

CHAPTER FOUR TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AND THEIR BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from the interviews with both instructors and the results of data analysis based on the observations of the instructors' assessment practices.

Instructor A's Beliefs about Language, Language Learning, and Assessment in General

The findings are from the three formal interviews and two informal interviews with Instructor A, focusing on Instructor A's beliefs about language and language learning, beliefs about assessment in general, and beliefs about designing, implementing, and evaluating assessment.

Beliefs about Language and Language Learning

Instructor A had three major beliefs about language and language learning. The first one was language should be learned following a step-by-step, continuous process from simplicity to complexity. This belief was reflected in her objectives of Freshman English and Guided Writing. She thought the ideal objective of Freshman English was communication in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, she admitted that the objective was too high-sounding. Thus, she had the reading ability as priority for Freshman English. She said, "For Freshman English, reading is the most important objective." Beside, Instructor A thought that the objective of Guided Writing was to make students produce a unified and coherent "paragraph", rather than a unified and coherent "essay". This was based on a fair assessment of the proficiency level of students in Guided Writing. They were English minors and had relatively more

problems in grammar than English majors did. Another reason was that she thought English should be learned following a step-by-step sequence, and students should learn to write a paragraph before writing an essay. Instructor A also considered her workload when setting the objective. She said, “Teaching students to write a paragraph is within the scope I can control. I think I may not be able to teach them all the skills they need for writing an essay within one semester.” This shows that aside from her beliefs about language learning, Instructor A considers students’ proficiency level, backgrounds, and her workload when she sets course objectives.

The second major belief was that encouragement and motivation influence students’ learning most. Instructor A thought that in order to promote students’ motivation for learning English, a teacher should try his or her best to discover students’ strengths and to emphasize what students have accomplished, rather than simply attending to students’ limitations. She said, “Attending to students’ accomplishment and offering them much encouragement on that give them stronger motivation for learning English.” Besides the two major factors, there were some factors that had only mild influence on students’ English learning, and among which were teaching methods, materials, and classroom atmosphere.

The third major belief held by Instructor A was that learning English was to communicate. She thought expressiveness was more important than linguistic accuracy. This belief was formed under the influence of her teaching experiences. She used to think that accuracy was more important than fluency and regarded students’ basic grammatical errors unforgivable. However, after several years of teaching, she found that students might feel self-restricted in expressing their thoughts in writing and speaking for fear of making mistakes. The situation was more debilitating for many low-achievers. Thus, she started to believe that expressiveness was more important than accuracy. Such change in belief was also reflected in her teaching, so

she started to value students' thoughts and place fewer emphases on accuracy.

In sum, Instructor A has three major beliefs about language and language learning. These beliefs guide her focus of teaching and her course objectives. Besides, she considers her workload and students' proficiency levels when she sets course objectives.

Beliefs about Assessment in General

Instructor A had two major beliefs about assessment in general. First, the major goal of assessment was to contribute to the positive washback effect, namely, to promote students' learning. She thought assessment should be used to motivate students to learn and thus to meet teachers' requirements.

Second, formative assessment was more important than summative one. She thought that formative assessment was a tool to make sure that students did what they should do at any time. She claimed, "If students make regular efforts, they do not give up preparing for summative assessment due to the heavy loads of studying." As for summative assessment, she said, "Summative assessment simply shows a result of good or bad." Instructor A thought that formative assessment was more important than summative one for the former had the function of promoting learning. Besides, she continued, "Formative assessment provides many opportunities for making up." It shows that Instructor A emphasizes students' progress in learning. This is influenced by her belief that language learning is a continuous process, through which one practices using and internalizing English. Formative assessment helps ensure this process and thus is more important than summative assessment. In addition to students' performance in tests, Instructor A took students' participation in class, attendance, the profundity of their opinions, and their regular efforts in class into consideration when assessing students. For "participation in class", she considered

students' initiatives in discussion, in responding to others' opinions, and in giving comments or encouragement to the speaker. Besides, she took into consideration whether students paid extra efforts such as visiting the language lab outside the class when assessing their performance.

To sum up, Instructor A views language learning as a continuous process, and she emphasizes the positive washback effect of assessment. Besides tests, she also takes into account students' in-class performance, participation, and attendance when assessing students.

Beliefs about Planning and Evaluating Assessment

Beliefs about planning assessment include Instructor A's beliefs about designing assessment and setting criteria for assessment. Beliefs about evaluating assessment refer to Instructor A's reflections on assessment.

Beliefs about Planning Assessment

This section delineates Instructor A's beliefs underlying planning assessment, including setting the requirement and the grading criteria for assessment in Freshman English and Guided Writing.

Beliefs underlying the Requirements of Course A "Freshman English".

Generally speaking, in Freshman English, the requirements of the "Construction and Implementation of College English Language Curriculum" (referred as "the Freshman English Project" in the following part of the study) had major influences on Instructor A's belief about the choice of assessment activity and about setting criteria for the assessment activities. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the score of students' performance in the activities related to the four skills and the score of the mid-term

and final together constituted 70 percent of a student's final score, and students' performance in proficiency test represented 30 percent of the final score. Instructor A showed her opinions about the unified criteria. She stated, "Frankly speaking, I thought it is too ambitious to attend to all the four skills in a Freshman English class. For low-achievers, 30 percent for the proficiency test may cause them to fail the class."

Besides the institutional requirement, when designing assessment, Instructor A adjusted her assessment activities to the insufficiency of the textbook. She thought that the reading texts in the textbook were too simple, and it was less likely that students' reading ability would be enhanced through reading these texts. She took advantage of the simple reading texts to design more textbook-based listening and speaking activities. She stated, "The simple and interesting topics in the textbook make it easier for students to express their thoughts and opinions."

Instructor A's requirements of Freshman English included the assessment activities related to the four skills, summative tests such as the mid-term and final exam, and the proficiency test. In the four-skill-related assessment activities, the listening category included text listening and end-of-unit dictated reading comprehension quizzes. After students listened to the tape of the text, Instructor A would ask them comprehension questions to check their understanding of the text. In the dictated end-of-unit quizzes, Instructor A read the quiz questions, and students listened to them and then answered the questions orally. She explained, "Because we do not have separate listening quizzes due to the limitation of class time, I must integrate the quizzes on reading comprehension and on listening." This reveals that Instructor A integrates the assessment of two skills to cope with the contextual constraints such as time limitation. This also shows that Instructor A strives to promote students' learning through assessment activities.

Assessment activities in speaking were usually followed by assessment activities in writing. For speaking, students were required to engage in group discussions of the questions in the textbook, oral report of the result of group discussions of the post-reading questions, and group role-plays. For writing, students were required to write scripts of the oral report and group role-plays, and two journals. Instructor A asked students to have group discussions about the post-reading questions in the textbook. During the 10-minute discussion, one member in each group was required to take notes of the important points of the group discussion and to write up the draft of the oral report after class. Immediately after the discussion, another member of each group should report on the result of their discussion to the class on behalf of that group. Within the semester, group members took turns making the oral report and writing the drafts. Instructor A explained the reason she designed the assessment activities. She thought these assessment activities helped promote students' practice in speaking and writing. Besides, she continued, "If students have discussed and practiced answering these questions, it won't be difficult for them to do the short-answer questions in the mid-term and final." This was because the short-answer questions in the mid-term and final were similar to the post-reading questions in the textbook. This shows that Instructor A wants to help students prepare for the assessment. As for the reason for taking turns, she said, "I want to ensure fairness so that every student is given an opportunity to practice. Besides, grading is tiring if every member in a group hands in a writing report." However, when the instructional schedule was tight, Instructor A simply had her students brainstorm on the questions for discussion and then asked questions to check comprehension, and oral or writing report was canceled due to the limitation of time. This shows that Instructor A takes into consideration her workload when she designs assessment activities, and she cancels some planned assessment activities in order to keep to the instructional

schedule.

In addition to the oral report, students were required to do group role-plays concerning the text of the unit. Each group did the role-play once within the semester. Instructor A explained the reason for asking students to do two kinds of speaking activities. She said, “Besides promoting practice in speaking, the role-play adds variety to the class. It is also a valid way to assess students’ speaking ability.” This shows that Instructor A considers the variety in class to prevent students from feeling bored.

Besides the writing drafts on group discussion, the second requirement of writing was the draft of group role-plays. Each group had to hand in the draft before the role-play. Instructor A corrected the grammatical errors in it and gave some suggestions about the content and the word usage in the draft. The group members made revisions to the drafts following Instructor A’s suggestions and corrections. It was not until the instructor was satisfied with the draft that students could start memorizing the dialogs in the draft. This was because Instructor A thought that students of Freshman English had limited proficiency level in English, so memorizing erroneous input would have bad effects on their limited language proficiency. The last requirement of writing was two diary-based journals. Students could choose whatever they like to write on. She said, “They can write more without the restrictions on the topics. I just want them to have more experiences in writing.” This shows that promoting practicing is a significant belief of Instructor A.

For reading category, students were required to read the units assigned as outside reading in their free time. There were six units assigned by the Freshman English Project as outside reading in the semester. Three of them were tested in the mid-term exam, and instructors in the Freshman English Project were free to decide when to test the other three outside reading units. After the mid-term, Instructor A gave

true-false quizzes on the three outside reading units in class. The quizzes were sometimes in the written form and sometimes in the dictation form. She explained the reason for using true-false questions, “I just want to test their general comprehension of these units, not to ask them to scan the reading materials.” As mentioned above, the dictation form was to test students’ integrated skills of listening and reading and to cope with the limitation of class time. This shows that Instructor A varies the format of the quiz to suit its purpose.

Besides quizzes on outside reading units, students had to take end-of-unit quizzes. Instructor A stated that the purpose of the end-of-unit quiz was to check students’ understanding of the unit. She said, “I may use any format that can check students’ understanding of the unit. Sometimes I give a gapped summary of the text, and sometimes I give true-false questions.”

Instructor A did not give individual listening quizzes in Freshman English due to the limitation of class time. She integrated quizzes on listening into the end-of-unit, reading comprehension quizzes and the quizzes on outside reading units. For some end-of-unit quizzes on reading comprehension, Instructor A read the comprehension questions, and students answered the questions orally. Quizzes on the three outside reading units after the mid-term exam were conducted in the form of dictation. Instructor A read the questions, and students answered the true-false questions orally.

In addition to the four-skill-related assessment activities, students were given summative assessments, including the mid-term and final exam. The test items of the mid-term examination included “vocabulary in context”, “dictation”, “short-answer reading comprehension”, “essay questions”, and “outside reading”. Instructor A explained the rationale of the unified test items for the mid-term exam. She thought that “Vocabulary and Phrases” tested students’ understanding of some important words and phrases which they were supposed to know after learning a unit, and this

item constituted 30 percent of the mid-term. “Dictation” was used because instructors who taught the low-intermediate level classes wanted to enhance students’ listening comprehension. Besides, the objective of Freshman English was mainly to promote students’ reading ability, so they decided to have “Reading Comprehension”. Students had to answer the reading comprehension questions in complete sentences. This helps ensure that students fully understand the passages in order to answer the question. “Essay Questions” tested students’ ability to express their thoughts. The reading students did in class was mainly intensive reading, so “Quizzes on Outside Readings” were used to test students’ extensive reading skills. The format of quiz on outside readings was true-false questions in order to test their general comprehension of the readings.

The last requirement of Freshman English was the proficiency test. The proficiency test was the Intermediate Level Listening Test of General English Proficiency Test, but its version was different from the one which had been implemented as the placement test at the beginning of the semester. The requirement was also regulated by the Freshman English Project and was aimed at measuring students’ progress in listening after the training within the semester.

To conclude, Instructor A’s beliefs underlying the requirements of Freshman English are influenced by her beliefs about language learning and assessment in general. She also considers students’ proficiency level and her workload when designing the requirements.

Beliefs underlying the Grading Policies of Course A “Freshman English”.

Among the 70 percent representing students’ achievement in their final score, 10 percent of weighting was represented by students’ achievement in the four-skill-related assessment activities. 30 percent was determined by the end-of-unit

quizzes. Another 30 percent was represented by students' performance in the mid-term and final. Instructor A explained why the four-skill-related assessment activities represented only 10 percent of the final score. She said, "Four-skill-related assessment activities are more like exercises than assessment. Scores of these assessment activities represented a teacher's subjective assessment of students' in-class performance, which is difficult to enumerate." Besides, she thought that students had limited English proficiency, so she felt satisfied if they could engage themselves actively in the activities. Therefore, these activities constituted only a low weight of 10 percent. Among the 10 percent, Instructor A did not assign distinct weighting to the four skills respectively. It was because she thought it was difficult to give a separate weighting to each skill, and she thought that the percentage listed in the syllabi served more as a function of promoting students' learning than as an instrument of actual assessment. She said, "Students will more or less engage in these activities in the hope of obtaining some points if these activities will be included in their final scores."

With respect to the relatively higher weight assigned to the end-of-unit quiz and mid-term and final exam, she explained, "These scores are more objective, so I give higher percentage to them." Instructor A's assignment of different weight reveals two aspects of her beliefs about assessment. First, assessment is more than a tool to measure students' achievement; besides, it motivates students to practice and learn English. Second, Instructor A emphasizes the objectivity of scoring.

Instructor A had some criteria for grading in-class four-skill-related assessment activities. When grading students' performance in speaking assessment activities such as group oral report and group role-play, she emphasized students' expressiveness over accuracy. She stated, "I consider the contents, organization, the fluency of students' delivery, and whether the oral performance can arouse good responses from

the audience.” She continued, “I do not demand too much on accuracy in oral performance. I feel happy if students can speak out something.” As for the instrument of assessment, Instructor A employed direct observation to grade students’ oral performance, and she assigned a score right after listening to the oral performance. When listening to students’ group oral report, Instructor A simply corrected students’ global errors or errors in keywords in the oral report. This conforms to her belief that learning a language is to communicate.

Compared with grading speaking, Instructor A required more on accuracy of students’ writings, including the writing scripts of group oral report and group role-play. Instructor A asked students to correct the grammatical errors and word usage in the draft following her suggestions before the role-play. She explicated, “I correct everything that students are going to memorize in advance. They have bad control of language, and it would be debilitating if they memorize erroneous input.” This reveals that Instructor A attends to students’ proficiency levels when implementing assessment. As for journals, Instructor A simply read through them, but she did not correct or grade them. She explained, “It is difficult to grade something like diaries, and I think the purpose of writing journals is to promote practice in writing. There is no need to assign a grade or a score to the journals.” This shows that Instructor A varies her criteria for grading writing from the purpose of assessment activity.

Instructor A did not implement individual assessment activity in listening in Freshman English for the limitation of time. She incorporated the listening quiz into the end-of-unit reading comprehension quizzes. She also incorporated quizzes on outside readings and listening quizzes. Therefore, students’ performance in listening assessment activity was not included in their achievement as an individual category. This was because the instructional schedule was tight, and there was no time for

individual quizzes on listening. This reveals that categories included in the grading policies may not be fully implemented due to the contextual constraint such as time limitation.

Instructor A emphasized objectivity and fairness in grading. When doing group oral report, every group member took turns representing the whole group. Thus, each member got a score for the oral report. Instructor A did not give a single score for the whole group. She thought that everyone had different level of oral proficiency, so it was unfair to give all the members in a group the same score according to the performance of a single student. This shows that Instructor A attends to fairness and individual differences within students.

Instructor A spent much time doing follow-ups after assessment. After grading, she taught students how to revise their writing drafts of group oral report or group role-play in class. She explained, “If I don’t teach students how to write, they will never know how to write a well-structured essay.” This shows that Instructor A values the positive washback effect of assessment. She not only assigns students to write, but also teaches them how to improve their writings. This helps promote students’ motivation and confidence in writing.

In addition to follow-up instructions, Instructor A gave students many opportunities to do the make-up activities. She allowed students to rewrite their writing drafts of oral report or group role-play. She explained, “Students should be encouraged to improve their writing. I will give them many opportunities to make up if they are willing to make efforts.” With regard to the score of the drafts, she said, “I will pick up several highest scores among their drafts and revisions.” This reveals that Instructor A appreciates students’ efforts in improving their writings. This helps promote students’ motivation and confidence when they engage themselves actively in assessment activities of writing. Besides, students had a chance to redo their drafts

of group oral report or group role-play. Instructor A also encouraged students to earn extra points by visiting the language lab where they were provided with access to different resources of English learning. This is based on her belief about language learning. She thought that encouraging students to receive more English input might contribute to learning. Furthermore, Instructor A gave students opportunities to make up for their bad performance in the summative assessments such as the mid-term exam. She said, “When they perform really bad on the mid-term, I give them extra points if they could memorize good passages or sentences in the texts.”

Aside from definite criteria, Instructor A employed subjective, impressionistic scoring when grading students’ regular efforts in-class. She graded students’ in-class performance in answering questions or participation by impressions. Such score did not represent large proportion of a student’s final score. She stated, “I don’t assign a score all by impressions. Such subjective score should only represent less than 10 percent of a student’s final score of the class.” The proportion came from her belief about a skill course like Freshman English. She thought that impressionistic score should not be given a heavy weighting in a skill course. She said, “I only deduct some points from a student’s overall score for his or her frequent absence.” This shows that Instructor A prefers to use objective scoring over subjective one. Besides, she varies her rationale for grading from the nature of courses.

Beliefs underlying the Requirements of Course B “Guided Writing”. Instructor A thought that the objective of Guided Writing was to teach students to produce a unified and coherent paragraph. Instructor A’s requirements of Guided Writing included students’ regular attendance and their performance in the assessment activities, including in-class writings, the discussion of the in-class writings, the revision of their writings, journals, assignment, and the mid-term exam.

Instructor A asked students to attend class regularly. She thought students could not improve a lot in writing if they simply came to class once or twice within a semester. She said, “I think it’s important to attend class regularly and make a lot of efforts in writing.” The second requirement was in-class writings. Students were required to write a paragraph in class every other week. Instructor A thought that students may need to produce a writing piece in a limited period of time in their daily lives, so she asked them to practice writing a piece within an hour. She provided three topics related to students’ daily lives for them to choose from whenever they were asked to write a paragraph in class. She explained, “If you simply give them a single topic, they may not want to write on this topic or have no inspiration for it. I hope to provide students with more alternatives.” Besides, she asked students to practice writing the topic of the High-Intermediate GEPT Writing Test. She stated, “Some students may need the certificate of GEPT when they seek jobs.” This reveals that Instructor A considers not only students’ interests but also their real-life needs of seeking jobs when designing assessment activities.

After students handed in their first drafts of each in-class writing, Instructor A underlined the errors in the paragraphs and wrote down the type of the errors, but she did not correct the errors for students. Instead, she wanted students to correct the errors by themselves. She explained, “I used to spend much time correcting errors for students, but they still made repeated errors.” She thought that asking students to correct their errors made them more aware of the errors and thus helped them correct the wrong concepts. The first draft was given back to the student a week later. In the class the following week, Instructor A chose two to three paragraphs to discuss with the students in class. She clarified important grammatical points with which students were often confused. She explained, “Clarifying students’ common errors helps resolve many students’ confusion.” In the discussion, Instructor A asked students to

give encouragement to their classmates' paragraphs, talking about their strengths. Instructor A, instead, gave some suggestions or pointed out problems in the paragraphs. Instructor A thought that asking students to comment on their classmates' writings might impose much pressure on them. This reveals that Instructor A attends to students' affect when implementing assessment.

After the discussion, students had to revise their first draft and hand in their revisions the next week. This was because Instructor A thought that writing was a process, and students should refine their writings through revision. For some in-class writings, Instructor A asked students to form groups to do peer proofreading, in which students discussed the errors and problems in each others' paragraphs, corrected the errors together, and gave feedback to each other's paragraphs following the teacher-designed checklist. Instructor A stated her belief, "The communication between students may be more effective compared with that between students and the teacher. They can learn much through the process of peer proofreading." She continued, "Students can not always have access to teachers when they have questions, so their classmates are good resources of learning for them." This shows that Instructor A tries hard to promote the beneficial washback effect when designing assessment activity.

Instructor A designed a checklist of writing and asked students to follow the checkpoints on it when they were engaged in peer proofreading. Six categories were included in the checklist, including "unity", "coherence", "grammatical accuracy", "diction", "mechanics", and "readers' response". Among the six categories, "unity" is the objective of Guided Writing. The other five categories were included because Instructor A thought that these categories were important from reading the literature on discourse analysis. This shows that one part of Instructor A's belief about assessment is influenced by her linguistic background. Under each category, there

were checkpoints serving to help students ensure that their paragraphs fulfilled the criteria of that category. Instructor A thought that following the checklist closely made students check their writings in detail, helping them know the strengths and weaknesses of their own writings clearly. Besides, in order to help students achieve the objective of Guided Writing, namely, writing a coherent and unified paragraph, Instructor A used two class periods to teach students the concept of coherence and unity. She explained, “For the two are the objectives of the course, I should teach students in advance. Thus, they can know what a good writing piece is like.” This shows that Instructor A does not simply assign an assessment activity to students. She further helps students perform better in the assessment activity by teaching them important concepts in advance.

After the peer proofreading, Instructor A corrected the errors and identified the problems that students did not detect in their in-class writings. Then the in-class writings were given back to the students the next week. Instructor A explained the reason why she corrected the paragraphs again. “Students can learn some concepts from my correction because all of them in the group are unable to identify the errors.”

In addition to the in-class writings, students were required to write journals every other week. The purpose was to promote students’ practice in writing. Instructor A appreciated students’ efforts in writing journals, reflected in the length and the abundance of thoughts in journals. She said, “I appreciate those students who have tried to express as many contents and thoughts as possible. The number of ideas students produce reflects their efforts devoted to writing.” To promote content richness and expressiveness in students’ journals, she imposed no restrictions on the topics of students’ journals. She contended, “There are no restrictions on the topic of journals because I hope that students can write more.” Concerning the load of journal writing, she used to ask students to write two journals a week. However, many

students said that writing two journals a week was a heavy burden for them, so she reduced the requirement and allowed students to hand in one journal a week.

Instructor A stated, “I think students have heavy loads of studying from their major fields, so I reduced the number of journals they have to write.” This shows that Instructor A reflects on the requirement she sets following students’ inputs or feedback.

Another requirement of Guided Writing was the mid-term examination. There were two parts included in the mid-term examination. The first part tested students’ comprehension of the important writing skills and concepts in the textbook, such as picking out irrelevant sentences from a unified paragraph or identifying the functions of the paragraph, and this part represented 40 percent of the total score of the mid-term exam. Instructor A thought that testing important concepts in the textbook in the mid-term forced students to study the textbook more thoroughly. The second part of the mid-term exam was writing a paragraph in response to a reading passage. This part represented 60 percent of the total score. Instructor A wanted to ensure students’ comprehension of the important points and concepts in the textbook, so she tested concepts and theory in the textbook. Besides, she took into account the objectivity of the test. She said, “If I simply ask students to write an paragraph in response to a reading passage, the test result will be too subjective.” In addition, she wanted to help students perform well in the mid-term. She said, “If they [students] do not perform well in writing the paragraph, they still can get good grades by answering the textbook-based questions.” The designing of the test items in the mid-term exam reveals that Instructor A tries hard to maintain the objectivity of the test result. It also reveals that Instructor A thinks that the comprehension of the textbook contents was as important as the ability of writing. Beside, she tries hard to help students experience success in assessment.

Instructor A did not spend much time on exercise and assignment in the textbook in class. She usually asked students to do the exercises in the textbook at home as the assignment. The answers to the assignment were checked and discussed in class. If students did not do well in their assignment, she asked them to redo the assignment. Instructor A did not spend much time on exercise and assignment in class because she thought that students were more interested in their own writings, and they cared more about the feedback the instructor gave them. Thus, Instructor A spent more time on giving feedback to students' writings than discussing the exercises and assignment in class.

Beliefs underlying the Grading Policies of Course B "Guided Writing". This section describes Instructor A's grading policies of the major assessment activities employed in Guided Writing, including in-class writings, the revision of the in-class writings, journals, and assignment.

Instructor A emphasized the quality of students' in-class writings and the revision of the writings. She said, "In-class writings should be correct, accurate, and mature in style." She followed the checkpoints in the checklist when assessing in-class writings and the revision of the writings. When grading the revision of the in-class writing paragraphs, Instructor A attended to students' efforts devoted to revising, reflected in the correction of grammatical errors and the degree the contents were expanded. She said, "Most of the students only correct the errors. If there are students who expand the content, I will use their paragraphs as the models for discussion and give them encouragement." Instructor A did not assign a score to the first draft or the revision of the in-class writing paragraphs. Instead, she simply gave a letter grade. The letter grade gave students a rough understanding of their proficiency in writing. For example, she explained, "'A+' means a good job; 'A' means average; 'A-' means

below average.” She stated that only to the paragraphs in the mid-term or final exam did she assign a score because the ultimate goal of the writing class was to enhance students’ writing proficiency. She continued, “What students really learn from this class is the process of writing and the feedback to their writings from the teacher and their peers. The process of writing, the revision, and the feedback help enhance their writing proficiency.” It is evident that Instructor A emphasizes the learning process over the scores given to the writing pieces.

Although Instructor A asked students to follow the checklist when they do peer-proofreading, she did not use category-based, analytic scoring when assessing students’ in-class writings and revisions. She explained, “Analytic scoring is very tiring. Besides, students’ paragraphs were discussed by categories in class; I think students can easily know in which aspects they need improvement.” This shows that Instructor A attends to what students learn through the assessment activities, which echoes her belief that assessment is to promote learning.

When assessing students’ weekly journals, Instructor A emphasized “quantity”, i.e. the number of ideas. In addition, she considered students’ efforts. She appreciated those students who tried to be as expressive as possible in their journals. She said, “The focus of journals is whether students can fully express their thoughts in journals, and grammar or organization of the journals are not so important.” This was because she thought that making grammatical mistakes was inevitable when students concentrated on expressing their ideas. Instructor A did not assign a letter grade or a score to students’ journals, either. She thought students would care more about the teacher’s feedback to their writing pieces than the score or the letter grade. Besides, she said, “Teachers’ feedback or comments are more helpful for students than numbers, and students will feel more motivated to write if they receive much feedback from the teacher.” Usually, Instructor A did not discuss students’ journals in

class, and she simply gave written response. Although she also picked up some salient grammatical errors in students' journals, she did not lay a great emphasis on accuracy. However, if there were many students making similar errors, Instructor A explained and clarified the erroneous grammatical concepts in class. Instructor A further explicated her belief of journal writing. She said, "Journal writing is just a measure to spur students to practice writing more and let students feel that they have someone to communicate with." Instructor A's assessment of students' journals reveals two aspects of her beliefs about assessment. First, journals serve as tools to promote practices in writing. As the purpose is to practice writing, Instructor A does not emphasize the accuracy of journals. Besides, she tries to enhance students' motivation for practicing writing by giving much feedback to their writings.

Instructor A listed classroom discussion and assignment in her grading policies, but students' performances in these two aspects were not graded. Instructor A said that the purpose of listing the two requirements was to let students know that those activities were important and to force them to make efforts to fulfill the two requirements.

In sum, Instructor A's beliefs about planning assessment are guided by her beliefs about language learning and assessment in general. Besides, she considers students' levels, real-life needs, interests, the purpose of assessment, and her workload when designing assessment, setting criteria, and implementing assessment.

Beliefs about Evaluating Assessment

Instructor A reflected on her assessment practice, and she based her reflections on her previous teaching experience and the suggestions from the literature. The prior teaching experience made Instructor A think that emphasizing students' errors would reduce their participation in in-class discussion. Thus, she decided to offer more

positive feedback and encouragement to enhance students' self-esteem and motivation in learning. However, this did not mean she did not provide suggestions or comments on students' performance. She thought teachers should give constructive comments aside from encouragement, and they had to attend to the way they offered comments or suggestions. She said, "If a teacher provides encouragement before giving suggestive feedback, students do not feel that the teacher only attends to their limitations all the time." She thought that considering students' affect helped enhance their motivation for learning. This shows that Instructor A thinks that it is important to let students know how to improve themselves; at the same time, she attends to students' affect.

Literature on assessment also guided Instructor A's reflections. She said, "Assessing writing is currently regarded as a long-term, continuous process, in which students revise their writings and try to make their writings perfect." Under the suggestion of the literature, Instructor A thought writing was a process. Thus, she allowed students to revise their drafts and took the revision into consideration when grading.

To conclude, Instructor A's reflections on assessment are guided by her teaching experience and the suggestions from the literature.

Beliefs about Implementing Assessment

Instructor A thought that teachers should take the initiative in checking students' comprehension in class to understand their learning condition, especially for those who had lower English proficiency. She thought that frequent comprehension check helped teachers detect students' difficulty and allowed them to take some measures to help resolve students' difficulty. For this reason, in Freshman English, she often checked students' comprehension by asking questions or giving quizzes. In Guided

Writing, she checked students' comprehension less often, for students were more responsive in discussion. She said, "Students of Guided Writing are English minors, and they have higher English proficiency and less difficulty in expressing themselves than the students of Freshman English." This shows that Instructor A adjusts the frequency of in-class comprehension checks to students' responses in class and their English proficiency.

Instructor A thought that incorporating four-skill-based assessment activities in class disconnected the sequence of the class. She said, "Sometimes I feel the class is in a hideous mess. I am busy implementing many activities. Actually I am not so willing to do so, but I have to."

Instructor A often deviated from her original plans of assessment to keep to the instructional schedule. She said, "To keep to the instructional schedule, it is inevitable that you have to cancel some assessment activities." After detecting students' difficulty, Instructor A provided learning sources for students. For example, she suggested students go to the language lab to use language learning software. She also told students that they could ask her for help whenever they had questions.

To sum up, Instructor A often deviates from her plans for assessment due to the limitation of class time. She also provides strategies to help students solve their difficulty after assessment to motivate students' learning.

Major Assessment Activities Employed by Instructor A

This section describes the major assessment activities employed by Instructor A in Freshman English and Guided Writing and explains how these assessment activities are implemented in both classes.

Course A “Freshman English”

Five assessment activities were identified from Instructor A’s teaching practices:

(1) textbook-related assessment activities, (2) group oral reports, (3) group role-plays, (4) quizzes, (5) in-class comprehension checks, and (6) the mid-term examination.

(1) Textbook-related assessment activities

Before Instructor A started teaching a new unit, she had students listen to the tape of the text. After the lecture, students were required to discuss the post-reading questions in the textbook. Instructor A also reviewed the texts just finished by question-and-answer procedures between her and students.

(2) Group oral reports

Students formed groups and had a 10-minute discussion of the post-reading questions in the textbook. After the discussion, one of the students in the group gave an oral report on the result of the group discussion. After the report, the presenter or the instructor asked the other students a question concerning the presentation to check their comprehension. Afterwards, Instructor A gave encouragement to the presenter and then offered suggestions on the structure, grammar, contents, and language of the presentation. Another student in the group took notes of the important points of the discussion, and the student had to write a report based on the notes and handed in the report the next week. Students in the group took turns doing these two activities. By the end of the semester, every student in the group did the two activities at least once.

(3) Group role-plays

After finishing each unit, there was a group doing a role-play concerning the topic of the unit. The group had to hand in the draft of the role-play to Instructor A in advance. Instructor A corrected the draft and offered suggestions about the contents, and students were required to revise the draft. The group members did not start memorizing the draft until the instructor felt satisfied with it. After the role-play, the

instructor provided encouragement to the group and then offered suggestions and comments on the performance. The instructor also elicited opinions on the role-play from the other students. She wanted the audience to give more encouragement to the group. Afterwards, the instructor discussed and commented on the drafts in class.

(4) Quizzes

After finishing a unit, Instructor A gave an end-of-unit quiz to test students' comprehension of the unit. There were two parts in the quiz. In the first part, there were questions such as cloze summary of the text or the fill-in-blank vocabulary test. In the second part, true-false comprehension questions were given. Besides the end-of-unit quizzes, to let students become familiar with the format of the quiz on outside reading in the mid-term examination, Instructor A gave quizzes on units assigned as outside reading before the mid-term exam. The format of the quiz on outside reading was true-false comprehension questions. Sometime the quiz was done in the form of dictation. The instructor read the questions, and students had to answer the questions orally. The instructor could know if students had full understanding of the unit immediately. When students gave a wrong answer, the instructor explained the answer by referring to the related passages in the text.

(5) In-class comprehension checks

Instructor A checked students' comprehension about the texts by after-reading and after-task questions. After having students do the after-reading exercises in the textbook, Instructor A elicited answers from students individually. She asked, "Ok, question number 2, how about Jean (pseudonym)?" When reviewing a previously taught text by the question-and-answer procedure, instructor A asked, "What is the expression, do you remember?" Besides, Instructor A also checked students' comprehension by after-task questions. After a group's oral report, the instructor asked, "Ok, tell me. What is her opinion? (Ask the class). Does she think that people

without similar qualities can be compatible?”

(6) The mid-term examination

The format and the questions in the mid-term examination were decided and written out cooperatively by the instructors of the Lower-Intermediate Level of the Freshman English Project. Question types included in the mid-term exam included vocabulary in context, dictation of the text, comprehension questions of the outside readings, reading comprehension, short-answer questions, and essay questions.

Course B “Guided Writing”

Six assessment activities were observed from Instructor A’s teaching practice: (1) in-class writings, (2) revision of the in-class writings, (3) discussion of students’ in-class writings, (4) journal writing, (5) textbook-related assessment activities, and (6) the mid-term examination.

(1) In-class writings

Every other week, students were required to write a paragraph in class. The topic of the paragraph was related to what was introduced in the textbook. Students had 50 minutes to write a paragraph in class.

(2) Revision of the in-class writings

After students finished their in-class writings, Instructor A pinpointed the errors in grammar or word usage in the in-class writings by underlining the errors. She did not correct them for the students; instead, she simply underlined the errors. Students had to correct the errors in their paragraph and revise the paragraph. They could revise until they felt satisfied with their writings. For some paragraphs, Instructor A asked students to form groups to do peer-proofreading. Students corrected the errors in their classmates’ in-class writings and offered feedback or suggestions regarding the contents of the writings. Students followed the checkpoints in the checklist designed

by Instructor A to make sure that their paragraphs could meet the requirements of writing set by Instructor A.

(3) Discussion of students' in-class writings

One week after students finished their in-class writings, Instructor A chose some in-class writings for discussion. In the discussion, Instructor A pinpointed and corrected the grammatical errors or problems in style, structure, and word usage in those in-class writings. Instructor A also elicited opinions about the paragraphs from the other students, and she encouraged them to offer encouragement or some positive feedback to the written paragraphs of their classmates. Instructor A offered suggestions for the contents and the structure of the written paragraph.

(4) Journal writing

Students were required to write a journal every other week. They could choose whatever topic to write on. Instructor A gave much written comments on the contents of the journals, but she rarely picked out grammatical errors in the journals.

(5) Textbook-related assessment activities

Instructor A taught the model paragraphs in the textbook by explaining the meaning of the sentences. Afterwards, she expressed her opinions and feelings about the model paragraphs. She asked students to do the exercises following the model paragraph at home. In the next class meeting, the exercises were discussed in class. Instructor A would correct the incorrect answers or provide better answers for the questions.

(6) The mid-term examination

There were two parts of questions in the mid-term exam. The first part included questions about important points and concepts in the textbook. The second part was paragraph writing. The topic of the paragraph was related to what was taught in the textbook.

Instructor B's Beliefs about Language, Language Learning, and Assessment in General

The findings presented below are based on the three formal interviews and three informal interviews with Instructor B. Interview questions include Instructor B's beliefs about language and language learning, beliefs about assessment in general, and beliefs about designing, implementing, and evaluating assessment.

Beliefs about Language and Language Learning

Instructor B had four major beliefs about language and language learning. First, English should be learned from receiving a great deal of native-like input. This belief came from her one-year experience living in England. Before that she had laid equal emphases on accuracy and the ability to communicate when teaching. However, the experience made her think that being able to speak idiomatic English and communicate with native speakers were more important than speaking grammatically correct English. Thus, she changed her beliefs and started to place communication on top of accuracy.

Second, thoughts were more important than linguistic accuracy. She appreciated, in particular, those students who will refine their thoughts and use simple words to express profound meanings. As she stated, "Although I teach more skill-based courses now, I tell my students that thoughts are more important than grammatical accuracy." In order to facilitate students' expressiveness, she corrected students' global or repeated errors, rather than local ones.

Third, motivation and confidence influenced students most when they learn English, especially for beginners. She stated, "As you try to boost students' confidence, they will perform better and better." Guided by this belief, she attended to students' affect. When students made mistakes, she tried every possible way to

prevent students from feeling embarrassed. For example, she gave encouragement to students first and then gave them cognitive feedback or used some strategies to guide students to find the correct answers. She thought encouragement would greatly boost students' confidence and promote their motivation of learning English.

Fourth, language learning should follow a proper sequence from simplicity to complexity. She said, "I will give more lectures in the second semester, for I think lectures help students think deeper and learn more about the text." Instructor B used English predominantly in class to enhance students' listening comprehension.

However, to avoid intimidation or confusion, Chinese explanations were added when she talked about important points and issues. She thought psychological assuredness was important for beginners, but when students made progress in their language ability and were used to listening to spoken English, she used only English in class.

Personal educational and teaching experiences influenced Instructor B's beliefs about language and language learning. Her high school English teacher taught difficult grammatical rules by providing repeated examples during instruction, not by asking students to memorize those rules. This contributed to her belief that "Never ask students to memorize trivial and boring details." Instructor B had taught in junior high school for one year and in university for five years. She thought that for university students, it was more important to foster critical thinking. Thus, she designed assessment activities that helped promote students' critical thinking such as evaluating an article or expressing views on a writing piece.

To sum up, Instructor B emphasizes communication when teaching English. She hopes that students could use simple English to express their thoughts. She also endeavors to promote students' motivation for learning English. This makes her pay attention to students' affect when correcting students' errors. Besides, she holds the belief that language learning should follow a proper sequence from simplicity to

complexity.

Beliefs about Assessment in General

Instructor B had three major beliefs about assessment in general. First, assessment was a tool to spur students to study hard during or after class. To promote students' learning, she gave quizzes after finishing every unit to check students' comprehension of the lesson. This learning function of assessment can also be identified in quizzes. The questions of end-of-unit quizzes were about the important points in the textbook. Therefore, students had to understand the text thoroughly and concentrate during class in order to obtain good grades in quizzes. Besides, Instructor B used assessment tools to help students review their common errors. She gave a quiz on agreements, pronouns, and antecedents in Guided Writing because she found that students made a lot of mistakes in these categories. She stated her purpose of giving such a quiz, "I just want to help students review their common errors." The above statement shows that Instructor B lays a heavy emphasis on the washback effect of assessment.

Second, formative and summative assessment were of equal importance but had different functions. "Formative assessment helps ensure that students really work hard during or after class, and summative assessment is to test students' ability to organize what they have learned," she said. In addition to tests and quizzes, students' regular efforts devoted to the course or their initiative when answering questions during class were also taken into consideration when she graded students.

Third, quizzes should increase in difficulty as students were making progress in English. She stated, "In the first semester, I give students quizzes with definite answers, and in the second semester, I will give them open-ended quizzes. I hope that they can learn in greater depth gradually." This shows that Instructor B's beliefs about

language and language learning influence her beliefs about assessment. Thus, the degree of difficulty of quizzes increased as students learn more and more English.

To conclude, Instructor B values the washback effects of assessment. Besides, her beliefs about assessment are guided by those about learning, that is, language learning should start from simplicity to complexity.

Beliefs about Planning and Evaluating Assessment

This section specifies Instructor B's beliefs about designing and implementing assessment.

Beliefs about Planning Assessment

This part specifies Instructor B's beliefs about designing assessments and setting criteria for assessments. Whether assessment activities could arouse students' interests was Instructor B's top concern when she designed assessment activities. The belief was based on her reflections on assessment after joining in the Freshman English Project. Before that, she thought that making students learn useful knowledge was most important. Influenced by the opinions of other instructors in the Project, she started to think that for students who had lower motivation for learning English, promoting students' interests should be a more important concern in designing assessment activities. Such change in the belief of language learning influenced her beliefs about assessment. She started to give assessment activities such as individual oral reports or group role-plays. She thought that allowing students opportunities to use English to perform some tasks helped promote students' interests in learning English. She stated, "Interesting assessment activities provide an opportunity for those who are likely to give up learning English to show themselves, which in turn promotes their motivation and confidence in learning English."

In addition to students' interests, another factor that influenced Instructor B's design of assessment activities was her beliefs about language learning. She wanted students to learn more and think about the lesson more thoroughly, instead of just reading it through. Thus, she asked students to form groups and assigned paragraphs of the text to each group. Students of the same group had to teach and explain the paragraph to their classmates. To conclude, factors of student levels and the beliefs about language learning guide Instructor B's beliefs about designing an assessment activity.

Beliefs underlying the Requirements of Course A "Freshman English". Instructor B set several requirements for Freshman English, including regular attendance, the four-skill related assessment activities, summative tests such as the mid-term and final exam, and the proficiency test.

She asked students to attend class regularly, and each unreported absence led to a drop of 2 points of a student's final score. More than five times of unreported absence could result in failing the course. Instructor B thought that students of Freshman English had to spend much time studying for their major fields, so it was understandable that sometimes they might be absent from class. However, she still attended to students' learning. She thought that students might not study English if they were often absent from class. Therefore, she required regular attendance of the students. This was suggested by Instructor B's prior teaching experience. She found that most students did not come to class regularly if she did not include attendance in the requirements. This shows that although Instructor B gives students much freedom and considers students' needs, she still wants them to spend more time learning English.

If students who attended class regularly failed the class, they were allowed to

earn extra points by visiting the language lab to help them pass the class. Instructor B stated, "I think students have to spend much time on their majors. So I will let them pass if they have made great efforts to do the make-up activities." This shows that Instructor B is still willing to help students to make up for their bad performance. This also reveals that Instructor B does not use assessment to discourage students. Besides, for Instructor B, assessment is a tool to promote learning. Instructor B thought that helping students to pass the course promoted students' learning in the second semester. She said, "Students will study harder in the second semester if I give them opportunity to pass the course, and this will make our relationship better." This shows that Instructor B thinks of the consequence of grading, so she gives students opportunity to make up.

In addition, students could earn extra points by visiting the language lab because Instructor B wanted students to receive as much English input as possible. This is consistent with her beliefs about language learning.

Besides regular attendance, students were required to discuss the post-reading questions in the textbook. Instructor B simply asked students to discuss some part of the post-reading activities in class, and she had an arbitrary standard for choosing which questions or activities to do in class. She explicated, "It depends on how much time we have. Time permitting, we discuss some of the questions; if not, we just skip some of them." Another reason why she chose to skip some of the post-reading activities and questions was illustrated in the following statement. She said, "The post-reading activities and questions in the textbook are not all well-designed, and students might have nothing to say if they did not do research on the questions." Therefore, she preferred to have students come up with a question for each paragraph of the text, and she thought such questions were more thought-provoking.

After every meeting, students were given an end-of-unit quiz. Instructor B used

the quiz to check students' understanding of the contents of the unit.

Quizzes also served the function of discussion. Instructor B thought that discussion often occupied much time in class, and what students said was usually not what the teacher wanted. Instructor B stated, "Compared with group discussion, the questions in quizzes are more concrete. Students think about the questions and write the answers down, which helps them learn the text more thoroughly." This shows that Instructor B attends to not only the function, but also the efficiency of assessment activities.

After quizzes, Instructor B collected students' end-of-unit quiz sheets for correction. She stated, "I [Instructor B] would like to correct their grammatical mistakes and mistakes in word use." This shows that Instructor B emphasizes accuracy of students' writing pieces. If a student did not attend class on the quiz day, he or she had the chance to do voluntary make-up quizzes because Instructor B thought that as long as students could make efforts to do the make-up quizzes, they have the opportunity to pass the course. The passing score of the quiz is 70. The instructor originally wanted students who got a score below 70 to take the make-up tests. However, this was not implemented for the limitation of class time. The format of the end-of-unit quiz was short-answer questions. Instructor B read the questions and students wrote them down. Instructor B said that writing down the questions served as a listening comprehension test. This shows that she wanted students to practice listening more. Instructor B stated the reason for giving short-answer question in the quiz. "When answering short-answer questions, students can practice writing some vocabulary in the text, which intensifies students' impression of these words." This shows that for Instructor B, the main purpose of assessment is to promote learning.

When the instructional schedule was tight or when the instructor wanted to use

the audio-visual equipment in the classroom, she asked students who had not finished their quizzes to finish them at home. She thought that this would not cause unfairness. She said, “Students have different English levels. Some can complete the quiz quickly, but others need more time. After all they have to spend some time doing the quizzes. It’s just individual differences.”

For speaking-related assessment activities, students were required to hand in a three-minute tape-recorded self-introduction, and they had to present group role-plays based on the content of the unit. Instructor B thought that these speaking activities promoted students’ practice in speaking. Instructor B borrowed the idea from another instructor in the Project. Originally, Instructor B planned to play two to three tapes in every class meeting. However, there were only several tapes being played within the semester for the limitation of time. Instructor B said that she did not finish listening to all the tapes, so students’ performances in this part were not included in their final scores. The instructor said that the purpose of self-introduction was to let students practice speaking English in public. She stated, “At least, students have chances to listen to themselves speaking English in public.” To motivate students to practice more, encouragement was very important here. She said, “Affective support is important. You should give students compliments whether they perform well or not. Such encouragement helps remove their fear of speaking English in class.” This illustrates that Instructor B attends to students’ affect.

In addition to self-introduction, students were required to present group role-plays. The topics of the role-play were related to that of the unit. Instructor B thought that role-play helped students review the lesson. This indicates that the purpose of group role-play was to make students more familiar with the content of the unit.

Furthermore, students were required to submit writing drafts of their

self-introduction and group role-plays. Instructor B corrected the grammatical mistakes in the drafts. She stated, “When it comes to writing pieces, I emphasize their accuracy, but for speaking, the most important thing is communication.” This shows that Instructor B varies focuses for different assessment purposes.

Beliefs underlying the Grading Policies of Course A “Freshman English”. Among the 70 percent representing student’s achievement in their final score, 14 percent of weight was assigned to speaking and listening assessment activities respectively. 7 percent was given to writing activities, and 35 percent was given to reading assessment activities. Instructor B set the percentage according to the time allocated to each skill in class. The weightings are illustrative of Instructor B’s belief about assessment; that is, assessment is to make sure that students study hard during class, and that assessment is to promote learning. Among the four skills, reading was given the highest percentage. She explicated her beliefs, “The mid-term and final exams are mainly about reading. Besides, the goal of Freshman English should be reading. So I give the reading category 35 percent”.

The “Reading” category included mid-term, final exam, and text reading in-class. Besides the amount of class time being invested in reading and the course objective, there was another reason why the category was so heavily emphasized. Instructor B said, “The reason why I give a heavy weight to mid-term and final exams is that I want students to study triply hard for the mid-term and final.” This reveals that Instructor B emphasizes the positive washback effect of assessment.

The format of the mid-term and final exam included vocabulary, phrases, short-answer questions, essay questions, and reading comprehension. The format was decided by the instructors of the intermediate level classes in the Freshman English Project, and the format followed that of previous summative exams. Instructor B said

that “We simply followed the typical format of mid-term and final examination. But if I can write my own test items, I will include vocabulary, translation, phrases, short-answer questions, and essay questions. All of them are activities we do in class.” This conforms to Instructor B’s beliefs about assessment; that is, assessment is a tool that checks students’ regular efforts in class. If students make regular efforts in class, they can perform well in the mid-term or the final exam.

Compared with students’ performance in summative assessment, Instructor B laid a heavier emphasis on students’ efforts. She said, “If they [students] do very well in the mid-term and final but are often absent in class or skip the quizzes, they may fail the course.” Therefore, we can know that Instructor B appreciates students’ regular efforts more than their grades in mid-term or final. If students work hard in class or in quizzes but do badly in mid-term or final, they still have the opportunity to pass, but not vice versa.

The speaking category included the self-introduction and group role-play. In practice, the self-introduction was not fully implemented, for Instructor B did not finish listening all the tapes. Instructor B had the same criteria for grading self-introduction and group role-plays. She stated, “Being able to arouse good response from the audience is most important for an oral performance. Besides, I appreciate students’ original thoughts and their creativity.” This conforms to her belief that language learning is to communicate and to make students express their thoughts. She continued, “I appreciate students’ efforts devoted to their oral performance. I will encourage students who feel depressed about their performance.” Guided by the belief, she provided much affective feedback to every group, and this enhanced students’ motivation and confidence in speaking. Instructor B used holistic scoring to grade students’ oral performances, and she assigned only one score to the writing drafts of self-introduction and group role-play and the actual performance. She explained, “I

simply give a subjective and holistic score to students' group role-play." Accuracy of the performance has only mild impact to the grades of oral performance. She continued, "Communication is the most important. As long as the speaker can arouse good responses from the audience, flaws in accuracy and fluency will not be the problem." Here, Instructor B's beliefs about communication precede those about accuracy and fluency, which is consistent with her beliefs about language learning.

For the listening category, there were quizzes on listening. At the beginning of the semester, there were listening quizzes. The instructor read the sentences in the textbook and asked students to write them down; however, the test was only implemented for two times due to the limitation of the class time. Besides, the instructor asked students to listen to the quiz questions and to copy them down to serve as a listening comprehension test when they took quizzes after each unit. In practice, Instructor B simply implemented assessment of listening in class for two times and the result was not included in students' final grades.

The writing category included the writing drafts of the self-introduction, group role-plays, and journals. Instructor B corrected the grammatical mistakes in the drafts. She explicated, "Since you have written something down, naturally, you should pay attention to accuracy." Originally, the instructor asked students to write journals. At last, the requirement was not implemented for two reasons. First, the instructor had no time grading the journals. Second, other instructors in the Freshman English said in their group sharing that having students write journals did little help to students' learning. Thus, Instructor B canceled the requirement. It is apparent that not only time limitation, but also the negative suggestions of other instructors are the factors that influence Instructor B's requirements. In addition, Instructor B had different standards for English majors and students of Freshman English when grading writing. She deducted 0.5 point for one grammatical error in the writing draft of an English major

but deducted only 0.3 point in the draft of a non-major freshman.

Besides students' performance in the four skills, their participation in class was taken into consideration when Instructor B assigned grades. Participation referred to students' performance in the group teaching of the text paragraphs and their initiatives in answering questions. She continued, "You will naturally have an impression of an individual student's performance in class, and it is a pretty easy job to grade that." She graded students' classroom performance by impression. Although she did not set a grading policy for assessing students' in-class participation in the syllabus, she took that into account when grading students.

Instructors in the Freshman English Project decided that the proficiency test should represent 30 percent of the total score of a student. Instructor B thought that it was good to have students take the proficiency test. She said, "The proficiency test lets students know that simply studying the textbook is not enough. They have to read some extra curricular materials in order to pass the test." This also echoes her belief about assessment that assessment is to promote learning.

Students were assigned three lessons as outside readings. In the first semester, six units were assigned to students as outside readings. Three out of the six units were tested in the mid-term exam, and instructors could decide freely when to test the other three. These units were tested in the format of true-false questions. The instructor explained the choice of the quiz format. "The purpose of outside reading is to make them [students] read more, not to ask them to scan the text. So we decided to use true-false questions for outside reading." She also found an additional advantage of using this format. "I found that true-false questions are easy to grade."

To conclude, in Freshman English, Instructor B's beliefs about planning assessment are strongly guided by her beliefs about assessment in general, about language and language learning, her reflections after previous assessment, opinions

from other instructors in the Freshman English Project, and contextual factors such as time.

Beliefs underlying the Requirements of Course B “Guided Writing”. Instructor B set several requirements for the course “Guided Writing”, including regular attendance, exercises, journals, and take-home writings.

As was the case in Freshman English, students also had to attend to class regularly. Each unreported absence led to a deduction of 2 points of students’ final score, and more than five times of unreported absence would fail the student.

Students were required to do some exercises in the textbook in class or at home. Exercises that Instructor B considered important were done in class. Sometimes students forgot to preview important exercises in advance, and she let them think about the exercises in class. The instructor said, “I want them [students] to think about those important exercises more.” This shows that Instructor B’s standard for choosing exercises is whether the exercise is important or not. She wants students to learn important concepts in the textbook. This echoes her belief that assessment is to promote learning.

Besides, students were required to do some assignments. They have to write weekly journals. Instructor B thought that journals gave students more opportunities to practice writing English. Students could choose whatever topic they like to write on because Instructor B thought that students would write more if they had the freedom to choose the topics. This shows that for Instructor B, assessment is to promote practicing and learning. Students were allowed to hand in all of their journals at one time or hand in one journal a week. The instructor’s flexible timetable for collecting journals reveals her belief of student-centeredness when she sets requirements.

Take-home writing was the major assessment task in this class. After studying a

chapter, students had to write a paragraph on the same topic as that of the chapter. The submitted paragraph was the first draft, on which the following rewrites were based. Each draft must be revised at least once. Instructor B thought that writing was a process along which students make progress. Thus, she took students' revisions into consideration when grading the take-home writings. She said, "Beginners have to spend much time planning and revising their writings." Considering students' needs and their level of proficiency as beginners, Instructor B provided room for students to make progress through revising their drafts. Students were allowed to revise their drafts until there were no grammatical mistakes in the drafts and until students felt totally satisfied with their drafts. Usually, students were told to write a paragraph on Friday and submit it before the noon of the next Monday. Late assignments were not accepted unless students had proper reasons, and late assignment resulted in a deduction of 2 points. In other words, students were given only three days to work on their drafts of the take-home writings. This was because, the instructor said, "I can check immediately whether they have learned certain organizing principles taught in class." This shows that Instructor B is eager to know students' learning situation and wants to take necessary measures to help them learn. Instructor B thought three days were enough for students to work on the take-home writings. She said, "They [students] have more time to work on the draft on holidays. They can do other assignment after finishing the draft." Two aspects of Instructor B's beliefs about setting requirement were revealed from her requirement of students' take-home writings. First, her beliefs about writing are closely related to those about setting requirements. Second, she emphasizes students' needs when setting deadline for the assignment.

Originally, Instructor B planned to give open-book quizzes on the important points and concepts of the textbook. However, she did not give quizzes in the first semester. Instead, she gave quizzes in the second semester. She said, "I found students

making many mistakes in agreement, pronoun use, and antecedent. So I gave them the ready-made quizzes on these grammatical points appended in the textbook.” She continued, “I only gave the quiz once, for I thought in a writing class, asking them to write, instead of taking quizzes, is more important.” When asked about the reason for giving the quiz only once, she explained, “Quizzes are simply used to help students review the mistakes they often make.” This shows that the quiz is given to help consolidate learning, which is consistent with Instructor B’s beliefs about assessment. This also reveals that she varies the frequency and the type of the quiz in accordance with the purpose of the course.

Beliefs underlying the Grading Policies of Course B “Guided Writing”. The weight given to different writing assessment activities was guided by Instructor B’s beliefs about teaching writing. She explicated, “The emphasis of the writing class is on the quality and students’ efforts devoted to the drafts of the take-home writings and the revisions.” Instructor B assigned 50 percent to “Drafts of take-home writings and Rewrites”, but only 10 percent for the mid-term and final exam respectively. “Journal writing” was given 10 percent of weight. “Attendance, Classroom participation, and Quizzes” accounted for 20 percent of a student’s total score. There was no quiz in the first semester, so attendance and classroom participation took up 20 percent of the total score. Instructor B explained, “The percentage is decided according to the institutional time spent on each category. Besides, the actual writing in a writing course is the most important, even more important than participation and discussion.”

Instructor B thought that writing was a process, and she emphasized three aspects when grading writing: content, organization, and grammar. She used analytic scoring and gave a score to different categories of a writing draft, including the topic sentence, supporting details, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, the purpose of writing,

and audience's expectations. She gave a score to each category for each revision, and the total score for that revision was the sum of the scores of each category. A student's final score for "Drafts of take-home writings and Rewrites" was the average of all revisions. The purpose of the category-based, analytic scoring was to provide students with guidance on the improvement of their writings. Instructor B said, "They [students] can know in which aspects they have made progress by comparing the score in each category in different revisions." The grading was influenced by her belief that writing is a process, so she took students' progress into consideration. Further, she provided students with specific directions for improving their writings, which conformed to her belief that assessment was to contribute to learning. When grading journals, she did not grade category by category. This was because the purpose of writing journals was to give students opportunities to write in English. So she just read through the journals and singled out mistakes in grammar and content.

Besides a score, Instructor B gave comments. If students wrote very well in a particular category, she gave positive comments such as 'It's great.' She said, "I think category-based grading is concrete enough in informing students' of their strengths and limitations in writing." This shows that she tries to enhance students' confidence and motivation in learning when she grades students' writings.

As revealed in the above statement, Instructor B's grading is predominantly guided by her beliefs about writing and language learning. Her belief in enhancing students' confidence and motivation also influences her grading policies. Besides, the criteria for different writing tasks vary with the purposes of the assessment tasks.

There were two parts in the mid-term and final exam. The first part was questions on important concepts in the textbook. The second part was paragraph writing, and the topic was one of the writing types introduced in the textbook. Instructor B told students the format of the summative exam in advance, thus helping

them make preparations. This gives students more confidence and motivation for preparing for the assessment. This also shows that the instructor's beliefs about language and language learning influence her beliefs about assessment. She wants to enhance students' confidence and motivation in preparing for the assessment. She explained the reason why she tested students' comprehension of the textbook aside from asking them to write a paragraph. She said, "I want to test their [students'] understanding of the textbook content, for I think an English major should know some writing principles and theories." Apparently, the instructor varies the format of assessment according to the objectives of the course and what she wants students to learn.

To sum up, Instructor B's beliefs underlying her grading policies of Guided Writing are guided by her beliefs about writing, assessment, language learning, her beliefs in enhancing students' confidence and motivation, and the objective of the course.

Beliefs about Evaluating Assessment

Instructor B claimed in the interviews that she rarely reflected on her assessment practices, but actually, she did reflect on several aspects of assessments. Her experience of living abroad made her start to think that communication was more important than accuracy. This changed her beliefs about language learning and further influenced her beliefs about assessment. Her teaching experience taught her that voluntary attendance policy resulted in very poor attendance rate, so she started to require regular attendance. This was also influenced by her belief that making regular efforts in class led to more effective learning. She decided to give more lectures in the second semester after thinking about the consequences of employing too many interesting assessment activities that made students learn nothing but have fun. This

was guided by her belief that learning language should follow a proper sequence. She wanted students to think in greater depth and learn more about the lesson content, and this could be achieved by giving more lectures. She implemented the activity of self-introduction following the idea of one of the instructors in the Freshman English Project. Likewise, she canceled the requirement of journal writing following the negative comments from another instructor. Obviously, the Freshman English Project really helps the instructor reflect on her assessment activities. As she said, “The sharing between instructors in the Freshman English Project inspires me a lot and makes me implement some new assessment activities.”

To conclude, Instructor B’s evaluations of assessment were guided by her beliefs about language learning, her assessment theory, her teaching experience, her beliefs in students’ needs, her overseas life experience, and the experience of other instructors.

Beliefs about Implementing Assessment

Besides tests, Instructor B usually used writing quizzes, question-and-answer, and observations of students’ facial expressions and students’ initiative when answering questions to check students’ comprehension in class. Further, she thought time limitation was the major factor that caused her to deviate from her original plans for assessment. Most of the time, she let students think for a while when they could not answer her questions immediately. “I want them to think about the answers for a while, and I think this helps them come up with the answers.” Therefore, she needed more time for checking students’ comprehension than she had expected. When she detected students’ difficulty or errors, her top concern was students’ feelings. She stated, “I used any way possible to avoid embarrassment. I wanted them [students] to understand that being unable to answer questions was not a bad thing.” This echoes her belief about the importance of motivation and confidence in learning.

To sum up, Instructor B employs multiple ways to check students' comprehension and to deal with students' difficulty. The guiding principle is students' affect. Besides summative assessment, she also takes into account students' performance in formative assessment.

Major Assessment Activities Employed by Instructor B

This section describes major assessment activities employed by Instructor B in Freshman English and Guided Writing and how these assessment activities are implemented in both classes.

Course A "Freshman English"

Six major assessment activities were observed in Instructor B's Freshman English class: (1) the self-introduction, (2) textbook-related assessment activities, (3) quizzes, (4) group role-plays, (5) in-class comprehension checks, (6) and the final examination.

(1) The self-introduction

Instructor B played a 3-minute self-introduction tape made by one of the students. Afterward, the student who made the self-introduction posed five questions about the self-introduction. The other students formed groups to answer the questions to compete for points. The instructor gave the student who answered the question correct a point, and the group which got the most points won the competition.

(2) Textbook-related assessment activities

Students were divided into groups to work on paragraphs of the lessons or other activities such as discussion and point competition. Tasks that each group was required to do with the paragraph included identifying the topic sentence and the main idea of the paragraph, giving important words and phrases of the paragraph, giving a

difficult sentence and explaining its structure, and asking one question about the paragraph. Aside from the text itself, students were also required to do some of the lead-in questions and post-reading discussion. These tasks were completed in the form of question-and-answer between the instructor and students. Through the questions, the instructor identified individual student's difficulties and mistakes, thus making it possible for her to take measures to help the student.

(3) Quizzes

After finishing each lesson, the instructor gave open-ended quizzes to test students' understanding of the lesson. The quizzes were about the important points of the lesson. The format of the quiz included short-answer questions and fill in blanks with words provided. However, the answers to short-answer questions had to be written in complete sentences. Good answers or examples in students' quizzes were shared in class.

(4) Group role-plays

After finishing each unit, there was a group giving a role-play on a topic related to the lesson. After the performance, the group gave questions about the play and other groups competed for the points. Afterwards, the instructor provided brief comments on the performance, pinpointing the directions for students' further improvement.

(5) In-class comprehension checks

Instructor B checked students' comprehension about the texts by asking while-reading or after-reading questions. When discussing a paragraph with students, she asked questions such as "What was the most important reason [of being greedy]?" and "What's the third thing [the author mentioned]?" to check students' understanding of the texts and help the students identify the important points in the texts. Besides, she reviewed a unit just taught by asking students after-reading questions about it. For example, she asked the question, "How many rules about avoiding cultural taboos are

given?” to check students’ understanding of the lesson just taught.

Another channel of checking students’ comprehension in class is observing students’ answers to the after-task questions in group competitions. Groups competed for points after self-introduction, the discussion of texts, lead-in and post-reading questions, and the group role-play. After these activities, students responsible for the tasks posed some after-task questions. This way, Instructor B can have an idea of how much students have known about the tasks or the lesson through observing the process of competition.

Besides, Instructor B played the video “Family Album” after finishing each unit. While the students were watching the video, the instructor sometimes paused the videotape to ask students some questions about the video, such as “What is the telephone number of the restaurant?” The questions that the instructor asked when students were watching video also served as tools for comprehension checks.

(6) The final examination

The format and the questions in the final examination were decided and written cooperatively by the instructors of the low-intermediate level of the Freshman English Project. The format of the questions in the mid-term exam was related to the textbook content, including vocabulary, phrases, short-answer questions, essay questions, and reading comprehension test.

Course B “Guided Writing”

Seven major assessment activities were observed in Instructor B’s Guided Writing class: (1) textbook-related assessment activities, (2) working with handouts, (3) take-home writings, (4) discussion of students’ take-home writings, (5) journal writing, (6) in-class comprehension checks, and (7) the final examination.

(1) Textbook-related assessment activities

Instructor B followed the textbook closely when teaching. Most of the time, students formed groups to discuss the important points and share their opinions about the paragraphs in the textbook. Besides, the instructor assigned students to do the exercises after each lesson in class or at home. Afterwards, the instructor checked the answers to the exercises with groups or individuals.

(2) Working with handouts

Instructor B gave the class handouts on related topics of the lessons or important grammatical rules. The handouts were discussed in class. Students did the exercises on the handouts in class or at home. Afterwards, the instructor checked the answers to the exercises in class with the students.

(3) Take-home writings

After each lesson, students had to write a draft of the kind of paragraph taught in the lesson, such as a process paragraph or an example paragraph. Students could revise their drafts until they were fully satisfied with their writings.

(4) Discussion of students' take-home writings

Students' take-home writings that were well written were exploited as model paragraphs for discussion and opinion sharing. Students were encouraged to express the advantages and to express their feelings about of the writing piece.

(5) Journal writing

Students were required to write ten journals during the semester. Students could choose whatever topics they wanted to write on. They could hand in the journal once a week, or handed in all of the journals at the end of the semester.

(6) In-class comprehension checks

Instructor B checked students' comprehension of the exercises in the textbook by asking questions like "Did you all get it? If you are still confused, you can come to me

or you come to Mike (the student who did the exercise) (pseudonym). Ok.” At another time, the instructor asked students whether they had questions about her comments on students’ writing. She said, “Any question? Supposed you have questions on my comments, you can also ask me.” She also checked students’ comprehension of the important concept in the textbook. For example, she asked, “ So what mistakes can you make when we use subordination?”

(7) The final examination

There were two parts in the final examination of Guided Writing. The first part included questions about the important concepts in the textbook. These concepts had been taught and practiced in class. The other part was paragraph writing. Students had to synthesize the skills taught in the textbook such as providing primary and secondary supports and developing a narrative or descriptive paragraph.

To conclude, this chapter reports the two instructors’ beliefs about language, language learning, assessment, as well as their assessment activities. In the following chapter, interesting issues on both instructors’ beliefs about assessment and practices will be discussed.

Summary

The two instructors employed different assessment activities in Freshman English and Guided Writing. Instructor A had textbook-related assessment activities, group oral report, group role-plays, quizzes, in-class comprehension checks, the mid-term examination, in-class writings, revision of the in-class writings, discussion of students’ in-class writings, and journal writing. Instructor B had the self-introduction, textbook-related assessment activities, quizzes, group role-plays, in-class comprehension checks, the final examination, working with handouts, take-home writings, and discussion of students’ take-home writings.

Besides, the two instructors' beliefs about language learning guided and influenced their beliefs about assessment in general. The following table shows the interconnection between the two instructors' belief systems.

Table 4-1: The interconnection between beliefs about language and language learning and beliefs about assessment within the two instructors

Beliefs about language and language learning	Beliefs about assessment
<u>Instructor A</u>	
<i>Language should be learned following a step-by-step, continuous process from simplicity to complexity.</i>	Formative assessment was more important than summative one.
<i>Encouragement and motivation influence students' learning most.</i>	The major goal of assessment was to contribute to the positive washback effect by providing successful experiences.
<u>Instructor B</u>	
<i>English should be learned by receiving a great deal of native-like input.</i>	Assessment was a tool to spur students to study hard during or after class.
<i>Thoughts were more important than linguistic accuracy.</i>	Whether students' oral performances could arouse good response from the audience was more important than the linguistic accuracy of the performances.
<i>Motivation and confidence influenced students most when they learn English, especially for beginners.</i>	Teachers should give much encouragement to students when students perform well in assessments in order to promote their motivation for learning.
<i>Language learning should follow a proper sequence from simplicity to complexity.</i>	Quizzes should be getting more and more difficult as students were making progress in English.

The table shows that the two instructors' beliefs about assessment were closely related to their beliefs about language and language learning, and these beliefs further guided their planning, implementation, and evaluation of assessments.