

CASE 4

Alignment of Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Kiangsu-Chekiang College (Shatin)

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School

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Background

Teaching vocabulary in secondary schools can sometimes be frustrating. Students may rely on words they have learnt in primary school and are reluctant to push themselves to adopt vocabulary they are taught in secondary school. Such complacency is commonly seen in upper band schools. Kiangsu-Chekiang College (Shatin) (KCCS below) is one such case.

As Stahl (1999, p.7) puts it, 'vocabulary knowledge certainly affects comprehension'. This tendency may, in the long run, influence students' ability to comprehend. Teachers from KCCS also found that there was room to improve regarding students' performance in reading papers.

In face of these perennial issues, teachers wished to explore ways to motivate students to learn vocabulary, and enhance their skills in reading through vocabulary instructions.

Level

Secondary 2

Strategies Used

1. **Aligning Learning, Teaching and Assessment by Backward Planning**
2. **Designing Teaching Materials that Guide Learning**
3. **Adopting A Range of Classroom Assessments to Track Students' Learning**

Actions Taken

1. Vocabulary

a. **Aligning Learning, Teaching and Assessment by Backward Planning**

Effective lessons should clearly state the desired outcomes at the outset (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). With the end goal of broadening students' vocabulary, teachers reviewed the vocabulary section in exam papers, and agreed that students should be taught to use those words and spell them correctly. With these two desired results in mind, teachers made the following changes in assessment.

i. Analysing Reasons for Low Performance and Redefining Expectations

Picture 1: Vocabulary section from exam paper before collaboration (part of session)

2019/20 S2 First Exam

F. Vocabulary (10 marks)

Complete the passages below with the vocabulary provided in the word box. Use each word at most ONCE only.

| | | | | | | |
|----------|------------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|------------|
| species | insatiable | startled | skyscrapers | adversely | rational | endangered |
| pressing | glimpses | regret | consumption | stunning | casually | brink |

Another Face of Hong Kong

Hong Kong is home to a diverse array of wildlife, so take a walk on the wild side and see the (1) _____ city in a whole new light.

Beyond its world famous (2) _____, Hong Kong is a city of contrasts. While it might appear like a big concrete jungle, visitors might be surprised to find that Hong Kong is also home to 262 outlying islands and

The old version of the vocabulary section provided word choices for students (Picture 1). Students were asked to select words with the right meaning and part of speech to complete the passage. Although words were given, the task was still very challenging to many of them. Upon reflection, teachers came up with two possible reasons:

- Students were not motivated to revise vocabulary.
- Students did not assimilate grammatical sentence structures.

Besides, concerns about whether students could really learn and apply the words taught were raised. Teachers pointed out that students showed limited vocabulary in writing and speaking. Noticing these problems, teachers agreed that a change in assessment format should be made. Instead of providing options to students, the first letters of words were given in the blanks and students were required to spell the words themselves (Picture 2).

Picture 2: New testing format of vocabulary section

| |
|---|
| 2020/21 S2 First Exam |
| <p><u>Part 3 Vocabulary (10 marks)</u></p> <p>A. Basic Level (10 marks)</p> <p><i>Complete the article with the vocabulary in the Unit 3 and Unit 4 vocabulary lists. The first letter has been given as hints. You should make sure that your answers are spelt correctly <u>with the first letter</u> given.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Let's go Plastic-free</p> <p>Hong Kong is an international financial centre. But it isn't all banks and (1) s_____. There are plenty of great beaches to swim, (2) s_____ and wind-surf. But in recent years, the (3) s_____ views of beaches are ruined by the</p> |

b. Revamping Teaching Materials

i. Vocabulary List

To make vocabulary teaching more focused, the original vocabulary list was redesigned. Three questions were put forth and the subsequent criteria were suggested by teachers:

- How to select words?
 - Words that are common and generally useful for students to know with reference to their frequency, usefulness, transferability and difficulty.
- What to include apart from words?
 - Parts of speech and meanings
- How to arrange the content?
 - According to the order of appearance in the text
 - Dividing word lists into basic and challenging parts

To help students build vocabulary, 'teachers should also take note of their frequency of occurrence across different text types and the vocabulary demand in non-language subjects' (The Curriculum Development Council, 2017, p.35). Since the old list was considered lengthy and with words that might be hard to frequently recycle (Picture 3), teachers intentionally chose words that would meet students' needs in reading and writing this time. Besides, parts of speech and meanings were provided so as to assist students to comprehend passages.

Attention was paid to the list arrangement. Words were arranged in their order of appearance in the text for easy reference. To cater for learner diversity, the set of words was categorised into 'basic level' and 'challenging level' (Picture 4 & 5). Teachers selected words that they expected students to be able to spell and apply as core vocabulary. The words that teachers would want students to recognise and know the meaning at this stage were put in the 'challenging level' table.

Picture 3: Vocabulary list before collaboration

Unit 3 - Grow a sustainable future

| Vocabulary | Part of speech | Meaning |
|----------------|----------------|---|
| 1. incinerator | (n.) | a furnace for destroying things by burning them, especially waste |
| 2. critic | (n.) | a person who expresses an unfavorable opinion of something. |
| 3. foolproof | (adj.) | incapable of going wrong or being misused |
| 4. eliminate | (v.) | to get rid of; do away with |
| 5. emission | (n.) | the production and release of something, especially gas |
| 6. fume | (n.) | Gas; vapor; harmful smoke. |
| 7. outrageous | (adj.) | shocking |
| 8. vegetarian | (n.) | a person who does not eat meat |
| 9. insatiable | (adj.) | impossible to satisfy |
| 10. appetite | (n.) | desire for food |
| 11. unsettling | (adj.) | causing nervousness or anxiety, disturbing |
| 12. insanitary | (adj.) | so dirty or ridden with germs as to be a danger to health |
| 13. adverse | (adj.) | Not helpful; harmful |
| 14. ingest | (v.) | to take food, drugs, etc. into your body, usually by swallowing |
| 15. massive | (adj.) | large and heavy; great in size or scope |
| 16. urgency | (n.) | importance requiring quick action |
| 17. pressing | (adj.) | requiring immediate attention; urgent |
| 18. brink | (n.) | the edge of something |
| 19. drought | (n.) | a long period without rain |
| 20. severe | (adj.) | very bad or serious |

Picture 4: Words students were expected to master their usage and spelling were put in the basic level table

Basic Level

| Vocabulary | Part of speech | Meaning |
|----------------|----------------|---|
| 1. sustainable | (adj.) | causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time |
| sustainability | (n.) | the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment |
| 2. excessive | (adj.) | too much or too many |
| 3. adopt | (v.) | to accept or start to use something new |
| 4. appetite | (n.) | desire for food |
| 5. livestock | (n.) | animals and birds that are kept on a farm, such as cows, sheep, or chickens |
| 6. deforest | (v.) | to cut down or destroy trees in an area |
| 7. adverse | (adj.) | Not helpful; harmful |
| 8. massive | (adj.) | large and heavy; great in size or scope |
| 9. pressing | (adj.) | requiring immediate attention; urgent |
| 10. disaster | (n.) | a sudden event that causes a lot of damage, such as a very bad fire, storm, or accident |

Picture 5: Words that students were expected to recognise and know the meaning were put in the challenging level

Challenging Level

| Vocabulary | Part of speech | Meaning |
|-------------------|----------------|---|
| 1. insatiable | (adj.) | impossible to satisfy |
| 2. the atmosphere | (n. phrase) | the mixture of gases around the earth |
| 3. insanitary | (adj.) | so dirty or ridden with germs as to be a danger to health |
| 4. contribution | (n.) | something that you contribute or do to help produce or achieve something together with other people, or to help make something successful |
| 5. undeniably | (adv.) | in a way that is truly certain |

ii. Vocabulary Worksheets

Students were guided to understand a word's meaning and part of speech through sentence making. Making sentences of all the words on the list would be a tedious job. With this in mind, teachers offered options. Students could choose words from the list to construct sentences.

Picture 6: Worksheet on sentence making and extended response

Sentence making

(a) Circle two words and use them to make two sentences.
 (b) Use any words in the table to complete the sentence about the text.

| | Word | Sentence |
|----|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. | sustainable sustainability | Sentence (1) <i>It will help the environment if you adopt a vegetarian diet.</i> |
| 2. | excessive | |
| 3. | adopt | Sentence (2) <i>The farm keeps many livestock so that it sells them with a large amount every day and becomes rich.</i> |
| 4. | appetite | |
| 5. | livestock | |
| 6. | deforest | |

Excessive appetite for meat is bad for the environment because *livestock* releases some greenhouse gases to cause global warming, so we need to *adopt* a vegetarian diet.

A student's response to 'About the Text'

Further to sentence making, a sentence for completion was set to test students' understanding of the text. It also offered room for students to recycle the taught vocabulary. As seen from the above student's work, a student used the target words '*livestock*' and '*adopt*' in his/her extended response (Picture 6).

c. Adopting Classroom Assessments to Inform Teaching

Formative classroom assessments are activities conducted by teachers to track students' learning, give feedback accordingly, and modify their instructions that would improve student's motivation and learning (McMillan, 2007). Several activities were undertaken by teachers to serve the above purposes.

i. Admit Slip

Admit slip is used as a means to gauge student understanding about a given topic at the beginning of lesson. It can test students' prior knowledge when a new topic is introduced, or be served as a way to check if students have grasped things taught in the previous lesson. While grading is not needed, admit slip is a platform for students to reflect on learning, and at the same time, provide information for teachers to decide if they have to re-teach certain areas.

Picture 7: Google Document as admit slip

Admit slip: write down 3 words you learnt in paragraphs 1 & 2

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. deforest | 2. adopt deforest excessive | 3. | 4. Adopt Excessive livestock | 5. Adopt Excessive Deforest | 6. Adopt Deforest livestock |
| 7 | 8 Insatiable Deforest Adopt Insatiable sustainability | 9 excessive | 10. adopt Deforest Livestock | 12. adopt Livestock deforest | 14 Insatiable Adopt Livestock |
| 15 adopt livestock deforest | 16 | 17. | 18 Deforest adopt atmosphere | 19 adopt deforest sustainability | 20 adopt deforest livestock |
| 21 adopt Deforest excessive | 22 Adopt deforest livestock | 23 Adopt Insatiable Appetite | 24. Adopt deforest Livestock | 25. 1) adopt 2) Insatiable 3) deforestation | 26 1. adopt 2. deforest 3. livestock |
| 27 Adopt Deforest insatiable | 28. Livestock Atmosphere excessive | 29. Adopt Livestock deforest | 30. adopt Livestock excessive | 31 Adopt Excessive Deforest | 32 Adopt Livestock excessive |

Students that needed more attention

Words that teachers might need to re-teach

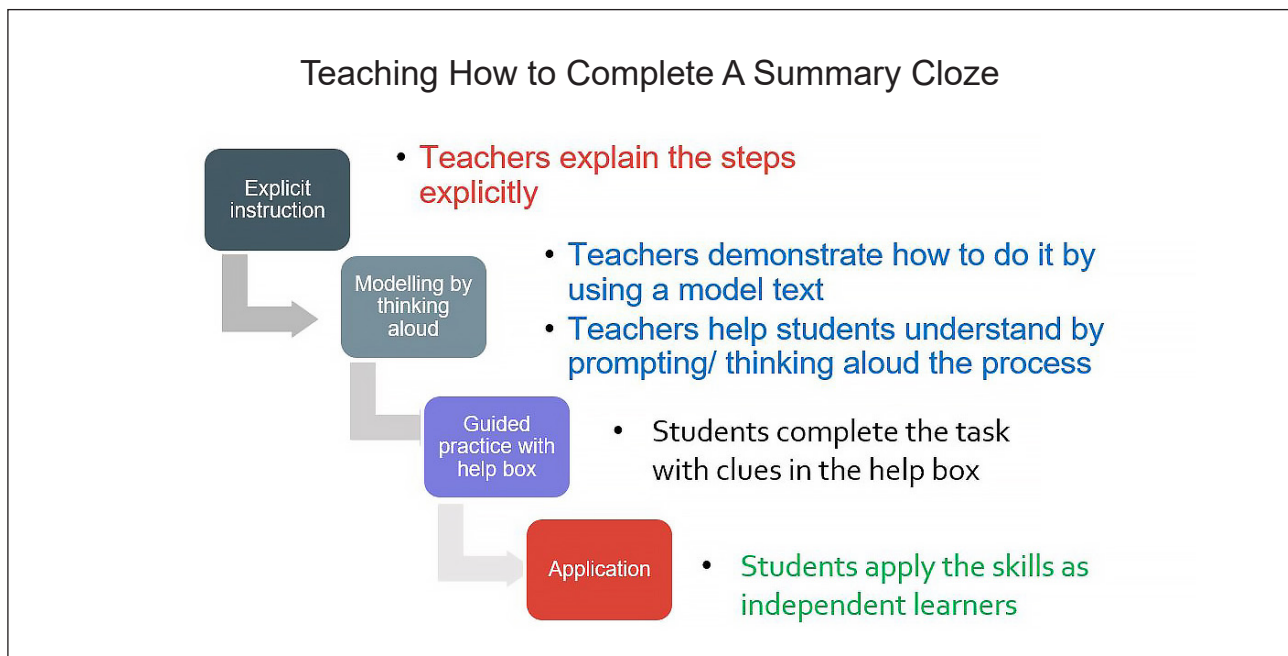
During school suspension period, teachers adopted Google Drive Document as admit slip. Students were asked to type three words they had learnt in the previous lesson on the document. The numbered boxes corresponded to students' seat numbers, where students typed in words in their respective boxes.

This quick activity allowed teachers to know words that were less familiar among students (Picture 7). From the result, only two students recalled the word '*sustainability*' and just one remembered the word '*atmosphere*'. The teacher then realised it was worth teaching the less commonly recalled words again in the lesson. Such follow-up action would result in spacing effect, which refers to outcome brought when content taught in a spread-out-through-time manner instead of being crammed in a short period of time. It is found that spacing effect in teaching vocabulary would produce a higher long-term retention compared to massed learning (Sobel, Cepeda, & Kapler, 2011). Applying admit slip as classroom assessment to track students' learning can therefore modify teaching, and at the same time help students learn more effectively.

Besides, a few students were found lagging behind or not being on task during Zoom lesson as their boxes were empty. Actions were then taken to see if those students encountered any problems.

2. Comprehension – Summary Cloze

Picture 8: Flow chat of new teaching approach on summary cloze



a. Aligning Learning, Teaching and Assessment by Backward Planning

In the second term, teachers identified summary cloze in the reading comprehension section needed support. Unlike vocabulary in the first term, a consensus was drawn on keeping the format of summary cloze. To attach importance to this part, more marks were

allocated to summary cloze in the final exam. Greater variation on sub-questions came with higher weighting was allocated to the summary cloze. This could provide a fuller picture to see if students had grasped the skills (Picture 9 & 10).

Picture 9: Table of grammar skills assessed in S2 2019/20 Final Exam Paper (Before collaboration)

| Words from the text | Answers in Q.4 | Grammar Tested |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| i. 1,510 deaths | i. to die | to + infinitive |
| ii. ... zero overdose deaths | ii. nobody has died | subject, vocabulary |
| iii. more than 270,000 visits annually | iii. is visited | passive voice |

Picture 10: Table of grammar skills assessed in S2 2020/21 Final Exam Paper (After collaboration)

| Words from the text | Answers in Q.11 | Grammar Tested |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| iv. You can stroll | iv. strolling | suggest + gerund |
| v. after shopping | v. after shopping | N.A. |
| vi. different themed areas | vi. different themes | adj. + noun (plural) |
| vii. After taking photos | vii. can take | modal (can) + infinitive |
| viii. enjoy... dining | viii. can...dine | modal (can) + infinitive |
| ix. making a wish come true | ix. to make | to + infinitive |
| x. is then tossed | x. by tossing | prep. + gerund |

b. Teaching Materials

i. Employing Word Formation Table to Work on Target Vocabulary

One of the strategies to build vocabulary is to teach students to use knowledge of word formation (The Curriculum Development Council, 2017). To train students in summary cloze skills, a past paper was chosen as teaching material. The words that were answers for the summary cloze question, together with the ones worth highlighting in the passage were put in a word formation table (Picture 11). In the table, students were asked to write down other parts of speech of the selected words. It was supplemented with an exercise for students to apply these words in sentence level. The aims behind such design were threefold:

- To expose students to the various forms of the target words.
- To provide them with opportunities to use the words grammatically.
- To guide them to attempt sentence structures that they would face in the adapted paper.

Picture 11: Word formation table

Word Formation

Fill in different parts of speech of the words below.

| | Verb | Noun | Adjective | Adverb |
|----|------------|-----------------------|------------|--------|
| 1. | N.A. | | cultural | |
| 2. | speculate | | | N.A. |
| 3. | | | innovative | |
| 4. | substitute | | | N.A. |
| 5. | | immigrant/immigration | N.A. | N.A. |
| 6. | influence | | | |
| 7. | | theory | | |
| 8. | travel | | | N.A. |

Following this table was a set of sentences with blanks for students to use the words above to complete meaning. The design of the exercise is discussed in 2.b.ii below.

ii. Designing Teaching Materials that Guide Students to ‘Think-aloud’

‘Think aloud’ is a common strategy that teachers vocalise what they are thinking so as to model the process to tackle a task for students. For students who are attempting comprehension questions, such verbal think-aloud process may not be feasible. Therefore, modification was done to teaching materials in which students were guided to undergo the process in a written manner. Help boxes were put next to each blank in the summary cloze section. Respective sentence patterns and part of speech rules were explained in the boxes. By visualising the thinking process of a teacher, students were led to arrive at answers step by step.

Picture 12: Exercise for students to apply the target words

Fill in the following sentences by choosing a word from the above table. Make sure your answers are grammatically correct. In the bracket, fill in the part of speech of the chosen word. The first one has been done for you as example. The clue box underneath each sentence provides you hint. Circle the right choice among the options given.

- He has a **theory (n)** that the particular germ caused this deadly disease. Whether or not his idea is correct is yet to be proved.

○ We usually have a verb/noun/adj/adv after the article 'a'
- As an international school, our students are from _____ () diverse backgrounds. There are Chinese, British, Dutch, Japanese, American, Malaysian and Thai students. They have different religions and traditions.

○ diverse is a(n) verb/noun/adj/adv
○ To describe it, we need a(n) verb/noun/adj/adv
- Before pandemic, he _____ () to at least four different countries every year. Now he can only visit various places locally in Hong Kong.

○ In a sentence, we have Subject + verb/noun/adj/adv + object
○ The first sentence talks about things in the present/ past/ future

Help box

iii. Providing Options to Students During Practice

Several changes were made to the original past paper question to assist students. Echoing the vocabulary exercise mentioned in 2.b.ii, brackets requiring students to fill in the part of speech were added to the target question in the past paper. It aimed to once again draw students' attention to the importance of sentence structures in attempting summary cloze.

As more able students might have already picked up skills elicited in the first exercise, the help boxes were put as a separate section this time to serve as an optional input. Should the students need support for a particular question, or all questions, they could refer to the help boxes located at the lower part of the page. Otherwise, students could just complete the summary cloze. This handy arrangement of teaching materials could cater for learner diversity in two ways:

- More able students could focus on the summary cloze only.
- Less able students could refer to the help box(es) and had the autonomy of using the amount of support they needed.

Picture 13: Original summary cloze question in past paper

7. Complete the following summary chart of paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 using either words from the passage or your own words. Use ONE word to complete each blank. (5 marks)

Stories of the Egg Tart

paragraph 2: As butter was hard to come by, chefs i) _____ it with lard, which was much ii) _____, when making custard tarts.

paragraph 3: Egg tart imitators from Guangzhou in _____, which Hong Kong together with Chinese iv) _____.

paragraph 4: The egg tart was v) _____ by pastel de nata.

Picture 14: Adapted summary cloze question for practice

Summary Cloze (changing POS) (2nd Form Test 1819 Q.7)
 Complete the following summary chart of paragraph 2, 3 and 4 using either words from the passage or your own words. Use ONE word to complete each blank. You may need to change the forms in order to provide grammatically correct answers. (10 marks)

Stories of the Egg Tart

paragraph 2: As butter was hard to come by, chefs i) _____ it with lard, which was much ii) _____, when making custard tarts.

paragraph 3: Egg tart imitators from Guangzhou in _____, which Hong Kong together with Chinese iv) _____.

paragraph 4: The egg tart was v) _____ by pastel de nata.

Help box (Optional)
 Use this box to assist you to come up with the POS of the words to be filled in.

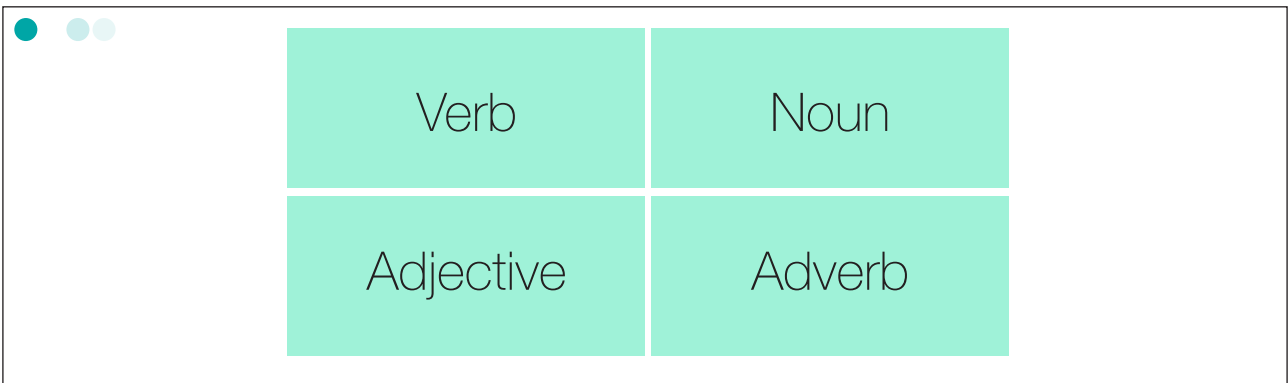
| | Note Circle the option that you think is correct | If you have chosen a verb, what tense should you use? |
|------|--|---|
| i. | Chefs + <u>verb/noun/adj/adv</u> + it (S + V + O) | |
| ii. | ..., which is much _____ o Which → relative pronoun, meaning 'it' o Much is commonly used in comparison: e.g. 'much higher', 'much thinner' o It + is + much + <u>verb/noun/adj/adv</u> | |
| iii. | Egg tart imitators from Guangzhou + <u>verb/noun/adj/adv</u> + to Hong Kong (S+V+O) | |
| iv. | ... to Hong Kong together with Chinese _____ Chinese is a(an) <u>verb/noun/adj/adv</u> , which is to describe a(an) <u>verb/noun/adj/adv</u> | |
| v. | The egg tart was _____ by pastel de nata. This sentence is in <u>passive/active</u> voice. The blank should be a word in <u>verb/noun/adj/adv</u> form. | |

c. Adopting A Range of Classroom Assessments to Track Students’ Learning

Understanding the right parts of speech (POS) plays a pivotal role in doing summary cloze. Teachers mainly employed word cards and exit card to learn what students struggled with.

i. Word Cards

With similar application as admit slip, teachers guided students to write down verb, noun, adjective and adverb on a piece of A4 paper:



At the beginning of the lesson, teachers showed the target words on the screen. They had been taught the previous lesson. In order to recall the words’ nature, teachers asked students to fold the paper and raise the word’s corresponding POS. The activity could give teachers a general idea on whether certain words they needed to re-teach. Furthermore, it also served as a self-assessment that made students aware of their learning.

ii. Exit Card


Teachers outlined the process to handle summary cloze in five steps. Before the end of the lesson, teachers showed the following slide and checked if students had picked up the main focus of the lesson.

Picture 15: Exit card at the end of lesson

EXIT CARD

What are the steps of completing a summary cloze?

1. _____ keywords in the cloze.
2. Look for _____ around the blank.
3. Label the _____ and identify the sentence structure.
4. Locate the answer in the reading passage with the help of keywords.
5. Fill in the blank with correct _____.



Impact

1. Student level

Improvement in students' performance in both the vocabulary section and summary cloze in exams was observed. Although the new vocabulary section was more challenging when compared with the old version, students were able to spell words in the basic section, and many attempted the challenging part in the bonus section as well. Similar situation also happened to summary cloze. With more sub-questions, teachers expressed that students did a better job in summary cloze in the final exam. This is evidence that the strategies used were conducive to better learning.

On the whole, the project motivated students to participate in class. In particular, students were enthusiastic about the word card (admit slip) activity as observed by teachers. Using an individual set of word cards to show answers, the risk of making mistakes in front of the class was greatly reduced. Students were therefore more willing to respond in class.

2. Teacher Level

Having participated in the entire process of backward planning, teachers expressed that this approach would better assist them to plan the learning, teaching and assessment cycle. To design what is worth learning, teachers now begin with the end in mind. There are three things they focus on:

- What students are going to do with this topic in the final assessment?
- How was the students' performance in the past assessment?
- What problems would students face in learning this topic?

The above questions steer teachers in planning teaching materials and activities.

Since students' abilities and learning problems may differ year by year, timely changes and adaptations need to be made to suit students' needs. Teachers have recognised the importance of using diversified classroom assessments to track students' learning, and more importantly, to use the information collected to adjust their instructions accordingly.

3. Curriculum Level

This collaboration brought about two layers of impact to the English panel.

A learning circle is developed among S2 form teachers. They reviewed past student performance and located two specific areas to tackle. Professional exchanges on what to teach and how to teach were facilitated by the collaboration. The changes made to the vocabulary list and the teaching of summary cloze in this project will be kept and reused in the next academic year.

Moreover, such a form-based teaching experiment and try-out success was used as a pilot study for the panel to kick start changes in other forms. Since the two panel heads participated in the entire collaboration, problems identified and strategies used in the project were easily disseminated to other forms. During collaboration in the first term, panel heads saw the potential benefits of the new vocabulary teaching and therefore communicated with S1 and S3 teachers to adopt similar approach of having basic and challenging vocabulary sections:

Picture 16: Vocabulary section in S1 First Term Exam Paper 2020/21 (part of the section)

Section 4 Vocabulary (13 marks)

Part 1 Basic Level: *You are writing a blog entry about a charity that helps children. Complete the blog entry using the correct form of the words from the Basic Level Vocabulary list. The first letter of each word is given as a hint. You should make sure that your answers are spelt correctly **with the first letter** given. Part 1 is compulsory. (13 marks)*

Help a child in-need get a chance in life

There are many charities in the world which aim to (1) c_____ poverty but *Save-A-Child* aims to do so by connecting individual donors to individual children, one-to-one. Each donor agrees to (2) s_____ at least one child.

Part 2 Challenging Level: *You are writing a blog about being a teenager during the COVID-19 school suspension. Complete the blog entry using the correct form of the words from the Advanced Level Vocabulary list. The first letter of each word is given as a hint. Part 2 is **not** compulsory.*

(2.5 bonus marks, 0.5 marks each)

Adolescence is a difficult time of life in general; the (1) r_____ we go through as so many changes are happening to our minds and bodies are immense. But my generation has to experience a totally new (2) p_____: going to school online during a global pandemic.

The strategies used in teaching summary cloze will be introduced and promoted in the other forms in the coming academic year.

Way Forward

Dissemination of strategies and the application of backward planning are considered to be practical and effective to bring along changes after conducting the CEAL project. The panel has laid down two areas to focus on:

- To facilitate the sharing of experiences and strategies among junior forms
- To strengthen the alignment of learning, teaching and assessment

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