CASE 1

Formative Assessments: Practices and Techniques in the Virtual Classroom

Catholic Mission School

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School
Catholic Mission School

Background
It is generally accepted that using formative assessment in the classroom is a requisite component of learning and teaching. Data collected from formative assessments helps teachers to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. It then will assist the teacher to adjust or revise the lesson plan and give the students advice on how to improve their work (Prinsloo & Van Rooyen, 2003).

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers are required to conduct online lessons occasionally – but not all teachers feel fully prepared to meet this sudden challenge especially as traditional knowledge checks are no longer as easy as they are in the physical classroom. Teachers are then in search of new tools to face difficulties they have not faced before.

Based on the belief that keeping formative assessment in their online classes is essential to help support learning during the learning process, P4 English teachers at Catholic Mission School decided to update their teaching tool kits so as to assist them to achieve internationally accepted goals that teachers around the world share, for example, encouraging student engagement and exploring ways to utilise formative assessment in their virtual classroom. To address such an immediate need, the teachers introduced a series of strategies to collect instant student feedback in an effective way in order to guide instruction.

The aim of this article is to present the relevant learning activities arranged and illustrate how students achieved the desired learning outcomes.

Level
Primary 4

Strategies Used
With the intention of conducting formative assessment effectively in the virtual classroom, the team of teachers adopted the following strategies :

1. **Using Student Data to Support Instructional Decision Making**

As Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) states 'Assessment is today's means of modifying tomorrow's instruction', pre-assessment is important for teachers to plan their lessons as it gives information about what is already known about a topic. In order to check students' prior knowledge of using modal verb 'should' and 'should not' to give advice, a pre-lesson task was assigned to students. Students were asked to give advice for one scenario without any teaching. Teachers could read each of the response closely, and informed students of the next step of designing the learning content. Teachers chose an e-learning tool for students to work on their pre-task as it enabled teachers to connect the task with the learning activities in online lesson together.

Example 1A

Based on the student performance shown in Example 1, the teachers found that students had no idea about the topic 'Using should and should not to give advice'. Most of them used 'imperatives' and 'can' instead, which are both inappropriate. The former indicates the state of commanding and the latter is used to express ability, possibility, permission, request and offer. Assessing prior knowledge like this allows the teachers to understand the needs of students and plan their instructions accordingly. Explicit explanation of the use of 'should/should not' to give advice was then given in the lesson.

Example 1B

Students' good work
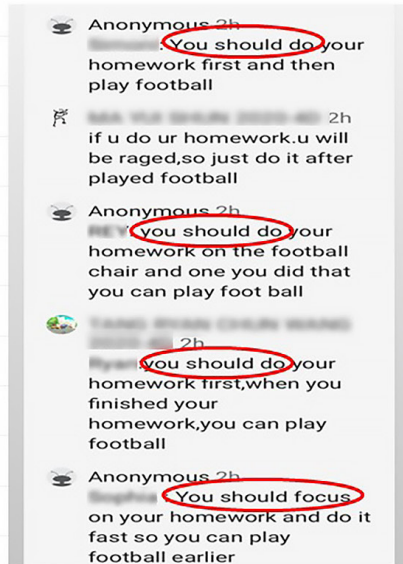
The vast majority of students were able to use "should" to give advice during the lesson.

The basic objective aim achieved

(See screenshot)

We did some extension work...

"I recommend _____(ing)

2) why don't you...?)

3) if I were you, I would...

T's comment:

Good: Extra grammar points; many were able to use them.

Immediately presented a diverse range of ability, but catered through choice

Could've differentiated more on the lesson objectives
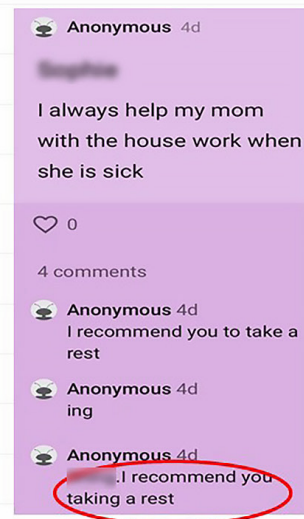
After receiving exposure to the target language, students were asked to rewrite their advice (Example 1B). Based on the work of students, the teacher realised that students were able to use 'should' and 'should not' correctly. The teacher then made a qualitative data-driven decision. They introduced some other expressions of giving advice, such as 'I recommend....', 'Why don't you....' and 'If I were you, I would....' to enhance students' English ability.

Example 1C

Consolidation: Homework

E-learning Game

We _____ smoke because smoking is bad for our health.

A should   B should not

2 of 10

You should not _____ too much fast food.

A eats   B ate   C eating   D eat

3 of 10

Should we _____ a bike without a helmet?

A rode   B rides   C ride   D to ride

3 of 10

Result 7 for 'Should or shouldn't'

ASSIGNMENT   QUIZ   16 Mar 11:26   No deadline   10 (11)   All · Best ○ First   wordwall.net/play/12668/147/466

Summary

NO. STUDENTS	AVERAGE SCORE	TOP SCORE	FASTEST
10	9.9 /10	10 /10 9 students	4.3 s sherlock

Correct or incorrect by question

Score distribution

Using data to improve instruction

Results by question

SORT BY · Number   ○ Correct   ○ Incorrect

	Question	Correct	Incorr...
1	Jack cannot focus in the online lesson. He _____ turn off the Youtube function in his digital device.	10	0
2	The COVID-19 situation is serious, we _____ wear a mask when we go out.	10	0
3	If you have fever, you _____ go to school.	10	0
4	We _____ bully the others.	10	0
5	You _____ click the raise hand button before you want to share your opinion in the online lesson.	10	0
6	You _____ turn on your camera during the online lesson.	10	0
7	You _____ keep on jumping around in the classroom.	10	0
8	Mary gains a lot of weight during the school suspension period, she _____ do more exercise to keep fit.	10	0
9	We should _____ more vegetable in each meal.	9	1
10	We should _____ the door before we get into the classroom.	10	0

Results by student

SORT BY · Submission   ○ Name   ○ Correct · Time

	Student	Submitted	Correct	Incorrect	Time
	Arianna	11:36 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	1:11
	Micah	11:36 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	1:20
	Agnes	11:36 - 16 Mar 2021	9	1	1:18
	Anya b	11:36 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	1:28
	Jessica Liu	11:36 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	1:35
	Aaron li	11:37 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	53.5
	sherlock	11:38 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	43.5
	T	11:38 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	58.8
	Hayden	11:38 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	1:19
	kingsley leung	11:41 - 16 Mar 2021	10	0	2:06

Offering reports to track students' performance is a good point of using online learning platforms. Example 1C illustrates the e-homework assigned by teacher after the lesson. Other than giving a summary report, the e-learning tool "Wordwall" also showed results by students and questions. It outlined where students performed well and advised those who needed more input. This made it easier for teachers to provide specific and timely feedback to students based on the data analysis. So the teacher considered it as an alternative to traditional pen-and-paper homework to consolidate student learning and check retention levels.

2. **Using Multi-sensory Strategies to Increase Student Participation**

According to Morin (n.d.), multi-sensory instruction is a teaching strategy that uses more than one sense at a time. By conveying information through five senses, such as touch, smell, taste, movement, hearing and sight, students are encouraged to connect with new information by different means. It is particularly effective to engage students in online classes without the physical presence of students.
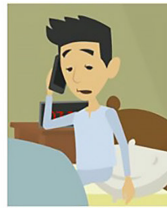
Example 2A

Lead in

Video (Star Class)

Our teacher gets upset when students don't come to class. So you **should** go to class.
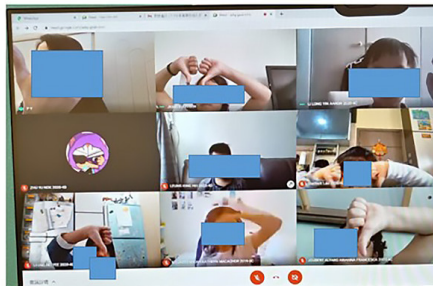
You **should not** go to class today. You cannot focus in class when you feel sick.

Whose advice do you agree with?
Should my friend go to class today?

Physical checks for understanding:
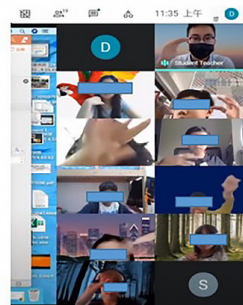### Giving hand signs to show a response to a question

Turn on your camera

Give me a thumbs up if you think he *should* go to class.

Give me a thumbs down if you think he *should not/shouldn't* go to class.

Give me a thumbs up if you think he *should* go to class.

Give me a shaking hand if you think he *should not/shouldn't* go to class.

Check for understanding:
To show a response to a question in the chat box

What is the good idea the girl is telling you about?

Our teacher gets upset when students don't come to class. So you **should** go to class.

You **should not** go to class today. You cannot focus in class when you feel sick.
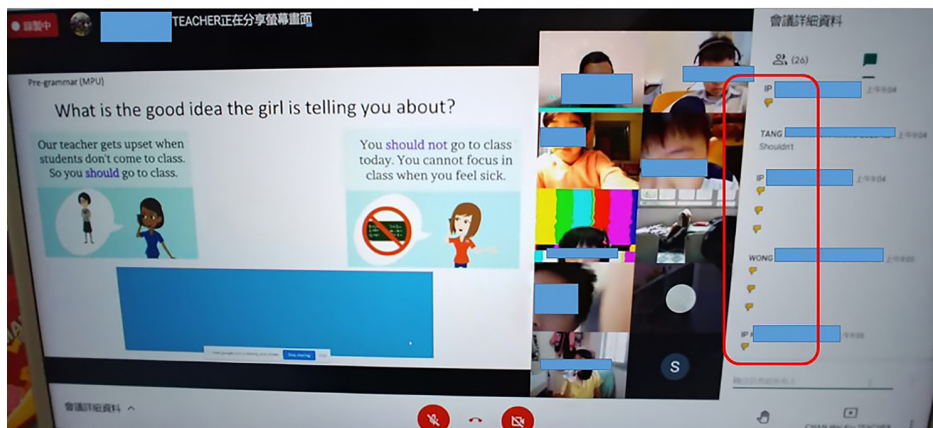
Example 2A illustrates how the teacher made good use of multi-sensory strategies to enhance student participation. A video was played as a lead-in to arouse students' interest. Students were then asked if the boy having a fever in the video should go to school or not. When the question was posed to the class, students were asked to respond by simply giving a thumbs up or thumbs down — the responses were then displayed on the screen in real-time. Such classroom response system not only can help engage students, but also let teachers understand how students are performing. It also gives students a chance to move a bit after sitting in front of the computer for long. Asking students to insert the emoji of thumbs up or thumbs down in the chat box is another way to serve the purpose of increasing student participation as all students have a chance to express their idea.

Example 2B

Formative assessment:
Using "should" and "should not" to make sentences about obligation.

Using Online Random Wheel to motivate and engage students in a fun way
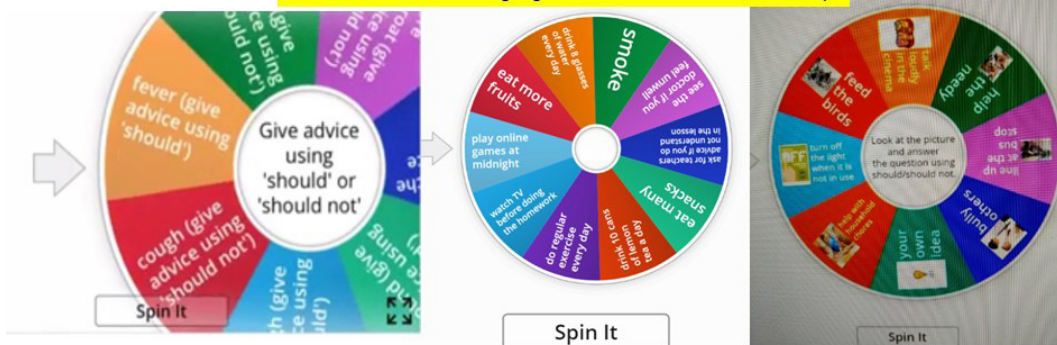
Different versions to cater learner diversity

Entertainment-driven learners are more easily motivated to benefit from the learning process through meaningful activities defined in a game context (Covaci, Ghinea, Lin et al., 2018). In view of the fact that educational computer games can improve both attention and memory of students, the teacher designed a game-based activity to check students' understanding of using 'should' or 'should not' to talk about obligation (Example 2B). Students were very excited about having their names on the random wheel. The sound of students' laughter filled the air once a student was picked to make a sentence based on the hints given in another wheel. Since students were eager to know who the next would be and how the classmate would perform, they concentrated in class.

3. **Using E-learning Tools to Foster Self- and Peer Assessment**

Self-assessment and peer assessment are assessments which allow students to assess their own performance and each other's performance respectively. Both can be used as part of a formative assessment process. They are valuable in helping students to reflect on their own learning and learn from each other. Most importantly, by having self- and peer assessment, students learn how to be responsible for their own learning.

Example 3A

As mentioned earlier in Example 1A, students were taught the form, use and meaning of the modal verb 'should' and 'should not' after being diagnosed with having problems in giving advice in the pre-lesson task. To ensure students understand the key concepts, the teacher used an e-learning tool "Padlet" to create multiple walls to house all the posts shared by students. Students were then required to assess their own performance by correcting their mistakes on the Padlet (Example 3A). Besides helping students clarify their misconceptions by themselves, the activity also makes it easier for the teacher to manage instant student feedback on one screen.

Example 3B

Mr. So would like to go to a movie while he hasn't finished marking the dictation. Give him one advice to solve his problem.
Please type your name as well...

Students vote for the best piece of advice

Anonymous 4mo
You should watch the movie first then mark the dictation
♥ 3
1 comment
Anonymous 4mo
joshua herv movies are mostly watched at night when he finshed then it will be minight

Mr So, you should:
1) Mark the dictation first, then you can go to watch the movie another day.
2)Ask Miss Luo to help you mark it. (You should remember to buy a gift for her, such as a necklace !)
3)Ask me to help! 😄😄😄😄(just saying)
♥ 3
1 comment
Anonymous 4mo
You can choose one of them to follow, Mr So.

Mr. So should mark the dictation and then go to a movie, because the dictation has a due date, but the movie doesn't.
♥ 1
1 comment
Anonymous 4mo
some movies have limits

Anonymous 4mo
:you should ask ms Lou to help mark the dictation
♥ 3
3 comments
Anonymous 4mo
nice
Anonymous 4mo
good
Anonymous 4mo
cool

you should forget about the movie and mark the dictation instead 😊
♥ 3
Add comment

Anonymous 4mo
Mr So can:
1) You should mark the dictation first then go to watch the movie
2)You should mark it the next day

** Only Emergency** Ask Ms Luo to help you (Do something nice for her. E.g. Buy her a gift or something) **Just Emergency**
♥ 2
1 comment
Anonymous 4mo
Good idea

Anonymous 4mo
1.you should watch the movie first then mark the dictation
2.you should ask miss lou to help and go to the movie(and you should buy a big present for her or two)
3.you should wait for miss lou to mark it and you should go to the movie with her
4.you should watch on netflix
5.you should ask me to help
6. you should forget about the dictation and watch the movie then make an excuse why you didn't mark the dictation and they will be mad at you(im joking don't try it)
♥ 4

Anonymous 4mo
Mr. So should mark the dictation before he goes to the movir
♡ 0

Assessment as Learning

Peer Assessment

Vote for the best piece of advice, think about:
1. Is it a good idea?
2. Is the grammar correct?

Click on the ❤ to show your choice.

Many teachers agree, applying the language by actually using it, i.e. immersion, is one of the most effective ways to learn the language. Thus, the teacher created a chance for students to practise giving advice to others. What the students had to do was to read classmates' problems which were collected in advance, followed by giving advice to at least three classmates (Example 3B). By doing so, teachers could see if students were able to transfer what they have just learnt to a new context. Students were then given clear criteria to assess their peers' performance. They could click on the heart button to vote for the best piece of work.

The activity encouraged students to build up their understanding, as well as to reflect on their learning by comparing their own work to their peers. By giving each other feedback, students learnt from and supported each other. It helps students develop lifelong skills to improve their own work. And it tells why peer assessment is an important component of Assessment as Learning.

The two examples above have shown that self- and peer assessment can still conveniently and effectively be carried out in online lessons by using e-learning tools.

Actions Taken

A meeting was held in early September, right at the beginning of the academic year, to discuss the needs of English teachers and confirm the focus of collaboration with the English panel head. School Development Officer of the QSIP-CEAL Project paid a courtesy class visit to a P4 class to get a general idea of learning and teaching at the school.

Three units, two from the P4 textbook and one from the P3 textbook, were chosen for collaborative lesson planning. After each cycle of collaborative sessions, lesson observations and post-lesson-observation feedback sessions were conducted. Evaluation meetings with P4 and P3 teachers were held at the end of each term to enable reflection and assist in the identification of future change.

A within school dissemination was arranged in June in which English teachers who participated in the project shared experiences and insights gained from all initiatives taken with teachers of other subjects.

Impact

1. Student Level

The impacts of assessment literacy on student learning are positive. Students have got more involved in self- and peer evaluation. According to teachers, students have become more able to reflect on their own performance as well as to give meaningful feedback to peers. Besides, a major increase in students' motivation and engagement in online lessons was noticed.

2. Teacher Level

The collaboration has enriched teachers' knowledge and skills on conducting classroom formative assessment. They have been more aware of learning, teaching and assessment alignment. Teachers have also developed their I.T. skills, being familiar with online learning tools in particular. With those well-chosen e-learning tools, teachers were able to check student understanding, encourage peer learning and facilitate self-correction.

Teachers have also been more confident to make use of student data to inform their instruction. They all agreed that making use of both the qualitative and quantitative data in formative assessments did help teachers better identify students' learning difficulties.

Way Forward

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, technology-driven learning was adopted in the last two years and the 'classroom-only' approach is transforming. Traditional face-to-face learning is combined with e-learning. Students are given greater flexibility such as learning at their own pace. It helps students with different learning needs and styles to realise their full potential. Having experienced the benefits of using online tools and platforms in enhancing learning and teaching in the virtual classroom, teachers at Catholic Mission School have come to a conclusion that they are working towards a hybrid model of teaching in the future. They plan to explore more about blended learning, which is the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences, and is an effective way to enhance student learning by using various formative assessment tools.

Teachers have also learnt that assessment could be used as an investigative tool to find out as much as we can about what students know, and the confusion, misconceptions, or gaps they might have. Teachers believe that assessment literacy is about a continuous process of growth for students as well. Inspired by this project, in the future, they would like to guide students to become assessment-capable students who are able to evaluate the processes and products of their learning. The ultimate goal is to help students to become a self-directed learner – being able to think more actively about where they are now, where they are going and how to get there.

References

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