

Teachers' Competency in Assessment for Learning in Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong

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This paper reports the outcomes of a 2-year research project designed to investigate the practice of assessment for learning by Hong Kong teachers. The project was a collaborative one, involving the School Development and Evaluation Team (SDET) of The Chinese University of Hong Kong and teachers from 10 kindergartens and 10 primary schools. In the project, training programmes, workshops and meetings were provided to the participating schools for the purpose of enhancing teachers' Assessment for Learning (AfL) competency in their daily teaching. A questionnaire was administered twice to all teachers in the project schools at the beginning as well as towards the end of the

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project to tap any improvement regarding teachers' habits in utilizing AfL strategies in their classrooms. Results indicate that there is a remarkable improvement regarding teachers' habits in utilizing AfL strategies during the study. It is recommended that more professional development programmes and school support for teachers should be provided for enhancing teachers' AfL literacy in their daily teaching.

Key words: assessment-for-learning, early childhood education, Hong Kong

Background

Traditionally, assessment has been used in ranking students' achievement in learning (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982, p.185) and inevitably produces academic winners and losers ever since they first enter their elementary class. Students, who succeed early, will build on winning streaks to learn more as they grow; whereas, those who fail early, will often fall farther and farther behind (Stiggins, 2007, p. 22).

According to Nisbet (1993), assessment has pervasive influence in schooling as it affects on how children learn and how teachers teach. It always impacts on the learning process through the wash back effect (Alderson & Wall, 1997), cramming and rote learning — to the extent that learning for assessment is almost as important as the genuine learning, which these assessments are originally devised to measure (Nisbet, 1993, p. 25).

Education today has shifted from its “sorter and sifter” role to a gap-bridging role for learning differences found in classrooms. As teachers, our mission is not to “let students who have not yet met standards fall into losing streaks, succumb to hopelessness, and stop trying” (Nisbet, 1993, p. 25), instead we must strive on assisting them to experience success in learning according to their own pace. Thus, the purpose of adopting assessments in the curriculum evolves from verifying learning to supporting learning, that is, Assessment for Learning — assessment which has learning as its object and through which, our students understand where they are and what they can do

next in the process of learning (Connell et al., 1982, p. 200). As Stiggins (2007, p. 22) states, "Rather than sorting students into winners and losers, assessment for learning can put all students on a winning streak". By analyzing 250 papers on formative assessments in classrooms by researchers in different countries, Black and Wiliam (1998a, 1998b) found that formative assessment could improve students' learning substantially through:

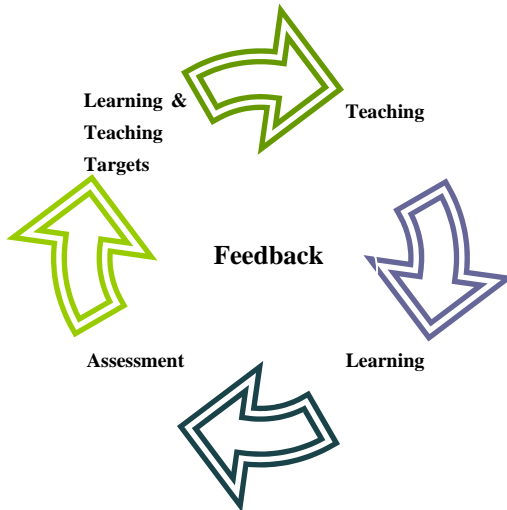
- provision of effective feedback to students;
- active involvement of students in their own learning;
- adjustment of teaching after taking account of assessment results;
- recognition of the profound influence of assessment on students' motivation and self-esteem; and
- the need for students to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

Assessment for Learning

Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2004, p. 10) further define that Assessment for Learning (AfL) "is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning" through providing useful information in modifying learning and teaching. In order to promote better learning, schools are encouraged to put more emphasis on AfL as an integral part of the learning, teaching, and assessment cycle (see Figure 1). This means that the curriculum is responsible for setting out what students should learn in terms of learning targets or objectives, while the assessment serves as a means to collect evidence of student learning by assessing both the learning product (i.e., the learning targets and content that students are expected to achieve) and the learning process (i.e., how they learn). Most importantly, teachers should use the information collected by the assessment practice as the basis for decisions on improving learning and teaching, and informing students about their strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, students' motivation and

interest of learning will be reinforced with teachers' recognition of their achievements and provision of necessary steps for improvement (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Curriculum Development Council, 2001, 2002). Another important function of AfL is facilitating students' self-evaluation so that they can become independent learners in the future.

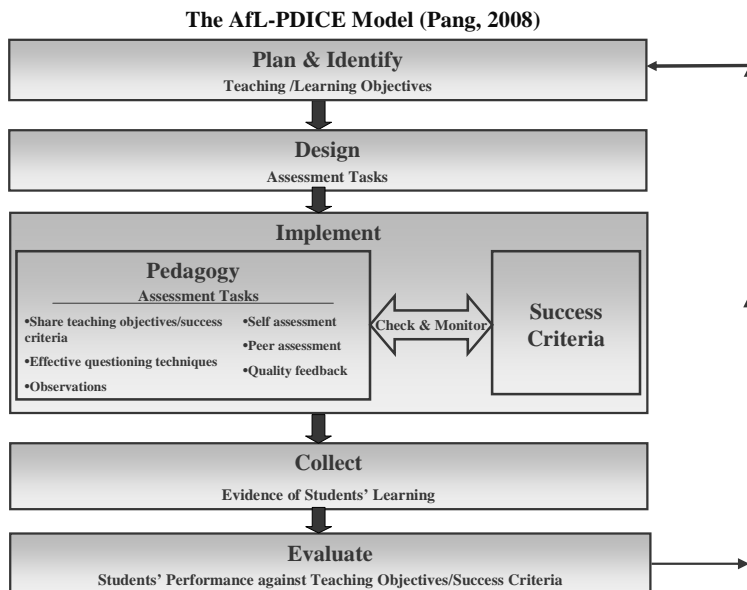
Figure 1: The Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Cycle (adapted from Curriculum Development Council, 2002)



Pang's (2008) AfL-PDICE Model

Pang (2008) further elaborates the AfL concept and develops the AfL-PDICE model (see Figure 2). In the model, there are five stages, namely, **Planning, Designing, Implementing, Collecting and Evaluating**.

Figure 2: Pang's (2008) AfL-PDICE Model



In the *planning* stage, teachers need to identify certain learning and teaching objectives before they design their assessment tasks or activities. In *designing* the tasks, teachers should have a clear picture about the learning objectives of the lessons and set *success criteria* around these goals.

During the *implementing* stage, teachers should share the learning objectives with students so that they can have a clear picture of what they are going to learn at the beginning of the lesson. Similarly, teachers should share the *success criteria* of the assessment tasks with students in order to assist them to understand what they need to achieve and thus facilitating *self and peer assessment* after the task as well as enhancing their ownership of learning. In order to enhance AfL, teachers are required to use *effective questioning techniques* such as high-order

thinking questions to encourage students to apply, analyze, synthesize or evaluate their knowledge currently learnt and also reveal their thinking processes and understanding so that teachers can make use of this evidence to target their teaching according to students' needs and diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses during the learning process. Also, a culture of success should be advocated with the belief that each student can make achievements by building on their previous performance. This can be achieved by the *quality feedback* given by the teachers through discussion with students about their strengths and weaknesses demonstrated in their work/performance and giving practical and feasible suggestions in order to help the latter to make plans for further improvement.

For *self and peer assessment*, it is based on the belief that encouraging students to self-reflect on their own work can enhance learning. Once students understand how to assess their current knowledge and the gaps in it, they will have a clearer idea of how they can help themselves to improve their learning. Thus, teachers should provide opportunities for their students to reflect on their own work. In addition, encouraging students to comment on their fellow classmates' work is essential in learning since they can understand both the learning objectives and the task requirement (or assessment criteria) while evaluating others' work. Moreover, looking at different answers or responses can help students to understand the alternative methods they could have used to the task.

It should be noted that the *collecting* stage is not necessarily detached from the implementing stage as teachers are often required to collect evidence of students' learning by assessing both the learning product (i.e., the learning targets and content that students are expected to achieve) and the learning processes (i.e., how they learn) through their observations in class, rating students' worksheets, reviewing students' self/peer assessment forms and conferencing with students. Finally, in the *evaluating* stage, teachers can make use of the information collected by the assessment practice to form basis in evaluating how well the learning and teaching is being done and thus informing learning and teaching in their curriculum plan in future (Pang, 2008, pp. 1–2).

In the following section, the initiative of AfL in Hong Kong will be reviewed in more details.

Education Reform in Hong Kong

Throughout the past decade, the concept of “Assessment-of-Learning” (AoL) has been adopted in most school assessment practices in Hong Kong (Pang & Leung, 2008); in which summative assessments have been used to confirm what students know, to check whether they have achieved the curriculum outcomes, and to show how they are placed in relation to their peers. However, this traditional rationale of AoL has been challenged and replaced by the AfL approach (discussed above) because the expectation for education from society has shifted from ensuring our students to possess basic skills and knowledge to helping them become competent in critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication for coping with the ever-changing society (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 14).

After a comprehensive review of the Hong Kong education system, the Education Commission (2000) recommended a reform for the education system in Hong Kong. The scope of the reform covers the curricula, the academic structure, the assessment mechanisms, and the admission systems for different stages of education and “lifelong learning and all round development” are the expected outcomes of the reform. In view of the deficiencies in the assessment mechanism, which are characterized by the heavy emphasis on the products of learning (e.g., memory, understanding of knowledge and concepts on written tests and examinations) while failing to reflect students’ “learning to learn” competence in the learning process; the Education Commission (2000) recommended AfL as one of the major areas of action in the current education reform:

As part of the curriculum, the major function of assessment is to help teachers and parents understand the learning, progress and needs of their students, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers could take into account the results of assessment in planning the teaching syllabus, designing teaching methods and giving guidance to individual students to help them learn effectively and exploit their potentiality fully. This will

also enable students to have a deeper understanding of themselves. (Education Commission, 2000, p. 46)

In order to promote the AfL culture at the school level, teachers are encouraged to conduct multiple modes of assessments at various stages of basic education to identify their strengths and weaknesses at an early stage, so that follow-up actions can be taken as soon as possible (Education Commission, 2000, p. 46). Additionally, teachers should share the learning goals or assessment criteria with students at the beginning of each lesson. This gives students an understanding of the standards for which they should aim, thus enabling them to evaluate their own learning as well as enhancing their ownership of learning. With teachers' effective questioning techniques, observations, timely and quality feedback, the comments from their fellow classmates as well as self-evaluation, students can recognize their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, not only will their motivation and self-esteem be heightened because of the recognition of their own achievement and progress of learning, the way to improve learning will also be known to them by making use of the feedback and suggestions from their teachers and peers. It is important to note that although the rationale of AfL has been clearly spelt out by the government since 2000, the inspection annual reports (see below) from the Education Bureau show that there is still room for improvement.

Quality Assurance Inspection Annual Reports — Kindergartens and Quality Review Summary Reports (Pre-primary Institutions)

With respect to early childhood education, *Quality Assurance Inspection Annual Report 2004/05 (Kindergartens)* pointed out that only 25% of teachers made proper observations and records about students' performance/work in their daily teaching. Moreover, many kindergartens failed to demonstrate a full understanding of the importance of formative assessments in early childhood development and were weak in utilizing meaningful assessment data for informing learning and teaching (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006).

Although *Quality Assurance Inspection Annual Report 2005/06 (Kindergartens)* showed that the majority of kindergarten teachers adopted formative assessments in evaluating children's learning, 20% of kindergartens under inspections still used dictations and examinations as major tools in assessing children's work. This implies that kindergartens teachers may not have a clear concept about AfL, thus inevitably increasing students' pressure in learning (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2007, pp. 4–5). Moreover, when analyzing the Quality Review Summary Reports (pre-primary institutions; by region), it is found that the most frequent comments given to the schools being assessed during 2010/2011 academic year are:

- teachers generally fail to utilize the learning evidence or assessment data collected in lessons for informing learning and teaching;
- teachers need to incorporate a wide range of questioning techniques and methods in the classrooms to tap children's deeper thinking (Education Bureau, 2011).

Quality Assurance Inspection Annual Reports — Primary and Secondary Schools

According to the Quality Assurance Division of the Education Bureau (2009), there were 714 primary schools and secondary schools undergone External School Review (ESR) from 2003 to 2008. The report indicated that there was a need for teachers to:

- further explore how to stimulate students' in-depth thinking through the use of a wider range of questions such as the chasing technique and high-order thinking questions;
- help students to clarify concepts and consolidate learning through prompting and re-directing questions;
- improve the quality of feedback, that is, concrete feedback should be given on how well students have performed and what needs improvement against the learning objectives, and suggestions should

be provided to facilitate improvement after questioning or class activities;

- improve the quality of peer assessment and effectiveness through provision of quality feedback and development of students' skills for analyzing and commenting on peer performance (Education Bureau, 2009, p. 16).

Since “teachers’ professional attitude and competence are the key to reform success” (Education Bureau, 2009, p. 19), it would be beneficial for schools to collaborate with professional organizations and tertiary institutions for improving teachers’ professional knowledge and skills in AfL.

Pang and Leung’s (2008) Study on AfL in Hong Kong Schools

Pang and Leung (2008) investigated teachers’ habit of using AfL skills and techniques in 39 primary school and kindergartens in Hong Kong. During the study, two School Development Officers (SDOs) from the School Development and Evaluation Team (SDET) of The Chinese University of Hong Kong visited each participating school and conducted class observations ($N = 78$) for three different lessons (single or double sessions) from November to January 2007. They were asked to observe whether the teachers had used any AfL teaching strategies (i.e., informing teaching objectives, informing success criteria, effective questioning, quality feedback, self assessment and peer assessment) in the lessons being observed. Both SDOs were required to fill in a checklist during their observations to record the frequency of the AfL teaching strategies used by the teachers.

With respect to the 78 lessons being observed, the most frequently used AfL teaching strategies was “effective questioning”, whereas “quality feedback” and “peer assessment” were sometimes and occasionally found in the lessons observed respectively. Other AfL teaching strategies, like “informing teaching objectives” and “success

criteria” strategies appeared to be rarely used by both the kindergarten and primary school teachers. It is worth noting that no teachers had ever adopted “self assessment” in the lessons observed (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: AfL Teaching Skills Used by Teachers (adapted from Pang and Leung, 2008, p. 25)

AfL Teaching Strategy	Frequency of Adoption (N = 78)
Questions that stimulate high-order thinking#	80.6%
Quality feedback#	65.7%
Peer assessment	43.3%
Informing teaching objectives of task(s)	12.8%
Informing success criteria of task(s)	12.8%
Self assessment	0.0%

indicates skills or techniques used at least 3 times per class observation

Pang and Leung’s (2008) findings indicated that the majority of the teachers failed to recognize the importance of informing teaching objectives to students at the early stage of their lessons or they did not have clear teaching targets when planning the lessons beforehand. Many of them did not acknowledge the importance of sharing success criteria before the task(s) so that their students were unable to understand what they were expected to achieve. The result also showed that some teachers were incapable to make use of the information collected by the assessment tools to give quality feedback for improving children’s learning. Moreover, some of them appeared to have little knowledge about peer assessment, self assessment and their crucial roles in developing students’ learning-to-learn competence.

Aims of the Study

With the findings of Pang and Leung’s (2008) study on teachers’ frequency of utilizing AfL techniques in Hong Kong classrooms in mind, the present research set out to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any differences of kindergarten teachers' habits in utilizing AfL strategies between the pre-study and post-study?
2. Are there any differences of primary school teachers' habits in utilizing AfL strategies between the pre-study and post-study?

Sample

The subjects of the study were all teachers from 10 primary schools and 10 kindergartens ($N = 543$ in the pre-study, and $N = 573$ in the post-study) participated in a school development project "From Assessment for Learning to Promoting Self-regulated Learning in Early Childhood Education (Kindergarten & Lower Primary levels)" in Hong Kong. This two-year school development project was sponsored by the Quality Education Fund from September 2008 to August 2010, and was organized by the School Development and Evaluation Team (SDET) of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Data Collection

A 66-item-questionnaire was designed to tap teachers' practice in using AfL strategies in their daily teaching. The questionnaire was compiled of nine components: "informing teaching objectives", "informing success criteria", "effective questioning", "quality feedback", "self assessment", "peer assessment", "class observation", "collecting learning evidence" and "teacher reflection". A 6-point Likert Scale (i.e., "1: strongly disagree", whereas "6: strongly agree") was used to tap teachers' habits of utilizing the above AfL strategies in their lessons. The same questionnaire was administered twice in December 2008 (at the early stage of the project) and June 2009 (at the end of the project). In the pre-study, 165 kindergarten teachers and 378 primary school teachers responded to the questionnaire; while in the post study, 179 kindergarten teachers and 394 primary school teachers responded to the questionnaire.

The QEF Project

The QEF project consisted of the following components which aimed at changing the participating teachers' assessment practice in the classrooms:

1. Setting Up a School-based Assessment Development Committee (SBADC)

Each participating school was asked to set up a SBADC (with maximum 5 persons) to facilitate the establishment of a school-based assessment mechanism with the infusion of AfL elements into daily teaching practices. The committee members were the school principals, the senior teacher(s) responsible for school curriculum development/student assessment and a group of subject teachers.

2. A Training Programme for SBADC

The programme consisted of six modules covering a wide range of topics, assisting the participants to practise AfL, to formulate approaches that facilitated assessment process, to develop appropriate assessment tools and to establish student learning portfolio system.

3. School-based Workshops for Teachers

The workshops aimed at assisting teachers to:

- conduct a self-evaluation to identify areas on which to be focused on;
- set up of a AfL framework for the school;
- incorporate AfL practices in the teaching and learning process;
- put skills and strategies of AfL into practices through lesson planning process;
- work collaboratively with teachers to design and incorporate appropriate assessment tools in the lessons.

4. Practicum Workshops for Lesson Planning

The practicum workshops provided opportunities for the teachers to incorporate AfL elements into teaching and learning process, and to develop assessment activities or tools for their lessons.

5. Lesson Observations and Post-observation Meetings

Two teachers in each project school were observed by their fellow teachers and SDO from the SDET. During the post-observation meetings, teachers to be observed, his/her fellow teachers and the SDO took turns to exchange their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses in incorporating AfL strategies of the lessons observed.

6. Parent Workshop

The workshop facilitated all parents in each project school to understand the concepts and principles of AfL for helping them to work collaboratively with teachers in exploring their children's needs and difficulties in their learning process.

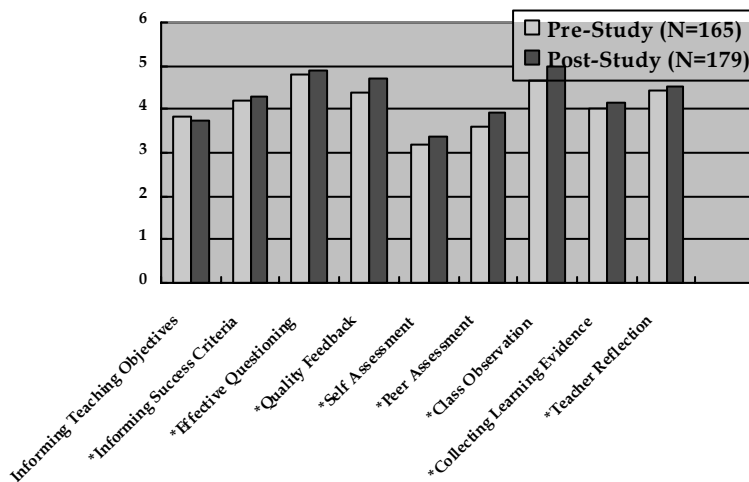
Findings

Comparison of Kindergarten Teachers in Utilizing AfL Strategies between the Pre- and Post-study

Data shows that there was a significant difference concerning kindergarten teachers' habits in utilizing AfL strategies in classrooms ($p < 0.05$) in all areas except in "informing teaching objectives" (i.e., "informing success criteria", "effective questioning", "quality feedback", "self assessment", "peer assessment", "class observation", "collecting learning evidence" and "teacher reflection").

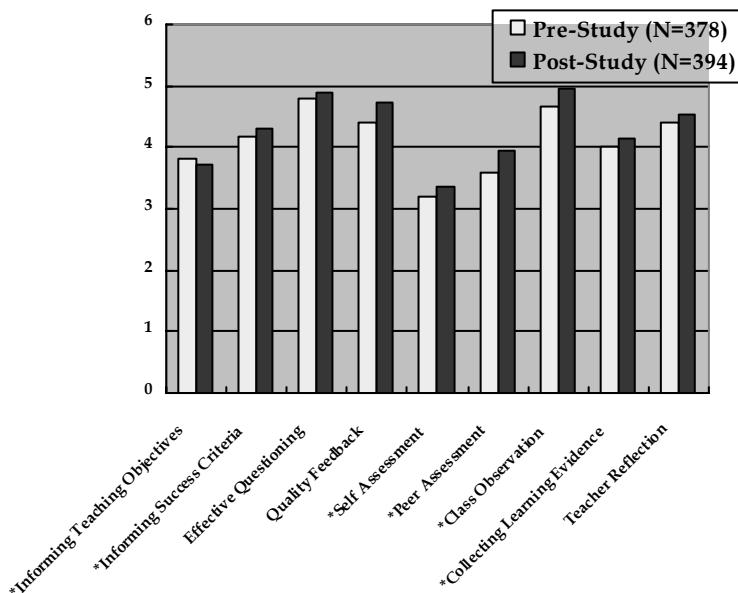
It is worth noting that, "class observation", "effective questioning", "quality feedback", and "teacher reflection" were found to be the most frequently used AfL strategies in kindergartens in both pre- and post-studies. On the other hand, "peer assessment" and "self assessment" were found to be the second least and the least AfL strategies used in the two studies (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Comparison of AfL Teaching Practice of Kindergarten Teachers between the Pre- and Post-Study



* significantly different

Figure 4: Comparison of AfL Teaching Practice of Primary School Teachers between the Pre- and Post-Study



Comparison of Primary School Teachers in Utilizing AfL Strategies between the Pre- and Post-study

For the primary school teachers, only 6 out of 9 AfL strategies were significantly utilized ($p < 0.05$) and more frequently adopted by the primary school teachers in the post-study (i.e., “informing teaching objectives”, “informing success criteria”, “self assessment”, “peer assessment”, “class observation”, “collecting learning evidence”) after the intervention. However, “effective questioning”, “quality feedback”, and “teacher reflection were the three AfL strategies which showed no significant improvement (see Figure 4).

Similar to the kindergarten classrooms, the same four AfL strategies (i.e., “effective questioning”, “class observation”, “quality feedback”, and “teacher reflection”) were found to be the most frequently used AfL strategies in primary school classrooms in both studies. It is interesting to note that “peer assessment” and “self assessment” were found again to be the second least and the least AfL strategies used in two studies.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that most of the AfL teaching strategies were significantly more frequently utilized by the participating schools after the intervention. In the kindergarten setting, 8 out of 9 AfL strategies (except for “informing teaching objectives”) were significantly more used in the lessons in the second study. It could be partially explained that kindergarten teachers generally have a deep-rooted view that it was unnecessary to inform the toddlers about the teaching objectives in order to keep the lessons more mysterious so that the young children were more motivated at the beginning of the lessons. Some researchers raise the point that teachers normally give little attention in sharing the learning goals of the tasks with children (Dixon & Williams, 2003; Torrance & Pryor, 2001). As Dixon and Williams (2003, p. 106) states:

While most teachers discussed the importance of working with and alongside children; in the majority of cases their discussion did not include reference to sharing learning goals with children.

For the primary school setting, only 6 out of 9 AfL strategies showed significant improvement in terms of utilizing frequencies in the classrooms. It was posited that no significant improvement could be found in the techniques of “effective questioning”, “quality feedback” and “teacher reflection”. It might be due to larger class size and tighter time-tabling (when compared with the kindergarten setting) owing to formal internal examinations/tests as well as public examination (i.e., Territory Student Assessment) in the primary school settings. In order to catch up with the curriculum, teachers might generally find that they had insufficient time for effective questioning techniques (e.g., redirecting, chasing, relaying, probing) nor allowed more wait-time for students to think about the questions or tapped their high-order thinking. For quality feedback, it seemed that teachers might be more inclined to give simple, short and evaluative feedback instead of assisting students to find their strengths and weaknesses to improve their learning owing to limited teaching time. For “teacher reflection”, it might be owing to teacher’s workload which avoided them to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their lessons nor use the learning evidence collected during the lessons to inform learning and teaching. It is consistent with Black’s (2000, p. 410) view that “overcrowded curricula and oppressive external tests, which inhibit development of new practices”.

The evidence gathered from the project schools here showed that “peer assessment” was the second least utilized AfL strategy in both kindergartens and primary schools in the two studies. It could be interpreted that teachers might assume that young children were unable to make comments on their classmates’ work or performance and so teachers did not provide sufficient opportunities for children to comment on their peers’ performance or work.

Similar reason might also be applied to the “self assessment” strategy, the least frequently found AfL strategy in the present research. Moreover, as Pang and Leung (2008) posited that since teachers had been brought up by traditional education, they might not be getting used

to a self-evaluating culture; thus were reluctant to provide opportunities for “self assessment” during the lessons.

Nevertheless, there was generally a significant gain in most of the AfL strategies for the participating teachers between the pre- and post-study in both settings. It could be interpreted that the project had a positive impact on teachers of the project schools through promoting the importance of assessment for learning in classrooms. Also, through the training programme and whole school workshops in the project, teachers’ awareness and competence of AfL strategies might have been enhanced in a certain extent. Many writers emphasize that it may take a considerable period of time to get teachers to switch their mindset from AoL to AfL as well as to take initiatives to put theories into practice (Black, 2000; Dixon & Williams, 2003), therefore, it is rather encouraging that teachers in the participating schools have already shown somewhat of improvement in practicing AfL strategies in such a short period of time (i.e., 2 years).

Implications

The present study explored teachers’ use of AfL teaching strategies in early childhood education in Hong Kong school settings. While the research pioneers a rather quantitative study ($N > 500$) in 20 kindergartens and primary schools, more in-depth, qualitative research are needed to consolidate the findings of this preliminary study. Nevertheless, the findings of this study have various implications for early childhood education.

As for the problems arising from the “informing teaching objectives”, we suggest kindergarten teachers to “make more explicit what was the purpose of certain activities” (Torrance & Pryor, 2001, p. 622) with their students at the beginning of the learning tasks. For promoting peer and self assessment, teachers should demonstrate the task(s) to the youngsters so that they can have a clearer concept on the requirement of the activity. Where possible, teachers can select some samples of students’ work from previous years and explain to the young children in what ways the samples are considered as a piece of good

work. In the mean time, they should teach the necessary vocabularies to facilitate students' self and peer evaluation.

A significant discovery of the study was that primary school teachers had shown no significant changes in "effective questioning", "quality feedback" and "teacher reflection". It is consistent with the Quality Assurance Division of the Education Bureau (2009) that teachers generally failed to utilize a wider range of questions to tap students' high-order thinking as well as giving concrete feedback on how well students have performed and what needs improvement during the learning progress (p. 16). It may be due to the large class size and tight time table which inhibit teachers to make further improvement in these three areas. Hence, it would be feasible for school management and curriculum designers to review the existing curriculum and to make subsequent adjustments so that teachers can afford to spend more time in different questioning techniques and skills, give more descriptive feedback for assisting students' learning progress as well as making use of the learning evidence collected in the lessons to further inform learning and teaching. As Black (2000, p. 410) stressed:

Another dimension of support would be to reduce some of the obstacles, such as overcrowded curricula and oppressive external texts, which inhibit development of new practices.

A key finding of the overall project is that both kindergarten and primary school teachers had generally demonstrated a considerable improvement in their AfL competence during the two-year intervention. We posit that specific components of the project have played an essential role in changing the participating teachers' assessment practice in the classrooms. A key finding of the overall project is that both kindergarten and primary school teachers had generally demonstrated a considerable improvement in their AfL competence during the two-year intervention. We posit that specific components of the project have played an essential role in changing the participating teachers' assessment practice in the classrooms.

Establishment of School-based Assessment Development Committee

The recommendation for each participating school to set up a School-based Assessment Development Committee (SBADC) (including the school principal, senior teachers/panel heads) at the beginning of the project seemed to facilitate the school management team to realize their leading roles in reviewing the existing assessment mechanism in their school, identifying specific areas for improvement as well as implementing AfL teaching strategies in daily classroom teaching.

Training Programme

The training programme appeared to provide the SBADC a solid ground of concept and theories about Assessment for Learning in the school context. Principals and teachers generally expressed a view that interactions and experience sharing with other participating schools during the training programme was valuable in inspiring them to make self-reflection as well as to initiate changes regarding assessment practices within their own schools.

Whole School Workshops

The school-based workshops served to introduce various AfL teaching and learning strategies to teachers. Additionally, through watching video-clips from sample lessons, teachers were able to have a general idea of incorporating AfL practices in the teaching and learning process.

Practicum Workshops for Lesson Planning

From the feedback given by the participating teachers, it appeared that the practicum workshops provided opportunities for the SDO (mentioned earlier) to work collaboratively with teachers to put AfL skills and strategies into practices through the lesson planning process. During the workshops, teachers were free to raise questions and difficulties regarding the AfL implementation. It is believed that through

brainstorming and experience exchange among fellow teachers, not only their AfL practice was improved but also an AfL culture would be built up automatically.

Lesson Observations and Post-observation Meetings

It is supposed to be one of the most popular components in the project. For each post-observation meeting, teacher to be observed and his/her fellow teachers took turns to exchange their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson observed. The most fruitful gist of the meeting was the suggestions made by the participating teachers for improving their AfL teaching practice in order to promote children's learning after thorough investigation and reflection (Torrance & Pryor, 2001).

Parent Workshops

As parents play an important role in assisting their children to reflect on their learning, it is essential for parents to have a clear concept about the AfL rationale. The parent workshops served to educate parents about their roles in facilitating young children's on-going development by making full use of feedback given by their teachers, peers and even the children themselves.

In sum, the project seemed to be an excellent starting point for blending the AfL theory and practice into a new assessment approach in order to address the different needs of the individual participating schools. Through programmes of development and dissemination which are matched to teachers' capacity in each participating school, it is believed that they will build up AfL practice gradually. As mentioned above, in enhancing the development of new practices, it is extremely important for the school management to take corresponding support measures, such as revising the crammed timetable, reducing the amount of administrative work of teachers and avoiding excessive internal tests and examinations (Black, 2000, p. 410).

Conclusion

While this paper reviews the definition of AfL and its importance in learning and teaching, it also explores the use of AfL teaching strategies in kindergartens and primary schools in Hong Kong. For teacher training, there needs to be a far greater emphasis on professional development programmes for raising teachers' AfL assessment competence through school-based professional training and development programmes (Pang & Leung, 2008, 2010). (Stiggins, 2002, p. 5). Only through this way can teachers' literacy in assessment for learning be promoted (Stiggins, 2002, p. 5).

Finally, the important role of school management to create a supportive learning community is also an influential factor in enhancing teachers to "keep abreast of new developments, evaluate tried and tested ones and experiment with [their] own initiatives" (Brown, 2004, p. 88). Unless this occurs, assessment will always sit outside of learning, and teachers and learners will only play a passive role in the learning and teaching process (Dixon & Williams, 2003, p. 108).

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