Case 2

Enhancing Assessment Literacy: From Classroom Level to Curriculum Level

St. Antonius Primary School

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School
St. Antonius Primary School

Background
St. Antonius Primary School is located in East Kowloon. There are a total of five classes in P4. Two of the five classes are what is called *bring-your-own-device* (BYOD) classes. As students require more exposure to the English language outside the classrooms, language support is much needed.

A total of five P4 English language teachers were involved in the collaboration. Two of them had taught the previous P4 cohort. Their experiences were valuable because they were able to provide first-hand information about the specific learning needs and difficulties that P4 students used to have.

The P4 teachers decided to work on grammar and reading skills as the main foci for the collaboration. In the first term, the grammar item chosen was comparative and superlative adjectives and quantifiers. Back referencing of pronouns in reading was the focus of the collaboration in the second term.

Level
Primary 4

Strategies Used

1. Evaluation-Planning-Implementation-Evaluation (E-P-I-E) Model
It has been the English department's practice to use the E-P-I-E model to carry out curriculum and department level plannings. The model was adopted in this QSIP-CEAL collaboration. Assessment reports were scrutinised and based on the evaluation carried out, goals were set according to students' learning needs and difficulties.

Figure 1: The E-P-I-E model adopted
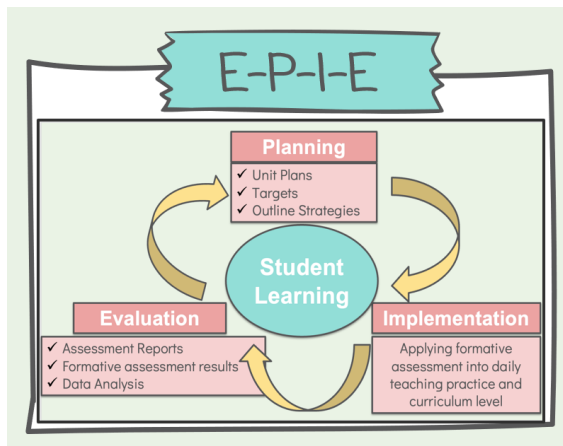
Assessment reports from the last cohort were referred to. For the reading paper, students were seen having difficulties in applying the reading skills learnt. As for the writing paper, students need more support in changing the forms of comparatives and superlatives. Based on the evaluation that the teachers made from the school assessment reports, coupled with the observations of the P4 teachers from the previous year, the target for the collaboration was made clear.

Students faced challenges in the spelling and application of comparatives and superlatives. Rules were taught but many students were still confused about their usage and unable to apply them.

Figure 2: Scrutiny of the previous cohort's P4 assessment reports

Last Year's P.4 Assessment Report

Reading Paper

In the parts of reading comprehension, students were quite weak in making inferences. For example, in Part H (Qs. 4 and 5), most students were not able to identify the meaning of "Hurray!" and the meaning of "top of the class". Many students also overlooked the clues about time, so they could not answer the questions correctly in Part I (Qs. 2 and 4). As for Part J, students, especially those in general classes, were also weak in locating specific information from the text. They could not match their answers to the corresponding questions.

Writing Paper

1. Students were very weak at comparing things with using the comparative and superlative adjectives. They were not familiar with using the correct sentence structures to compare things.

The assessment data of the previous cohort was used to modify instructions and lesson designs to benefit the future cohort, i.e., the current year's P4 students. Feed forward was set in motion.

Figure 3: Feed forward was set in motion
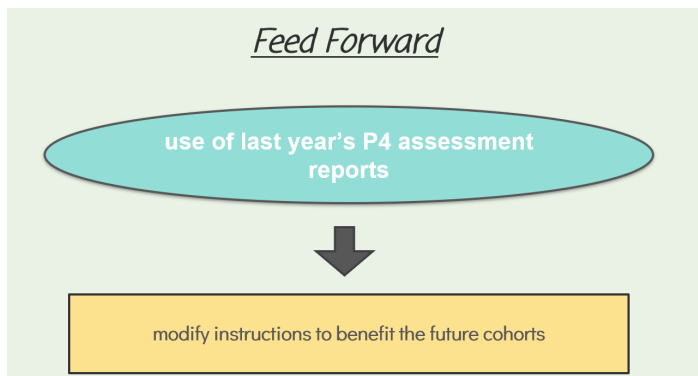
2. Use of Formative Assessment Tools in the Classroom

a. Pre-lesson quiz and post-lesson quiz

In the first term collaboration, comparatives and superlatives were the focus of the trial in formative assessment of the classroom level. A pre-lesson quiz was carried out at the beginning of the teaching of the grammar item, to inform the teachers on whether students could identify parts of speech, i.e., nouns and adjectives. Adjectives are the foundation for forming comparatives and superlatives and the quiz informed the teachers of students' prior knowledge of adjectives. After knowing this, the teachers were able to more specifically adjust their teaching pace to cater for students' learning needs.

Figure 4: Students' pre-lesson quiz

The quiz was designed in this way because the accurate identification of adjectives is the foundation for learning comparatives and superlatives. Gathering data from the quiz, the teachers were able to conclude that students need to have a clearer concept of the different parts of speech. A lot of support had to be given to students in order to help them to identify adjectives. After acquiring this data on students' learning, the teachers drew up follow-up actions for teaching the identification and use of adjectives.

Figure 5: The pre- and post-lesson quizzes of the same student

At the end of the lesson, students had to complete a post-lesson quiz on adjectives. They were asked to write five adjectives learnt that day. Most of the students finished the task and had satisfactory results. Having these two quizzes as formative assessments, the teachers were given feedback about the effectiveness of the teaching of the day's lesson. Students were able to recognise adjectives, which showed that learning had taken place.

b. Adjective-rule table

Apart from pre- and post-test, an adjective-rule table was also adopted when teaching comparatives and superlatives. The teachers categorised different comparatives and superlatives, according to how the forms are changed, e.g., +er / +est, y ⇨ ier/ iest. Adjectives were also categorised according to the number of syllables, i.e., 1-2 syllables and 3 or more syllables. They were also categorised into regular and irregular adjectives. The rules and explanations, which are listed in Figure 6, helped students become familiarise with the forms of turning an adjective into its comparative and superlative forms by presenting the categorisation visually.

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The table worked as a reference for supporting students' learning on changing the forms of adjectives. Students made use of the table for self-checking. Assessment as learning was practised as the use of it engaged students in self-checking. Students also made used of the adjective-rule table for answering questions in their homework.

Figure 6: The adjective-rule table for learning and self-checking

Adjectives (1-2 syllables)	
Rules	
+ er /est	cheap / cheap**er than** / **the** cheap**est**
	clean / clean**er than** / **the** clean**est**
	hard / hard**er than** / **the** hard**est**
	light / light**er than** / **the** light**est**
	long / long**er than** / **the** long**est**
	new / new**er than** / **the** new**est**
	old / old**er than** / **the** old**est**
	short / short**er than** / **the** short**est**
	slow / slow**er than** / **the** slow**est**
	small / small**er than** / **the** small**est**
	soft / soft**er than** / **the** soft**est**
	thick / thick**er than** / **the** thick**est**
y ⇨ ier /iest	busy / bus**ier than** / **the** bus**iest**
	dirty / dirt**ier than** / **the** dirt**iest**
	dry / dr**ier than** / **the** dr**iest**
	empty / empt**ier than** / **the** empt**iest**
	funny / funn**ier than** / **the** funn**iest**
	happy / happ**ier than** / **the** happ**iest**
	heavy / heav**ier than** / **the** heav**iest**
	hungry / hungr**ier than** / **the** hungr**iest**
	pretty / prett**ier than** / **the** prett**iest**
	spicy / spic**ier than** / **the** spic**iest**

Rules	
Adj. ending with letter e `+r / st`	cut<u>e</u> / cute**r than** / **the** cute**st**
	fin<u>e</u> / fine**r than** / **the** fine**st**
	larg<u>e</u> / large**r than** / **the** large**st**
	rud<u>e</u> / rude**r than** / **the** rude**st**
Adj. ending in a short vowel **(a,e,i,o,u) and a consonant** (last letter) **Double the consonant** `+er`	b<u>ig</u> / bi**gger than** / **the** bi**ggest**
	f<u>at</u> / fa**tter than** / **the** fa**ttest**
	h<u>ot</u> / ho**tter than** / **the** ho**ttest**
	s<u>ad</u> / sa**dder than** / **the** sa**ddest**
	th<u>in</u> / thi**nner than** / **the** thi**nnest**

Adjectives (3 or more syllables)

Rules	
`more ___ than /` `the ___est`	delicious / **more** delicious **than** / **the most** delicious
	interesting / **more** interesting **than** / **the most** interesting
	popular / **more** popular **than** / **the most** popular
	* special / **more** special **than** / **the most** special
	* tired / **more** tired **than** / **the most** tired
	* useful / **more** useful **than** / **the most** useful

Adjectives (Irregular)

| Rules	
X	g<u>o</u>od / better than / the best
	bad / worse than / the worst

c. e-Learning tools

Another grammar item, the quantifiers 'too many' and 'too much', was chosen for the trial of formative assessment in the classroom. An e-learning tool was used for teaching this grammar item. Students were asked to make sentences with the quantifiers 'too many' and 'too much' on *Nearpod*, which allowed the teachers to take immediate follow-up actions. Feedback was given to the students. The use of this e-learning tool allowed real-time interaction for instant feedback. Students engaged in peer checking by reading their classmates' work. They also self-evaluated their learning process. The teachers were able to better gauge the learning level of students and adjust their teaching pace accordingly.

Figure 7: Students classwork performed on the e-learning tool for formative assessment

easy view of answers of all students
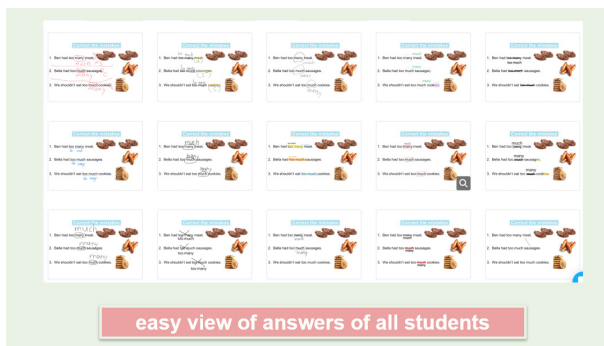
In this sentence correction task, students were asked to cross out the mistake in each sentence and make corrections. The interface of this e-learning tool has made providing feedback to students much more effective for the teachers, as they could see all students' answers at a glance.

Figure 8: Students in-class work on the e-learning tool for formative assessment

Too (many / much) fried food (is / are) bad for us.

peer check + immediate feedback from teacher
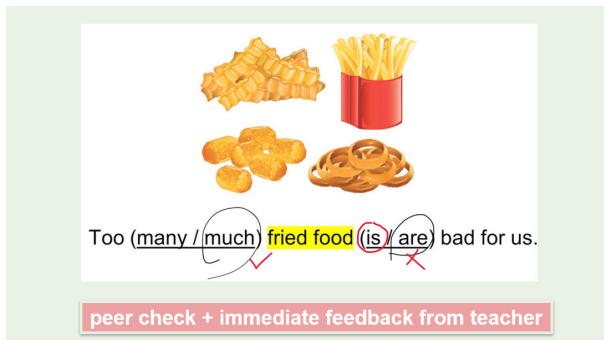
The e-learning tool enabled the teachers to select certain common errors and bring them up for further discussions in class. Peer checking could be conducted efficiently as students' work was easily shared and being displayed in every single student's e-device. Students simply corrected the errors by clicking their own e-device to edit. Once students' answers were submitted, teachers gave on-the-spot feedback to students that greatly facilitated the learning.

Figure 9a: Use of the e-learning tool for peer-learning and assessment as learning

Students learnt from each other while correcting the peer's mistakes. This practice enhanced students' note-taking skills as they were asked to mark others' work and took their own notes to explain the answer, e.g., whether a countable or uncountable noun was needed to match the correct quantifier 'too many' and 'too much'.

Figure 9b: Use of the e-learning tool for peer-learning and assessment as learning

Students were able to make use of the highlighting function of the e-learning tool to spot the plural forms of the food items. This made easier for them to complete the task for formative assessment and understand the differences in the usage of 'too much' and 'too many' for uncountable and countable nouns.

d. Note-taking

Figure 10: Sample worksheet design facilitating note-taking as formative assessment

The task was designed as follows: The teachers extracted a passage from the textbook and put the pronouns in bold type face on the worksheet. This was to help students focus on the pronouns, which was the main learning objective of the lesson. Back referencing skills were taught explicitly and students were asked to make notes of the pronouns that were being referenced to.

To assess students' learning, the teachers asked students to replace the pronouns with the word(s) referenced. By checking the sentence, most students were able to spot their own mistakes if the sentence did not make sense and they were able to replace the pronouns with another word(s) from the text. From the notes that students made, the teachers spotted mistakes made by individuals and then provided them with feedback. Re-teaching also took place when the teacher identified common mistakes.

e. Exit Card

An exit card was given to students at the end of the reading skills lesson. The purpose of the exit card was to check whether students could understand the use of back referencing skills to locate the pronouns. On this exit card, students were asked to read a short paragraph and find out what the pronouns referred to. Most students did quite well in finding the subject pronouns in Questions 1 and 2. Figure 11 shows a sample of an exit card. In this case, some students struggled with the object pronouns 'them' and were unable to find the correct word that it referred to.

From the results that the teachers obtained from the exit cards, they found that most students could locate the subject pronouns referring to. However, some students had problems in locating the object pronouns, which showed that students were not familiar with this type of pronouns.

Thus, the result that the teachers obtained from the exit card task helped a great deal in modifying the instructions for the following lesson – the teachers made clarification of the usage of object pronouns, which was the focus of that lesson.

Figure 11: Exit card task

4. Data Analysis

To better align learning-teaching-assessment (L-T-A), questions on pronoun referencing in reading were set in the assessment paper of the final examination.

The teachers wanted to learn more about the use of assessment data to provide feedback on learning and teaching. Two questions with pronouns as the testing point were selected for a trial of item analysis.

Figure 12: The two assessment questions set on pronoun back referencing

I'm doing a school project with two of my classmates, Ken and Jim. Ken thinks we should stop having school uniforms. He thinks **they** are uncomfortable and expensive. However, Jim thinks we should keep uniforms. It's good because they make all students look like a family. He also thinks they look neat and tidy.

I'm going to see Ken and Jim this Saturday to talk about the project, but **I** don't know what to tell them. Do you think uniforms are important?

Assessment Paper

2. In line 2 , the word 'they' refers to _____ .
   - ○ A. Fufu and Ian
   - ○ B. Ken and Jim
   - ○ C. all students
   - ○ D. school uniforms
3. In line 6 , the word 'I' refers to _____ .
   - ○ A. Tom
   - ○ B. Ken
   - ○ C. Ian
   - ○ D. Jim

Figure 13: Item analysis conducted by teachers

Data Analysis

Option B: Option with the second highest percentage

Option D: Correct Answer

The data here shows the percentage of students choosing each answer for each option for each class. The items highlighted in yellow are the correct answers. Those highlighted in red indicated that many students chose option B instead of option D in Question 2.

Figure 14: Question 2 of the item analysis

Item Analysis

I'm doing a school project with two of my classmates, Ken and Jim. Ken thinks we should stop having school uniforms. He thinks **they** are uncomfortable and expensive. However, Jim thinks we should keep uniforms. It's good because they make all students look like a family. He also thinks they look neat and tidy.

In line 2 , the word they refers to _____ .

○ A. Fufu and Ian
○ B. Ken and Jim ← **strong distractor**
○ C. all students
● D. school uniforms

In this question, students were asked to find out what the word 'they' refers to. Most students chose option B, 'Ken and Jim', whereas the correct answer was option D, 'school uniforms'. When the teachers got the data, they engaged in discussions of why students had opted for option B. It was thought that students might not understand that the pronoun 'they' could refer to both people and things. In addition, after the discussion of why students had opted for option B, the teachers came up with some follow-up tasks. They designed a follow-up worksheet of the same testing point. Moreover, the teachers taught students to substitute the options with the pronouns and read aloud the sentences in order to check if the meanings were correct.

Actions Taken

E-P-I-E has always been used in the department. A needs analysis was conducted prior to the commencement of the collaboration to determine the target area for improvement on learning and teaching.

Collaborative lesson planning sessions were held throughout the school year and two rounds of lesson observations were carried out.

Two workshops on assessment literacy were conducted. One was conducted in late August 2021 for all teaching staff. The other workshop, held in late November 2021, was for English teachers and focused on assessment tools.

A whole school sharing session was held in late July 2022. Teachers of five other subjects, Chinese, Mathematic, General Studies, Music and Visual Arts, also shared the assessment practices tried out in their subjects respectively during the school term.

Impact

1. Student Level

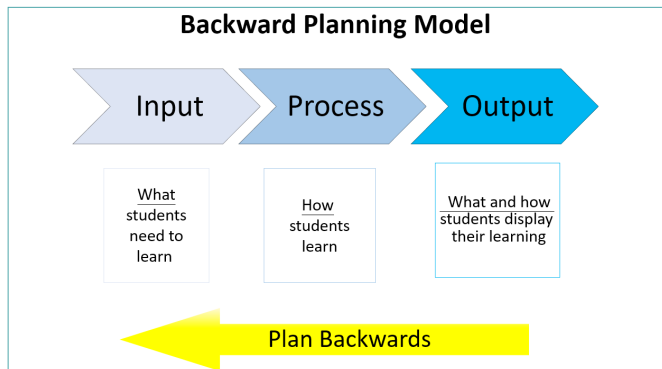Students were seen to be more engaged during lessons when tasks for formative assessment were carried out.

They had the opportunity to practise self-checking, which raised their awareness of the application of the rules of comparatives and superlatives. With the teachers' intended frequent reminders, students were seen making notes as part of their learning, e.g., pronoun referencing when reading texts. Automation was seen happening among the more able students, who were able to self-check by replacing terms with pronouns to check the meaning.

2. Teacher Level

The teachers reflected on how they were more equipped with assessment skills and had gained experience in:

- exploring different instructional methods for formative assessment;
- reviewing and improving teaching strategies to conduct formative assessment;
- enhancing teaching effectiveness through the use of formative assessment;
- attempting the use of backward design in curriculum design and aligning L-T-A in their daily lesson planning.

Figure 15: Backward planning model

Backward Planning Model

Input — What students need to learn

Process — How students learn

Output — What and how students display their learning

Plan Backwards

The teachers have become much better informed about students' strengths and weaknesses with backward planning now in place. Designing the assessment questions during the lesson planning stage has more clearly anchored the learning. This has demonstrably enhanced the effectiveness of the learning and teaching.

3. Curriculum Level

The L-T-A cycle was strengthened through a review of internal assessment papers and learning and teaching materials. The teachers then decided on the challenging parts for students and the testing points be assessed in the examination. By adopting backward design in the curriculum planning, the teachers set the examination paper as part of the lesson planning.

Designing formative assessment tasks is gradually taking on greater importance in collaborative lesson planning sessions. This will be one of the items to be included in the P4 collaborative lesson planning sessions.

4. Departmental Level and School Level

At the internal dissemination conducted in late July 2022, the teachers from the English Department, together with teachers from five other subjects, shared their assessment practices developed this year with the entire teaching team. These ranged from formative assessment tasks conducted in face-to-face classroom settings to students' self-assessment conducted during online lessons and online assignments.

Given that assessment literacy is one of the major concerns of the school, the sharing was a showcase of the teachers' enhanced understanding, as well as a display of the good work conducted in different departments.

Way Forward

As more teachers gained experience in formative assessment, they will be the change agents sharing their experiences and ideas with their peers.

More emphasis will be placed on the use of formative assessment in the daily teaching at other grade levels of the English Department.

The same applies to the use of backward design in curriculum design and the alignment of L-T-A at their both classroom and curriculum levels.

References

The following books are useful references about assessment literacy:

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests.* Oxford University Press.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning.* Routledge.

Hattie, J., & Clarke, S. (2019). *Visible learning: Feedback.* Routledge.

Regier, N. (2012). *Book two: 60 formative assessment strategies.* Regier Educational Resources. https://portal.gssd.ca/public/mr3xg4k4nrxxq5dvfz4hq5lomq/Lists/SharedDocuments/Assessment/Formative%20Assessment%20Ideas-Natalie%20Regier.pdf

Tileston, D. W. (2004). *What every teacher should know about student assessment.* Corwin Press.