CASE 2

Strategies for Success: Classroom Activities and Formative Assessment for Vocabulary Instruction

Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School

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School
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Background
According to the analysis of students' performance in their recent internal summative assessment, English teachers at Ching Chung Hau Po Woon Primary School arrived at the conclusion that their students have a relatively low mark in reading among the four language skills. Many of them struggle with reading lengthy texts in the exam, which is caused by their lack of English vocabulary. Therefore, the teachers decided to strengthen students' reading proficiency through building up their vocabulary. This article aims at sharing the newly adopted strategies that enhanced learning and teaching of vocabulary and how the teachers improved their instruction to tackle students' learning difficulties in using the assessment data.

Level
Primary 5

Strategies Used
Vocabulary is one of the very important areas in language, and plays a significant role for learners in acquiring a second language (Cameron, 2001). It is impossible for students to learn English without word knowledge. Therefore, the teaching of vocabulary has become one of English teachers' top priorities. To help students master vocabulary well, effective instructions including both comprehensible input and relevant classroom assessment are required.

The strategies used by teachers are summarised below:
1. **Using Graphic Organisers to Help Build Vocabulary**
   Graphic organisers are excellent tools that help students develop vocabulary skills. By visualising the connections between words and their meanings, not only can students better understand the meanings of words, but also find it easier to remember them.

Example 1

Definition:
A present is something that you give to someone on a special day to show friendship or to say thank you.

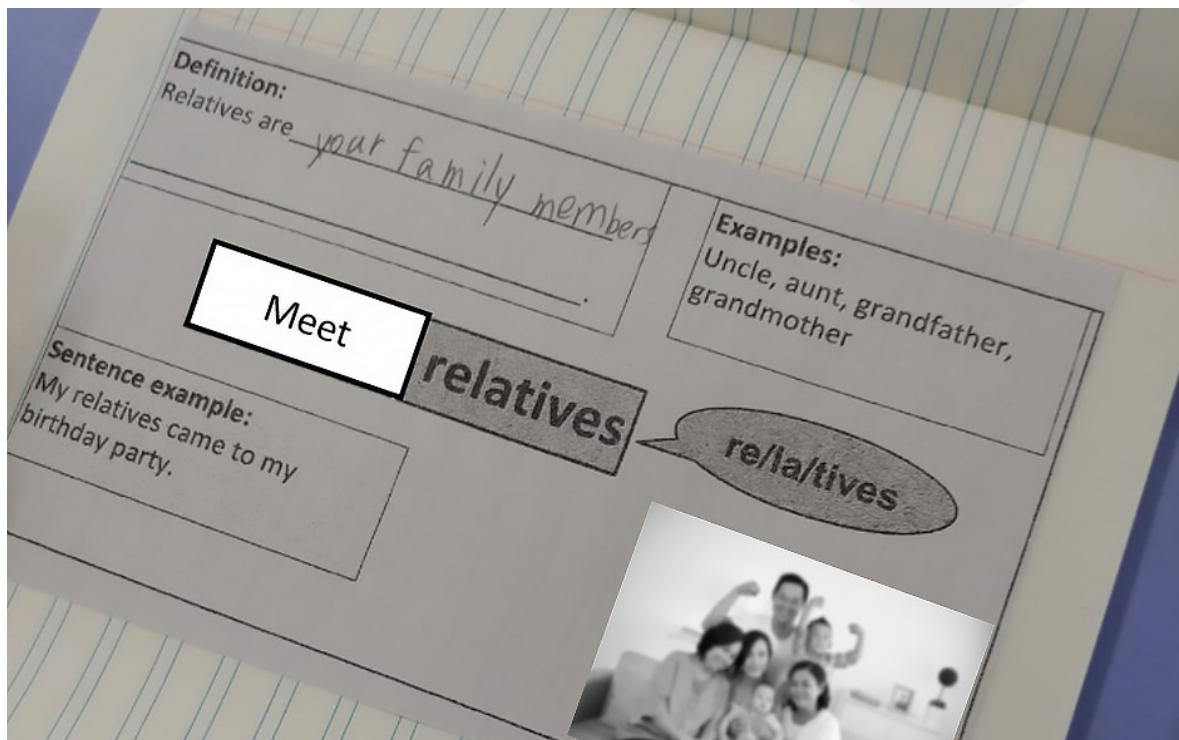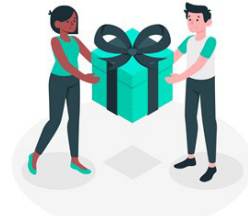**Examples:**
birthday presents, Christmas presents

give **presents** pre/sents

Sentence example:
I gave a present to Annie on her birthday.

Definition:
Relatives are *your family members*

Meet relatives re/la/tives

Examples:
Uncle, aunt, grandfather, grandmother

Sentence example:
My relatives came to my birthday party.

Example 1 illustrates the design of the graphic organiser used by the teachers in the lesson. It engaged students in inserting the definition, pictures, examples, a sentence example and syllable chunks for a target vocabulary item and its collocation. It simultaneously activated students' prior knowledge, and presented new information to them visually. Students were encouraged to think about each new term from different aspects. When using such a design with capable students, the teachers could even introduce the synonyms and antonyms of the new words.

2. Enhancing Students' Learning through Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is an essential part of learning and teaching. According to Black and Wiliam (2001), formative assessments are activities that provide information to teachers to be used as feedback to adjust the teaching work to meet the needs of students. To make formative assessment productive, teachers should train students in self-assessment so that they can meet their learning objectives and how to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The table below illustrates the details of implementing formative assessment in the classroom.

STEP 1

Activity / Task

After providing necessary input, the teacher wanted to check if students understood the material teacher shared. To make vocabulary review fun and effective, an interactive vocabulary matching game (Picture 1) was arranged. According to Eline (1997), visual aids can make ideas clear and understandable and help an audience remember facts and details. In order to increase student participation, students were asked to work in groups and send a representative to match the target words with pictures and their collocations.

The activity provided teachers with student feedback, and they could immediately adjust instruction based on students' errors.

Picture 1: Vocabulary matching game

Activity / Task

Picture 2.1: Guided writing task

FAMOUS COUNTRIES FOR STUDY TOUR

1. **Which country** will you go for your study tour?
2. **Which tourist attractions** will you visit?
3. **What local food** will you eat?
4. **Who** will you meet?
5. **What will you buy** for your relatives in HK?

Stahl (2005) states 'Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world'. The teachers believe that application of the target words is crucial as it provides another context for learning word meanings.

Therefore, students were challenged to apply the target words to their own experiences after the matching game.

In the guided writing task (Pictures 2.1 and 2.2), students were asked to write a short paragraph about their plan for a study tour, using the words they had just learnt.

The classroom assessment provided students with an opportunity to process the meaning of each word at a personal level.

Picture 2.2: Guided writing task

Going on a Study Tour in ___Japan___

I will go to Japan for my study tour. I will visit tourist attractions such as Mount Fuji and Tokyo Tower. I won't make a viedor. I will eat local food such as Sushi and sashimi. I will meet my host family and give presents to them. I will buy souvenirs like green tea and mochi for my relatives.

Finally, I will send postcards to my parents and friends. I hope I can learn a lot of new things as well as the culture of Japan.

To cater for learner diversity, tiered writing worksheets were designed. Less able students were given more clues to complete their task (Picture 2.3).

As can be seen from students' work, they were able to use the new vocabulary words to express their own ideas with a few spelling mistakes.

Picture 2.3: Tiered worksheet for less able students

Going on a Study Tour in _Japan_

I will go to 1. _Japan_ for my study tour. I will 2. _eat_ local food such as _Sushi_.
I will 2. _visit Doraemon Museum_.
I will 3. _drink green tea_ such as _mochi_.
I will 4. _make video_ and _send postcard_.
to them. I will 5. _____ like _____ for my relatives in Hong Kong.
I will send postcards to my friends too.

The teacher was told what and how the students really did in their vocabulary learning process from the qualitative data collected from the writing task.

STEP 3 Activity / Task

Peer-assessment and self-assessment is important to learning because it helps students know what to do to develop each other's learning as well as reflect on their own learning process.

In this lesson, students were required to comment on the work of their peers with prompts from the teacher (Pictures 3.1 and 3.2).

Students adopted a serious attitude towards the task and some were able to give meaningful feedback to their partners.

Picture 3.1

Going on a Study Tour in _Japan_

I will go to Japan for my study tour. I will visit some tourist attractions like Tokyo Tower. Tokyo Tower start working for the television signal since 2012. we can also go up the tower to see the view of Tokyo. I will also eat local food such as sushi. I will buy some sourenirs like green tea

Picture 3.2: Peer evaluation

Name: _____ Class: P.5_

Read your partner's writing and give him/her some comments.

Name of your partner: _____

Checklist
Content:
☑ provide interesting information with supporting details
☐ provide an appropriate ending
Language:
☑ use the words we learnt today correctly
☑ use future tense
Organisation:
☑ write in a paragraph
Others
☑ _u R not finishing ur Work sheet!_

*Put a tick in the box if it is properly done.

As for self-assessment, students were given an Exit Ticket (Picture 3.3) at the end of the lesson as an informal measure of how well students understand the topic and a way to collect student data for planning instruction of the next lesson. This also allowed students to know their performance and to be aware of the improvements they needed to make. Although students were asked to write down at least five words that they learnt in that lesson, most of them could put down all the collocation words with minor spelling mistakes and plural form of nouns.

Picture 3.3: Exit ticket
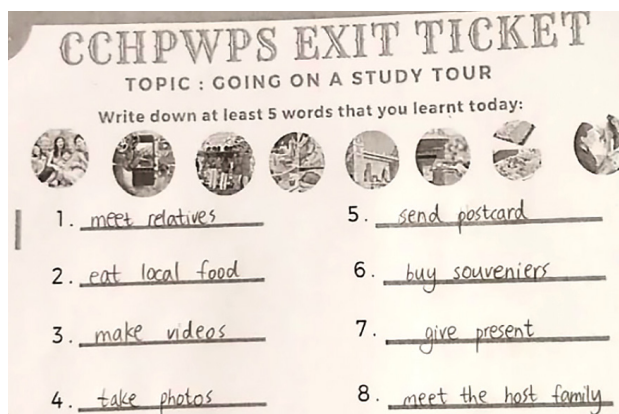
STEP 4 — Activity / Task

To consolidate students' understanding and application of the target vocabulary in an authentic context, the teacher prepared a piece of e-homework in the form of cloze passage using Google forms. Students could attempt exercises of a different degree of difficulties and review their work. Level 1 was the easiest and Level 3 was the most challenging (Picture 4.1). This can enhance their learning motivation and commitment to self-learning. Using

Picture 4.1: E-homework (cloze passage)

online tools benefits assessment. There are powerful data collection tools that can provide instantaneous feedback to both students and the teachers.

As grades were released immediately after each submission, it allowed students to see their total score and which questions they answered correctly or incorrectly.

This instant feedback encouraged the students to question their understanding and ask for help if necessary. In turn, the teacher could assess how well students had understood the lesson.

Once the students had completed the assessment, the teacher took some time to reflect on the results. As shown in the table of results analysis (Picture 4.2), students' performance in Questions 4, 6 and 7 was less satisfactory. This quantitative data, similar to the findings of Exit Ticket, gave the teacher ideas that students were weak in spelling and countable noun. Thus, the teacher revisited the lesson with a different approach - clearing up areas that the students felt confused. Follow-up activities like spelling games, dictation and proofreading exercises were provided to heighten students' awareness of spelling and use of plural nouns.

Picture 4.2

Using assessment data to improve teaching and learning

Cloze passage results analysis

No. of Correct Responses (Overall)			
Questions	Level 1 Attempters	Level 2 Attempters	Level 3 Attempters
1	74%	95%	90%
2	79%	83%	77%
3	84%	100%	90%
4	42%	63%	77%
5	53%	90%	90%
6	42%	80%	73%
7	42%	95%	73%
8	47%	80%	83%

Actions Taken

To discuss the focus of the collaboration with core group members, a meeting was held at the beginning of the academic year. Right after that, School Development Officer of the QSIP-CEAL Project paid a courtesy visit of a P5 class to get a general idea of learning and teaching at the school.

To enhance assessment literacy of English teachers along with the entire teaching staff of the school, a total of three workshops were held during the collaboration. The first workshop was held in early September, introducing assessment literacy to all teaching staff, followed by a needs analysis workshop for English language teachers in late October. The third workshop, on assessment literacy, was organised for curriculum leaders in early November.

Regular collaborative lesson planning meetings were also arranged to discuss teaching strategies and develop learning materials. In order to try out the strategies discussed and evaluate their effectiveness, lesson observations and post-lesson-observation feedback sessions were conducted in November and following April. At the end of the collaboration, an evaluation meeting was held to enable reflection and assist in the planning of future development.

Finally, P5 English teachers shared their experiences and insights gained from the project with teachers of other subjects in a within school dissemination session in June.

Impact

1. Student Level

The collaboration has impacted on students' learning quite considerably. Students' learning motivation has been enhanced with a variety of learning activities such as group competition, semantic mapping and e-exercises. Students have also developed a habit of keeping vocabulary notes using the vocabulary building strategies introduced. Besides, cooperative learning has been facilitated among students and students' confidence of conducting self- and peer assessment has been boosted. With the introduction of online learning tools, students have also developed self-directed learning skills, having the ability to manage their own learning activities and needs.

2. Teacher Level

The collaboration has made positive impacts on teachers. Teachers have become more aware of the importance of the alignment of learning, teaching and assessment. When planning a lesson, they would identify interests and needs of students; think of ways to enhance students' motivation; develop class activities to meet learning objectives and assess what students have learnt. Teachers have also gained a better understanding of

the role of formative assessment, assessment for learning and assessment as learning in particular, in enhancing English learning and teaching in everyday classroom practice.

3. **Curriculum Level**

    The use of graphic organisers and chunking of words are found effective in helping the students to understand word meanings and improve pronunciation respectively. Teachers would like to adopt these strategies in other levels in their future teaching.

4. **Departmental Level and School Level**

    The culture of developing formative assessment has extended beyond the English panel. For example, the Mathematics panel recognised the benefits of classroom assessment. Teachers have become more aware of providing timely feedback to students after identifying students' weaknesses from class activities. Teachers also try to promote assessment as learning in their panel. Self-assessment and peer assessment are included in student assignments, providing chances for students to evaluate their own performance and make adjustments with clear learning goals and criteria.

Way Forward

In addition to enhancing learning and teaching through formative assessment, teachers recognise the importance of using student performance data, both qualitative and quantitative, to inform instruction. The current practice of section analysis in the General English examination paper will be extended to item analysis so that more detailed information of students' performance would be collected. Furthermore, a focus of development is to review on the assessment design, including mark distribution, time allocation and question validity. For example, teachers will reconsider giving more time for students to finish the tasks in the G.E. Paper which include reading, writing and grammar.

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