure meaning.

1. Grammatical and mechanical problems obscure meaning or fragment text.

D. Ability to Engage the Reader

4. The writer is able to engage the reader by effectively using stylistic devices such as sentence length, variety and appropriacy of vocabulary, word order and idiom.

3. The writer is able to engage the reader by effectively using stylistic devices such as sentence length, variety and appropriacy of vocabulary, word order and idiom, though not always appropriately.
2. The writer shows some ability to use stylistic devices such as variety and appropriacy of vocabulary and idiom, though not always appropriately.
1. The writer shows little ability to use stylistic devices such as variety and appropriacy of vocabulary and idiom.

E. Responsiveness to Feedback
4. The writer responds well to the written feedback by incorporating the feedback fully and appropriately into the text.
3. The writer responds satisfactorily to the written feedback. The feedback provided is appropriately incorporated into the text.
2. The writer may respond to the written feedback but may not incorporate the feedback appropriately into the text.
1. The writer fails to respond to the written feedback. The feedback provided is not incorporated into the text.
F. Meta-awareness

4. The writer is able to reflect on the processes and strategies he/she has used to complete the task in a narrative piece. The narrative piece goes beyond literal discussion of the work completed. It also shows evidence of growth by referring to the samples produced.

3. The writer is able to reflect on the important aspects of writing that helped him/her to complete the task in a narrative piece. The narrative piece goes beyond literal discussion of the work completed to a great extent. It also shows some evidence of growth by referring to the samples produced.

2. The writer is able to reflect on some aspects of writing that helped him/her to complete the task. The narrative piece provides literal discussion of the work completed. It may or may not refer to the samples produced to show evidence of growth.

1. The writer is not able to reflect on the aspects of writing that helped him/her to complete the task. The narrative piece does not refer to the samples produced to show evidence of growth.
All the six dimensions shown in Figure 6.1 are not useful to assess each and every sample in the portfolio. The dimensions and the samples/tasks they apply to are given in Table 6.1 below:

### Table 6.1 Analytic scale as applied to individual pieces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Task Fulfilment</th>
<th>Cohesion and Organisation</th>
<th>Grammar, Syntax and Mechanics</th>
<th>Responsiveness to feedback</th>
<th>Ability to engage the reader</th>
<th>Meta-awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing a biography</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting an event</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving a message</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A letter to the Editor</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective piece</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 6.1, the dimension ‘Task fulfilment’ applies to the four tasks but is not relevant to assessing the reflective piece. The reflective piece is assessed using the two dimensions ‘Cohesion and Organisation’ and ‘Meta-awareness’ of the writing processes.

However, the analytic scale does not provide a clear picture of the overall quality of the portfolio. Also, the analytic scale does not capture the growth of the individual over a period of time. Therefore, a holistic scale is designed to assess the portfolio as a whole. The holistic scale has 4 levels as shown in Figure 6.2.
**Score 4**

The writer satisfies the criterion completely

The writer:
- is able to use a variety of processes and strategies to create a text that is fully appropriate to the task
- can engage the audience by using stylistic devices, appropriate vocabulary, tone and idiomatic expressions
- can create coherent and cohesive text making full and appropriate use of a wide range of cohesive devices
- has full control of grammar and syntax
- can reflect deeply on the process of writing indicating the goals set and the targets achieved.

**Score 3**

The writer satisfies the criterion to a high degree

The writer:
- is able to use a number of processes and strategies to create a text that is appropriate to the task
- can engage the audience to a great extent by using stylistic devices, appropriate vocabulary and tone
- can create coherent and cohesive text making appropriate use of a variety of cohesive devices
- has a high degree of control of grammar and syntax.
- can reflect on the process of writing indicating the goals set and the targets achieved.
Score 2

The writer satisfies the criterion to a reasonable degree

The writer:
- is able to use limited processes and strategies to create a text that may be appropriate to the task
- can engage the audience to some extent by using appropriate vocabulary and tone
- can create coherent and cohesive text showing controlled use of cohesive devices
- has reasonable control of grammar and syntax
- can reflect on the process of writing indicating some of the goals achieved.
Score 1

The writer satisfies the criterion to a small degree

The writer:
- can use only basic processes and strategies to create a text
- can use only a very limited number of cohesive devices to link ideas and produce a text that may not be coherent
- has limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns
- can reflect on the process of writing to some degree.
With the analytic and a holistic scale, it is possible to provide a more detailed profile of the teacher’s strengths and weaknesses as a writer. The analytic scale will be used separately to score individual tasks in the portfolio. The holistic scale will be used to make a single judgement of overall quality of the portfolio. Thus, each rater will follow two stages in scoring the portfolio. In the first stage of scoring, a rater will score the individual samples/tasks in the portfolio using the analytic scale. In the second stage, the rater will review the four levels in the holistic scale, consider the evidence from the analytic scores and assign a holistic score. At the end, there will be two types of scores assigned to the portfolio: individual analytic scores and a holistic score. If necessary, we can have a third type of score which is a combined analytic score (formed by summing across analytic scores). The three types of scores will be useful in conducting inter-rater reliability studies.

6.2 Main findings, limitations and conclusions

The study was conducted in three phases with a view to gather teachers’ views on how portfolios should be assessed, the criteria used by expert raters to assess portfolios and expert raters’ reactions to a common scale. Thus, the input for judging the outcome of the portfolio came from teachers as well as expert raters. They indicated that both the process and product of assessment tasks should be evaluated.

The interviews with the expert raters revealed that an analytic scale alone would not do complete justice to the portfolio. It was suggested that we should develop a holistic scale to provide a descriptive summary of the individual’s performance in the portfolio. Accordingly, new scales were developed to evaluate portfolios. The study, thus, confirms that the portfolio
has the potential for open, shared assessment. However, this may be further investigated by conducting similar studies that focus on the development of assessment criteria for portfolios.

The study gains significance because it shows the merits of using an analytic scale and a holistic scale for assessing portfolios. The issue is, thus, not whether we should use an analytic scale instead of a holistic scale or vice versa for assessing portfolios as it is currently debated in the literature surrounding portfolios. Both the scales may be useful for assessing portfolios but the methods adopted to design these scales and also the criteria and the descriptors that are included in the scales need much attention.

This study has provided evidence that assessing portfolios is a complex process. It can be assumed that assessment of portfolios is not an activity that can be done by the raters alone. It may be beneficial to involve various stakeholders and gather their views while designing new rating scales. The consensus arrived at during the process might help in achieving validity and reliability. It may be desirable and useful to adopt a combination of different approaches, such as intuitive and empirical methods, to constructing rating scales for portfolios.

The study clearly suggests that portfolios are useful professional development tools. They can be used for various purposes such as to develop teacher participants’ professional skills and competences, to develop reflective practices, to share the knowledge and expertise gained with colleagues and to use them in enhancing the linguistic skills of school children. The experience of creating portfolios has enhanced teacher participants’ knowledge of classroom processes, provided sample materials that can be used in teaching and training contexts and developed a positive attitude towards teaching and assessing writing in English as a second language.
However, it is worth noting the limitations of the study. Perhaps the major limitation of the study is the use of a single portfolio for assessment. Hence, it is necessary to use the newly developed scales to score a number of other portfolios. The scales may then be used to train raters and to examine reliability measures. While using the new scales, the raters may be asked to rate a series of carefully selected portfolios illustrating a range of abilities. This will help in making an estimate of the reliability and consistency of the raters’ judgements. Along the same line, studies may be conducted focusing on the process by which raters make their decisions. Think aloud protocol analysis may be done to understand the mental processes going on in raters’ minds.

In sum, this study has presented one model for portfolio-based assessment of writing. The model focuses on ‘the process of creating a portfolio’ as well as on the ‘portfolio as product’. The model will be analysed further to address the issues of validity and reliability. The possibility of using the model for high-stakes purposes will be examined in future studies.