Alignment of Teaching and Assessment and Using Assessment Data to Make Educational Decisions

School

Tin Shui Wai Methodist College

Background

The mastery of reading skills is essential for the acquisition of knowledge and one of the important skills is reading beyond the surface by making inferences (The Curriculum Development Council, 2018, p.29 & 32). Teachers at Tin Shui Wai Methodist College, through needs analysis, saw the need for students to enhance their inference skills to gain a deeper understanding of reading texts. With assessment being a significant part of the learning and teaching cycle, teachers also aimed at improving existing assessment practices and explore ways to collect and use assessment data which would provide detailed and accurate information about students' mastery of target knowledge and skills and help teachers plan their next-step instructions (Popham, 2018).

A needs analysis based on students' performance as reflected in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Item Analysis Reports, S1-3 internal assessment papers across 2017/18 and 2018/19 as well as students' performance in class during three courtesy visits to S2 classes was done and the following needs were identified.

1. On English Language Learning, Teaching and Assessment Practices:

a. helping students develop higher order thinking skills, namely making inferences from reading texts
b. engaging students more in the assessment cycle in the forms of assessment for learning

2. On the Use of Assessment Data:

a. strengthening the alignment between learning, teaching and assessment
b. a more comprehensive and purposeful approach to the type of assessment data to be collected and recorded
c. the practice of using assessment data to make data-driven decisions on what and how to teach and assess

Level

Secondary 2

Strategies Used

1. The Use of Internal and External Assessment Papers and Data to Capture Students' Strengths and Weaknesses as well as the Quality of Internal Assessment Papers

Using the HKDSE Item Analysis Report and data collected from internal examinations, areas of good performance and areas needing further improvement by students were identified. The areas of good performance were then strengthened and developed to further stretch students' abilities. The identified areas requiring further improvement helped teachers to prioritise what to teach and re-examine the approaches that had previously been used to teach and assess the related items.

2. A Backward Planning Approach on the Learning and Teaching of Inference Skill in Reading

Using the backward planning approach, teachers determined the learning objectives by analysing the assessments students were to complete. The analysis of the assessments helped teachers identify a sequenced set of subskills and bodies of enabling knowledge that students must master en-route to mastering the curricular aims (Popham, 2018). The identified subskills and enabling knowledge were then sequenced as small goals for students to achieve. Based on these small goals, teachers planned instructions and tasks in the formative assessment process to help students attain them step by step.

3. The Use of Multiple Forms of Assessment and Assessment Data to Feedback Teaching, Learning and Assessment Design

The types of assessment data to be collected and the way they were analysed and presented were discussed and improved with an increase in purposefulness. E-platforms and their data collecting function were also utilized and incorporated into lessons as learning tasks to collect data which inform students' performance. Based on the data collected, follow-up measures and tasks were designed to help students reflect, re-learn, correct and progress.

Actions Taken

1. A Backward-planning Approach: Identifying Target Knowledge and Skills by Analysing Assessment Questions

With a short story excerpt and a playscript in the planned S2 curriculum, the type of inference skill to be taught was inferring the feelings of the characters in the story and play from their speech and actions. The enabling knowledge and the sub-skills needed to successfully make such inferences were identified:

Enabling Knowledge	Sub-skills
adjectives describing feelings	associating speech and actions with particular feelings
the words and patterns used in the utterances of the characters	
language describing actions of the characters	

Upon identifying the enabling knowledge and sub-skills, various teaching materials and practice tasks were designed and sequenced to help students acquire them.

2. Using Formative Assessment Tasks in an Online Classroom

In the midst of all the challenges faced by educators during the school suspension period, teachers still exerted every effort to design online formative assessment tasks to gather evidence of learning. The assessment data were then analysed and used to feedback learning and teaching.

Step	Activity / Task
1	PowerPoint slides were used to help students learn the adjectives describing feelings and the respective actions, facial expressions and utterances that show such emotions. Visual aids and words of differing degrees of difficulty were provided to cater for learner diversity. Instead of directly transmitting the knowledge to students, teachers guided students to come up with the actions, facial expressions and utterances by asking them what they could see from the character in the visual aids and led them to infer the meaning of the adjectives describing feelings. Students were guided to jot notes and organise the knowledge using graphic organisers. With teachers telling students the notes would be used for a task on the lesson and making the notes a piece of work to be submitted for checking after the lesson, the need for jotting down notes was made clear to students and their motivation in doing so increased.

Step	Activity / Task
2	With the input, students were then given the opportunity to apply their knowledge in a tiered blank-filling exercise which they could do on an e-platform. Students were given the autonomy to choose 'Easy' (with basic level contextual clues and visual aids), 'Normal' (with basic level contextual clues only) and 'Hard' (with advanced level contextual clues) according to their own readiness. Using the e-platform, students' answers and assessment data were collected automatically and teachers could use these assessment data for analysis and feedback to teaching. Easy version with basic level contextual clues and visual aids Normal level with basic level contextual clues

Easy version with basic level contextual clues and visual aids

HOW TO GUESS THE FEELINGS? (NORMAL)

■ When Yoyo found out that her friend had lied to her, she showed her teeth and screamed, 'Argh!' at her friend. She was _____ about being cheated.

Normal level with basic level contextual clues

Q1a. When Yoyo found out that her friend had lied to her, she showed her teeth and screamed, *
'Argh!' at her friend. She was _____ about being cheated.

Short answer text

Step	Activity / Task
	Hard version with advanced level contextual clues
	Q1a. When Yoyo found out that her friend had lied to her, she stomped her feet and showed her * teeth. Then, she shouted hysterically at her friend. She was _____ about being cheated. Short answer text
3	The following note-worthy observations could be made from analysing the assessment data and students' answers: a. More high achievers could be encouraged to attempt the 'Hard' level exercise. b. Some students attempting the 'Easy' level were able to infer the feelings of the characters in the task but still used basic adjectives instead of target adjectives. For example, some used 'happy' instead of 'delighted' and 'angry' instead of 'furious'. c. Most students in the stronger class were able to infer the characters' feelings from contextual clues and express them using the target adjectives, but some showed difficulty in differentiating between positive emotions like 'delighted', 'excited' and 'enthusiastic'.

Weaker Class

Choose your level.	Q1a. When Yoyo found out that her friend had lied to her, she showed her teeth and screamed at her friend. She was _____ about being cheated.
Hard	
Easy	furious
Easy	Angry
Easy	Angry
Hard	
Hard	
Easy	furious
Easy	Angry
Normal	
Easy	Furious
Easy	Furious
Easy	Angry
Normal	
Normal	
Easy	Angry.
Normal	
Easy	furious
Easy	Again
Easy	Again
Easy	
Easy	

Stronger Class

Choose your level.	Q4a. When Henry knows that he is going to get a prize, he shouts, 'Hooray!' and jumps up and down. He feels _____ about it so much.	Q4b. What are the clues (e.g., eyes shining with joy) that can help you guess the feeling word?
Hard		
Easy	amused	jumps up and down
Easy	Exciting	jumps up and down.
Easy	Happy	Mouth
Hard		
Hard		
Easy	delighted	'Hooray!'
Easy	Eurhusiastic	Eyes
Normal		
Easy	Enthusiaic	mouth
Easy	Enthusiastic	Jump or dance
Easy	Happy	Eyes
Normal		
Normal		
Easy	Delighted.	Jump.
Normal		
Easy	enthusiastic	jumps up and down
Easy	Excited	jumps up
Easy	Exciting	Hooray!
Easy	Enthusiastic	eves
Easy	Surprise	
Normal		

Step	Activity / Task
4	Based on the observations, a video targeting the challenges students faced was made to help students clarify concepts and pay attention to traps. While the 'skip' function of the e-platform allowed high achievers to skip the parts they already know, the 're-watch' function allowed low achievers to re-watch the clarifications by teachers to consolidate their understanding. In addition to the follow-up video, a follow-up practice task was set on questions that students found challenging to check whether they had gained a better understanding of the concepts. HOW TO GUESS THE FEELINGS? (NORMAL) ■ When Yoyo found out that her friend had lied to her, she showed her teeth and screamed, 'Argh!' at her friend. She was _____ about being cheated. Yellow: What do you **do**? Orange: How does your face look? Blue: What is the **sound** you make? Green: What is the **Cause / Situation**? NOTE Please THINK before I give you the answers. Rewatch Skip Continue Q1a. The kids were really _____ about the idea of having a party. It's the first time that I saw them prepare tables, chairs, balloons and all the food in only 15 minutes! They jumped up and down and can't wait to have fun! * Short answer text Q1b. What are the clues (e.g. eyes shining with joy) that can help you guess the feeling word? * Short answer text Q2a. My mom saw the 'A' on my report card and she was absolutely _____. She was smiling happily and her eyes are shining. * Short answer text
5	The assessment data from the follow-up task showed that while low achievers would require further practice to consolidate their learning, high achievers were ready to move from application to creation. Students were put into mixed ability groups. High achievers were instructed to create a situation with contextual clues and low achievers were given the task to read the situations and highlight the contextual clues in different colours to show understanding. The grouping of students provided opportunities to students of different abilities to contribute and allowed high achievers to help low achievers when they faced problems identifying the contextual clues.

Step	Activity / Task
5	The sentences produced by the groups were then collected by teachers who corrected any mistakes that might impede understanding and suggested any additions and/or advancement of contextual clues. The sentences were made into a task in which students could read the sentences written by their classmates and infer the feelings of the characters. Some extra outstanding sentences written by individual high achievers were also included in another online exercises with the names of the students shown. The task of creating a situation not only provided the opportunity for students to either consolidate their understanding or move onto the next level, but also gave students a sense of ownership and achievement as their creations were used as an assessment.

WRITE YOUR FEELINGS FOR YOUR CLASSMATES TO GUESS!

You are the girl.
Don't use the adjective but…
1. How do your eyebrows / eyes /mouths look?
2. What do you do?
3. What is the sound you make?
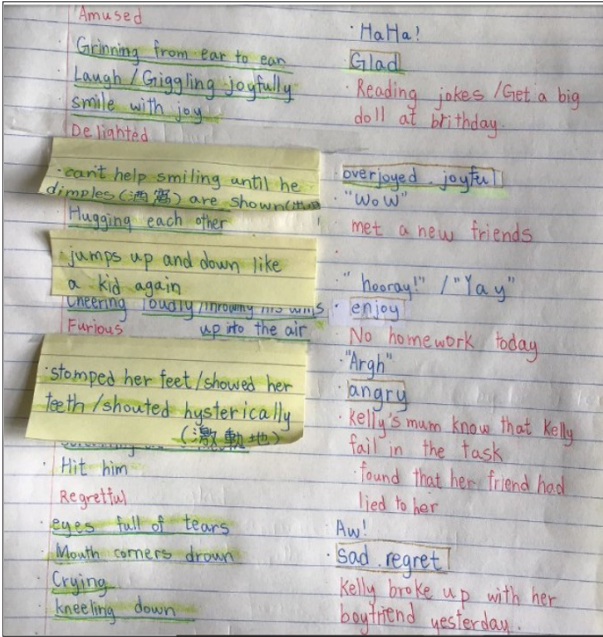
HA HA HA~

E.g., **When** she heard the joke, she grinned from ear to ear and started giggling joyfully that she went, 'Hahaha!'

Answer: **Amused**

Green – Situation 處境/ Cause [Reason – Why?]
Blue – Interjection 感嘆詞 (What is the sound you make?)
Orange – Facial expression 面部表情 (How does your face look?)
Yellow – Action 動作 (What do you do?)

Choices: delighted / enthusiastic / surprised / amused / furious

Groups	Situations	Adjectives
1	Today, King did not do homework then teacher said "Argh!" and shouted to King. The teacher's face looked very red.	Answer 1: _____
2	After I saw my friend try to celebrate my birthday in the classroom. I ran to them. I said 'haha! Thank you so much!' and I smiled.	Answer 2: _____
3	Today is Jenny's birthday. Jack and Samuel went to buy a birthday cake tofor Jenny. Then, they went to her home to find her. Jenny seesaw Jack and Samuel but the cake to her. She stay was shocked in the room for one minute and said 'Omg (Oh my God)…'	Answer 3: _____
4	Today, I forgot my phone aton the bus, but someone returned it to me. I feelfelt very happy. I didn't know how to express gratitude to him. My tears came out. I said 'Oh, thank you very much!' and I bowed.	Answer 4: _____
5	Today is my birthday. I laughed 'yay'. I couldn't stop laughing all day. My face is very red.	Answer 5: _____

Step	Activity / Task
	1. 'Oh! May！ You are finally back!' said Mary. 'Yes,' said May. 'I miss you very much！ Welcome back!' said Mary. Mary gave May a big hug.--> Mary is _____. (by Coco) * ○ enthusiastic ○ delighted ○ surprised ○ confused The creator's name was displayed in the sentence they had written Students were also guided to enrich their vocabulary graphic organiser based on their peer's work.

Impact

1. Student Level

The knowledge and sub-skills necessary for the achievement of a teaching objective were clearly delivered to students who benefitted from the modelling by teachers. The thoughtful design of tasks, with gradual progression, and the feedback as well as follow-up measures with which they were provided upon completing them, motivated the students.

2. Teacher Level

Teachers' repertoire in planning for the teaching of reading comprehension skills in alignment with both formative and summative assessments has been enriched. They show more confidence and proficiency in using assessment data to provide quality and timely feedback on both learning and teaching. They also agreed that their awareness in catering for learning diversity in both teaching and assessments has been heightened.

3. Curriculum Level

The backward planning approach was adopted and tried out in other levels. More school-based materials were devised to help students acquire target knowledge and skills with effective scaffolding and to cater to the diverse learning needs of students.

Way Forward

Whilst the use of a backward planning approach helped teachers design teaching steps, materials and assessments that are aligned with each other, the use of authentic materials in the lead-in stage and in task design could be further explored to boost the motivation of students.

References

Popham, W. J. (2018). *Assessment literacy for educators in a hurry*. ASCD.

The Curriculum Development Council. (2018). *Supplement to the English Language Education key learning area curriculum guide (Secondary 1-3)*. HKSAR: The Education Bureau.