

Case 5

Enhancing Learning and Teaching Effectiveness with Formative Assessment in the Classroom

ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School

Enhancing Learning and Teaching Effectiveness with Formative Assessment in the Classroom

School

ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School

Background

ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School is a Chinese medium-of-instruction school in which students have different levels of English abilities. Catering for the vast learner diversity in class has been challenging. The teachers wanted to explore how the use of formative assessment in the classroom would enhance learning and teaching effectiveness.

Listening was selected as the focus of collaboration in the first semester. It has been identified as the most challenging among the four skills in language learning for students. In the second semester, reading was selected as the focus of collaboration. To boost students' confidence and strengthen particular reading skills before promoting to S4, the teachers planned to make use of the post-examination period to teach a Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Paper 1 reading text of the appropriate level of difficulty.

Different classroom assessment tools have been deployed to deal with the difficulties faced by students in both listening and reading. The teachers decided to equip S3 students with selected listening and reading skills to boost their confidence.

The teachers wanted to try out how the provision of quality feedback to students would enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching. The use of a backward planning model became part of the collaboration plan. To provide more specific feedback, the teachers implemented formative assessment activities in the classroom and learning practices based on the task and the strategies discussed during the collaborative lesson planning sessions.

Level

Secondary 3

Strategies Used

1. Needs Analysis: Use of Vocabulary Inventory

The lack of vocabulary was one of the reasons of the difficulties for the students in attempting listening and reading tasks.

The vocabulary inventory also served as a needs analysis. The inventory was given to students as a pre-task. Based on the answers, the teachers collected information on students' prior knowledge of the vocabulary items. Lesson time was saved as vocabulary items that students already knew did not have to be taught.

During the lesson, students were asked to read the words in the inventory aloud to make sure that they knew the pronunciation. The goal was to provide input as support, which helped students to be more confident when listening to the recording.

Figure 1: Words selected for the vocabulary inventory included key words from the recording

Try it out (p.25)

Vocabulary Inventory

Read each of the following words carefully. Then mark whether you know the word (✓), whether it seems familiar (Ⓜ), or whether you don't know the word at all (✗).

Word / Phrase	✓ / Ⓜ / ✗
1. entertaining	
2. fake	
3. gripping	
4. original	
5. plot	
6. scenes	
7. unpleasant	
8. violent	

Vocabulary List

Word / Phrase	Meaning
1. entertaining	有趣的
2. fake	假的
3. gripping	引人入胜的
4. original	原创的
5. plot	情節
6. scenes	場景 / 場面
7. unpleasant	使人感覺不舒服的
8. violent	暴力的

p. 25

Announcer: Three friends are talking about a film that they have watched. Listen to the conversation and complete the table.

Ivy: What did you think about the film, George?

George: In my opinion, some of the scenes are ⁽¹⁾ too violent. The fighting scenes are so long and there is so much blood in every shot ... Don't you think so, Ivy?

Ivy: Well, I agree some parts are ⁽²⁾ unpleasant to watch. I almost had to cover my eyes for some of the scenes. But personally speaking, I think the storyline is quite ⁽³⁾ original. You rarely see a zombie film that's set in the Middle Ages, do you? What about you, Mable? What do you think about the film?

Mable: Hmm ... As I see it, the best thing about the film is the ⁽⁴⁾ gripping plot. The film kept my attention from start to finish. But on the other hand, some of the make-up on the zombies is kind of ⁽⁵⁾ fake. I could see parts of the actors' skin showing. They should do a better job covering their faces.

George: I didn't notice that when I was watching the film. Maybe that's because I looked away every time the zombies appeared ... But other than that, I think the film is ⁽⁶⁾ entertaining overall. There were some good jokes in the film that distracted me from the violence.

Announcer: This is the end of the recording.

QSIP-CEAL(2021/22) Case 5

Figure 2: Design of the theme-based vocabulary inventory for the HKDSE reading task

Design of Vocabulary Inventory

Pre-reading Task Vocabulary Inventory

Look carefully at each word/phrases below. Then mark whether you know the word (+), whether it seems familiar (?), or whether you don't know the word at all (0).

Word		+ / ? / 0
1. usual	3	
2. sort of	7	
3. stuff	7	
4. let alone	9	
5. depression	13	
6. loneliness		
7. make somebody's day	25	
8. random	28	
9. global	31	
10. conference	31	
11. shipped		
12. campus		
13. requested	43	
14. scribble	46	

Look carefully at each word below. Then mark whether you know the word (+), whether it seems familiar (?), or whether you don't know the word at all (0).

Word		+ / ? / 0

[1] The website *The World Needs More Letters* aims to spread joy through letters. Not through emails, or your usual love letters, written to real people you love, but surprise letters for strangers. These letters don't say "I love you" but they are full of kindness, telling people how special they are. It's the sort of stuff that most people don't really say out loud even to the people they care about, let alone a total stranger.

Students were required to indicate their knowledge of each vocabulary item by using the symbols: '+', '?', or '0'. These symbols mean 'I know the word', 'The word seems familiar' and 'I don't know the word' respectively. Students also made notes of some explanations of the words for their own learning.

The purpose of using the inventory was for the teachers to quickly spot which vocabulary items required explanation and which ones did not.

Figure 3: Sample student work of the vocabulary inventory for the reading task

Student Work

Pre-reading Task Vocabulary Inventory

write

Look carefully at each word/phrases below. Then mark whether you know the word (+), whether it seems familiar (?), or whether you don't know the word at all (0).

Word		+ / ? / 0
1. usual	3	+
2. sort of	7	?
3. stuff	7	+
4. let alone	9	+
5. depression	13	?
6. loneliness		+
7. make somebody's day	25	0
8. random	28	+
9. global	31	+
10. conference	31	+
11. shipped		?
12. campus	school	0
13. requested	ask	+
14. scribble	(r)	0

Pre-reading Task Vocabulary Inventory

Look carefully at each word/phrases below. Then mark whether you know the word (+), whether it seems familiar (?), or whether you don't know the word at all (0).

Word		+ / ? / 0
1. usual	3	+
2. sort of	7	0
3. stuff	7	?
4. let alone	9	+
5. depression	13	0
6. loneliness		?
7. make somebody's day	25	+
8. random	if something is made someone happy	+
9. global	28	?
10. conference	meeting	+
11. shipped		0
12. campus		0
13. requested	ask to sth	0
14. scribble	(r)	0

2. Self-Questioning – Self-Checking as Formative Assessment

Teachers expressed one of the most common reasons for students to make mistakes in listening is their lack of awareness of the purpose or subject matter of the listening tasks. The use of self-questioning in a pre-listening task was tried out in order to develop students' listening habits.

Since students are usually not familiar with the context of a listening task, it is important for them to understand the context and the topic. Very often, students find that the content of a recording not making sense. This pre-task could be considered as an example of assessment as learning. The aim of it is to raise students' awareness of the importance of knowing about their role and the listening task(s) they have in hand.

When self-questioning was applied, students developed a clearer concept about who they were and what had to be done. They were found to be more confident in attempting the listening task.

Figure 4: Self-questioning task for listening

Activity 2 (p.22)	or younger or brother.
Who are you?	An elder sister. (I, one of the speaker)
Who are the speakers?	Me, My sister.
What are you / they talking about?	A film we have just watched.
Keywords I'll pay attention to are ...	The plot, The character, actor, actress.

To make better sense of the text and tasks, the self-questioning task required students to ask questions before, during, and after reading the instructions and materials. This was part of active reading. For skilled readers, the self-questioning quickly became automated.

Given that students better understand their role and the situation, it is still common for students to make mistakes with pronouns and tone, etc. Prediction making is what active learners go through before reading or listening to a text. This is when they predict what they are going to hear or read. Students predict what vocabulary they may hear, and what emotions the speaker(s) in the audio may feel. They listen to confirm their ideas. It is easier for students to use their prior knowledge to make sense of what they are about to listen to.

The self-questioning task is an example of both assessment for learning and assessment as learning. In addition to students performing the task as a self-check to raise awareness, the teachers were able to make use of the answers provided by students to feed back on the progress of learning and teaching, which helped inform the next step of teaching.

Students in the school who struggle with reading comprehension are often passive readers. They can read and understand vocabulary items at word level but have problems connecting words and sentences to make meaning. Passive readers are unable to visualise what they read and they fail to connect details to people, places and events. Students who struggle with comprehension may read a passage from a text and not be able to recall key points or details. Self-questioning is applied in reading to help students improve through self-checking.

Self-questioning helped the passive readers to become more active by providing directions to their reading. During and after reading the passage, students asked themselves questions. The teachers directed students to read for specific information so that the questions could be answered. High-achieving students and competent readers employed active-reading strategies, such as self-questioning. As a result, they continually reflected on their understanding and employed strategies such as re-reading. By internalising this habit of self-questioning, students were themselves engaging in assessment as learning. They were more aware of the various types of essential information crucial for the thorough understanding of a reading text.

Figure 5: Self-questioning task for reading

Self-questioning: Pre-reading Task

What is the text type?	an email/ an article/ a leaflet/ a report/ a proposal
What is the genre?	_____
What is the language and tone?	formal/ semi-formal
Who is the writer?	- _____ - _____
Who are the target audience?	_____
Where is this text likely to be found?	_____
What is the purpose?	_____
Writer's message	_____ _____ _____

S3 students were provided with a set of questions for self-questioning. This set of questions could in general be applied to other texts. The ultimate goal of getting students to work on these self-questions was that they would internalise this framework after repeated practice. This served as a framework to guide students in how the reading of texts should be

approached. Questions on text source, text type, genre, language, tone, purpose of the text and writer's message, etc., were included.

With practice, students were able to familiarise themselves with the above-mentioned elements and thus, better comprehend the text.

As with tackling the listening tasks, the teachers used self-questioning tasks as a self-check to raise students' awareness. They also made use of students' answers to this formative assessment to give feedback on the progress of learning and teaching. Thus, informing the next step of teaching.

3. Note-Taking and Note-Making

The teachers assessed students' learning with the notes they took. Some students had not developed the habit of predicting answers or identifying useful information that might appear before a recording begins. As a formative assessment task, their predictions were checked by the teachers prior to listening to the audio clip.

The teachers guided students in distinguishing the nature of words. Students identified the words with facts and opinions before listening to the recording. This gave the teachers information on whether students had understood the context well enough to proceed, or if (re-) teaching was needed.

Figure 6: A student's note-making

Checking Notes Taken

Try it out (p.25)

Who are you? Audience

Who are the speakers? George, Ivy and Mable

What are they talking about? A film that they have watched

Keywords I'll pay attention to are _____

Try it out!

Three friends are talking about a film that they have watched. Listen to the conversation and complete the table.

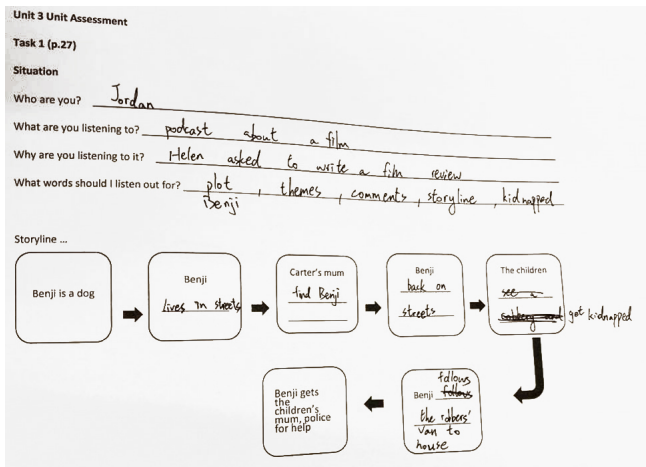
Ivy (Girl)	The storyline is quite (3) <u>original</u>	Some parts are (4) <u>impleasant</u> ^{← adj} to watch.
Mable (Girl)	The film has a/an (5) <u>gripping</u> <u>plot</u> . <u>story</u> ←	The <u>make-up</u> on the zombies is rather (6) <u>fake</u> . ↓ <u>needed costumes</u>

Based on students' notes, the teachers provided feedback to students on whether they were heading to the right direction for predicting and/or expecting the information to be heard in the recording.

4. Use of Graphic Organisers

The teachers made use of graphic organisers as a tool for formative assessment, and to visually present the organisation of the text. When the listening component was a narrative one, a flow chart was adopted. The sequence of events could then be clearly presented to the learners.

Figure 7: A student's work using a graphic organiser



This task was carried out prior to the actual listening to the audio clip. By reading the instructions and questions, students made guesses about the development of the story. When the teachers walked around the classroom and collected information about students' work, they were not looking for correct answers. On the contrary, they were looking for common inaccurate predictions made, after which they provided students with immediate feedback on how the predictions could be made more accurately.

Students were more familiar with the use of a graphic organiser, as they had tried it with listening task(s) in the first semester. In the second semester, the teachers provided only an empty graphic organiser for the reading task. Students had to think of and select important and relevant information for each box.

Figure 8a: A student's work using a graphic organiser

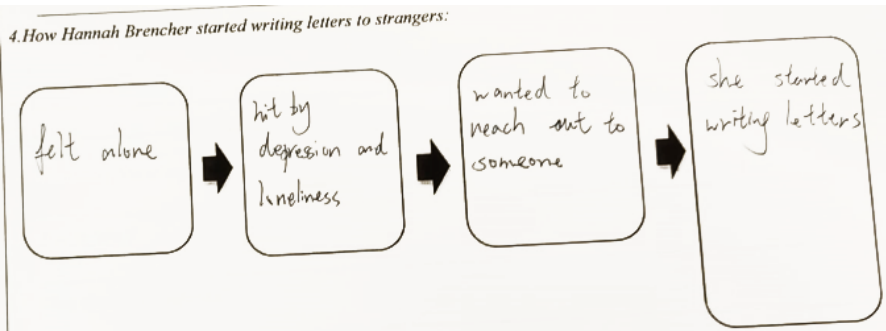


Figure 8b: A student's work using a graphic organiser

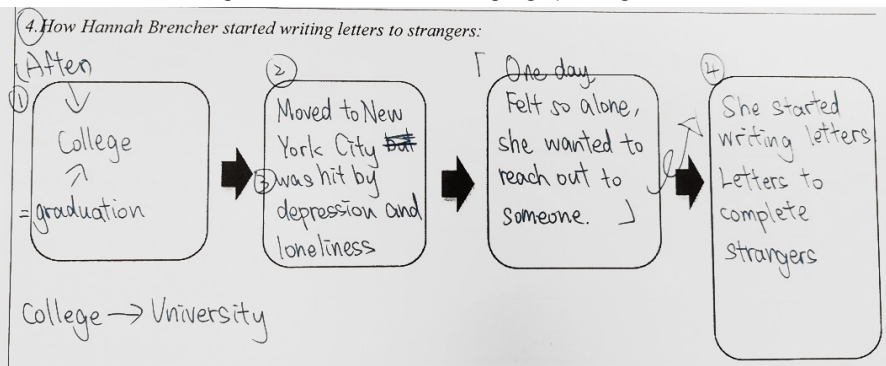


Figure 8c: A student's work using a graphic organiser

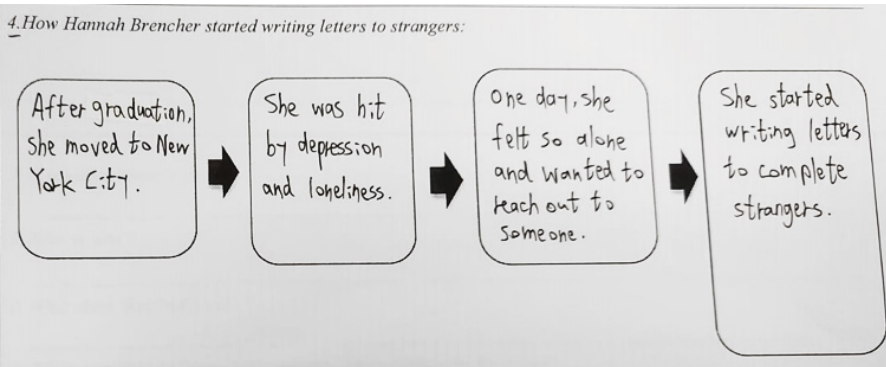
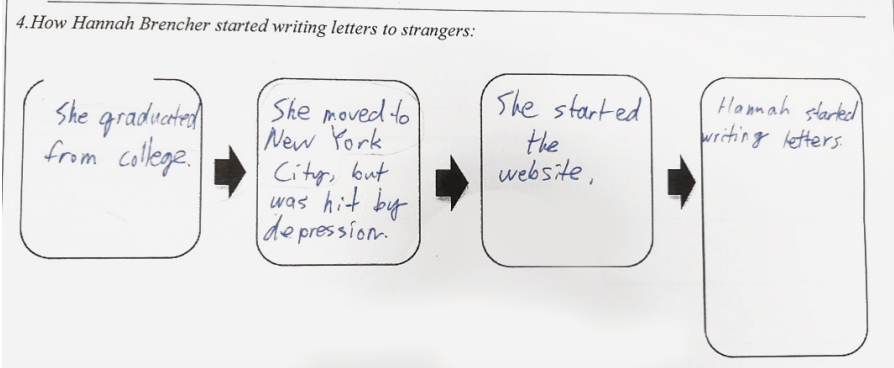


Figure 8d: A student's work using a graphic organiser



This presented a challenge to students. The teachers spotted many different answers, some of which were less important information that was not supposed to be put in the graphic organiser. This informed the teachers on to what extent students understood the text and were able to identify the important episodes.

5. Backward Planning Model

A backward planning model was applied in the learning and teaching of reading. The learning and teaching goal, i.e., main idea and referencing, were clearly defined right at the beginning of the planning stage.

The learning–teaching–assessment (L-T-A) cycle was strengthened through thorough discussions, follow-up work of adaptation, and trial of new strategies for students to learn about main ideas and references in reading.

The skills to be tested were determined prior to the teaching of the reading skills. See Figure 9 for the questions and testing points set for the pre-test and post-test.

Figure 9: Aligning teaching with the questions and testing points set at the pre-and post-tests

Reading Pre-test Statistics						
		Class (No. of Students)	3A	3B	3C	3D
Referencing	Q8	<i>What does 'they' (line 18) refer to?</i>	●	●	●	●
Referencing	Q11	<i>What is 'the problem' (line 20)?</i>	●	●	●	●
Main ideas	Q17	<i>Which of the following is the best alternative title to Text 4?</i>	●	●	●	●

Reading Post-test Statistics						
		Class (No. of Students)	3A	3B	3C	3D
Referencing	Q2	<i>What does 'the exact same thing' (line 3) refer to?</i>	●	●	●	●
Referencing	Q14	<i>What does 'it' (line 18) refer to?</i>	●	●	●	●
Main ideas	Q16	<i>Which of the following is the best alternative title for Text 2?</i>	●	●	●	●

Actions Taken

The planning of the collaboration commenced after the whole-school assessment literacy workshop which was conducted in late August 2021.

During the preparation stage, there were discussions on which of the four language learning skills should be chosen as the focus. Listening was selected.

An assessment literacy workshop for English teachers only was conducted in late October 2021. At this occasion, assessment that could be further improved at both curriculum and department levels was explored.

With reference to the needs analysis and students' learning needs, reading was chosen as the focus of collaboration for the second semester.

Despite the suspension of the project during the 'special vacation' that took place from March 2022 to April 2022 due to the pandemic, collaborative lesson planning sessions were conducted throughout the academic year.

Lesson observations were conducted in December 2021 and June 2022 and evaluation of the collaboration was conducted in June 2022.

Impact

1. Student Level

The teachers described how the majority of students were rather passive in doing listening tasks, which was due to the fact that they were unfamiliar with the instructions, headings, prompts and choices that were given to help them predict the likely development of the task in hand. Students also had difficulties in predicting the vocabulary that they would be hearing in the recording and in making guesses about the possible answers.

The teachers had done a lot in terms of reading, from recognising the words to understanding the meaning of words in context. When students encountered vocabulary that they did not know of or recognise due to inaccurate decoding, they were likely to skip and move ahead. For students, the more blanks in a line of text, the harder it is to make meaning of the text and the more difficult the reading task becomes. Moreover, students had to identify the main ideas and specific details and make inferences about what they were reading.

With different strategies and tasks being tried out, students were more aware of the task at hand. Many students were seen beginning to develop the habit of keeping a vocabulary list based on the theme-based vocabulary inventory provided by the teachers.

Students were seen to be more aware of contextual clues, and better preparing themselves for the tasks ahead. Students were also more confident in attempting short listening tasks.

Students, the more able ones in particular, were gradually understanding the importance of getting the main idea of each paragraph. They realised how the use of graphic organisers could help them in achieving this.

2. Teacher Level

The collaboration has enhanced the teachers' assessment literacy. The teachers agreed that the use of various formative assessment tasks in the classroom was very useful in informing them about what the next step of teaching should be. Students' performance in the

assessment activities provided useful feedback on learning and teaching. The data collected in this way were more accurate and hence more beneficial than those collected solely by observations during class.

The teachers' feedback and effective modeling of answers increased students' confidence in listening tasks. With their enhanced knowledge and skills in assessment for learning, the teachers placed more focus on providing students with immediate oral feedback during lessons and adjusted their teaching strategies accordingly.

The teachers also became more aware of making learning explicit, and they practised applying different formative assessment tools, which helped cater for diverse learning needs of each class.

It was obvious that the above strategies facilitated students' learning and will be adopted in the future. The teachers are better informed about students' strengths and weaknesses with formative assessment in the classroom carried out.

3. Curriculum Level

The L-T-A cycle has been strengthened. Clear learning goals were set during the planning stage. What students were targeted to achieve, was aligned with the assessment goals. In order to achieve this, the assessment set was aligned with the teaching.

Given the encouraging results seen in the reading tests, the alignment of the written, taught and assessed curriculum will be further strengthened.

There are strategies and tools that can be used in the learning and teaching of both listening and reading.

The use of a vocabulary inventory, for example, has become a regular formative assessment activity in lessons. The teachers found this to be a very useful, yet easy-to-use tool for collecting information about students' learning and providing feedback for their teaching.

The use of graphic organisers as a formative assessment tool will also be included in the planning of the curriculum.

4. Departmental Level and School Level

The English Language Department took this opportunity of collaboration to reflect upon learning and teaching through the use of formative assessment in the classroom.

At the internal dissemination for the entire teaching staff conducted at the end of the academic year, the assessment practices tried out in other subject departments were shared.

Item analysis was tried out in Mathematics Department. Moreover, the provision of immediate feedback to students by engaging them in formative assessments in the classroom were adopted in other subjects.

Way Forward

The collaboration this year has set the wheel in motion for further enhancement of formative assessment.

- a. Promotion of the following by the English Language Panel at other levels:
 - strengthening of the alignment of learning, teaching and assessment
 - formative assessment activities in the classroom to facilitate assessment as learning
- b. The use of data to conduct a needs analysis in other subject panels.
- c. The use of internal dissemination to share experiences and ideas among different Key Learning Areas.

References

The following books are useful references on 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.