Aligning Assessment with Curriculum Reform in Junior Secondary English Language Teaching

QEF Teacher Conference
24 November 2007 (Saturday)
9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
LG06, Hui Oi Chow Science Building, HKU

Funded by Quality Education Fund
Welcome to this conference for teachers involved in junior secondary English language teaching. The theme of this conference, aligning assessment with curriculum reform, is very timely. The adoption of an outcomes-oriented syllabus and an official policy of assessment for learning (AfL) by the Education Bureau, and the recent introduction of a school-based assessment component into the senior secondary English language curriculum have created obvious challenges for teachers and schools. This conference focuses on how English language teachers in the junior secondary school can help pioneer assessment practice and in turn inform the development of theory.

We are delighted to put together a rich and diverse programme of speakers who in their various ways have been at the forefront of assessment innovation in Hong Kong. I hope you find the conference rewarding and relevant to your needs and interests.

Dr Chris Davison
Faculty of Education
The University of Hong Kong
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Prof Shirley Grundy
The University of Hong Kong

Research, Reform and Renewal: Leveraging Curriculum Reform for Teacher Development and School Renewal through Action Research

Professor Shirley Grundy is the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Hong Kong. Professor Grundy is an active educational researcher and a past President of the Australian Association for Research in Education. She has published widely in the areas of action research, curriculum studies, educational policy and administration and qualitative research methodology. Maintaining partnerships with the schooling sector and with teachers has always been a strong feature of Professor Grundy’s work. From 1994-96 she was the Joint National Coordinator of the school/university partnership professional development program, *Innovative Links between Universities and Schools for Teacher Professional Development*. This was a large nation-wide program, which adopted participatory action research as a whole school development and reform process. The program involved over 100 schools, collaborating with 16 universities through a national structure of school-based projects, local round-tables and national forums. She will open our conference with a brief talk about the importance of partnerships with schools and the value of action-research in implementing school reform.
Promoting student learning is a principal aim of the curriculum reform, and assessment is an integral part of this process. The CDC English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 to Secondary 3) (2002) provides a framework in which learning targets by Key stages are set covering both language-specific and generic skills at the level of basic education. On-going assessments administered by teachers provide valuable information about student progress/achievement on one hand and learning problems/difficulties on the other. Such assessment data can yield a clear basis for planning the next steps to improve learning and teaching in response to student needs. The presentation will focus on the contribution of assessment to learning and teaching, the importance of planning for assessments as well as the fitness for purpose in selecting different assessment modes.

Mr Sheridan Lee obtained his B.A., Cert. Ed. and M. Ed. at the University of Hong Kong. He had taught English and Drama for 5 years in 2 local secondary schools before joining the Government in 1984. Since then, he has worked on the teaching and learning of English, educational television (ETV) as well as the professional development of principals and teachers.
Towards More Effective Assessment in Hong Kong Secondary Schools: Aligning Assessment with Curriculum Reform in Junior Secondary English Language Teaching

Successful assessment reform requires significant cultural and pedagogical changes at the school as well as system level. In this presentation we will report on the findings of a large capacity-building QEF-funded action research project which had two main goals: firstly, to develop the English language assessment confidence, skills and knowledge of S.1-3 English language teachers; and secondly, to research, develop and disseminate a collection of high-quality multi-modal formative oral language assessment resources, including case studies, which actively involve students in the assessment process. The teachers chose their own focus for action research from five key areas of assessment for learning: task design, grouping arrangements, interactive assessment, self and peer assessment and teacher feedback.

Drawing on the analysis of questionnaires, teacher focus interviews, and video-recordings of student assessment activities, the findings reveal the importance of starting assessment reform earlier, i.e. in junior forms. The project demonstrated that with appropriate guidance and support junior secondary teachers were able to improve their current methods of assessing oral English significantly, hence enhancing student learning. The project also evaluated some of the teachers’ concerns and problems regarding assessment for learning and identified as obstacles to assessment reform a number of external pressures and situational factors, in particular teacher training, assessment resources, and support at both whole-school and classroom levels for teachers, all of which would need to be addressed to facilitate more effective assessment in Hong Kong secondary schools.

Dr Chris Davison is the Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong and project leader of several major assessment initiatives for Hong Kong secondary schools, including this QEF-funded collaborative action research project, Aligning Assessment with Curriculum Reform in Junior Secondary English Language Teaching.

Ms Jane Mok is the manager of the QEF-funded collaborative action research project, Aligning Assessment with Curriculum Reform in Junior Secondary English Language Teaching.
Aligning Assessment with Curriculum Reform in Junior Secondary English Language Teaching

Teacher Presentation I

Ms Joyce Cheung, Ms Angel Lee & Ms Winnie Ng

Carmel Bunnan Tong Memorial Secondary School

Assessment Criteria and Feedback

In the *Introduction to the SBA Component* (SBA Consultancy Team, 2006), it is emphasized that assessment criteria should be discussed with students and actively used by them for formative purposes and that providing quality feedback is a vital part of assessment for learning. In view of this, we were interested in exploring how feedback, based on assessment criteria, could boost our students’ performance in speaking. Our research question was: Does feedback based on a shared understanding of assessment criteria and the viewing of students’ performance prior to teachers’ feedback help students remember and implement the advice they have received from their teachers in group discussions? The participants in the research were 4 groups of S.3 students. There were two cycles in the research. In Cycle 1, the participants were given a list of assessment criteria (focusing on communicative strategies) and then they did a discussion task followed by teachers’ feedback. In Cycle 2, the participants viewed the recorded performance of themselves and did some self-reflection before their teachers gave them feedback. Pre-tests and post-tests were conducted in both cycles. The results suggest that familiarizing students with assessment criteria may clarify students’ understanding of what is required of them in group interaction tasks and feedback based on those criteria help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses in a way which is both comprehensible and concrete.

Ms Joyce Cheung has been an English teacher in Carmel Bunnan Tong Memorial Secondary School for three years.

Ms Angel Lee has been an English teacher for fourteen years. She is the S3 Co-ordinator in Carmel Bunnan Tong Memorial Secondary School.

Ms Winnie Ng has been teaching English for nine years. She is the English Panel Head in Carmel Bunnan Tong Memorial Secondary School.
Self Reflection and Student-Student Feedback

The oral component is becoming more and more important in the Hong Kong Certificate Examination because of the introduction of SBA. We were interested in researching junior secondary student self reflection and feedback following interactive tasks. Our research questions were as follows: firstly, to what extent students can comment on their own performances to improve their participation in subsequent group interaction tasks; and secondly, whether the opportunity to view their own performance on video increased junior secondary students’ participation in feedback and enhanced their ability to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses.

The participants in the research were two groups of average S.2 students. There were two cycles to the research. In Cycle 1 students did an interactive task followed by peer feedback. In Cycle 2 the same students did another interactive task, then had an opportunity to view a video recording of their performance prior to peer feedback. The results suggested that the use of video recording in group interactions can help students to reflect on their own participation in interactive tasks and may enable them to identify areas that need more practice and improvement.

Ms Diana Chen has been an English teacher for four years in Kowloon Tong School (Secondary Section). She is now an Assistant Panel Chair in her school.

Ms Wong Wa On has been an English teacher teaching junior and senior form students in Kowloon Tong School (Secondary Section) for more than ten years. She is also the Careers Mistress in her school.
Peer and Self-assessment as Tools to Develop Students’ Oral Communication Strategies

The focus of this action research was on how peer and self-assessment can support students’ oral communication strategies in group interactions. Three teachers were involved in the study, two teaching S.1 and one teaching S.2. Similar processes were used with each year group through two cycles of action research. Teaching procedures included: videos of student performance used to stimulate student identification of suitable and unsuitable communication strategies in group interactions; the development of peer and self-assessment worksheets for classroom use; and target setting with students focusing on areas such as eye contact, clarity and fluency of speech, and interaction with classmates. The main means of data collection were classroom videos, student completion of peer and self-evaluation forms, and focus group interviews with students. The main findings included: increased student awareness of the need to respond actively to other students’ utterances; the need for teacher guidance in target setting; and increased confidence in students’ spoken English, although it is too soon to identify significant learning gains. In terms of recommendations, some practical teaching suggestions are outlined in terms of preparing students for SBA; developing students’ oral communication strategies; and implementing peer or self-assessment.
The focus of this action research is on interactive assessment, a very new concept grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development and Lantolf and Poehner’s (2004, 2005) dynamic assessment theories. In this eight-month study, which was conducted on two S.1 speaking classes, the teachers investigated the extent to which their use of questioning during students’ presentations in class could enhance their overall performance. To examine the effectiveness of teacher questioning on student learning, classroom observational data was gathered and analysed in conjunction with information obtained via other sources, namely questionnaires, interviews and peer evaluations. In this presentation, the teachers will explore with conference participants students’ perceptions of the teacher’s role during the individual presentations and the impact of teacher intervention on student learning. Findings of the study show that questioning, if effectively used, has the potential to improve the quality of students’ responses, advancing their skills in elaborating on ideas and giving richer presentations, and empowering them to ask higher-order questions. Motivational gains and positive changes in students’ attitudes towards assessment were also discovered and will be discussed. The teachers will reflect on what they have learned about their ‘new’ roles and strategy use as mediators in interactive assessment and end by sharing what they have gained from the action research process and how it has impacted on their actions in their own language classrooms.

Ms Claire Leung holds a Masters Degree in English Language Education. In her MEd dissertation, which focuses on the English teacher’s mediational role during speaking assessments, she studied the impact of processing questions, back-channelling, probes and prompts and wait time, which have all been found to be effective in facilitating the development of students’ speaking skills.

Ms Joanna Leung has been English Panel Chairperson at Stewards Pooi Tun Secondary School for two decades. Dedicated to curriculum design and renewal, she has played a leading role in revising the school-based curricula at all levels with her colleagues to support the school-based assessment initiatives.
In recent years, all Hong Kong teachers have been bombarded with the notion of tasks and task-based assessment and learning. This idea is often very different from the textbook based approach to teaching we are used to and is certainly a far cry from the external exam-focused teaching that many of us are used to. As part of the HKU action research focusing on assessment tasks, and in concert with our own panel’s desire to restructure our junior form curriculum and to make a school-based curriculum that fits with the needs of our students and school community, we decided to focus on how units could be designed in order to better equip students to cope with and negotiate the expectations of the set tasks. While this seems like an obvious idea, the process was not that simple and ultimately included curriculum design, professional development of teachers and classroom implementation. As part of our research, we experimented with a totally restructured approach to planning units which include a text-type focus that is developed in both the written and oral tasks of the unit. In this way, we have attempted to ensure that the tasks are seen as a natural part of the learning process and not an add on. We will be presenting our findings on the two cycles conducted as part of the action research and continue to discuss how we have used our findings and applied what we have learnt to the planning of our junior form units in the 2007/2008 academic year.

Ms Yammie Leung is the Assistant Panel Chair for English, responsible for overseeing the junior forms. She has been teaching English for about ten years. As the junior form Panel Chair, her main duty is to supervise the matters related to the junior form teaching including the design of the curriculum and teaching materials. She is also responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the teaching in junior forms.

Ms Phyllis Long is the S.3 Co-ordinator for English and has been teaching secondary English for several years. As well as being a junior form teacher, she is also the Form Coordinator for S.3 and TSA implementation and studies.

Mr Jason Pacey is the school NET. He has been teaching English for seven years, four of which have been in Hong Kong. He has worked in both the primary and secondary systems in Hong Kong and has degrees in education and arts, both majoring in English. His focus at YY3 is in curriculum change and design and thus he works closely with both Yammie and Phyllis in this regard.
The aim of this action research project was to evaluate the effectiveness of formative criterion-referenced assessment in developing students’ perceptions of performance skills, and fostering students as assessors of oral performances. Data was collected from 5 S.1 English drama classes, covering the entire ability range in the school, taught by the same teacher over a whole year. Analysis of the data revealed positive correlations between student- and teacher- assessments, showing shared understanding of the criteria.

Ms Christine Bruce has been the English Department Head for four years, having previously taught at another HK EMI school, followed by four years in the Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, at CUHK.

Ms Sarah Milner, NET, has worked at LTPSS for five years, having previously taught for six years at New Plymouth Boys' High School in New Zealand. She was the SBA Coordinator from September 2005 - July 2007.

Ms May Tai joined LTPSS last year after graduating from the University of Hong Kong with a bachelor degree in English and completing her PGDE in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is currently teaching junior form English.
Integrated Task Design in School-based Assessment

Current assessment activities, instruments and procedures for oral English language assessment in the senior secondary school are still dominated by the demands of the externally-set and marked oral exams; hence their range is narrow and their validity is questionable. School based assessment, with its focus on authentic tasks conducted in the classroom, offers scope for transcending these limitations. But to be effective, school-based assessment tasks and the procedures for their classroom implementation must be carefully developed in order to ensure the integration of teaching, learning and assessment. This workshop will examine the potential of sociocultural theory as a framework for designing integrated school based assessment tasks, drawing in particular on the notion of scaffolding to ensure the task balances challenges and support for learners. Illustrations of successful task design will be drawn from the work of participants in the QEF research project who worked with junior forms.

Dr Stephen Andrews headed the TEFL Unit at the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate before joining the Faculty of Education in 1990. He has been involved in washback research for over fifteen years.

In addition to SBA, Dr Matthew Clarke’s research interests include teacher identities, critical discourse analysis and critical literacies. His forthcoming book, Language Teacher Identities, is part of Multilingual Matters’ New Perspectives on Language and Education series.
Assessing Interactively - Finding the Right Moment and Using the Right Strategies

In this workshop, the leaders will first introduce key concepts in interactive assessment (IA), a valuable aspect of assessment for learning in school-based assessment, and discuss the differences between IA and static forms of assessment. Focusing on mediation and support during the assessment event, IA creates opportunities for learners to see assessment as feedback (Wiggins, 2004) as the teacher(-assessor) engages them in a collaborative relationship by providing timely and appropriate ‘mediated assistance’ to scaffold and support learners in producing at their best everyday level, stimulate and challenge them to reach a higher-level performance than that being produced, and develop skills that can be extended beyond the immediate task. Through video-clips and group activities, participants will heighten their sensitivity to their mediational role in the assessment process. They will learn to recognise opportunities for positive intervention during assessments and develop strategies that can be applied to their own language classrooms. These include increasing wait time, consciously using back-channelling, employing a wider range of questioning techniques and the staging of questions.

Dedicated to teacher education, Ms Nicole Tavares is keen on introducing teaching innovations and experimenting with ‘new’ pedagogies. She holds major positions in the HKEAA and has been working very closely with the EDB and local secondary school English teachers in promoting SBA initiatives and other areas of professional enrichment. Having worked for nearly a decade in local mainstream schools, served as English Panel Chairperson and taught students across all levels, she has sound knowledge of L2 learners’ needs as well as expertise in both classroom-based practices and school-based curriculum development.

Prof Liz Hamp-Lyons, Honorary Professor in Education at The University of Hong Kong, is an assessment researcher and consultant with experience in many countries, acting as senior advisor to the National College English Testing Committee of China on CET-4, and to Cambridge ESOL (UK). A Past President of the International Language Testing Association, she holds Honorary positions at Shanghai Jiaotong University and the University of Nottingham, and is Professor of English Language Assessment at the University of Bedfordshire. With Chris Davison, she developed the HKCEE school-based assessment speaking component for the HKEAA.
Giving constructive, quality verbal feedback to students about specific aspects of their oral language skills in relation to mutually understood success criteria, as well as information on how to improve, provides students with opportunities for learning and maximizes their potential to do better in subsequent assessment tasks. The provision of quality feedback which optimizes learner development is therefore at the heart of assessment for learning. This workshop explores the meaning of feedback, its purpose and what quality feedback might look like drawing on the work of Black and Wiliam (2003), Wiggins (2004), Sutton (1999) and Clarke (2001). Participants in the workshop will be involved in analyzing and reflecting on feedback strategies shown in sample video clips drawn from the data of the action research conducted by the teachers in the QEF project with a view to enhancing our understanding of some or all of the following: 1) the language of feedback and the provision of quality feedback; 2) helping students to understand the success criteria; 3) the importance of helping students to be reflective and to participate fully in feedback events.

Salient issues relating to teacher feedback will be elaborated during the workshop and participants themselves will be invited to reflect on and discuss their own good practices in relation to feedback with a view to enhancing the quality of student/teacher feedback events.

Ms. Gerry Davies began working as an English language teacher in 1979 and has taught English language in many forms to many different age groups in England, Australia and Hong Kong. She is passionate about helping students to learn and enjoy English and soon began to share her passion with future generations of English teachers through teacher training. She joined Hong Kong University in 2003 where she teaches PGDE English Major Methods and Language Awareness on the B.Ed and M. Ed programmes. She is currently researching teacher feedback in assessment for learning.

Ms Cheri Chan is a teacher trainer at the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong. Prior to joining the Faculty, she was involved in English language teaching and ELT related work for more than a decade. She has served as a Panel Chairperson and has taught students across all levels at different local schools. She has a deep understanding of the theory and practice of English language teaching. A strong believer in teacher education and collaborative learning, Cheri initiated action research projects with teachers to implement school-based development when she was working at school. She still works closely with a network of local teachers in the community. Her current research interest is exploring how teachers learn through collaborative action research.
Enhancing Student Learning through Peer Feedback and Self-Monitoring

This workshop begins by setting out the case for student involvement in assessment processes and unpacking different terminologies: peer assessment, peer feedback, self-assessment and self-monitoring. The presentation alludes to various relevant learning principles, including constructivism, student engagement, metacognition and self-regulation. I draw on a number of influential research studies which indicate the powerful learning gains accruing from well-focused peer feedback and/or self-monitoring. The second half of the workshop is more practical in orientation and addresses the issue of how Hong Kong secondary school students might be usefully involved in reflecting on the standards of their own work and that of their peers. It draws on previous and ongoing case studies carried out in Hong Kong schools and interim QEF findings from work done in SKH Li Fook Hing Secondary School. Some of the benefits, challenges and pitfalls of student involvement in assessment are elaborated. Sample worksheets will be distributed and discussed. Participants themselves are also invited to consider and share how students are or might be involved most productively in peer feedback or self-monitoring so as to enhance their performance on school-based assessment tasks.

Dr David Carless is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong. His recent co-authored book (with Gordon Joughin and Ngar-Fun Liu) is entitled, How Assessment Supports Learning: Learning-oriented Assessment in Action.
Teacher Assessment as Policy Instrument – Potentials and Capacities

Assessment has played a very large part in school education in a number of education systems such as Hong Kong and the UK. After a sustained period of heavy investment in standardized testing of school students, there now appears to be a policy shift in favour of teacher assessment, particularly in terms of formative uses of teacher assessment. I will draw on recent experiences in whole-system reforms in parts of the UK and elsewhere to argue that the alignment between policy expectations and professional capacities is a critically important issue to be addressed.

Prof Constant Leung is Professor of Educational Linguistics at King’s College London and Deputy Head of the Department of Education and Professional Studies. He has worked for many years in the field of second/additional language education. His academic and research interests include classroom pedagogy, content and language-integrated curriculum development, language assessment, and language policy. He serves on the editorial boards of four international journals: Language Assessment Quarterly, Language and Education, Prospect and Reflections on English Language Teaching.
Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to all the participating teachers and students in the QEF project schools. Your interest and enthusiasm have ensured the success of the conference.

Caritas Fanling Chan Chun Ha Secondary School
Carmel Bunnan Tong Memorial Secondary School
China Holiness College
Good Hope School
HKFEW Wong Cho Bau Secondary School
HKFYG Lee Shau Kee College
HKTA The Yuen Yuen Institute No. 3 Secondary School
Kowloon Tong School (Secondary Section)
Law Ting Pong Secondary School
Ling Liang Church E Wun Secondary School
Ma On Shan St Joseph’s Secondary School
Ma On Shan Tsung Tsin Secondary School
Methodist College
Ng Wah Catholic Secondary School
Ning Po College
PLK Laws Foundation College
PLK Tang Yuk Tien College
Pui Shing Catholic Secondary School
Shau Kei Wan East Government Secondary School
SKH All Saints’ Middle School
SKH Li Fook Hing Secondary School
Stewards Pooi Tun Secondary School
St. Paul’s School (Lam Tin)
Tack Ching Girls’ Secondary School
The Salvation Army William Booth Secondary School
Acknowledgements

The organising committee would also like to take this opportunity to thank Prof Shirley Grundy, Mr Sheridan Lee, Prof Constant Leung and all the presenters (in presentation order):

Ms Joyce Cheung, Ms Angel Lee & Ms Winnie Ng
Carmel Bunnan Tong Memorial Secondary School

Ms Diana Chen & Ms Wong Wa On
Kowloon Tong School (Secondary Section)

Ms Cecilia Chan, Ms Doris Lee & Ms Ivy Sun
SKH Li Fook Hing Secondary School

Ms Claire Leung & Ms Joanna Leung
Stewards Pooi Tun Secondary School

Ms Yammie Leung, Ms Phyllis Long & Mr Jason Pacey
HKTA The Yuen Yuen Institute No. 3 Secondary School

Ms Christine Bruce, Ms Sarah Milner & Ms May Tai
Law Ting Pong Secondary School

Dr Stephen Andrews, Dr Matthew Clarke, Ms Nicole Tavares, Prof Liz Hamp-Lyons, Ms Gerry Davies, Ms Cheri Chan & Dr David Carless
The University of Hong Kong

Finally we would like to thank the Co-sponsors:
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