Project Title : Assessment as Learning Through Portfolio Assessment in the Second Language Writing Classroom

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Abstract *(no more than 250 words)*

The past decades have seen a paradigm shift towards alternative assessment approach that puts learners at the heart of the assessment process, resulting in increased recognition for Assessment as learning (AaL). Portfolio assessment (PA), holding the potential for student empowerment and learner independence, provides multiple avenues for weaving AaL into the fabric of second language (L2) writing classrooms. Despite the wide acknowledgment of its significance, there is a lack of empirical research investigating teachers' and students' perceptions of AaL implementation through PA in L2 writing classrooms. Drawing on individual interviews with principals, English Department Heads, teachers, group interviews with students, student questionnaires, classroom observations as well as portfolio samples and documents, student writing and writing tests, this study examined the effectiveness of the use of PA with a focus on AaL in improving students' writing abilities, investigated the attitude of teachers and students towards the use of PA to promote AaL in the teaching and learning of writing, as well as explored the challenges teachers face and support they need in its implementation through a year-long integration of AaL-oriented portfolios as an assessment innovation in elementary writing classrooms. The findings revealed that the students generally held a more favourable attitude towards the use PA as a means of promoting AaL compared to teachers. As a result of their engagement in AaL through PA, the students experienced considerable improvement in their writing quality. However, several factors have been identified that facilitate and constrain

teachers' implementation of AaL through PA.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, assessment has undergone a significant transformation, where emphasis has been placed on more learner-centred assessment that enhances active involvement and self-regulated learning of learners (Clark, 2012; Earl, 2003). A prime illustration of this evolution is the shift from assessment of learning (AoL), a traditional method with an emphasis on grading and ranking students, to assessment for learning (AfL), an alternative approach that strives to use assessment to enrich both teaching and learning (Black & William, 2009). More recently, assessment as learning (AaL), has come under the spotlight, becoming the focal point in assessment research, policy, and practice. Broadly defined as "a subset of assessment for learning" (Earl, 2013, p. 3) and "a process through which pupil involvement in assessment can feature as part of learning" (Dann, 2002, p. 153), AaL aims to encourage learners to take a proactive role in learning through utilizing assessment information to self-assess, self-monitor, self-reflect, and self-regulate their learning (Lee et al., 2019). To complement the shifting paradigm of assessment, portfolio assessment (PA) that espouses the notion of student empowerment and active involvement in the assessment process has gained wider currency as a promising alternative to traditional assessment and instructional approaches. Focusing on the learning process rather than the end product, portfolios present a purposeful and organized collection of students' work which not only showcases their academic achievement but also chronicles their effort and progress in learning (Belgrad, 2013).

In second language (L2) classroom writing contexts specifically, the implementation of the portfolio does not only enable students to be more metacognitively aware of who they are as learners and engage more deeply in the writing process, it also promotes a stronger sense of responsibility and participation in the learning process, and a heightened level of self-determination (Nicolaidou, 2012, 2013; Yancey, 2009). Despite the accolades dedicated to portfolios in the literature, the implementation of the use of portfolios with a focus on AaL has not made inroads into the L2 writing classroom (Mak & Wong, 2018) and is hamstrung by such factors as teacher workload, the prevalence of product-oriented writing pedagogy (Mak & Lee, 2014) and the lack of assessment literacy on the part of the teachers (Lam, 2017). Moreover, the use of the portfolio, as an assessment tool to promote student learning is "an area of assessment that is long overdue for careful, empirical study" (Belgrad, 2013, p.337), and there exists a paucity of studies to validate the effectiveness of portfolios in the foreign language (FL) contexts (Delett et al., 2001). In L2 writing portfolio assessment literature specifically, studies conducted outside the US and European contexts about the productive use of portfolios have been limited (Burner, 2014) and there is an urgent call for more research into the impact of portfolios on teaching and learning of writing in L2/FL contexts (Hamp-Lyons, 2007), as well as their effect on the learning experiences, beliefs and the writing performance of students (Aydin, 2010; Nicolaidou, 2012). To fill this significant void, the present study examined the effectiveness of portfolios, as a tool for AaL, in improving students' writing abilities, delved into the effects of portfolios on the attitudes of teachers and students towards the teaching and learning of writing, and investigated the challenges students face and the support they need to effectively incorporate PA to promote AaL in their writing instruction.

2. Review of literature of the project

2.1 Assessment as learning and portfolio assessment in second language writing

The three main approaches that underpin the current assessment landscape are assessment of learning (AoL), assessment for learning (AfL), and assessment as learning (AaL). AoL is a summative form of assessment, which primarily serves to measure learning outcomes and report them to students, parents, and other stakeholders at the end of an instructional period. Conversely, AfL is a formative assessment practice that involves the ongoing collection and application of varied forms of evidence, specifically designed to improve teaching practices and stimulate active learning. In turn, AaL, conceived as a "learning strategy" rather than an "assessment device" (Yan & Boud, 2022, p. 15), goes beyond AfL by positioning learners as the critical connector between the assessment and learning process. As a subset of AfL, AaL emphasizes the use of assessment "as a process of developing and supporting meta-cognition for students" (Earl, 2013, p.3) and enhances student agency in the assessment process through self-monitoring their own learning, progress as well as achievement (Mutch, 2012). The ultimate purpose of AaL is for students to acquire the skills to be metacognitively aware of their learning throughout the assessment process, which entails goal setting, the monitoring and evaluation of one's progress, as well as reflection of one's learning, making adjustments and adaptions to achieve deeper understanding. In developing students' capacity and depositions to be their own assessors and become autonomous in their learning, AaL, is a potent catalyst for differentiation and provides students with an evolving picture of their own learning trajectory.

In the L2 writing context, as opposed to a product-based classroom where students are not afforded the opportunity to act on teacher feedback offered to one-shot writing as evident in AoL (Lee, 2011), AaL encompasses the development of learners' cognitive and metacognitive competence in self-reflecting, monitoring and evaluating their writing (Lee, 2016). According to Lee and

colleagues (2019), the AaL process entails the adoption of four main strategies in their pedagogical practice: 1) Establishing learning goals and success criteria for the target writing task in relation to the writing content, genre structure, and language features; 2) Helping students set learning goals according to their writing ability and interest; 3) Engaging students in performing peer assessment; and 4) Encouraging students to exercise ownership of their learning through self-assessment, self-monitoring and self-reflection. As such, the writing portfolio resonates with the four AaL strategies proposed by Lee et al. (2019), which is embedded in concepts of student-centred and self-regulated learning, with students assuming active agents in the writing process through various activities, including identification of genre-specific assessment criteria, goal-setting, self-assessment, peer assessment, error logging and reflection in the portfolio process (refer to Figure 1 for the portfolio process).

As noted by Burke (2009), the portfolio process engages students in metacognition and enables learners to become more self-reflective and capacitates them to be stakeholders in their own learning. First, establishing genre-specific assessment criteria develops learners' understanding of good writing performance, provides them with a clear vision of how to progress towards the expected standards, and ultimately enables them to set tangible and achievable learning goals (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Second, PA incorporates self-assessment that empowers students to monitor, make judgments, and take charge of their papers-in-progress in respect to the assessment criteria (Oscarson, 2009; Wong & Mak, 2019). At the same time, students are able to monitor gaps between their set goals and intended outcomes (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Third, the feedback from different sources including that from teachers and peers compels students to reflect upon their existing knowledge and self-monitoring their progress towards their own goals (Mak & Wong, 2018). It is noteworthy that feedback must be manageable so that it is not overwhelming to

the students (Bitchener, 2008). Finally, self-reflection offers students a roadmap to improvement, by encouraging them to critically analyze progress towards their personal goals, and strategically plan their next steps toward better writing (Lee et al., 2019). The writing portfolio, an assessment approach that positions learners at the center of the writing process and cultivates their agency through a host of interconnected mechanisms, provides multiple avenues to exercise AaL and serves as an appropriate tool to promote AaL in L2 writing classrooms.

2.2 Teachers' and students' attitudes towards AaL and PA in L2 writing

Despite a substantial body of literature highlighting the potential merits of PA, there is a notable lack of empirical research on the implementation of PA, especially within L2 school contexts. Within the existing and limited body of literature on this topic, the findings indicate relatively favourable attitudes of both teachers and students towards this assessment practice.

In the Asian school contexts, Mak and Wong's (2018) study about the implementation of PA in an elementary L2 writing classroom concluded that the participating teachers recognized the value of PA in enriching the students' writing. Moreover, the students acknowledged that PA enhanced their agency, improved their ability to work with peer and teacher feedback, and boosted their motivation in writing. Similarly, Lee et al.'s (2019) study investigated two teachers' attempts to integrate AaL into two Hong Kong primary writing classrooms, with a focus on the teachers' and students' perception of the benefits and challenges in its implementation. The findings revealed that the teachers developed a firmer grasp of the basic principles of AaL and experienced professional growth in their roles as change agent. Through engaging in AaL, the students believed that they possessed an enhanced understanding of the requirements of writing, adopted stronger ownership in the writing process and had greater capacity in evaluating their peers' work in both

content development and language use. Relatedly, Chen (2006) carried out a study in two 7th grade English classrooms in Taiwan, where the PA was implemented for two semesters. A majority of the students held positive attitudes towards the portfolio system, considering the learning activities beneficial to their learning, and portfolios to be effective tools to evaluate their learning progress and enhance their learning approaches.

Research into the tertiary settings paints a similar picture. Bader et al.'s (2019) study investigated students' perception of formative feedback as part of PA at two teacher education institutions in Norway. The feedback, which was provided by both the teacher and peers, aimed to offer constructive guidance to students on how to improve their writing. The findings show that students generally appreciated teacher feedback as it was specific and offered students concrete guidelines on how to improve their writing. Some students, however, commented that they did not possess the capacity to improve their work due to inadequate knowledge and skills in understanding and processing feedback as well as the poor quality of feedback provided by their peers. In a similar vein, Li (2016) inquired into the perspectives of undergraduate English major students in China about a portfolio-based writing assessment project. The findings indicate that such portfolio approach was welcomed by students, who viewed it as a fair assessment tool in evaluating writing. The students also believed the writing portfolio empowered them to assume greater ownership in the writing process, shaped their ability to use writing strategies, enhanced their enthusiasm and inspired them to become better writers. The study carried out by Lam and Lee (2015) examined the teachers and students' attitudes about the influence of the portfolio process on student writing and their views about the summative and formative functions of PA. The authors concluded that the writing portfolio posed a positive impact on students' written accuracy and idea development. Regarding the perception of teachers and students about the formative aspects of PA, both parties

expressed the benefits brought by PA like the receiving continuous feedback and having opportunities to revise the written drafts.

2.3 Factors influencing the implementation of AaL and PA in L2 writing

Notwithstanding the favourable attitudes of teachers and students, the widespread adoption of AaL through PA in L2 writing is met with challenges, encompassing mediating factors at the individual, institutional and societal levels. At the individual level, previous studies consistently reported the lack of teacher assessment literacy owing to inadequate training during pre-service preparation programmes (Crusan et al., 2016; Xu & Brown, 2016) where teachers do not possess the competence to develop effective assessment practices to support students' learning. In the study of Mak (2019b) on the impact of a professional development (PD) programme on the development of teachers' assessment literacy in two elementary schools in Hong Kong, it was found that the teachers possessed lack of assessment knowledge about PA. Hence, they demanded extensive coaching and mentoring from the university educator, and required teachers' continuous effort to enhance their skills in PA. Prior studies also point to the deficit in students' assessment and feedback literacy (e.g., Carless & Boud, 2018; Li & Han, 2021). For instance, Bader et al.'s (2019) study show that the participating students were incapable of interpreting and using feedback to improve their work, nor were they able to generate effective feedback on the work of others, thus reflecting their low feedback literacy.

Apart from the individual factors, a number of studies reflect pervasive influences of institutional mandates. In Duong et al.'s (2011) study, the researchers constructed a framework for assessing EFL students' competence in writing portfolios at Vietnam National University (HULIS-VNU) in collaboration with teachers of the institution. Despite process-oriented portfolios being in place

for six years at HULIS-VNU, norm-referenced interpretation held sway, with the absence of clear definition of the assessed construct. This institutional constraint hampered the effectiveness of the writing portfolio. Likewise, in Lee et al.'s (2019) study, it was found that there was a lack of critical mass in the teaching context as other colleagues were neither involved in the assessment innovation nor prepared to practise PA, illustrating inadequate support from the school as a whole. In addition to meager institutional support (Yan et al., 2018) that posed a threat to the implementation of AaL and PA, the deep-seated Confucian-heritage culture (CHC) prevalent in Asian contexts run counter to the constructivist perspective inherent in PA (Kaur and Lim-Ratnam, 2023). In Chen's (2006) study, the teachers' practice of PA was hindered by the presence of CHC, which involves a strong emphasis on tests, thus limiting the widespread practice of PA.

3. Theoretical and/or conceptual framework of the project

AaL makes learners at the epicentre of the assessment process and accentuates assessment as a process of metacognition or the knowledge and application of cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979). This assessment approach places strong focus on students' thinking about their learning, the strategies they use to support or challenge the learning, as well as the mechanisms used to modify and develop their learning (Earl & Katz, 2006). Within this view of learning, learners become skilled at metacognitively monitoring their learning, use the information from the monitoring to make adjustment and adaptation in their thinking. The primary goal in AaL then is to develop students' capacity to be their own assessors and assume increasing autonomy in the assessment process.

The theoretical construct underpinning AaL draws upon theories of social cognitive theory, social constructivism and metacognition. First, AaL is associated with social cognitive theory, in that

learners are required to sustain learning both individually and socially (Bandura, 1986). Accordingly, the capacity to control one's behaviour and actions or to self-regulate is situationally specific and context dependent, and is influenced by factors such as learners' beliefs and their ability to reach a specific goal (Pintrich, 1999; Shunk, 1989). This is equally applicable to the writing context, where learners hold beliefs and dispositions about their writing ability and competence. AaL is also theoretically underpinned by social constructivism (Brookhart, 2011; Shephard, 2000), where knowledge is co-constructed with others and through scaffolding provided by more knowledgeable others, empowering learners to progress from present to a higher ability level, termed as zone of proximal development. The ultimate goal is equip learners with the capacity to take up an agentic regulatory role in their learning (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). As such, there is a need for learners to be aware of their own learning so that they can regulate and evaluate the learning process, or reflect upon themselves as writers. The development of self-awareness skills is also directly linked to metacognition, referred to as metacognitive knowledge or metacognitive awareness (Flavell, 1987), which not only entails "thinking about thinking or cognitions about cognition, but also regulation or execution of cognition" (Zhang, 2010, p.322). The metacognitive function comprises planning, understanding and controlling one's learning and plays a vital role in the construction of new knowledge (Allwood & Jonsson, 2001; Zimmerman, 1990). In the L2 writing classroom, metacognitive knowledge may include general strategic knowledge awareness such as mechanics of writing and domain-specific knowledge awareness like the generic structure of writing (Wong & Mak, 2019). Through practising these strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning over time, it is believed that they become automated (Flavell, 1981; Hartman, 2001) and learners will be able to direct their own learning.

4. Methodology

4.1 Purpose of the study

This project adopted a case study design, which enabled the researcher to advance knowledge and understanding about how the assessment as learning with the use of portfolio was implemented and the associated impact on the attitudes of teachers and students as well as the writing abilities of students. The study included all the Primary 4 English classes in two elementary schools in Hong Kong. Both schools adopted the traditional product-oriented pedagogy but expressed a desire to transform their assessment practice through portfolios within a writing process approach. All the teachers of the Primary 4 level of each school (5 classes in School A and 6 classes in School B) and their students participated in the study.

This study aimed to address the following four research questions:

1. How do elementary teachers implement assessment as learning through portfolio assessment in the writing classroom?

2. What are teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of portfolio assessment to promote assessment as learning in the teaching and learning of writing?

3. To what extent is the use of portfolio assessment to promote assessment as learning effective in improving students' writing abilities?

4. What challenges do teachers face and what support do they need to integrate assessment as learning through portfolio assessment in the writing classroom?

4.2 Data collection and analysis

Throughout the whole academic year, data were gathered from multiple sources, including individual interviews with principals, English Department Heads, teachers, group interviews with students, student questionnaires, classroom observations as well as portfolio samples and documents (i.e., school policy and assessment practices guidelines, pedagogical material, meeting notes and minutes), student writing and writing tests. The interviews with the principal and the focus group interviews with 30 students from School A (SA01-30) and 36 students from School B (SB01-36) were conducted in the participants' first language. Those carried out with the English Department Heads, five teachers from School A (TA01-05) and six teachers from School B (TB01-06) were conducted in English upon their wish. All the interviews were audio-recorded while the classroom observations were video-recorded upon the consent from the participants.

The interviews conducted in English were transcribed verbatim while the ones carried out in Cantonese were transcribed and translated into English. The data were analysed inductively (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) with reference to the research questions and literature on AaL and PA. The analysis involved an iterative and recursive process through open and axial coding, where codes assigned to the transcripts were constantly compared and revised. Video recordings of classroom observations together with field notes were reviewed to identify significant episodes that shed light on pedagogical practice of the teachers, the teachers' and students' attitudes towards AaL-oriented portfolios arising from the interaction between the two parties and the factors which mediated the implementation of AaL-oriented portfolios. This data source also served to triangulate and enrich the interview data. Documents relating to AaL-oriented portfolios were analysed to investigate contextual factors that supported or inhibited the teachers' assessment practice. AaL-oriented portfolios and student writing were reviewed to uncover the learning material (e.g. writing rubric and personal reflection) used to help them improve their

writing ability and to investigate the extent to which the students were able to make use of feedback from the teacher and peers to improve the quality of the writing.

5. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: How do elementary teachers implement assessment as learning through portfolio assessment in the writing classroom?

This section focuses on how the participating teachers attempted to implement AaL through PA in writing. On the whole, the implementation of AaL in L2 writing marked a noteworthy shift in the instructional and assessment approaches previously employed in both schools. This was achieved through the use of a holistic portfolio process encompassing a recursive endeavour with its components being intricately linked and mutually reinforcing (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Portfolio process
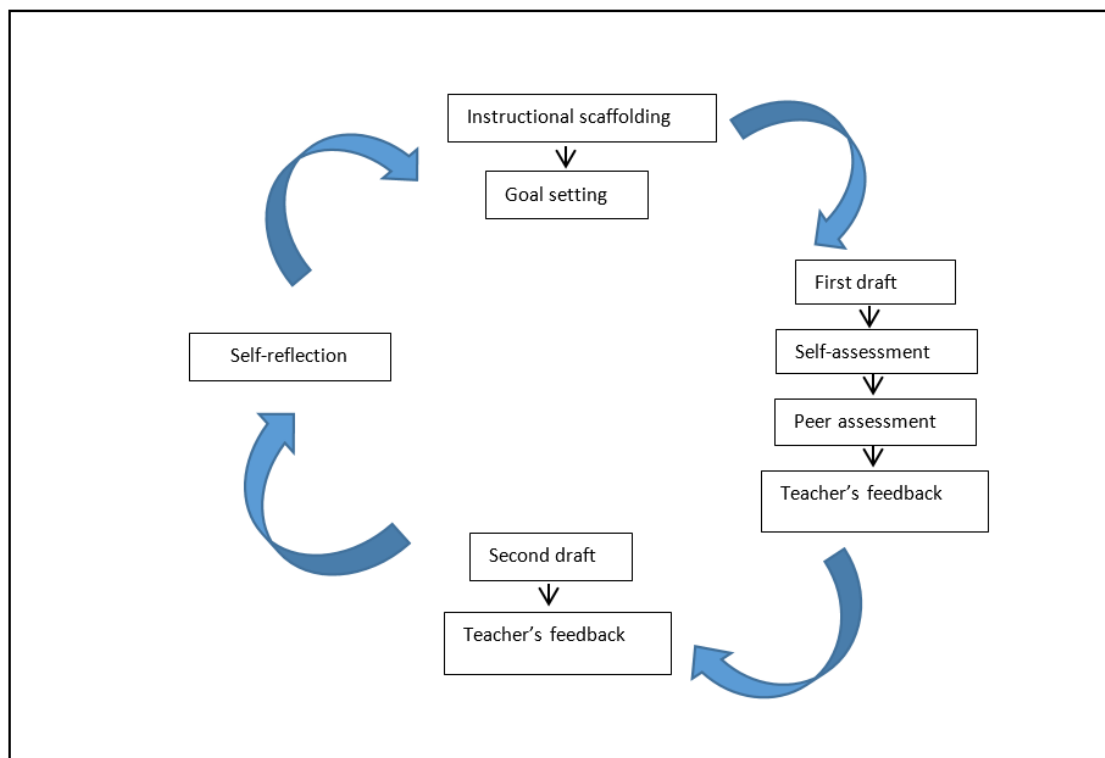
The portfolio process began with instructional scaffolding, which laid the groundwork for the entire writing within the AaL framework. Such teaching support followed a genre process approach, whereby the teachers provided detailed input to the students to shape their understanding of a good piece of writing in the target text type. As such, prior to engaging students in a writing task, the teacher would deconstruct a sample text in the target text type with the students (Martin, 1999). To further develop students' understanding of what good performance is, the teacher also unpacked genre-specific assessment criteria in the feedback form to provide them with a clear vision of the expected standards, enabling them to set tangible and achievable learning goals (Nicol & Macfarlene-Dick, 2006). These learning goals mirrored assessment criteria in the genre-specific feedback form designed to prepare the students for assessment in the subsequent stages and give them diagnostic feedback to develop their portfolios-in-progress. The establishment of expected standards and assessment criteria was aligned with the guiding principle of AaL, aiming to give learners a better sense of where they are going and shaping their perception of the expected learning outcome (Lee et al., 2019; Mak & Lee, 2014).

Specifically, using writing samples as a model, the teachers deconstructed the texts through a detailed analysis of their generic structure and genre-specific lexico-grammatical features. Through this exercise, the students formed a core understanding of the target genre's requirements, which could be applied in their own writing. The majority of the teachers found such scaffolding effective.

Instructional scaffolding was followed by goal-setting. Goal setting is congruent with the cornerstone of the AaL paradigm, which strives to cultivate independent learners cognizant of their thought processes (i.e., metacognition) and capable of directing their learning trajectories

(i.e., self-regulation) (Earl, 2013). To elaborate, using personal learning goals as a blueprint, the students could regulate and monitor their writing progress during further rounds of revision and reflection. To achieve this, a goal-setting sheet, featuring between four and six items pertaining to content and structure as well as language use of the target genre, was provided to the students . The students would select learning goals they believed they were capable of. Goal setting could then foster a growth mindset in students and promote their independence from teachers, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. From a Vygotskian perspective, optimal learning and development takes place when learners strive towards the goals close to, yet somewhat beyond, their current level of understanding.

Following goal-setting, the students produced the first draft of the target text. Upon creating their initial drafts, the students evaluated their work-in-progress using self-assessment forms. By going through their first drafts and cross-checking them against the assessment criteria and personal goals, the students took steps towards nurturing a sense of ownership over their own learning (Lee et al., 2019; Mak & Wong, 2018). This critical examination gave students a chance to recognize their recurring strengths and weaknesses and identify the areas that require further attention.

After self-assessment, the students also carried out peer assessment. This AaL technique, which involved learners reviewing and providing constructive feedback on each other's work, fostered a collaborative learning environment in both schools. Assigning learners with the role of "key assessors" working beside teachers was meant to empower them to act as learning resources for one another and enable them to "play an active role during the learning and assessment process

in the writing classroom" (Lee, 2016, p. 269). This type of assessment was more consistently used in School A as opposed to School B where its application was more sporadic. The teachers who were able to integrate this AaL component provided training to accommodate peer assessment by introducing the peer assessment form and emphasizing its connection with other AaL-driven materials integrating the same assessment criteria (i.e., self-assessment and teacher feedback forms). The classroom observation data indicate that the teachers demonstrated the procedures of peer review by scrutinizing students' work as a class, which served as a model of how peer evaluation should be conducted.

Teacher assessment was the next crucial step of the portfolio process strongly linked to the previous procedures leading to this point. Using the teacher feedback form with genre-specific criteria, the teachers enabled the students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses aligned with the assessment criteria and learning goals. The first round of teachers' assessment predominantly focused on the content and structure of writing. This enabled the students to produce more organized writing pieces with enriched content. With the feedback provided, the students engaged in a revision process that they found useful in strengthening the content and structure of their drafts before submitting their second improved version of their work. This finding lends support to the applicability of multiple drafting, as will be elaborated in further subsections. Following the revision and resubmission of the first draft, there was another round of teachers' corrective feedback on the second draft. This time, the feedback centred on language use. Throughout the second round, the teachers administered focused and coded feedback. As such, they limited their indications to certain error types as opposed to marking every mistake and used specific codes to signal recurring errors (i.e., WW for the wrong word, SP for spelling,

T for tense, and P for punctuation). In some cases, the teachers' adoption of codes meant to stimulate learners to address specific mistakes prevalent in their writing.

Generally, the main purpose of focused and coded feedback is to steer learners towards the most important issues in their writing without overwhelming them or causing them distress (Mak & Lee, 2014; Mak, 2019a). Notably, these feedback types were closely connected to self-regulated and autonomous learning. Utilizing the new feedback format, the students had an opportunity to learn from their mistakes as their teachers gradually stepped back from being the sole evaluators and correctors of their work. As a result, the students in Schools A and B who were universally in favour of such feedback shared the sentiment that it inspired them to assume more responsibility for their writing. Classroom observations and portfolio collections further reinforce this viewpoint. During the lessons, these focused types of feedback not only ignited the students' ability to exercise monitoring and control over their writing but also offered a more fruitful and time-efficient alternative for the teachers compared to comprehensive error marking. The teachers' feedback compelled the students to delve deeper and rectify their mistakes in the final revision as they produced the third draft of their work.

The final stage of the portfolio process allowed learners to review and critically evaluate their learning during reflection. Introspective in nature, reflection not only reminded the students whether they had acquired the knowledge in the prior stages but also helped them to identify the areas for further improvement. In other words, this exercise simultaneously fostered a deeper comprehension of students' writing development (hindsight) and provided them with a clear roadmap for their future learning trajectory (foresight). To facilitate reflection, the teachers

directed the students back to the relevant AaL materials (e.g., the goal-setting and goal-reflection sheet and the multiple drafts) so they could revisit the goals they set before writing and assess their attainment.

All in all, the portfolio process was a novel AaL-driven approach, which was undertaken by the two primary schools that opened their doors to implement it in their L2 writing classrooms. This was a multifaceted exercise comprising a series of interconnected stages. As previewed here and will be further elaborated on, it yielded numerous positive learning outcomes, leaving much promise for the future of AaL implementation in Hong Kong and analogous school settings. As with any significant change, the portfolio process takes time and requires consistency and optimism in its enactment. The success of this endeavour, however, to a large extent depends on the attitudes of teachers and students involved in its implementation. The following subsection offers an in-depth exploration of this particular aspect of AaL.

Research Question 2: What are teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of portfolio assessment to promote assessment as learning in the teaching and learning of writing?

This section examines teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of portfolio assessment. In general, the findings revealed a discrepancy in teachers' and students' attitudes towards such an approach, with students generally displaying more enthusiasm and acceptance and teachers being more reserved and cautious.

Concerning goal setting and reflection, half of the teachers perceived it positively, describing it as beneficial and necessary. In their experience, goal setting and reflection provided students with a clear picture of how to construct their work, empowered them to take responsibility for their

learning, improved their writing outcomes, and promoted a more student-centred learning environment – the advantages of portfolio-based assessment that are closely aligned with the insights gained from the prior empirical research (Lee et al., 2019; Mak & Wong, 2018).

Other teacher perceptions of goal-setting and reflection ranged from neutral to sceptical. When trying to evaluate the usefulness of goal-setting, some teachers often spoke on the students' behalf, saying that they might not find it very useful. What contributed to this perception was teachers' conviction that engagement with this stage of portfolio process heavily relied on students' attitudes. Put differently, the success of goal setting and goal reflection exercises was contingent upon learners' willingness. As such, goal setting seemed considerably useful for high-proficiency students already possessing good dispositions and abilities. The problem with some "weak" and other less engaged students was in their attitudes.

The student interview data did not corroborate with that of these teachers. Overall, the students' attitudes to goal setting and reflection were mostly positive to neutral. The students seemed to view goal-setting as a standard stage of the writing process. This finding contradicts the teachers' predictions of the students' reluctance to engage with this component of PA. The learners appeared to have recognized its importance.

The data reveal a few other noteworthy insights. The students in both schools were keen in goal setting and approached this task in one of the following ways. Some opted to set between 3 and 4 goals and progressively expanded them as their writing abilities matured. Others took a contrasting approach by ticking off all the goals from the get-go, seemingly aiming to challenge themselves and avoid "stagnation".

Reflection gave students an opportunity to check the progress and identify the goals that have not been attained. Learning about where they were in their learning, they were motivated to set further goals to challenge themselves in the next writing piece.

Considering multiple drafting, the teachers' attitudes encompassed a range of stances, including enthusiasm, neutrality, and scepticism, with slightly over half of the teachers belonging to the latter. Generally, they saw a consistent and notable improvement in students' writing from the first draft to the second draft, and acknowledged that most students paid attention to their feedback and applied it to revise their works. Specifically, the students corrected their errors and provided more details, which enhanced the overall quality of their writing.

Although they recognized the students' improvement in writing, those who maintained a sceptical stance towards multiple drafting expressed uncertainty and doubt about having too many drafts. They commented on the students' reluctance and resistance towards engaging in repeated writing. Consequently, this led some of them to question the usefulness of the second draft and propose to minimize extensive revisions, at least for high-proficiency and high-achieving. These insights point to the teachers' role in finding ways to maintain students' engagement and motivation throughout the writing process.

The students' perception of multiple drafting was contrary to the concerns expressed by the teachers. The majority of the students in both schools appreciated the iterative aspect of the portfolio process, recognizing the value it brought to their writing skills. They highlighted the opportunity to enrich their work, correct mistakes, and improve the precision of their writing through the second draft. In their opinion, the final submissions showcased a remarkably refined

and polished rendition, diverging significantly from the initial draft. What is noteworthy is the reported degree of autonomy.

While the attitudes towards multiple drafting and revision were predominantly positive, there were signs of dissent among a minority of students (i.e. two students). In their post-study interviews, two students expressed a preference for a single draft, with one of them suggesting that the second draft offered limited room for improvement beyond reflection. There were other critical observations about engaging in multiple drafting, which were, however, related to teacher feedback and instructional methods. These students expressed reservations about the effectiveness of the process or the lack of feedback received on the first draft. One of the student participants raised concerns about the clarity of the feedback and its alignment with his writing goals. He was uncertain as to why he still had numerous errors despite his efforts to diligently address all the feedback provided. This experience left him disheartened and sceptical about the efficacy of PA in accurately reflecting his progress and proficiency.

As far as teacher feedback is concerned, virtually all teachers in both schools displayed positive attitudes towards the new way of assessing students' work. The participants expressed their appreciation and preference for this method, as they collectively recognized the significance of providing explicit and focused feedback that addresses specific issues pertaining to content and language. This made students motivated to improve their writing skills and consequently happy with their progress, as acknowledged by the teachers. Based on their experience, the teachers found this approach to be more effective compared to comprehensive feedback, which often felt like menial and unappreciated labour for teachers.

As the teachers strongly supported the adoption of a more targeted feedback approach, they highlighted the significance of coded feedback. The majority of teachers' evaluations demonstrate a positive attitude towards the effectiveness of coded feedback in providing a practical and accessible approach to correcting writing errors while also promoting student autonomy in the revision process. Despite the generally favourable perceptions of coded feedback, one teacher in School A expressed doubt regarding the students' ability to interpret and effectively utilize the provided codes to make substantial revisions and improvements in their work. This could be attributed to the teacher's perceived complexity of the coding system or her limited practical familiarity with such feedback mechanisms.

Contrary to focused and coded feedback, peer assessment was met with scepticism by a majority of the teachers, with a noticeable concern about its effectiveness. They underscored that for peer assessment to be effective, students must possess the ability to evaluate the peers' work and provide constructive feedback. They expressed that students tended to focus on grammatical errors and did not have the ability to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their peers' writing. Thus, such an exercise failed to provide meaningful directions or suggestions for improvement. As for students, slightly more than half of the students expressed a negative opinion about peer assessment. The students of both schools doubted their peers' ability and lamented about the inaccuracy of peers' feedback and believed that teachers were more authoritative in giving feedback.

Research Question 3: To what extent is the use of portfolio assessment to promote assessment as learning effective in improving students' writing abilities?

This section examines the effects of the implementation of portfolio assessment to promote assessment as learning on students' writing ability. On the whole, the use of PA to promote AaL demonstrated significant improvement particularly in the enrichment of the content and mechanics of students' writing. From the perspective of the teachers, the students were able to produce longer pieces of writing with richer written content and that there was notable improvement in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Through directing students' attention to different components of writing in different drafts (i.e. content feedback in the first draft and language issues in the second draft), the teachers enabled students to devote extended focus on developing their ideas or addressing their writing limitations without worrying about language-related issues until a later stage.

The student interview data were consistent with that of their teachers. When asked whether they witnessed any improvement in their writing, students commented that AaL through PA contributed to improving their writing performance. In line with the teacher and student data, the results of pre- and post- tests of the two schools, evaluated based on the criteria of TSA writing papers for primary schools, show that there was an increase in both the content and accuracy scores from the pre-test to the post-test. In general, the improvement of students' writing ability was influenced by their awareness and understanding of genres, adherence to writing conventions, ability to structure texts effectively, and the use of metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor and improve their writing. The findings revealed how the integration of all these elements contributed to enhancing students' proficiency in writing, as explicated below.

Enhanced genre awareness and understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses

The sharing and demystifying of assessment criteria enhanced students' understanding of the genre structure and genre-specific lexico-grammatical features of each target writing task. Through such

instructional scaffolding, the students deepened their comprehension of the specific features and purpose of each target genre as well as the structure and organization of the writing pieces. This knowledge, together with the goal setting strategy, contributed to students' perception about their own writing abilities.

Owing to consistent engagement in pre-writing goal setting and post-writing goal reflection, students were able to identify the weakness and strengths in their own writing. As such, students grew more aware of the areas for improvement and mastery. Students with weaker abilities selected goals that they believed were attainable at their perceived writing competence. As goal setting targeted language use and content and structure of the writing tasks, students focused on improving their expertise through consistent exercise. Once target goals were reached, students' sense of accomplishment and confidence in their own writing abilities grew, and they widened the scope of writing goals further. If students were initially concerned with the goals concerning the language use such as correct tenses, punctuation or spelling, subsequently they broadened their attention to enriching the content and presenting their writing in an interesting manner that fits with the structure of the given genre. More confident writers tended to select goals in order to challenge themselves. This is particularly important in the context of AaL as students' choices in goal setting demonstrate their emerging sense of autonomy and choice and increased motivation for their own learning, thereby aiming to attain higher levels of proficiency in their writing.

Goal setting not only encouraged and motivated students to challenge themselves to improve their writing, but also equipped students with a sense of responsibility for learning and self-management. Through continuous practice of goal setting and reflection, students develop awareness over their own personal progress and learn to negotiate their abilities and expectations more critically.

Self-monitoring on writing progress

AaL strategies for goal setting, self-assessment, and self-reflection were integral in fostering students' capacity to monitor their own writing progress. Students referred to goal setting sheets and rubrics in order to appraise the quality of their draft during and after the completion of the writing tasks. A number of students relied on the goal setting sheet to monitor their progress during the writing. Aside from the goal setting, students also made productive use of the assessment criteria to evaluate the quality of their written work. Through assessing their work-in-progress against the criteria, students not only improved the quality of writing but also sustained their knowledge of writing conventions. Students also utilized rubrics not only in planning but also in revising their writing, as this helped develop both their capacity to evaluate and monitor their work. Students were able not only to identify the gap in their written work, but also were encouraged to seek ways to close such gaps through self-initiated acts (Sadler, 1989).

Engagement with feedback for writing improvement

The third area in which the use of PA to promote AaL impacted students' writing abilities can be seen from the students' engagement with teacher feedback. According to Carless and Boud (2018), affective variables such as beliefs, attitudes and motivation play a mediating role in influencing students' effort in utilizing the feedback provided. To illustrate the transformative effect of the AaL for writing abilities then, it is important to present the comparison of student views before and after the study. Pre-study interview data showcased the central role of a teacher in the feedback process. Feedback predominantly focused on errors, and due to comprehensive marking, the students never had an opportunity to act on the feedback provided. The students then believed that such feedback was effective, as it failed to encourage improvement through re-writing and revising.

In the post-study interview, a clear pattern emerging in the students' perspectives was that the feedback played a pivotal role in enhancing their writing and assisting them to better understand their errors. Throughout this process, the feedback served as a pivotal component in guiding students' reflection upon completing their drafts, helping them assess their writing progress.

When asked about the efficacy of the type of teacher feedback, the students spoke highly of coded feedback, recognizing its value as a powerful tool that provided them with clear and actionable guidance for improving their writing skills. The use of codes helped them easily identify and focus on specific areas, such as spelling, punctuation, tense use, and word choice. Due to the easily understandable nature of coded feedback, the students displayed enthusiasm and satisfaction when discussing this feedback approach. The positive attitudes surrounding coded feedback were primarily rooted in its substantial contribution to nurturing student autonomy and fostering active engagement in the learning process. The students consistently underlined their preference for independently thinking and making corrections. The teachers also underlined the efficacy of coded feedback which allowed students to self-correct revise their drafts in accordance with the hints provided. Since students were given coded feedback, they had to decode the errors independently which contributed to students' deeper understanding of grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules.

The aforementioned discussion showcases students' engagement with feedback as well as the efficacy of teacher feedback. The use of AaL through PA then helped transform students' understanding of teacher feedback and their utilization in improving their writing abilities. To elaborate, the shift of focus from teacher directive telling approach (i.e. comprehensive feedback with predominate focus on errors) to developing proactive recipience through the use of coded feedback encouraged active student engagement with and use of feedback (Winstone et al., 2019).

Research Question 4: What challenges do teachers face and what support do they need to integrate assessment as learning through portfolio assessment in the writing classroom?

This section of the report addresses the challenges that participating teachers identified in implementation of AaL through PA and the support they would need to integrate it in their writing classrooms. The teachers identified several major challenges for implementation of AaL through PA. These challenges included time constraints, the impact of the pandemic on writing classroom, low student receptivity towards AaL through PA, as well as policy or structural hindrances. Regarding support, teachers appreciated all of the resources provided by the research team, which facilitated the smooth implementation of the AaL through PA. They emphasized the necessity of continuous support from the research team and highlighted the crucial role of the leadership of the English panel head.

Firstly, all the participants noted time constraints as the main challenge. With additional time required for material design and the completion of writing tasks, the teachers found themselves rushing through the syllabus.

Time constraints were further exacerbated due to the global pandemic and the reduced contact learning hours. As schools began to shift to remote learning, teachers struggled with adjusting their writing classrooms into a different mode of instruction. Relatedly, the teachers noted how the lack of time affected their students as well. They were concerned with the additional time allotted for the writing classroom.

In sum, the interview data illustrate that the global pandemic had severely disrupted classroom operation, teacher instruction, and student learning and aggravated the challenge of time constraints in the implementation of AaL through PA even further.

Next, the teachers highlighted that the low receptivity among lower ability students appeared to be another challenge. Unlike their previous experiences in the writing classroom, AaL through PA required students to conduct multiple revisions through continuous self-assessment and self-reflection. The teachers believed that their students struggled with adjusting to this approach as it required them to dedicate more time and effort into writing assignments, and as a result, the students of lower ability levels felt even more discouraged at the prospect of constant writing.

Apart from low receptivity, a few teachers mentioned the institutional infrastructure and policies might have hindered the implementation of the AaL through PA in the writing classrooms. For instance, the teachers tended to be apprehensive about the results of the project which was conducted through remote learning as opposed to face-to-face engagement. Since some writing tasks were implemented during face-to-face learning phase, and others were facilitated via distance learning platform, teachers could see that the remote learning posed additional implementation challenges. For instance, scarce teacher-student interaction, or accommodation of supportive learning environments via ZOOM became challenging issues.

Although the teachers believed that external feedback on their own practice could contribute to their enhanced pedagogical practices, they shared that there was lack of professional exchange among the colleagues and that there was an absence of opportunities for peer observations and feedback. As commented by some teachers, school timetabling posed an impediment for peer observation in that all the teachers adhered to the same class schedule. This inhibited them from gaining new perspectives and learning from each other. When facing such challenges, teachers often considered them as a policy issue that is beyond their scope. For instance, when asked about ways to address potential challenges, the teachers mostly voiced uncertainty about possible solutions.

Concerning support for the project, they appreciated the guidance and coaching provided by the research team. They believed that external support was still needed for its further integration into the curriculum.

Firstly, the teachers valued the advice given by the project team including pedagogical material development, lesson planning, discussion through phone calls and email. The teachers expressed that their team had enhanced their knowledge and skills in implementing AaL so that they were able to finetune the pedagogical practices to better develop their students' writing abilities. Furthermore, the teachers also highlighted the support given by their panel heads, who were considered as the key actors who maintained the line of communication and mediation between various stakeholders, and facilitated the smooth implementation of AaL through PA in writing classrooms. The panel head's role in sustaining the progress of the project and facilitating its further improvement and preventing future hindrances was brought forward. In addition, teachers from School B highlighted the role of their English team in providing additional support.

In summary, according to the teachers who participated in this project, the use of AaL through portfolio assessment is still evolving. While all the teachers emphasized the merits of the project, the lack of time was seen as the main obstacle in its implementation. A deficit in student receptivity towards the use of AaL through PA and other structural hindrances such as the lack of peer observations and uncertainty regarding school policies can be viewed as inhibiting factors in its successful implementation. Therefore, teachers emphasized the support from the external project group and the active leadership of the panel head along with the English team as important factors in facilitating the integration of the AaL through PA into the writing classrooms.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined the effectiveness of the use of PA with a focus on AaL in improving students' writing abilities, investigated the attitude of teachers and students towards the use of PA to promote AaL in the teaching and learning of writing, as well as explored the challenges teachers face and support they need in its implementation through a year-long integration of AaL-oriented portfolios as an assessment innovation in elementary writing classrooms. On the whole, the teachers and students from both schools reported significant improvement in the quality of writing, both in terms of content and language, as a result of their engagement in AaL through PA. There was widespread agreement that PA presented an effective tool for enhancing students' writing skills and increasing their motivation and engagement in the learning process. In particular, PA received acclaim for its ability to empower students in identifying and rectifying their writing errors. This aspect of PA seamlessly aligns with the core principle of AaL, which aims to place students at the heart of the learning process and cultivate a profound sense of autonomy, responsibility, and ownership in their writing endeavors (Lee et al., 2019). In respect to the teachers' and students' attitudes, the overall perception of PA as a means of promoting AaL among students was more positive than that of teachers. The teachers, who appeared to draw a relatively negative conclusion about PA, attributed their resistance to students' attitudes, which presented as a significant barrier to the successful implementation of AaL through PA. When discussing the role of PA, they noted that while some students engaged constructively with various PA elements and showed a willingness to improve, others (i.e. mostly students of low-ability levels) exhibited apathy or resistance, viewing AaL-oriented strategies as burdens to be quickly dismissed rather than opportunities for growth. A few factors were found to facilitate and constrain teachers' implementation of AaL through PA. In view of the potential problems, the research team has the following recommendations:

1. The findings revealed that students held more positive attitudes towards the implementation of AaL through PA compared to their teachers. While the students viewed AaL beneficial for their development in writing, the teachers appeared to be less enthusiastic due to their beliefs about the lack of students' receptivity as well as institutional and contextual challenges. To alleviate the teachers' scepticism, it is important to inform teachers of the positive student perceptions garnered from the study. As such, the teachers are advised to share good practices during their team meetings. In view of institutional and contextual challenges, the schools should provide comprehensive support and training for teachers on a regular basis. Such workshops could offer additional assistance in understanding typical AaL-related difficulties and equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills for navigating them (Xu & Brown, 2016). These meetings could shift the perspectives of teachers to view AaL conducted through PA as a promising tool that can improve students' experiences and outcomes in writing.

The schools may consider creating a collaboration network involving teachers, school leaders and researchers, where the teachers implementing AaL through PA can receive support and empowerment. Teacher participants of such groups can engage in reflections of their daily assessment practices, discuss the challenges they encounter, and collaborate with colleagues to design the appropriate solutions. Also, such support group could offer an opportunity for teachers to communicate their needs to the school leaders directly and obtain feedback and professional advice from the researchers in the field (Lee & Coniam, 2013; Mak & Wong, 2024). In addition to support networks, the schools have to modify a professional environment for teachers so that they have necessary resources and motivation for redesigning their teaching content and approaches to incorporate alternative assessment methods. The measures can include reducing their teaching load, proving financial compensation, and giving space for collaborative

teaching and lesson planning (Lam, 2020). In light of time constraints, it is recommended that the teachers utilize e-learning tools to optimize their time. For instance, the teachers could flip the classroom with Edpuzzle. Through assigning students video lessons to watch at home, the teachers could make use of class time to engage students in other meaningful activities. To afford time for students to carry out peer assessment, the teachers can consider using online platform such as Seesaw. The benefits of not having to be restricted by class hours coupled with the virtual learning environment should not be under-estimated.

2. The results of the study indicate that not all the AaL-oriented strategies garnered positive response from the teachers and students. For instance, some students have a predilection for teacher feedback over peer feedback due to its perceived usefulness of helping them improve their writing. To enhance the efficacy and perceived value of peer feedback, teachers must explain the rationale of such an activity and coach students to give and evaluate peer feedback. To develop students' ability to discern the quality of the peers' work, teachers could make use of exemplars of varying standard to guide students through a structured analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the writing pieces. Such an analysis enables students to understand assessment expectations and allows them to distinguish between different levels of performance (Carless & Boud, 2018). In addition to analysing exemplars of differing standard with reference to genre-specific assessment criteria as mentioned above, teachers can also display some examples of feedback of varying quality and model how to give descriptive feedback.

To shift students' negative dispositions towards peer assessment, teachers can also encourage students' oral peer feedback giving by engaging them in informal class discussions. Such an approach, prioritizing informal review and exchange of ideas among peers over the formalized

written feedback, might serve as a way for students to appreciate the value of peer assessment for their learning and develop more favourable attitude towards it (Bader et al., 2019).

3. The findings show that there is a strong inclination towards the efficacy of teachers' feedback practices, particularly coded feedback. Some teachers, however, provided lack of constructive feedback or suggestions for improvement. Feedback, if any, has a predominate focus on language errors. To facilitate good feedback practices, the English team must have concrete guidelines and examples on how to provide detailed, specific and manageable feedback to students. With mechanisms for monitoring instructional practice, teachers are more likely to adhere to the guidelines (Mak & Wong, 2024). To encourage students to engage with and use feedback to improve their writing, teachers could consider providing appropriate praise and workable suggestions so that students know where they are in their learning and how to strive for improvement. It is also crucial to establish a non-threatening learning environment, where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions without fear of judgment or criticism. It is also important that students understand the feedback provided. As such, teachers could give feedback with language pitched at the students' level as well as encourage students to seek help and engage in dialogue with the teacher about the feedback they may not understand (Carless, 2016).

In conclusion, learning to write is a protracted process, especially for second language learners. While the findings of the study revealed that AaL through PA effectively supported students' learning by enhancing their motivation, self-regulation and overall performance in writing, it is important to bear in mind that significant improvement in writing does not occur overnight. To

ensure the longevity of AaL through PA, both administrators and teachers must be committed to change and engage in continuous collective learning for the betterment of students.

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