Beyond Testing and Grading:
Adopting Effective Assessment Strategies to Enhance English Learning and Teaching

Assessment usually conjures up images of a marked written assignment, an end-of-term examination or a report card. However, these do not capture the full extent of how assessment operates in the English Language classroom. Assessment not only provides information about students' achievements in relation to the learning targets and objectives, but also shows where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. The word "assess" comes from a Latin word that means "to sit beside", implying an active partnership between teachers and students, and among students. To achieve these, Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Assessment as Learning (AaL) should go hand in hand. As illustrated in the diagram below, the ultimate goal of AfL and AaL is to improve learning and teaching and nurture lifelong language learners through enhancing their intrinsic motivation and metacognitive strategies.

Self-directed lifelong English learners

AaL occurs when students are engaged as active participants in assessment. They **monitor** their learning progress and use feedback received to **reflect** on learning and set goals.

AfL occurs when teachers use information about student learning to inform teaching and provide **feedback** to students.

Assessment as Learning — Assessment for Learning

- Ownership & responsibility
- Self-monitoring
- Self-reflection
- Metacognition
- Growth mindset
- Motivation
- Confidence

ASSESSMENT-RELATED RESOURCES

The English Language Education (ELE) Section provides support for schools to develop effective strategies and practices for assessing students. A variety of resources (e.g. references, professional development programme materials, the assessment task bank) are available for teachers' use. For details, come visit our website at **http://www.edb.gov.hk/ele_assessment**.

Assessment is an essential part of effective planning, learning and teaching. With effective assessment strategies and practices, schools can shape the assessment into positive learning experiences that promote self-efficacy and commitment to learning among students.

CONTEXTUALISING ASSESSMENT WITHIN THE PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION CYCLE

Curriculum Planning (Pre-instruction Stage)

- Examine the data collected from different internal and territory-wide assessments (e.g. Pre-S1 HKAT, TSA, HKDSE Examination) to understand the performance and needs of students. Understand the purposes of each assessment and the values of the findings, so as to inform the formulation of assessment and homework policies at the school, subject and classroom levels.
- Make use of reference tools such as the Learning Progression Framework (LPF) to set assessment objectives and plan assessment activities to facilitate the progressive development of language skills and a smooth interface across key stages.
- Design an evaluation mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of assessment policies and practices. Refine the previously adopted practices based on past experiences.

Curriculum Implementation (While-instruction / Learning and Teaching Stage)

Providing a clear and understandable vision of learning

- Identify what students need to learn, set clear learning targets and present them in student-friendly language and accessible formats.
- Involve students in establishing assessment criteria where appropriate to give them a sense of ownership.
- Illustrate the task requirements and expected standards with sample work.

Adopting a variety of assessment in different modes to engage students and promote learning

- Design a variety of assessment tasks (e.g. oral presentations, quizzes, games, projects, performance tasks, reciprocal teaching) to allow students of different ability levels and learning styles to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Allow students some autonomy in the ways they learn and present their learning outcomes.
- Incorporate the use of e-assessment platforms available (e.g. Student Assessment Repository (STAR)), particularly those with instant feedback, personalised features and adaptive functions, to cater for learner diversity and facilitate self-directed learning.

Embedding assessment strategies into everyday classroom practice

- Create a safe classroom culture and learning environment that encourages risk taking.
- Establish a structured classroom with clear procedures to enable students to take charge of their own learning.
- Make the learning focus and intention (often the most significant piece of new learning) clear and visible throughout the lesson(s).
- Ask a variety of questions (e.g. open and closed questions, content-based questions, free response questions) to encourage critical thinking and reflection. Use wait time, cues, prompts and follow-up questions aptly to deepen learning.
- Engage students in peer and self-assessment. For younger learners, model the language and demonstrate how you would like students to comment on their own and others' works to enhance their reflection skills.

Using evidence of student learning needs to determine next steps in teaching

- Actively observe what students say and do, interpret evidence and make judgement on how learning can be improved.
- Adjust teaching pace, strategies and learning materials based on students' strengths and weaknesses identified from daily observations and assessment data collected.
- Design focused instruction to explicitly teach strategies to address students' areas of weaknesses (e.g. think-aloud). Provide opportunities for practice and focused feedback.

Providing quality feedback

- Reduce reliance on grades and marks. Give timely and encouraging feedback which focuses on the success criteria and learning objectives.
- Highlight success and identify areas for improvement in the feedback. Provide concrete suggestions for improvement to close the gap and move learning forward.
- Allow time for students to respond to the feedback (e.g. formulating improvement plans) through practices such as conferencing and process writing.

Empowering students to take charge of their own learning to foster self-directed learners

- Provide opportunities and guidance for students to set learning goals, identify the next step in learning and devise strategies, monitor progress and evaluate effectiveness through practices such as keeping a learning journal.
- Introduce metacognitive strategies (e.g. self-questioning) and reflection tools (e.g. KWHL Table, 3-2-1 Summariser, Venn Diagram) to enhance students' capacity for self-assessment.
- Reinforce good habits of mind and steps for self-monitoring with strategies such as visual displays, chants and mnemonics.

Evaluation (Post-instruction Stage)

- Design summative assessment to evaluate students' achievements over a period of instruction with due attention to balanced coverage of learning targets and objectives, variety of question types and intents, and meaningful contexts for purposeful use of English.
- Work with the school management to devise a reporting system that communicates to stakeholders students' learning performance, including not just their English knowledge and skills, but also their learning attitudes and efforts.
- Analyse various aggregate assessment results to review whether curriculum goals are achieved, and to inform future curriculum planning with a view to improving student learning.
- Enhance the lateral coherence and vertical continuity of school assessment strategies and keep systematic records to track students' learning progress over years.

Developing School-wide Assessment Strategies to Deepen Learning – The Case of S.K.H. Tin Shui Wai Ling Oi Primary School

Putting learners at centre

- Assessment requirements are adjusted to suit individual students' needs and enhance intrinsic motivation.
- Homework is diversified. Mechanical exercises or drilling are avoided in order not to kill students' interest in learning.
- Ample opportunities are provided for students to engage in self-reflection (e.g. self-editing checklist) and peer review (e.g. gallery walk that allows students to put smilies and question marks on classmates' work).

Focusing on learning progress, not marks

Marks and grades are not provided in assessments (e.g. dictations) to:

- encourage students to reflect on their performance and understand why they get the answer or make a mistake; and
- focus students' attention on learning attitude (e.g. efforts) and strategies (e.g. revision or question answering skills), as well as ways to improve their own learning.
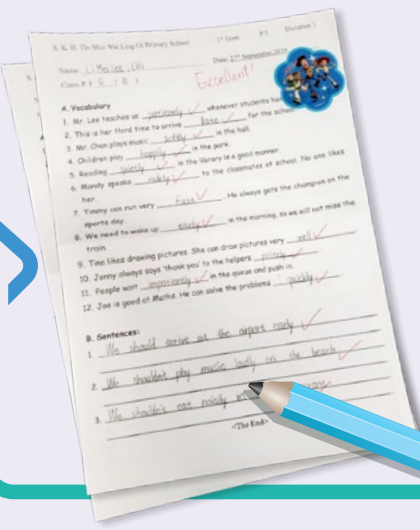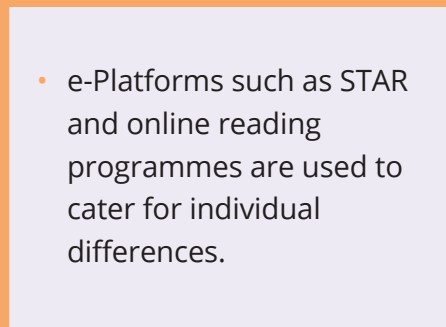
Designing fun-filled formative assessment

- A variety of fun activities such as English challenge and orienteering, excursions and "Learning Fair/Bazaar" are organised for students to display learning outcomes and apply skills learnt to accomplish real-life tasks.

Embracing e-assessment

- e-Platforms such as STAR and online reading programmes are used to cater for individual differences.

Letting data speak – evidence-based decision making

- A mechanism is established to facilitate effective collection and management of internal assessment data (e.g. question intent mapped out in the paper setting stage). Focus is selected for data analysis, often based on the key learning objectives and target skills taught in class.
- Data from STAR, TSA reports and internal examinations are analysed to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers look into the underlying causes of students' learning difficulties, devise coping strategies and track students' progress.

Creating an assessment-literate learning community

- Teachers are actively involved in professional development activities such as Quality Education Fund Thematic Network (QTN) and HKEAA Quality Assessment Management Accreditation Scheme (QAMAS), which have developed their competence in interpreting data and making effective use of them to adjust curriculum design and teaching strategies.

Interview with the Principal and English Panel Head of Lock Tao Secondary School

In Lock Tao Secondary School, assessment data and evidence of student learning are systematically recorded to help students connect their learning experiences and reflect along the learning journey. Mr. Richard Choi Hong-nin, the Principal, believes that **assessment is about marking milestones, charting progress, creating success and celebrating achievements.**

Q: What are the core values and underlying principles of the curriculum and assessment practices in your school?

A: Most of the students enter our school with little confidence and motivation in learning English. They find English Language challenging with their weak foundation. Our curriculum and assessment practices are designed with the psychology of learning in mind. We hope to craft an empowering learning journey that changes students' perception of themselves and English learning.

Q: Could you tell us more about the empowering learning journey you have crafted for your students?

A: Students learn best when there are positive emotions and accomplishments in the learning process. We try to engineer such experiences by creating a signature activity at each year level for students to "shine". For example, in S1, we have a multiple-intelligences project involving a study tour to Heyuan. In this cross-curricular project, students apply the knowledge they have acquired in different subjects to solve problems in the Heyuan visit. At the end of the project, students do a group presentation in English to reflect on their learning experiences. Similarly, in S2, drama is the highlight to be imprinted in every student's mind. Students undergo a series of lessons that focus on script writing, speech delivery, acting, dancing and singing skills. They then stage a musical where everybody has a role to play. Parents are invited to help and watch the performance to witness their children's growth. We capture the memorable moments front and back stage in the programme booklet and no student is left out. This serves as a memento of their fun learning experience in S2.

Q: Apart from keeping records of students' participation in these signature activities, how does your school collect evidence of student learning and make use of assessment data?

A: Systematic data collection and record keeping are crucial for reflection, review and evaluation. For ten years, we have introduced the practice of e-portfolios. We keep records of each student's written work and oral presentations since S1. Over the years, students can review their work and witness their progress. Teachers use the e-portfolios to understand their students' needs, as well as to guide them to reflect and set goals. e-Portfolios have greatly facilitated vertical coherence in curriculum planning and self-directed learning.

In addition to keeping e-portfolios, we have taken advantage of e-learning tools with instant feedback and statistical analysis. In the past few years, we have incorporated diagnostic pre-and post-tests at the junior secondary level to inform pedagogical decisions. At the beginning of each term, English teachers would stock-take the grammar and vocabulary items they plan to cover and design a short test using Google Form with all relevant items. Students complete the assessment before and after the period of instruction. Data generated (e.g. mean, attainment rate) will help teachers adjust the teaching focus and pace and evaluate teaching effectiveness. We find the electronic tests very cost-effective, as comprehensive data are generated for teachers' reference without marking.

Q: Does the introduction of e-portfolios and diagnostic tests create a lot of work for teachers?

A: Keeping records of students' work over the years does involve some scanning and recording but with a system established and technical support provided (e.g. camcorders set in advance), the work soon becomes routine and manageable. When teachers see the positive impacts on learning motivation and effectiveness, they find the work worthwhile.

Q: What are some of the positive impacts you and teachers have observed?

A: With the continuous collection and effective management of assessment data, we can easily present a full picture of students' learning progression and show them how far they have come from S1. Parents see their children's growth from the learning evidence and begin to show more recognition and support. In reviewing peers' work, students learn to show appreciation and make constructive feedback to encourage each other to break through and move forward. The assessment data we collect over the years really help to showcase students' achievements, building greater self-efficacy and grit in English learning.