



Reforming Short Story Teaching and Assessment

School

Sacred Heart Canossian School

Background

Schools are beginning to create an assessment-as-learning culture by strengthening the alignment between assessment and the intended curriculum. Teachers are brushing up their skills in developing school-based curricula that prescribe the intended learning outcomes in parallel with the assessment methods so that students know exactly what to learn and how to demonstrate they have learnt it.

When creating an assessment instrument to evaluate if a learning outcome is achieved, the validity of the instrument must be considered (Hughes, 2003). The validity of an assessment is that the instrument ‘measures accurately what it is intended to measure’ (p.26). This article demonstrates how teachers of Sacred Heart Canossian School were guided to examine the validity of the assessment materials developed for the short-story reading curriculum and how they reacted to their discoveries.

Level

Primary 5

Strategies Used

With the aim of aligning assessment with the intended learning outcomes, the team of teachers implemented the following strategies:

- 1. Reviewing current teaching strategies and assessment practices relevant to the development focus**
- 2. Discussing the discrepancies between the current teaching and assessment practice and the intended curriculum**
- 3. Revising teaching, learning and assessment strategies at the same time**

Actions Taken

The tables below illustrate the details of implementing the three strategies.

I. Reviewing Current Teaching Strategies and Assessment Practices Relevant to the Development Focus

Action Steps

1. Recall the major learning and teaching activities for using short stories in the classroom
2. Analyze the question types and formats used in the teaching and assessment tools

Discovery

1. Learning and Teaching Activities

- Teachers went through each chapter with the students by:
 - reading through the story with students
 - articulating the storyline in each chapter
 - teaching vocabulary
 - discussing scenes and character traits at the end of each chapter
- Teachers found it quite time-consuming to read through the chapters page by page, and the students, especially those with short attention spans, felt bored soon after a short while. They admitted that the book talks remained at a superficial level due to the limited lesson time, and the activities that helped students to read the story with appreciation and make self-to-text connection were limited.

2. The Teaching and Assessment Tools

- The assessment tasks used for classroom and formative assessment purposes were targeting at training the students to elicit factual information that could be located through searching the texts. The questions were written in the text format. Picture questions were not common.
- The assessment tasks used for summative assessment purposes were written using four short-answer question formats: multiple-choice, sequencing, true or false, and blank-filling. The questions appeared to test the students' ability to memorize and recall facts and details, which were not the core skills the teachers intended to measure.

II. Discussing the Discrepancies between the Current Teaching and Assessment Practice and the Intended Curriculum

Action Steps

1. Revisit/recognise the objectives and intended learning outcomes of using short stories in the English classroom
2. Identify the language skills and the generic skills the students needed to acquire to read a short story
3. Discuss the discrepancies between the current teaching and assessment practice and the intended curriculum

Discovery

1. What the Existing Curriculum Achieved

- The existing curriculum enabled the students to gain the text-type and language knowledge of the following aspects to achieve the goals of internal and external assessments.

<input type="radio"/> Book Title	<input type="radio"/> Themes
<input type="radio"/> Author	<input type="radio"/> Points of View
<input type="radio"/> Illustrator	<input type="radio"/> Character
<input type="radio"/> Publisher	<input type="radio"/> Setting
<input type="radio"/> ISBN	<input type="radio"/> Plot
	<input type="radio"/> Conflict

2. What was Required to Better Achieve the Intended Learning Outcomes

- As most of the students already performed very well in identifying the facts and details, the teachers would like to develop classroom assessment tasks that develop students' abilities to:
 - make text-to-self connection
 - perceive the purposes and beauty of selected writing techniques used in a short story, and apply them in their own writing
 - develop higher-order reading and thinking skills through discussing and commenting on the ideas, events and issues promoted in the story

III. Revising Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies at the Same Time

Action Steps

1. Formulate learning objectives and meaningful criteria to assess learning outcomes
2. Design appropriate assessment tasks for both formative and summative purposes to achieve intended learning outcomes
3. Implement the planned assessment tasks
4. Examine the impact of the implemented tasks on learning and teaching

Examples of Revised Learning and Assessment Tasks

Example 1: Pre-reading Task: My Sibling(s) and Me

This pre-reading task was specially added to the first lesson of using the storybook with the students. It aimed to increase students' interest in reading the story and help them make a connection with the book.

Paste a photo taken with your sibling. Write a caption about it. Describe your sibling relationship using one / two adjective(s) and explain your choice of words.



Answer one of the questions below:

- Our sibling relationship is _____ (adjective) because _____

- If you do not have a sibling, do you wish to have one? Why?

Objective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To connect students to the theme 2. To predict what the story is about using the title and pictorial clues 3. To facilitate discussions
Procedure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students brought a photo taken with sibling(s). 2. Students wrote a caption about it. 3. Students described their sibling relationship using one/two adjective and explain their choice of words. 4. Students shared their views on having siblings among group mates. 5. Teacher assigned students to look at the picture on the front cover and read the title aloud with them. Teacher then asked them what they might read about in the book.
Success Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students guessed the theme and made prediction about the story using the pictorial clues and their background knowledge and personal experience. 2. Students demonstrated willingness to share their thoughts and ideas.

Example 2: Facts and Details Quick Quiz

The questions below were written to get the students to self-assess their understanding of the facts and details. The question types and formats varied to meet the classroom, school, and territory-wide assessment goals.

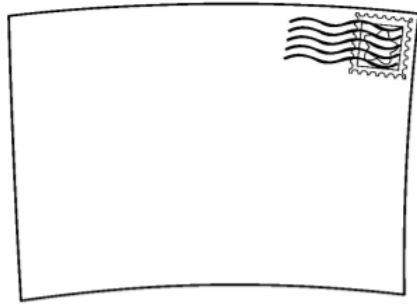
Most of the questions were Literal Questions, for which answers could be located directly from the text.

Read the chapter 'Fifty-fifty'. Answer the questions to show your understanding.

1. This chapter is written from The Pain's / The Great One's point of view. (circle the correct answer)
2. Read line 3 of p.6, 'But he shut his mouth and shook his head.' means
 - A. Jacob refused Abigail's offer to help.
 - B. Jacob accepted Abigail's offer to help.
3. Read line 2 of p.7. The word 'swallow' means
 - A. (noun) a small bird with pointed wings and a tail with two points that flies quickly and catches insects to eat as it flies
 - B. (verb) to cause food, drink, pills, etc. to move from your mouth into your stomach by using the muscles of your throat
4. Read line 10 of p.9, what does 'it' refer to?
 - A. the microscope
 - B. Jacob's tooth
 - C. the envelop
5. Circle the flap of the envelope.



6. What did Abigail write on the front of the envelope?



7. Read lines 3-7 of p.10, 'I didn't let it out of my sight for one minute. And now look -- you lose everything!' How did Abigail feel when she said the above line?

<p>Objective</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To self-check own understanding of story facts and details after first reading at home 2. To check answers with peers and learn to justify own answers by stating the contextual clues 3. To raise questions to solve discrepancies
<p>Procedure</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher assigned students to read the chapter and complete the worksheet before the lesson. 2. Teacher started the lesson by checking the answer of the first question in the worksheet with the students. Teacher demonstrated how answers could be elicited from a group mate and what students could do when they came across a different answer from theirs. 3. Teachers assigned students to check the worksheet answers with their seatmates. Teachers encouraged students to raise questions to each other to solve discrepancies. Students should justify their answers by pointing out the contextual clues. 4. Teacher put up useful expressions to remind students about the language they might use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'My answer is ... / not the same as yours. I think the answer is ... because it says ... here / in line ...' • 'I think my answer is wrong. How did you get yours?' • 'I don't think our answers are right. Let's ask the teacher.' 5. Teacher checked answers with students (focused on mainly the difficult ones).
<p>Success Criteria</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students read the text and completed the worksheet. 2. Students confirmed their understanding of facts and details by checking answers with group mates. 3. Students justified their answers by pointing out the clues used. 4. Students asked questions to resolve discrepancies.

Example 3: Higher-order Thinking Questions

The following inferential question was one of the questions used during the lesson to develop students' higher-order thinking skills. Answers needed to be interpreted from the character's speech or action in the story. The options were produced to stimulate the students to think. To avoid blind guesses, students were invited to explain their answers.

3a. Read lines 1-2 of p. 43. Abigail told Emily, " You can kiss him instead." And walked away. Why * did Abigail say so and walked away?

A. Abigail thought Emily liked Lucas so she asked her to do so.




B. Abigail thought about what happened at the dinner table and wanted to get away from the troubles.

C. All of the above.

3b. Explain your answer in 3a. *

詳答文字

Objective	To study the character's speech and infer his intent and / thoughts								
Procedure	<p>1. Students read the texts assigned before answering the questions.</p> <p>2. Teacher collected and analysed students' response using Online Forms.</p> <div data-bbox="403 1182 1362 1648"> <p>Reader WS Ch. 5 Chasing Lucas</p> <p>3a. Read lines 1-2 of p. 43. Abigail told Emily, " You can kiss him instead." And walked away. Why did Abigail say so and walked away?</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Student Responses for Question 3a</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Option</th> <th>Number of Responses</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A. Abigail thought Emily liked Lucas so she asked her to do so.</td> <td>9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B. Abigail thought about what happened at the dinner table and wanted to get away from the troubles.</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C. All of the above.</td> <td>7</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <div data-bbox="403 1666 1362 1966"> <p>3b. Explain your answers</p> <p>It's because Abigail doesn't want her brother, Jake sees her is kissing Lucas.</p> <p>It's because Abigail doesn't want her brother sees her is kissing Lucas.</p> <p>The book said.</p> <p>Abigail thought about what happened at the dinner table and do not want to bully or make fun of Lucas.</p> <p>Abigail said that and walked away because she thought Emily liked Lucas so she asked her do so.</p> <p>Abigail told Emily, " You can kiss him instead."because Abigail don't want to kiss Lucas.</p> <p>Abigail thought about what happened at the dinner table wanted to get away .</p> </div>	Option	Number of Responses	A. Abigail thought Emily liked Lucas so she asked her to do so.	9	B. Abigail thought about what happened at the dinner table and wanted to get away from the troubles.	12	C. All of the above.	7
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<p>Procedure</p>	<p>3. Teacher combined feedback and instruction - turning students' answers into teaching materials while giving feedback.</p> <p>4. Teachers guided students to obtain the right answers by demonstrating the 'thinking-aloud' process using the Speech-Cause-Effect organiser.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="416 387 1409 992"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="416 387 724 465">Speech</th> <th data-bbox="724 387 1066 465">Cause</th> <th data-bbox="1066 387 1409 465">Effect</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="416 465 724 992"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacob, " I know more. Want to hear"  </td> <td data-bbox="724 465 1066 992"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacob interrupted Abigail's conversation with their parents. He was told to shut up. • He wanted his parents to know more about the girls-chasing-Lucas story. He thought that was funny </td> <td data-bbox="1066 465 1409 992"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abigail shouted at Jacob again, trying to stop him from going on disclosing the details about the girls-chasing-Lucas story. </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Speech	Cause	Effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacob, " I know more. Want to hear" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacob interrupted Abigail's conversation with their parents. He was told to shut up. • He wanted his parents to know more about the girls-chasing-Lucas story. He thought that was funny 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abigail shouted at Jacob again, trying to stop him from going on disclosing the details about the girls-chasing-Lucas story.
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<p>Success Criteria</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students reread the assigned text to infer the character's speech/ action. 2. Students explained their answers (in writing). 3. Students reviewed/ revised their answers according to teacher's feedback. 						

Example 4: Mastering the ‘Show! Don’t Tell!’ Techniques

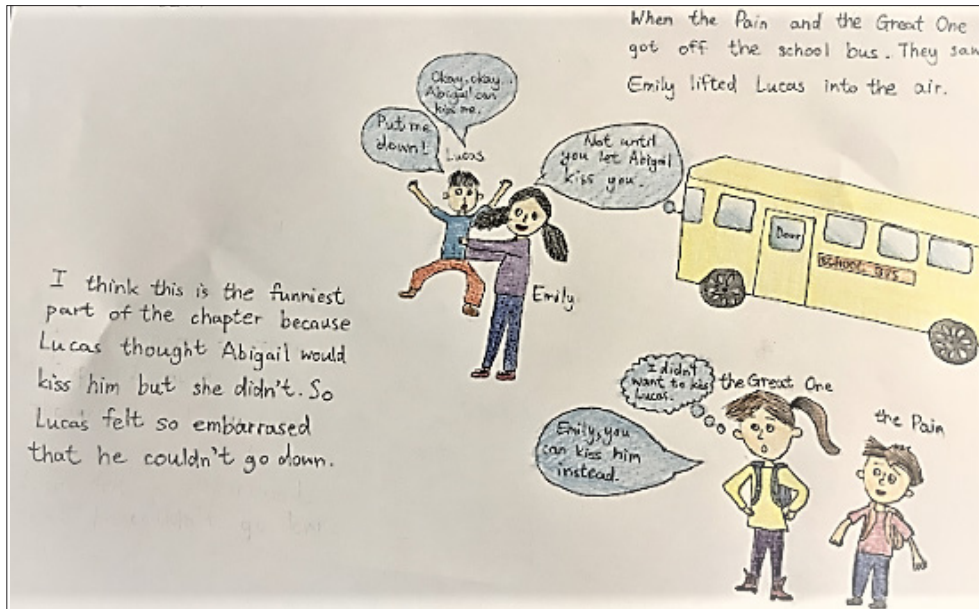
The ‘Show! Don’t Tell’ writing technique was explicitly taught to show students how to create a story that engages the reader’s imagination. Discussions were held to figure out the writer’s intentions to describe the characters’ actions in detail.

Objective	To learn how to write a more interesting story by <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. adding conversations to develop the characters; 2. applying the ‘Showing! Not Telling’ technique to create mental pictures in the reader’s mind. 						
Procedure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers displayed the texts by which the writer reveals their characters through describing their actions. Teachers guided the students to visualize the text and compare the <i>Showing Sentences</i> with the <i>Telling Sentences</i> to feel the effects created. <table border="1" data-bbox="437 775 1391 1014"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="437 775 912 819">Show</th> <th data-bbox="912 775 1391 819">Tell</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="437 819 912 898">But he shut his mouth and shook his head.</td> <td data-bbox="912 819 1391 898">But Jacob did not like the offer.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="437 898 912 1014">But the Pain just stood there smiling his dragon smile, holding his half of the loot.</td> <td data-bbox="912 898 1391 1014">The Pain won. He ended up getting just half of the loot.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> 2. Students rewrote a <i>Showing Sentence</i> into a <i>Telling Sentence</i> and/or vice versa. 	Show	Tell	But he shut his mouth and shook his head.	But Jacob did not like the offer.	But the Pain just stood there smiling his dragon smile, holding his half of the loot.	The Pain won. He ended up getting just half of the loot.
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But he shut his mouth and shook his head.	But Jacob did not like the offer.						
But the Pain just stood there smiling his dragon smile, holding his half of the loot.	The Pain won. He ended up getting just half of the loot.						
Success Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students located other Showing Sentences in the story. 2. Students applied the technique in story-writing assignments. 						

Example 5: Drawing Assignments - Visualize the Text

The drawing assignments were assigned at the end of each chapter to encourage students to illustrate their favourite character or favourite scene of the story.

Student's work: 'My Favorite Part of the Chapter'



Objective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To develop students' ability to visualize the texts 2. To help students to get a sense of characters (how they look and act) and where the author is setting the story
Procedure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher explained the purpose and the success criteria of the assignment. 2. Teacher assigned students to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. reread the story and choose a part of the story that impresses/ interests them the most; ii. draw pictures to illustrate the scene(s); iii. use paper and pencil and do a rough draft; iv. color their illustration or simply outline it in ink. 3. Students wrote captions to explain their choice of favourite scene (or their illustration).
Success Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students displayed their visualization of the text via drawing. 2. Students captured the crucial objects/details that remind the audience about the scene or understand the scene better. 3. Students wrote captions to explain the selection of scene or to illustrate the text-to-self connection.

Impact

1. Student Level

Students took part in the classroom assessment activities that offered them the opportunities to recognize the features of an engaging story and the significance of using them. They learned to identify the high-level story writing techniques, such as ‘Adding Dialogues’ and ‘Show! Don’t Tell’, used in the story followed by applying them to their own writing. Their assignments displayed pleasing improvement in both confidence and ability to comprehend and write a short story.

With the learning objectives and success criteria being explicitly conveyed, students were empowered to self-assess their own learning. They shared their learning output with their teachers and their classmates, providing information that could be used as feedback to improve learning and teaching. They themselves became one of the learning resources, contributing significantly to guiding their teachers to adjust their teaching plans to address their learning needs.

2. Teacher Level

Teachers have realised that the clarity and appropriateness of learning targets builds a foundation of sound assessment practice. They gained knowledge about learning, teaching and assessment from the three designated workshops and developed the skills of evaluating the validity of assessment instruments through practice.

Teachers’ awareness of prioritising assessment design and practice to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning was heightened. They designed assessment activities that enabled the teaching process to seek and interpret evidence of student learning. They also made a good attempt to use assessment data to improve learning and teaching.

3. Curriculum Level

There is a clear direction for reconstructing the story-reading curriculum. Following the strategies for aligning assessment and intended learning outcomes, the P5 story teaching curriculum was reviewed and revised in order that the expected learning outcomes for the target story reading and writing skills were identified, taught and assessed accordingly. Improvements in content validity, item sequence, item clarity and difficulty level of internal assessments were observed.

4. Departmental Level and School Level

The facilitation of teacher collaboration, peer observation and professional dialogues with regard to the features of both formative and summative assessments illustrated what being assessment literate entails and why teachers' assessment knowledge and competence are so important to student learning. The school and curriculum leaders were made aware that the development of assessment literacy should be viewed as a career-long learning process, which is ongoing, experiential and collaborative.

Way Forward

With the knowledge and skills gained, the curriculum leaders will lead their colleagues to reinforce good assessment practice in all contexts. They will continue to see learning target clarity and appropriateness as a foundation of sound assessment practice, and advocate for student involvement in their learning through the use of assessment as a learning and teaching strategy. They will also continue to share their experiences with other subject departments and the fellow CEAL schools.

References

Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for language teachers* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.