Using Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) data to improve curriculum planning and enhance professional capacity building

Background

The release of the first set of TSA results for S3 aroused concerns and discussion on how such data can be used to further improve learning and teaching. In this article, two school cases are used to illustrate how TSA data are used to improve curriculum planning and enhance professional capacity building in particular.
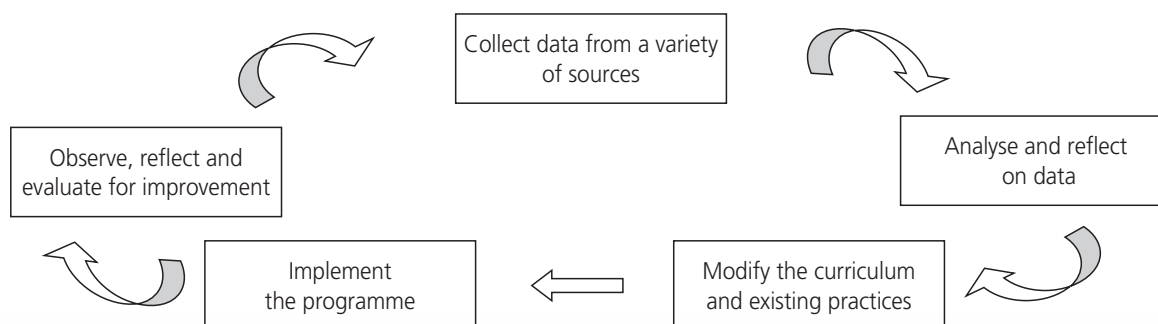
Levels

Levels	Name of the schools	Year(s) supported
S1	CCC Kei To Secondary School	1 year
S1-3	Tsang Pik Shan Secondary School	3 years

Strategies used

1. Data collection and analysis

In order to have a deeper understanding and reflection of the current practices in teaching, learning and assessment, the two schools collected and analysed S3 TSA data in combination with internal assessment data. This led to redesigning the school-based curriculum planning, exploring appropriate teaching and learning strategies and improving existing assessment practices.

Collect data from a variety of sources

Analyse and reflect on data

Modify the curriculum and existing practices

Implement the programme

Observe, reflect and evaluate for improvement

2. Holistic curriculum planning and curriculum leadership development

	First year of support (S1)	Second year of support (S1-2)	Third year of support (S1-3)
Professional Capacity Building (School level)	• Panel head and assigned teachers involved	• Focus group (including potential leaders) formed	• Addressing at panel level and then further to the whole-school
Curriculum Planning (Teacher level)	• Lesson and unit plans developed • Different modes of assessment activities introduced	• Focus on horizontal curriculum planning • Innovative teaching and assessment strategies explored	• Focus on vertical curriculum planning • Assessment for learning in the English panel infused systematically
Students' Learning (Student level)	• Raise motivation and confidence • Equip students with strategies to acquire knowledge, language and thinking skills	• Arouse greater sense of ownership • Focus on application	• Develop students towards independent learners • More emphasis on development of higher-order thinking skills

Progress map of holistic curriculum planning and curriculum leadership development

3. Developing students' reading and writing strategies

Based on the findings, students' reading strategies were limited and their interest in writing was low and they lacked ideas in writing. Teachers made use of a wide range of reading input to stimulate their thoughts and helped them generate and organise ideas in writing. With the introduction of peer-editing and self-reviewing, students were encouraged to develop a sense of ownership of their work and independent learning skills.

What happened

CCC Kei To Secondary School	
Event	**What happened**
Data analysis	TSA data analysis　　Teachers' observation　　Scheme of work Analysis and reflection **Conclusions:** • A variety of text-types for reading is essential • Language arts elements are not evident in the curriculum • More questions which require higher-order thinking skills are needed when guiding students in their reading • More practice on sequencing events is needed • Students need more practice in making inferences • Learner diversity needs attention

Actions Taken

Curriculum planning	**Unit planning level** • Basic compentency (BC) descriptors were used to plan the curriculum • A variety of text-types were used in the unit to give input to students • Language arts elements were infused in the unit **Materials design** <table><tr><th>Issues addressed</th><th>Strategies used</th></tr><tr><td>Develop students' higher-order thinking skills</td><td>• Introduce graphic organisers to help students organise and categorise ideas • Set questions of different levels of difficulty according to Bloom's Taxonomy for reading comprehension</td></tr><tr><td>Cater for learner diversity</td><td>• Identify sets of core and extended vocabulary for the streamed classes • Set questions of different levels of difficulty according to Bloom's Taxonomy • Develop different sets of teaching and learning materials which suit students' diverse needs • Develop different sets of assessment rubrics for students of different abilities in the speaking tasks</td></tr></table>

Integrate assessment for learning into learning and teaching	• Design the unit in a linked manner within a task-based learning framework such that students had to apply repeatedly the reading skills and target language in the unit, even when they prepared for the final writing task. This allowed teachers to identify students' learning problems early and take early intervention should they realise students did not learn well in the process. • Introduce the practice of self and peer assessment to students • Introduce criterion-referenced assessment in students' writing and speaking tasks through the use of rubrics	

Classroom teaching level

• Reading strategies, e.g skimming and scanning, identifying keywords and topic sentences, identifying main ideas, making inferences, analysing text, etc. were explicitly taught in the lessons. These help to contribute to the development of main ideas and mind-maps for the final writing task.

• Strategic grouping, e.g. ability grouping for better classes and mixed ability grouping for weaker classes is used. A variety of more student-centred learning activities were also planned.

Implementation

Preparation

School-based workshop on the teaching of reading and writing strategies offered by the Language Support Officer

The Language Support Officer and teachers jointly analysed school TSA data and other data

Input

📖 A menu

📖 A restaurant review

📖 A recipe

Target language :
-plurals & singular
-countables & uncountables
-a/an; some/any
-how much; how many
-imperatives
-sequence words

Process

TV script

Task : Complete a dialogue about what to buy for the cooking of the dish in the recipe

📖 A TV script on the teaching of how to cook the dish in the recipe

Task : Complete a dialogue about how to cook the dish with information from the TV script
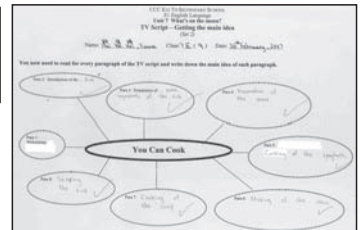
Students analysed the text structure of the TV script in a graphic organiser

👄 👂 *Task* : Students practised the dialogues with partners. Peer assessment on speaking skills done with rubrics given as guidelines

📖 A poem relating to the theme
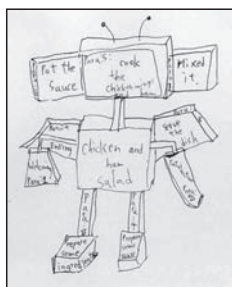
Mindmap for writing

✏ *Task* : Students developed mind-maps about a TV script teaching how to cook a healthy dish of their own choice on a *group* basis

⇩

✏ *Task* : Students wrote TV scripts *individually* to teach how to cook the healthy dish

⇩

📖👄👂✏ *Task* : Students conducted peer review and editing using the writing rubrics as guidelines

Students practising the dialogues

Output

Rubrics for writing used for peer assessment
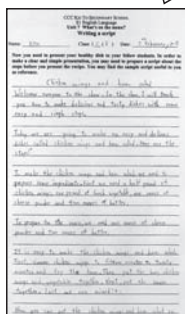
Student's work

Student presentation

Rubrics for speaking

Curriculum leadership development

After experiencing the co-planning process, teachers took the initiative to co-plan the other units in the rest of the term using a similar approach. They also conducted a sharing session with other panel members and shared their experiences. Similar practices were also adopted at S2 level. Teachers also concluded that they are confident in doing the analysis on their own for the coming years after their experience this year.

Way forward

Building on their first year experience in using TSA data as an entry point to improve curriculum planning at S1 and S2 level separately, teachers will review the vertical and horizontal curriculum planning for junior secondary in a more holistic manner in the subsequent year.

Tsang Pik Shan Secondary School

A. Infusion of assessment for learning culture – 3-year programme

Impacts

Teaching
The panel head extended the assessment practices into other levels during co-planning.

Learning
Students showed interest in learning how to use task specific criteria to assess peer's work.

Impacts

Teaching
Teachers started vertical and horizontal planning of the curriculum before the new term commenced.

Learning
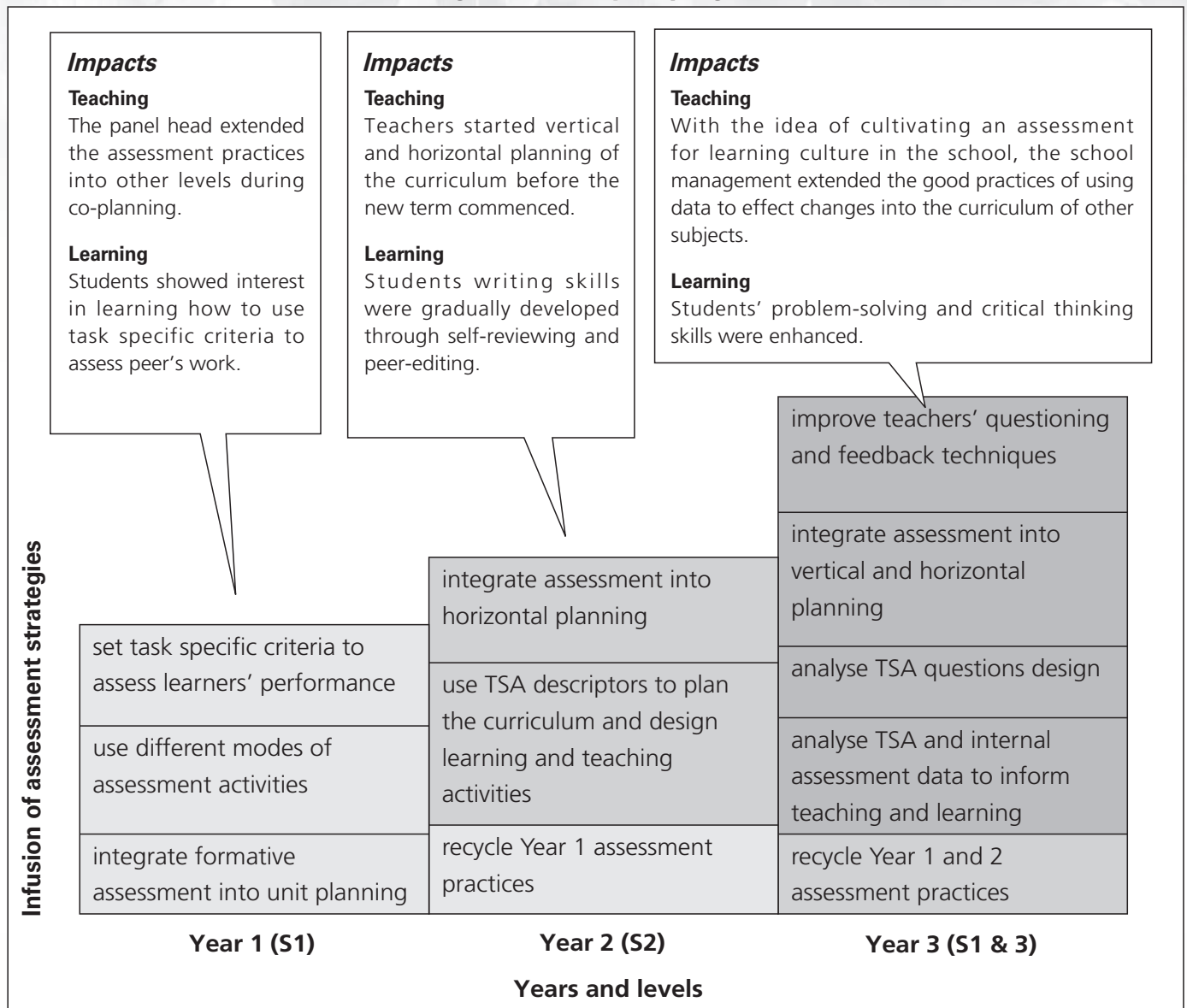Students writing skills were gradually developed through self-reviewing and peer-editing.

Impacts

Teaching
With the idea of cultivating an assessment for learning culture in the school, the school management extended the good practices of using data to effect changes into the curriculum of other subjects.

Learning
Students' problem-solving and critical thinking skills were enhanced.

Infusion of assessment strategies

Year 1 (S1)	Year 2 (S2)	Year 3 (S1 & 3)
		improve teachers' questioning and feedback techniques
	integrate assessment into horizontal planning	integrate assessment into vertical and horizontal planning
set task specific criteria to assess learners' performance	use TSA descriptors to plan the curriculum and design learning and teaching activities	analyse TSA questions design
use different modes of assessment activities		analyse TSA and internal assessment data to inform teaching and learning
integrate formative assessment into unit planning	recycle Year 1 assessment practices	recycle Year 1 and 2 assessment practices

Years and levels

B. Third year : Using data to effect changes in the English curriculum

Stage 1: TSA and internal assessment data analysis

As students in general were weak in writing, teachers decided to examine the matter critically by analysing different types of data to add value to teaching and learning.
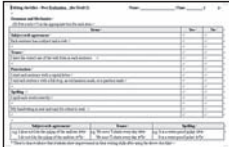
Data collected and analysed	Findings/ Observations	Actions taken
a) External assessment data • TSA results • design of TSA questions • TSA descriptors • redoing of the writing part by students	**Learning** • Students lacked interest in writing and they didn't know how to plan and organise ideas to form coherent texts. In addition, grammatical and spelling mistakes hindered the development of their writing skills.	• Teachers developed a process writing project in S3 on teenage problems. • They infused language arts and different text types as input at the brainstorming stage to help students generate ideas.

b) Internal assessment data	Teaching	• Different modes of assessment activities such as self-reviewing and peer-editing were introduced to develop students' writing skills.
• test and examination paper • students' writing assignment • students' performance in English lessons • teachers' interview • students' interview • pre- and post- project student questionnaires	• Teachers did not provide enough opportunities for students to develop writing skills. Students lacked exposure to different text types. In addition, teachers' professional knowledge on writing was limited.	

Stage 2: Developing students' writing skills through process writing
Module: Teenage problems

Main writing task: Writing an article for the student association blog to discuss teenage problems and provide solutions

Stage	Strategies used	Purpose
Pre-writing	**Infusion of language arts and print and non-print materials** • Teachers infused language arts elements and a variety of text types into unit planning. • A variety of print and non-print materials were introduced on discussing teenage problems about family, friends, self-image and study, and solutions to these problems. **Use of group discussion and individual presentation** • Students worked in group discussion to share teenage problems and provide solutions. Each group sent a representative to report their ideas.	• to brainstorm and generate ideas • to develop thinking skills • to develop collaboration and communication skills • to plan and organise ideas
While-writing	**Infusion of self-reviewing and peer-editing** • Students were asked to write an article for the student association blog sharing teenage problems and providing solutions. At this stage, self-reviewing (for content and organisation), peer-reviewing (for grammar) were introduced as assessment tools to track students' learning progress. • Teachers modelled the review and editing process through samples of students' work. Self-reviewing checklist Peer-reviewing checklist	• to develop self-editing and peer-reviewing skills • to develop creativity and independent learning skills • to plan, select and organise ideas

Post-writing	**Publication and presentation** • The outstanding work will be published on the school webpage and notice boards so as to celebrate the effort made by students and build their confidence in writing.	• to develop communication skills • to recognise the good work done by students and effort made by teachers

Stage 3: Holistic curriculum planning

Analysis and Findings	Actions taken
With the help of TSA and internal assessment data, teachers were able to identify problems in curriculum planning as follows: • poor transition between levels • lack of alignment between learning, teaching and assessment • textbook-bound teaching • gaps identified between objectives and learning outcomes	**Vertical planning** • Teachers scaffolded the TSA skills descriptors in S1-3 curriculum plans according to their level of difficulty and complexity. They also integrated a variety of text types into all levels, ensuring students have a balanced and comprehensive exposure to different kinds of text types. **Horizontal planning** • A balanced coverage of objectives, learning outcomes, text types and values and attitudes, etc. were included in unit and module planning. • A clear alignment between assessment and curriculum was identified and different assessment activities were used to track students' progress in learning.

Stage 4: Using effective questioning and feedback techniques to inform teaching and learning
Module: Believe it or not

Purpose	Strategy used	Activity
• to enhance teachers' questioning and feedback techniques	**Organising professional development activities for teachers**	• To enhance teachers' knowledge on the use of effective questioning and feedback skills to improve teaching and learning, the officer conducted a workshop for all S1 teachers before co-planning.
• to use different levels of questions to motivate learners and develop their thinking skills	**Integrating Bloom's Taxonomy of thinking skills into curriculum planning**	• Teachers designed the six levels of questions (based on Bloom's Taxonomy) and integrated them systematically into different teaching and learning tasks. With a variety and mixture of questions, students' knowledge gradually built from the recall of facts to higher level thinking and problem-solving.

• to develop communication and collaboration skills • to develop critical thinking skills	**Using task-based activities to promote interaction among learners**	• Students were encouraged to share their views on certain topics during pair and group activities with the help of a variety of questions as guidelines provided by teachers. This enhanced communication among learners and promoted their thinking skills.
• to enhance teachers' feedback techniques • to help students elaborate ideas • to enhance communication between teachers and learners	**Predicting the responses from learners and using appropriate feedback strategies**	• Teachers needed to predict the possible types of feedback from learners during co-planning and used different strategies such as probing, redirecting, reinforcing and rephrasing to stimulate students' thinking and develop their confidence in sharing ideas and experiences.
• to reflect on teaching and learning	**Use of reflection log among teachers**	• Teachers were asked to reflect their changes in teaching practices by sharing the findings in pre- and post- project questionnaires. It was found that teachers were more open in making reflection and positive changes had been made in their questioning and feedback techniques.
• to cater for the diverse needs of students	**Catering for learner diversity**	• Teachers intentionally designed different levels of questions and learning tasks to cater for the diverse needs of students. • To support less able students, teachers phrased the questions clearly and carefully, within the vocabulary limits of the class and made each question specific, short, and pro-active. In addition, more wait-time was allowed for learners to think and provide feedback.

C. Curriculum leadership development

Year	Purpose	Strategy used	Parties concerned
2004-07	• to develop core leaders in the English panel	**Forming a focus group** • The panel head formed a focus group by choosing some committed and potential leaders at each level and provided opportunities for them to take key roles in curriculum planning and resource management. This helped develop their leadership skills and sense of commitment to the English panel.	• panel head and level co-coordinators

	• to build the professional capacity of teachers	**Establishing a collaborative sharing culture** • Collaborative lesson planning was implemented at all levels. Joint effort had been made among teachers in formulating teaching plans, sharing experiences, observing peers and reviewing learning and teaching effectiveness. This allowed better achievement of consensus building and communication among panel members.	• all English teachers
	• to reflect and share different views and ideas among panel members	**Building a reflection and celebration mechanism** • A platform for reflection and collaboration of teachers' work and students' performance was built in the English panel to allow teachers to share the difficulties and successes in implementing the programmes and pursue the continuous improvement of the English panel. • An English resource bank was set up to share the co-planning materials and sustain the good impact of teaching and learning across levels.	• all English teachers
	• to develop the assessment literacy of the English panel	**Infusion of assessment for learning culture in the school** • A 3-year assessment programme had been implemented to infuse the assessment for learning culture from S1 to S3. (refer to part A) • With the idea of cultivating an assessment for learning culture in the school, the school management extended the good practices of using data to effect changes into the curriculum by inviting the officer to conduct a school-based assessment workshop for all teachers.	• S1-S3 teachers • all school teachers

Impacts

On students

1. Increased learning motivation

The holistic review of the vertical and horizontal curriculum, the better alignment between learning, teaching and assessment, the careful scaffolding of students' learning and the careful selection of authentic learning and teaching materials led to increased learning motivation among students.

2. Enhanced enjoyment in the learning process

The use of more student-centred learning and teaching approach, the adoption of diversified teaching strategies and the measures taken to cater for learner diversity contributed to students' enhanced enjoyment in the learning process.

3. Independent learners

The task-based learning approach with a wide variety of different modes of assessment activities enabled learners to gain increased ownership in their learning, which contributed to the gradual nurturing of independent learners.

On teachers

1. Promotion of assessment literacy

Teachers' assessment literacy, which includes the understanding of the TSA, the concept of assessment for learning and how to improve internal assessment practices, was raised.

2. Use of criterion-referenced assessment

Criterion-referenced assessment has been adopted to help further improve learning and teaching.

3. Making holistic curriculum planning

The English panel members will work together in early summer to develop the vertical and horizontal plans of the curriculum. More emphasis will be put on identifying strengths, weaknesses and gaps in curriculum planning and looking into alignment between learning, teaching and assessment.

4. Preparation for the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum

With the help of TSA and internal assessment data analysis, teachers took a more practical role in adapting their existing curriculum and integrating new curriculum initiatives such as infusion of language arts to prepare students for the NSS curriculum. This helped increase their awareness of the curriculum change.

Facilitating factors

Teacher level – Committed key potential leaders

The committed key potential leaders who worked with concerted efforts in reviewing the curriculum, improving teaching strategies and exploring different assessment activities to better suit students' diverse learning needs contributed positively to the success of the projects at the two schools.

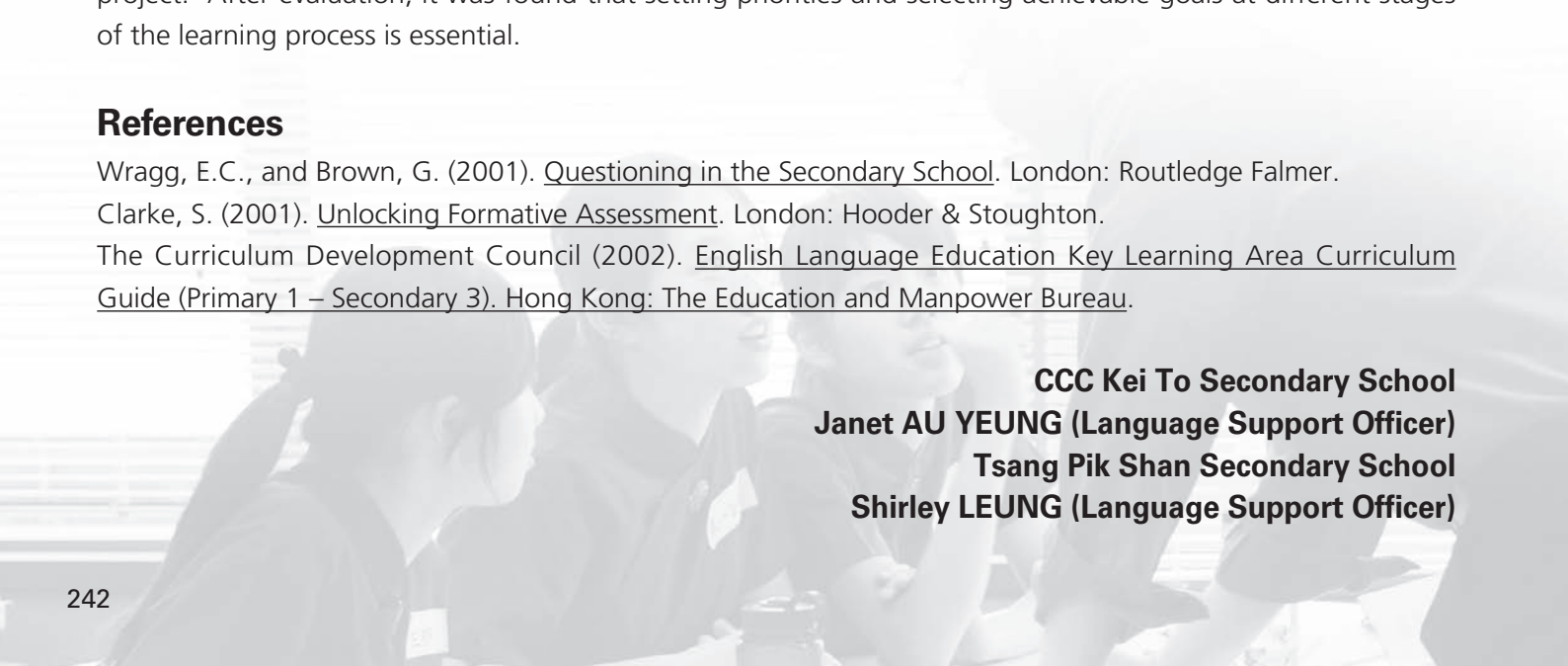**Panel level - Strong professional leadership of the panel head**

The panel heads were open-minded and receptive to changes. They started early planning with the officer prior to the commencement of the new term. This allowed greater flexibility in planning and experimenting with new teaching ideas. In addition, special arrangement had been made on time-tabling for the effective implementation of the projects.

Difficulties and suggestions

Time constraint was the main concern of teachers when carrying out the process writing and questioning skills project. After evaluation, it was found that setting priorities and selecting achievable goals at different stages of the learning process is essential.

References

Wragg, E.C., and Brown, G. (2001). Questioning in the Secondary School. London: Routledge Falmer.

Clarke, S. (2001). Unlocking Formative Assessment. London: Hooder & Stoughton.

The Curriculum Development Council (2002). English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3). Hong Kong: The Education and Manpower Bureau.

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Achieving assessment for learning through process writing

Background

> 'Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.'
>
> (Assessment Reform Group, 2002)

This article shares how assessment for learning was achieved in 3 school cases through the 5 different stages (Pre-writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing and Sharing) in process writing.

Levels and strategies used

| School	Pentecostal Gin Mao Sheng Primary School (P6)	Fung Kai No.2 Primary School (P3)	Tsz Wan Shan Catholic Primary School (P5)
School and students' needs identified	• Students need to enrich and better organise ideas • Different practices such as peer assessment and self-correction are needed to equip students to be independent learners	• Students need more input in vocabulary and ideas • Learner diversity needs attention • Common perception exists that it is difficult to ask students, especially the weaker ones, to do peer review	• The approach to writing is more content & language-based than skill-based • Input from other resources could be used in addition to textbook materials • Uniform materials used in streamed classes may not best suit learners' needs
Strategies used	• Using mind-map and outline plan to help students generate and organise ideas • Maximising the support given to students (from teachers and peers) • Introducing the practice of peer assessment and self-correction with tools provided	• Using different tasks in the pre-writing stage to help students generate and organise vocabulary and ideas • Using strategic grouping to cater for learner diversity • Designing the unit in a way that allows chances for teachers to observe, reflect and react based on the evidence of student learning collected	• Using internal assessment data to inform teaching and learning of writing skills • Developing and adapting teaching and learning materials other than textbook materials • Developing self and peer review skills by using strategically different sample writing for class review

Pentecostal Gin Mao Sheng Primary School (P6)

The writing task : a story about a fussy customer in a restaurant

Target language :
- Adverbs of manner
- Adjectives describing people and things
- Simple past tense
- Would you like + to-infinitive
- Would you mind + gerund
- Proper answer to the 'Would you mind' question

Strategies used and rationale		What happened
• Using mind-map and outline plan to help students generate and organise ideas in response to teachers' observation about students' writing performance and learning needs. • Group work was designed in a way that every student could contribute to the writing up of the mind-map. • Providing real-time response, teachers adapted different teaching strategies to provide support to students' work. • Group checking was done so that quality feedback gained from the peers was maximised.	**Pre-writing**	• Students developed mind-maps in groups. • Noticing that students had difficulties doing the group task, the teacher asked the students to turn the paper over and to write down individually what they think in the four corners of the blank page before sharing in groups again. Students could produce a mind-map with a lot of ideas after group discussion. • After the completion of the mind-map, students did group checking (idea revising) of the group work. Students gave feedback and comments to their fellows.
• Information about students' learning was collected and interpreted. • Teachers provided quality feedback on how to improve performance.	**Drafting**	• While holding a class discussion on the outline plan, the teacher used 5W1H-questions to stimulate and guide students to reflect on their work, to clarify misconceptions, and to correct mistakes. • Quality feedback gained from the teacher.
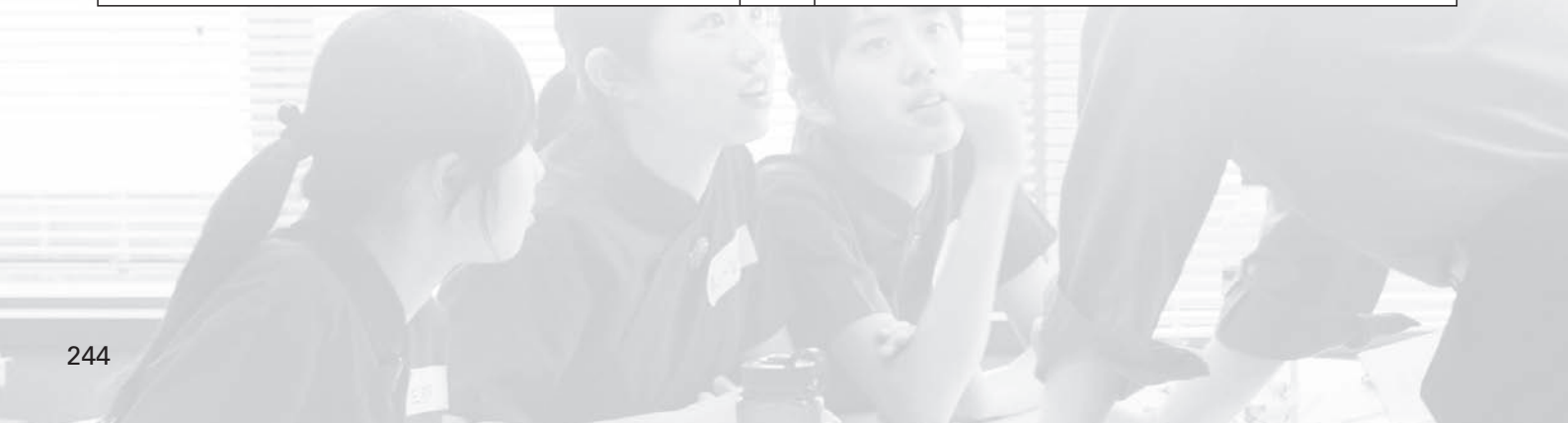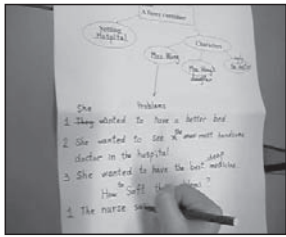
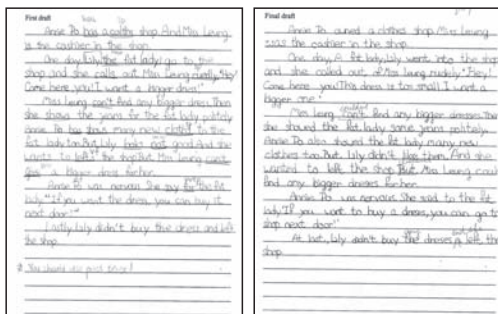|		
<u>Equipping students to be independent learners</u> • Checklists were given for peer review as a tool for peer/ self assessment. • Introducing the use of the marking codes, students were given clues to find out the correct answers, it also heightened students' awareness of the mistakes.	**Revising and editing**	• Students did peer review for ideas and story flow with a checklist given as guideline. • Students were introduced to these codes well before the writing lessons and they used the same codes for peer editing. • The peer review and editing activities required students to reflect on as well as to correct their own writing.
• Meaningful homework given to students as they no longer copy from teacher's marking but self-correction was done instead. 		• Students regained the responsibility and ownership of learning since they were given room of doing self-review and self-correction as teachers used the marking codes to mark the daily written assignments instead of just providing correct answers. • Teacher assessed how individual students responded to the feedback and comments given by their peers; further suggestions would be given to students on the final work.
• Students kept all their work in portfolios so that their learning could be traced; they celebrated their success by sharing their work with their peers at the final stage. • Teachers analysed students' performance for future teaching adjustment.	**Publishing**	• Students reflected that their confidence in individual writing was fostered. They would also use some writing tools learned for future writing. • Teachers sat together and shared what they observed from students' work; students produced longer pieces of writing with more complex sentence structures. Sentence Structure was found to be the next teaching focus.

Fung Kai No. 2 Primary School (P3)

The writing tasks : (1) factual account of a festival; (2) a postcard telling a friend about a festival

Target language :
- Prepositions such as 'on', 'in', 'at' for festivals
- Months of a year
- Names of festivals
- Present tense

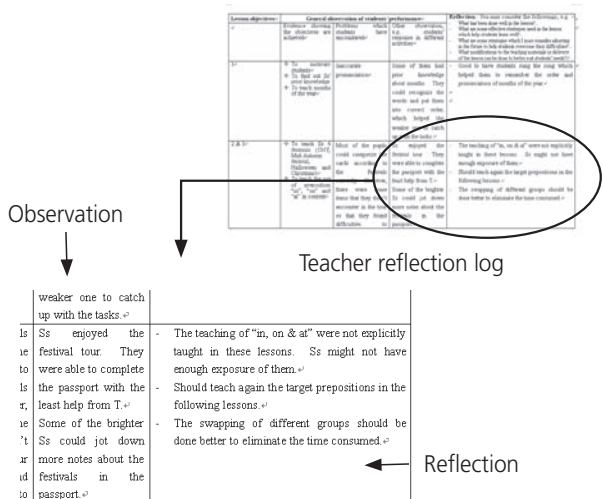| Strategies used and rationale		What happened
Catering for learner diversity - Ability grouping To ensure weaker students learned the core vocabulary and target language, while the more able ones were stretched by learning extra content.	Pre-writing	• Students, grouped in ability grouping, took part in a 'Festival Tour' to find out more about 4 festivals. Students taking part in the Festival Tour Passports for the Tour
Catering for learner diversity – Mixed ability grouping To allow the more able students to help the weaker ones. Pictorial cues served as hints.		• Students in mixed ability groups were given envelopes with cards of vocabulary and pictures relating to the 4 festivals. They were asked to categorise the cards. Students worked in groups Students shared their answers
Using different tasks to help students generate and organise vocabulary & ideas		• Worksheets given on the 4 festivals and the target language.
Assessment for learning The unit design enabled teachers to collect students' evidence of learning from various tasks and occasions. Early intervention could then be taken should teachers realise their students did not learn well in the process.		 Samples of students' work

Observation

Teacher reflection log

Reflection
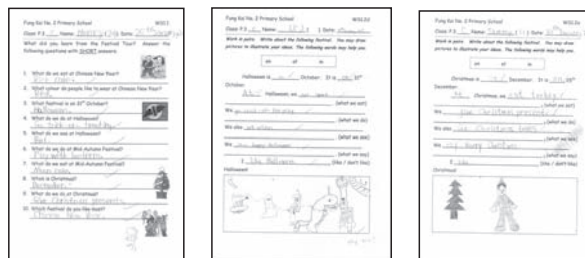
	Drafting	• Students learned how to develop mind-maps and write about a festival in pairs. Student's mind-map Students writing in pairs
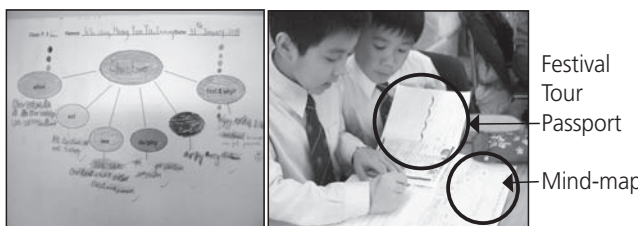
Festival Tour Passport

Mind-map

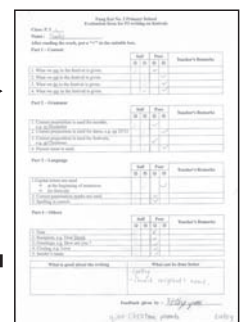|		
Catering for learner diversity – Role designation according to ability More able students were assigned to focus on content, while average ones focussed on grammar. Weaker ones focussed on spelling and others. The role designation was planned to make students more serious in the process and to ensure a better chance for the weaker students to make contribution in the process.	**Revising and editing**	• Students were put in random mixed ability groups of 4 and given peer review checklists with different focuses (content, grammar, language, others). They were then assigned different roles according to their ability so that they focussed on different items in the peer review process. A more able student was responsible for reviewing the content of the writing Students working in groups →
Assessment for learning The postcard writing task was designed to build on students' previous learning of the festivals.	**Drafting**	• Students were then taught the format of a postcard. They then drafted a postcard which told a friend about a festival based on their learning and their writing produced in the previous lessons.
Assessment for learning Teachers modified the form so that self review practice was also introduced. From their experience in the previous round of revising and editing practice, they thought it would also be beneficial to students if they could give feedback on the same form so students could collect feedback from 3 parties at one go and make improvement.	**Revising and editing**	• With students' previous experience of focussing on only one item in the review process, teachers modified the review form to let students review all items for themselves (self review) and their peers (peer review) in pairs in this practice. They also added a column for teacher's comments. Students then produced the final writing with feedback from all parties.
	Sharing	• Students shared their postcards with their classmates.
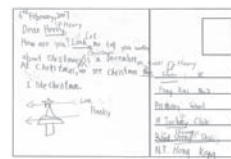
Tsz Wan Shan Catholic Primary School (P5)	

The writing task :   a journal entry
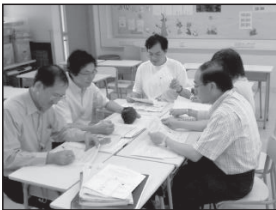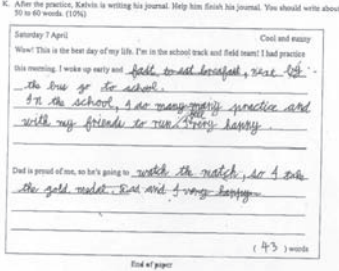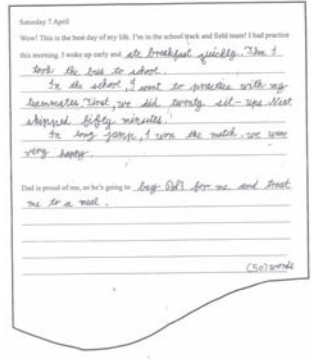
Target language :   • Adjectives to describe feelings
  • Linking words to show reasons and results
  • Tenses to describe past, present and future events

Strategies used and rationale		What happened
Using internal assessment data to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses and to diagnose their writing problems Co-planning meeting	**Data collection and analysis**	• Mid-term Examination scripts were collected from able students, average students and weak students in each of the 5 classes. • Their works were analysed and students' major writing problems were identified (e.g. not meeting the task requirement, giving irrelevant and illogical ideas, failing to support main ideas with details).
Developing teaching plans and materials that address the writing problems being identified Sample writing for class review Worksheets	**Development of unit plans and teaching and learning materials**	• Instead of using textbook materials, a series of worksheets was developed, each focussing on one or two writing problems. • Based on the findings collected in the analysis of students' examination scripts, teachers wrote up sample writing with identified common problems for class review. The sample writing was shared and used in all the five classes. • To cater for learner diversity, individual teachers also prepared sample writing with problems specific to their own class and in language pitched at appropriate level. • A unit plan and some detailed lesson plans were prepared.
Using a variety of sample writing strategically for class review before students practise self and peer review Class review Self review Peer review	**Classroom implementation**	In a total of 6-8 lessons, students were guided systematically to improve their works through self and peer review. They were guided to • understand the task requirement (such as the word limit, the genre, the topic to be written on); • identify irrelevant and illogical ideas in sample scripts and their own scripts with reference to the task requirement; • develop relevant, logical and coherent ideas with supporting details, using the 5W1H-questions and the 5-sense guide; • review, edit and revise the first draft with specific focus on the content; • review, edit and revise the second draft on the use of tenses, linking words and adjectives of feelings; • review, edit and respond to the works of their peers using a comprehensive checklist;
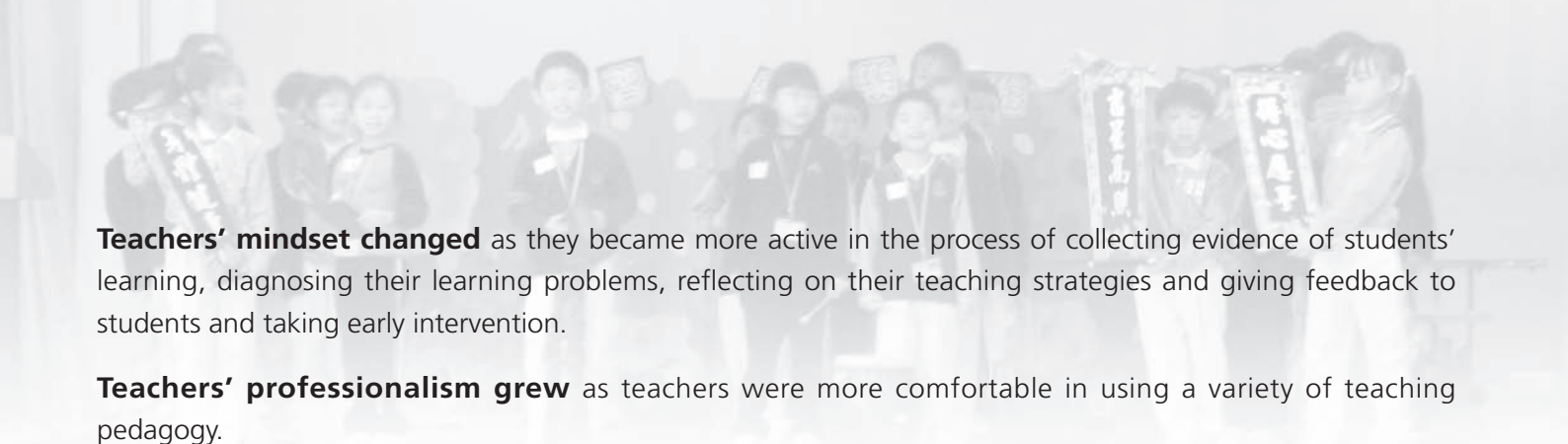
		• revise own work and come up with the final version;
		• share and present work in class in recognition of their efforts.
Fostering reflection among teachers to improve their teaching and among students to improve their writing performance Reviewing works to identify possible areas for follow-up	**Evaluation**	• Teachers gave verbal and/or written feedback to individuals and/or in class on students' works. • Drafts and fair copy were put into portfolios, for both teachers and students to witness students' improvement under guidance. • Teachers completed reflection logs and planned to infuse process writing into regular teaching with another unit.

Examination script →

First draft

Second draft

Final draft ←

Impacts

Increased student motivation was noticed as a result of more student-centred learning and teaching approach, more quality feedback given to students on their strengths and weaknesses and the assignment of manageable tasks to them according to their differences in abilities.

Independent learners nurtured through the use of more student-centred teaching strategies and activities. Students learned to take up more ownership in their learning and gained a better idea of their strengths and weaknesses and ways to improve further through the self and peer review practices and activities which scaffold their learning.

Teachers' mindset changed as they became more active in the process of collecting evidence of students' learning, diagnosing their learning problems, reflecting on their teaching strategies and giving feedback to students and taking early intervention.

Teachers' professionalism grew as teachers were more comfortable in using a variety of teaching pedagogy.

Curriculum leaders developed to help build an assessment for learning culture in the panel / school through sharing their reflection, experiences and work with other teachers.

Facilitating factors

Committed and reflective teachers who are ready to make changes through adapting and developing materials that meet the language needs and abilities of their students, responding to students' learning by revising the materials and experimenting different strategies to enhance students' writing skills.

Flexibility in teaching and the use of resources. Teachers trimmed the teaching syllabus, took the lesson time from textbook teaching to devote to process writing and developed materials that enrich textbook materials.

Support from the school management, especially the principals and panel chairs, in giving allowance for curriculum space to try out new initiatives was proven vital.

Difficulties and suggestions

Time should be allowed to nurture the culture of assessment for learning in a progressive manner. In order to achieve the expected outcomes, concerted and sustained effort from all members in the panel and long-term planning is necessary.

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Developing a reflective culture to improve questioning and feedback techniques

Background

The English Language Curriculum Guide Primary 1-6 (2004) recommends that priority should be given to the development of students' communication skills, creativity and critical thinking skills (3Cs), three of the target generic skills considered fundamental to learning how to learn. While the development of these skills should be infused into a school's English Language curriculum, it is also suggested that teachers of English ask 'more open-ended and thought-provoking questions in lessons and in assessment' and 'accept different but reasonable or imaginative answers from students' (p. 131) so as to help students enhance the development of these skills.

Similar implications can also be drawn on the basis of the Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) Report (2006) as quite a number of P3 and P6 students were found to have difficulty in identifying the main ideas, inferring meaning and making inferences when reading longer texts. Also troublesome was the developing and organising ideas in paragraphs when writing. The problems identified stem at least partly, if not completely, from the limited attention paid to the development of students' higher order thinking skills in classroom learning in general or the rather teacher-dominated approach adopted in some classrooms. As pointed out by educational research,

> 'There are many classrooms in which teachers rarely pose questions above the 'read-it-and-repeat-it' level. Questions that demand inferential reasoning, much less hypothesis-formation or the creative transfer of information to new situations, simply do not occur with any frequency (Wolf, 1987: 1).'

In view of this, curriculum leaders of five primary schools recognised the significance of including assessment for learning as an integral part of the teaching, learning and assessment cycle (Promoting Assessment for Learning in English Language Education at Primary Level 2004). They realise that some effort has to be made in reviewing and enhancing the use of formative assessment in their everyday classroom teaching to diagnose students' learning difficulties, provide quality feedback to them, raise their awareness of their own learning and get them to reflect on it. In this way, students' communication skills, creativity and critical thinking skills as well as their learning of the four language skills can be improved. Instead of confining professional development to individual teachers, these curriculum leaders aim to encourage their whole team to develop a reflective culture to enhance their skills in asking questions, handling students' responses and providing quality feedback to create learning contexts that facilitate good teaching and learning.

Level

P5

Strategies used

Teachers from the five primary schools involved initially got together to form a small learning community with particular interest in exploring knowledge and skills in asking questions, handling students' responses and giving feedback for the teaching of English. They set the sail for their teaching teams to be able to enhance their professional skills collaboratively through peer observation and discussion as 'lifelong learners', reflecting upon their teaching practices and re-discovering the joy of improving their teaching professionalism (Takahashi, 2005). The strategies developed by the core group are as follows.

Stage 1

Forming a learning community
- Enrich knowledge and skills in using questions, handling responses and giving feedback through literature reading and group interaction.
- Develop hands-on experience in planning the purposeful use of questions to reach the teaching objectives intended in target lessons.

Stage 2

Conducting inter-school lesson observation
- Try out the materials and skills using questioning and feedback in lessons.
- Invite other group members (from the four primary schools) to observe lessons. Discuss and reflect upon the effective use of questions and feedback and handling of students' responses in the lessons observed.

Stage 3

Transferring experience developed to internal staff development
- Organise school-based sharing/workshops to publicise initial experience obtained from inter-school lesson observation.
- Initiate and coordinate co-planning with panel members to develop strategies in using questions, handling responses and giving feedback.
- Try out co-planned lessons with intra-school lesson observation.
  Follow with discussion and reflection.

What happened

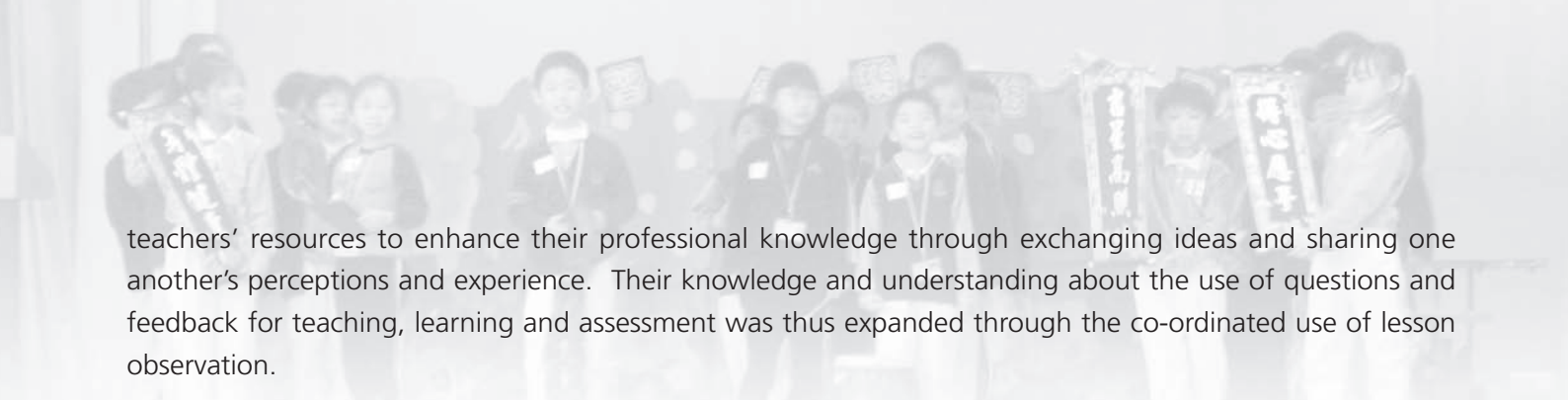|	Actions taken	Objectives
1.	Doing literature reading and having discussion on questioning and feedback techniques as a learning community (inter-school level)	• reflect on past experiences and students' needs • heighten teachers' awareness of the different levels of abstraction of questions and their uses, the appropriate strategies of asking questions and handling students' response and the role of instructors in asking questions and giving feedback
2.	Planning the strategic, purposeful use of questions in designing learning tasks/activities to reach teaching objectives targeted in a module/unit of work (inner school level)	• practise applying knowledge obtained from literature reading in actual planning of curriculum • come up with a lesson plan for a well-organised lesson with clearly defined teaching objectives • enhance teaching and learning through anticipating students' responses and progression of a lesson

3.	Preparing observers for the target lesson through despatching lesson plans, observation forms and teaching materials to be used in the lesson (inter-school level)	• allow ample time for observers to study lesson plans prior to the lesson to know the kind of teaching and feedback sought through the use of questions and feedback • evaluate the effective use of questions and feedback against the teaching objectives of a lesson
4.	Conducting live observation of the target lesson, followed by a break (inter-school level)	• collect evidence of learning and document the questions, students' responses, teacher's feedback and the student-student or teacher-student interaction geared towards the objectives of the lesson • allow observers time to gather thoughts for the debriefing
5.	Holding a post-lesson discussion (inter-school level) 	• analyse evidence of learning • allow the teacher the first opportunity to comment on his/her own lesson • direct observers to give constructive feedback, as elaborated with concrete evidence, on the use of questions, the handling of students' responses and the giving of feedback to achieve the aims of the lesson • exchange ideas, suggestions and past experiences among participants
6.	Sharing knowledge and experience with other panel members or teaching staff through workshops or meetings (inner school level)	• strengthen curriculum leaders' abilities in sharing and disseminating professional knowledge and experience • extend professional development to team • prepare more panel members for larger scale action on developing knowledge and skills in asking questions, handling responses and giving feedback
7.	Transferring experience to intra-school lesson observation activities (inner school level)	• build up an open, reflective learning environment among teachers • work out school plans on organising peer lesson observation to improve and reflect on their strategies and skills in the use of questions and feedback in reaching teaching objectives

Impacts

On teachers

1. Building a reflective culture essential to professional growth

The participating teachers saw the significance and merits of adopting a reflective attitude towards teaching to facilitate their professional development. Lesson observation was considered a useful tool to help them recognise the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching strategies and skills. After observing others' lessons, they became aware of the various ways to monitor feedback, depending on the teachers' perceptions. This sharpened their eyes on reflecting upon the effectiveness of their own teaching practice. The discussion session following the lesson observation was also a good occasion for them to tap into other

teachers' resources to enhance their professional knowledge through exchanging ideas and sharing one another's perceptions and experience. Their knowledge and understanding about the use of questions and feedback for teaching, learning and assessment was thus expanded through the co-ordinated use of lesson observation.

2. Enhancing knowledge and skills in executing teaching practice

The planning and try-out of strategies and the use of lesson observation helped teachers develop a more thorough understanding of the use of questions, students' responses and feedback for the teaching of English. First, they became aware of the significance of making purposeful, organised use of questions to gear students towards the intended teaching objectives in the learning process. The concerted use of questions of various levels of abstraction helped students scaffold target knowledge and skills in context. They gained thoughts and suggestions on a wide range of skills in asking questions that started students' discussion, triggered streams of thought or facilitated understanding. Second, the teachers became more confident in executing the right amount of wait-time and the appropriate approach to handle students' responses. Finally, they learned to be more strategic in eliciting students' response with corresponding feedback to extend students' learning experience. This included the use of reinforcement, probing, redirecting, rephrasing and refocusing in classroom.

3. Developing teachers as curriculum leaders

The five core teachers who first got together to form a small learning community in organising inter-school lesson observation took the lead to explore strategies and skills in asking questions, handling responses and giving feedback for the teaching of English. They made efforts to develop hands-on experience, followed by internal sharing for the transfer of experience to other panel members for further actions. Instead of confining professional development to an individual level, they found it essential to mobilise the whole panel to work towards the same goal of reforming their teaching skills and practice in the area concerned.

On students

1. Motivating students to participate in learning process

The extensive use of open questions to invite students to create and express their thoughts and feelings in a learning context relevant to their life experience motivated students to participate in the learning process. The thoughtful use of questions and feedback also provided an appropriate amount of challenge for students to exercise their creativity and critical thinking skills in working out ideas. Students in general became more patient and attentive in lessons, listening to their teacher's questions and trying to work out their own response during the wait-time. On receiving one student's response, the teachers redirected questions to others or to the class to encourage more students, regardless of their language ability, to participate in the lesson.

2. Creating an interactive, student-centred learning environment

The frequent use of questions of various levels of abstraction helped create an interactive learning environment. Instead of dominating the lessons with direct instruction, the teacher served more as a facilitator in providing ample opportunity for students to practise using English as a tool to express and communicate ideas. They also made use of questions and feedback to help elicit students' responses and thoughts. The practice of language was thus embedded in purposeful, authentic contexts with the presence of an audience. Neither was the teacher considered the only source of knowledge. Students were instead encouraged to share or construct ideas in groups before any individual students or groups were invited to give their response in class.

3. Developing students' communication skills, creativity and critical thinking skills

Questions requiring students to apply, analyse, synthesise or evaluate can stimulate students to develop their higher order thinking skills. These types of questions also help teachers understand students' thinking process and facilitate discussion or student interaction. In the lessons observed, students were actively involved in the interaction and they made sensible, logical responses to teachers' questions and other students' answers. Students liked challenging questions and they were eager to make attempts, provided that sufficient input, guidance and wait-time were given. Teachers were quite surprised to find that students were able to show good reasoning and analysis, and exercise their imagination.

Involving students' active participation

Challenging students with questions

An interactive, student-centred classroom

Eliciting students' responses with feedback

4. Assessment for learning

When a student makes a response, the teacher either replies giving immediate feedback or redirects the response to other students for comment or further discussion. In this positive atmosphere students are shown how to assess their own learning. By providing substantial, quality feedback teachers can direct students to see their strengths and areas for improvement in an effective way.

Facilitating factors

Teachers' enthusiasm and professional attitude

Enthusiasm and professionalism are the key to this fruitful experience – a collaborative effort combining the talents and energy of teachers. The teachers involved were highly motivated to pursue knowledge and professional development, and devoted their time to sharing as a learning community. The enthusiastic teachers, acting as curriculum leaders, also ensured dissemination of the good practices and the sustainability of the impact at their own schools. Teachers' willingness to take up responsibilities and give time contributed to the successful implementation.

Support from school management

As special time-table arrangements for the teachers involved are often needed, support from above is essential to the organisation of any inter-school or intra-school lesson observation. The management also needs to allow curriculum leaders enough time and resources to organise in-house training and sharing events and to launch development programmes on peer lesson observation.

Clear objectives for conducting lesson observation

It is essential that the teacher being observed has the chance to explain the teaching objectives and the flow of activities in a lesson, through face-to-face discussion and/or the help of a lesson plan. The design of an appropriate feedback form has also been found effective in reminding observers during the lesson of what to focus on and gather information about. On the basis of the data gathered, the observers and the observed can then exchange ideas more effectively in the post-observation discussion.

Difficulties and suggestions

Teachers' stress

The presence of observers can cause stress to a teacher whose lesson is being observed. This can however be avoided if the purpose of the lesson observation has been clearly communicated to the all involved. It should be clear that the practice is seen by everybody as part of the professional development programme for the panel and preferably with the curriculum leader or panel head taking the lead in opening up their classrooms to other panel members. The participants need to be well prepared in advance and be clear about the purpose of observation and their roles as the observed or the observer. To avoid possible confusion, the lesson observations should not be connected with any form of appraisal of the teachers involved.

Way forward

The good practice and the impacts will be sustained by the curriculum leaders at individual schools. Questioning and feedback techniques can be applied to all Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and more sharing can be conducted among teachers. Through continuous collaboration, lesson observation and reflection, teachers can contribute to curriculum development, teacher development and school development.

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