

Chapter 10

Assessment for Learning in Language Classrooms

Alice Chow and Pamela Leung

10.1 Introduction

In recent years, there have been numerous reform initiatives in different contexts around the world aimed at improving educational planning and practices. For the success of these reforms, teachers play a crucial role in conceptualizing, interpreting and modifying them in ways that have significant impact on the kinds of learning that take place in the classroom. This chapter examines how the educational environments within which a reform initiative is undertaken shape the challenges teachers have to contend with for a sustainable and wider use of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies. It describes an assessment project undertaken by one secondary school in Hong Kong to improve student learning of languages through classroom-based assessment for learning (AfL) strategies.

10.2 The Language Situation in the Hong Kong SAR

The policy of promoting “biliteracy and trilingualism” announced in 1998 by the Chief Executive of the first Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government gives recognition to the roles that Putonghua, Cantonese and English play in the political, cultural and economic arenas of Hong Kong. Ethnically, more than 96% of the population of 7 million are of Chinese descent, of whom 88.7% speak Cantonese, a Chinese dialect, as the usual language (Bacon-Shone & Bolton, 1998), and 1.3% are native speakers of English (Tsui, 2004). Clearly cultural loyalties of its people belong to China, with all important aspects of their lives, including education practices, reflecting Chinese traditions and influences (Chow & Mok-Cheung, 2004). Nevertheless, English has always played a very important role in Hong Kong during and beyond its 150 years of British colonial rule until 1997 when

A. Chow (✉)
Department of English, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Tai Po, Hong Kong
e-mail: alice@ied.edu.hk

its sovereignty was returned to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Before the political handover, when both Chinese and English were the official languages in Hong Kong, the language situation was described by Lai (2005) as "largely biliterate and bilingual", characterised by the use of modern standard Chinese and English in writing, and Cantonese and English, the two main spoken languages, for different functions.

The status of English has always been high, attributable not only to Hong Kong's British colonial history, but also to its drive for internationalization in an increasingly globalized world. The fact that English had been perceived as the language of power and prestige led to a predominance of English medium secondary schools in the early 1980s, outnumbering Chinese medium secondary schools by nine to one. Though the Mother Tongue Education Policy mandated by the first HKSAR Government reversed the situation, and led to a drastic drop in the percentage of English medium schools to 25% in 1998 (Chow, Tse-tso, & Li, 2005), this lasted for only a period of 10 years until 2009 when the "fine-tuning" of the medium of instruction policy revived the supreme role of English as a gatekeeper to higher education, a means for upward and outward mobility and a marker of internationalization (Lai & Chow, 2010). The role that the English language plays in the schooling of Hong Kong students has always been as significant as that of Chinese.

10.3 Reforms in Language Education and Assessment

In order to enable Hong Kong to continue as a thriving metropolis in Asia, the HKSAR Government believes that a steady and abundant supply of bilingual workers with proficiency in Chinese and English is needed (Cheng, 2004), and therefore, the two languages have always been two of the core subjects that students must take from primary one to senior secondary three (from 6 to 18 years of age). A two-track system in the medium of instruction is adopted in the majority of primary and secondary schools in which Cantonese is the teaching medium for oral communication, while standard modern Chinese (which has significant differences from Cantonese in terms of grammar and vocabulary) is adopted for written communication.

To raise the standard of Chinese and English, and to enhance the use of the two languages in the territory, the syllabuses of the two languages have undergone several revisions in different stages over the years (Lord & Cheng, 1987; Lee, 1995). For the subject of Chinese, the integrationist view emphasizing the integration of language learning with the nurture of Chinese cultural and ethical values shaped the Chinese curriculum in the 1950s (Tse et al., 1995). From the late 1960s onwards, it was replaced by the separationist view which argues that the acquisition of effective communication skills and thinking abilities should be the primary objective of Chinese language education (Tse, 2009). In line with the large-scale education reforms at the macro level, the new Chinese curriculum (Curriculum Development Council (CDC), 2001b, 2002b) now has an open and flexible framework which

features a learner-focused approach (Tse, 2009), aiming at motivating students to learn and enhancing the teaching effectiveness of the subject through authentic learning activities and diversified learning materials (CDC, 2001b).

The revisions in the English Language Syllabuses and associated curriculum guides over the years have been numerous. They share a common aim to give pupils more opportunities to use English as a tool for communication, and to ensure that their proficiency is adequate for further studies and future employment (e.g., CDC, 1999, 2002a). It was hoped that with these revisions English language teaching approaches practised in the Hong Kong classrooms would also be reformed. For instance, the emphasis, in the English Language Syllabus, on enabling students to master the formal structure of the language in the 1970s was shifted to preparing students to develop linguistic functional competences in the 1980s (CDC, 1983), and then to enhancing the all-round developments of every child through integrated tasks in the 1990s (CDC, 1999). A major reform initiative which involved both Chinese and English in the 1990s was the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) initiative which advocated an integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

At the classroom level, attempts have been made, over the years, to align educational processes with the student-centred pedagogy advocated in the published curriculum guides. With regard to curriculum implementation, while some studies conclude that the new Chinese Language curriculum has been successfully implemented (e.g., Wong, 2000; Wong & Lee, 2006), the research findings of other studies suggest that there is still room for improvement (e.g., Ho, 2003). Research studies investigating the process and outcomes of the TOC initiative enacted at the classroom level suggest that it failed as a curriculum and assessment renewal endeavour because of the lack of corresponding support measures in the external domain (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), which, in the case of Hong Kong, includes the cultural settings in which assessment is perceived and utilized as a means for measurement, quality control and selection. The examination-driven nature of the Hong Kong education system has constrained assessment innovations such as the TOC initiative (Adamson & Davison, 2003; Berry, 2008; Carless, 2005). The incompatibility between the espoused learning theories of Hong Kong teachers and the constructivist approaches advocated in the TOC initiative was also cited as another reason for its downfall (Cheung, 1996; Morris, 2000; Morris, Lo, & Adamson, 2000; Adamson & Davison, 2008). It was also pointed out by Adamson and Tong (2008) that teachers do not just implement the curriculum, they adapt and modify the innovation to form a “hybrid version” of the reform.

The backwash effect of major changes in high-stakes examinations on teaching is best illustrated by the changes in classroom processes instigated by the introduction of a spoken component in the Use of English examinations and Advanced Supplementary Level Examination in Chinese Language and Culture in Hong Kong in 1990s. These changes led to a substantial increase in class time being devoted to speaking activities, and to an increase in spoken fluency noted in the subject of English (Allison, 1999). Recent assessment reforms in particular for the subjects of Chinese and English include the introduction of school-based assessment (SBA) in high-stakes examinations such as the Hong Kong Certificate Education

Examination (HKCEE) (for pupils aged 18) (HKEAA, 2005; CDC, 2007a), which aim to promote a wider use of AfL strategies in the secondary school classrooms. The Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) (for pupils aged 9–15) implemented in the subjects of both Chinese and English since 2004 is another policy intended “to enable participating teachers to understand the key process involved in making sense of the (assessment) data and facilitate teachers’ effective use of TSA results to inform learning and teaching” (TSA, 2009).

Situated within an educational context which has a history of failed educational renewal initiatives, but increasing concerted efforts at all levels to revamp the educational processes and assessment practices – for example, through the introduction of TSA and the SBA component in the HKCEE, both of which emphasize the “analysis, feedback and reflection cycle” (Coomes, Folse, & Hubley, 2007, p. 13) – the AfL Project reported in this chapter might provide insights into the possibilities and challenges involved in the application of learning-oriented assessment strategies for improving learning and teaching at the classroom level. The design and perceived outcomes of the project will be outlined in the following sections.

10.4 Design of the Project

Guided by the fundamental concepts of AfL in the literature (e.g., Assessment Reform Group, 1999, 2002; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Torrance & Pryor, 1998; Watkins, Carnell, Lodge, Wagner, & Whalley, 2002) and the CDC curriculum guide (CDC, 2007a, 2007b), one secondary school in Hong Kong undertook a 12-month investigation in 2006–2007 into the use of AfL strategies in its junior Chinese and English language classrooms for students aged 13–15.

The project involved two teams of language teachers in the school: the Chinese language subject team consisting of the Head as well as ten members of the Chinese Department, and the English subject team comprising two English language teachers and the Head of the English Department. The project teams experimented, in junior secondary language classes and in two action cycles, with the use of AfL strategies, namely questioning, sharing of criteria and standards, provision of feedback, and peer and self assessment. These AfL strategies were tried out in a total of 10 Chinese language classes, i.e., five Secondary One (S1) and five Secondary Two (S2) classes for students aged 13–14 and 14–15 respectively, and two Secondary One (S1) English language classrooms for students aged 13–14. While the Chinese language teachers focused on the use of AfL strategies in promoting the development of oral presentation skills of students in both action cycles, the English language teachers explored their use in the development of students’ writing skills in the first action cycle, and then in their oral presentation skills in the second action cycle. Four faculty members from the Hong Kong Institute of Education served as facilitators and academic subject consultants in supporting the teachers’ efforts. The process and outcome of the initiative were captured through various methods of data collection. Recordings were made of the project meetings, lessons in which

AfL strategies were tried out, and semi-structured interviews with project teachers, students and the Principal of the school about their evaluation of the project. Project teachers' reflections on their experiences were recorded in open-ended questionnaires.

The following section describes the use of AfL strategies by the two subject teams. Materials used by the teachers in conducting classroom assessments, and lesson extracts are included for illustrative purposes. The perceived impacts of the project on student learning and teacher development are also reported to highlight the successes achieved and challenges encountered by the teachers in their attempts to enact AfL in their classrooms.

10.5 Use of AfL Strategies

The project teachers were introduced to the notion of AfL through a pre-project seminar conducted by the Institute's faculty members, during which the importance of the following AfL strategies were highlighted:

- (1) the use of questioning in language classrooms;
- (2) the notion of criteria-sharing for enhancing students' knowledge and awareness of the critical areas in which their performance would be assessed;
- (3) the provision of constructive effective feedback; and
- (4) the use of peer- and self-assessment for equipping students with the knowledge and skills for making judgments on their own as well as their classmates' performance.

10.5.1 The Use of Questioning

AfL is premised on the notion of communicative interaction in the classroom between teachers and students, through which students are guided to understand what is expected of them with respect to their learning and achievement. The following is a lesson extract illustrating the use of questioning by the teachers as a technique to raise students' awareness of the critical areas in which their performance would be assessed.

Lesson extract 1 CT7 – 2nd cycle (original in Chinese)

- CT7: What do we need to pay attention to when reading aloud?
 STD 1: We should avoid repetitive reading [*not repeating the same word or sentence so as to enhance fluency*]......
 STD 2: Voice should be loud enough.
 CT7: What do you mean by loud enough?
 STD 2: You must project your voice.
 CT7: Anything else do we need to pay attention to when reading aloud?
 STD 3: We need to have correct pronunciation.

- CT7: Correct pronunciation, I have mentioned some initial sounds which you need to pay special attention to, don't mix them up, and also avoid slurring.
- STD4: You need to put in more emotions.
- CT7: Putting in more emotions. Please take some time to look at the following paragraph, can you tell me, how to put in emotions? What do you need to pay attention to?
- STD5: When we read text that portrays a happy mood, we need to read louder [read in ways that convey that mood].
- CT7: Can you give some examples?
- STD6: For example, I got 100 marks for my exam today [saying this very loudly].
- CT7: Experiencing something happy or successful, you need to have a clear and resounding tone. How about the opposite? Being criticized or when you experienced failure, what sort of tone is appropriate?
- STD7: The tone needs to be lowered.
- CT7: Other than these, anymore?
- STD8: You need to have eye contact.

.....

CT7: (teacher demonstrated reading aloud a passage)

Note: CT7- Chinese Language teacher 7; STD- Student

The above extract shows the ways in which the Chinese language teacher facilitated and elicited a recap of pertinent assessment criteria which were relevant to the assessment of the reading aloud task at hand. The ultimate aim of reading aloud in the curricular subject of Chinese language is to enhance comprehension and appreciation of various types of texts. Students are required to read fluently and clearly with appropriate pausing and intonation, making very few or no pronunciation mistakes. By asking the right questions, the teacher (CT7) has successfully drawn the students' attention to the assessment criteria such as accuracy, fluency, appropriateness of intonation and awareness of audience.

10.5.2 Criteria Sharing

To share assessment criteria with students, the project teachers devised task-specific assessment checklists and feedback forms listing areas of criteria for assessment for use by both teachers and students (in teacher, peer- and self-assessment) in recording observations, and assessing student performances in the assessment tasks. Samples of checklists and assessment forms used for oral assessment tasks are provided below (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2).

The first sample (Fig. 10.1) was used in Chinese lessons for assessing students' performance in a speaking task which required students to read a text aloud. For this task, there were only two training goals for students to accomplish. The first one was volume control, and the second one fluency, and to achieve the second

Name: _____ Date: _____

Learning Objectives: Good volume, no repetition Unit 2 Textbook Session 2.36

Self-assessment

| Description | Accomplished ✓ / to be improved △ |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. I can finish reading 60 words in 1 minute. | |
| 2. I have repeated less than 2 times in a 1-minute presentation. | |
| 3. I think my voice is loud enough. | |

Give 3–5 examples of inaccurate pronunciation you made in this task _____

Peer-assessment 1 _____ (Name of Student Assessor)

| Description | Accomplished ✓ / to be improved △ |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. S/he can finish reading 60 words in 1 minute. | |
| 2. S/he repeated less than 2 times in a 1-minute presentation. | |
| 3. I think his/her voice is loud enough. | |

I think his/her overall performance is (Please ✓ the appropriate box)

good very good excellent

Give 3–5 examples of inaccurate pronunciation your classmate just made in this task: _____

Peer-assessment 2 _____ (Name of Student Assessor)

| Description | Accomplished ✓ / to be improved △ |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. S/he can finish reading 60 words in 1 minute. | |
| 2. S/he repeated less than 2 times in a 1-minute presentation. | |
| 3. I think his/her voice is loud enough. | |

I think his/her overall performance is (Please ✓ the appropriate box)

good very good excellent

Give 3–5 examples of inaccurate pronunciation your classmate just made in this task: _____

Fig. 10.1 Checklist 1: Assessment form for reading aloud in Chinese

| Teacher assessment | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Description | Accomplished ✓ / to be improved △ |
| 1. S/he can finish reading 60 words in 1 minute. | |
| 2. S/he repeated less than 2 times in a 1-minute presentation. | |
| 3. I think his voice is loud enough. | |

I think his/her overall performance is (Please ✓ the appropriate box)

good
 very good
 excellent

3-5 examples of inaccurate pronunciation this student just made in this task : _____

Fig. 10.1 (continued)

goal students were discouraged from repeating sentences in which they had made some minor mistakes. The clearly defined goals helped focus students' attention on specific aspects of the task, and specific indicators, such as the number of words read within a 1-min presentation, provided students with a more objective reference when they undertook self-assessment and peer-assessment. Of course, students' experience in doing assessment may not be comparable to teachers' professional judgment. Nevertheless, one of the characteristics of AfL is that through the process of self- and peer-assessment students are expected to study the assessment criteria repeatedly and refine their judgment with the support of teacher feedback. One of the key features of the use of checklists in the project is that both teachers and students used the same checklists for teacher, and student self- and peer-assessments. This design reduces the difference in expectations between students and teachers.

Checklist 2 (Fig. 10.2) is a generic assessment form used in English lessons for assessing students' performance in speaking tasks. Analytical scoring, as opposed to holistic assessment, was adopted, whereby the performance was judged against each of the assessment criteria specified for the task (see Chow & Li, 2008 for analytical and holistic assessment). Key domains, such as content, command of language and communicative strategies, were identified as aspects of oral performance which would be observed and evaluated. Additional criteria were added to focus on textual and skill-based features that characterized a particular assessment task.

As an essential AfL strategy that helped illustrate and elucidate the meanings of the assessment criteria and facilitate the development of abilities of discernment in students, exemplars illustrating different levels of performance in related assessment tasks were devised, and were also accompanied by focused training, in the form of performance analysis, led by the teacher, on samples of student work. The following Lesson extract 2 illustrates one such attempt by one teacher to help students

Presenter's Name: _____ Class: _____ Assessor's Name: _____ Class: _____

Task: Picture Description

A. Content (Relevance, coherence and interest of ideas)
 1 = Very Weak 2 = Below Average 3 = Average 4 = Above Average 5 = Outstanding

| Content | Self Evaluation | Peer Evaluation | Teacher Evaluation |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Express ideas with details and examples | | | |
| 2. Elaborate on ideas by giving reasons and results | | | |
| 3. Draw on own or others' experiences | | | |
| 4. Describing feelings | | | |
| Other Useful Ideas: | | | |
| 5. Make good use of cues provided | | | |
| 6. | | | |

B. Command of Language and Pronunciation
 1 = Very Weak 2 = Below Average 3 = Average 4 = Above Average 5 = Outstanding

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Use a good range of vocabulary and accurate grammar | | | |
| 2. Speak fluently with accurate pronunciation | | | |
| 3. Use voice well to draw audience's attention | | | |
| 4. Use good intonation to express ideas | | | |
| Other Functional or Notional Requirements: | | | |
| 5. | | | |
| 6. | | | |

C. Communication Strategies
 1 = Very Weak 2 = Below Average 3 = Average 4 = Above Average 5 = Outstanding

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Show appropriate awareness of audience (e.g. eye contact, smiling and body language) | | | |
| 2. Use coherent linkers effectively (e.g. although, then, and, but, first, when, while, however, this, there, that, those) | | | |
| Other Specific Requirements: | | | |
| 3. Ask questions to enhance communication | | | |
| 4. | | | |

D. Overall Feedback

| |
|----------------------------|
| Strengths and Improvements |
| |

Fig. 10.2 Checklist 2: Generic assessment form for English speaking tasks

understand one of the assessment criteria of oral presentations, which focused on the richness of the contents.

Lesson extract 2 CT3 – 1st cycle (original in Chinese)

- CT3: Please indicate which presentation, the one made by student A or student B in the video, has a rich content. When you hear a beeping sound, . . . [it means] the students went over time. (*Teacher showed a video*)
Which presentation has a richer content? Please raise your hand if you think Student A has a richer content (*students raised their hands*). Please raise your hand if you think student B has a richer content (*students raised their hands*). Why do you think B has a richer content?
- STD 1: The content covered more places for sightseeing.
- CT3: How about A? What do you think of the places that A introduced? He talked about a fair bit of history, Stanley and the Airport. If you were a tourist, what would you think about his recommendations on the sites for sightseeing? Are they interesting?
- STD 2: They are not interesting.
- CT3: Compared with B, Student A's recommendations were not as interesting. Other than whether it interests you, what other suggestions can you give him?
- STD 3: Recommend more places.
- CT3: Student A had a fair bit of time left, whereas Student B went overtime and had the timer set off.....

Note: CT3- Chinese Language teacher 3; STD- Student

Besides using videos for performance analysis, the teachers also used sample student writings in class to illustrate to students the assessment criteria, and different levels of performance in a particular writing task.

10.5.3 Peer and Self Assessment

Ample opportunities were provided in the project for students to assess the performance of their fellow classmates as well as their own performance, for facilitating the application of the criteria, and for promoting self-regulation and self-directed improvement. The following extract from a project lesson illustrates one such attempt by a teacher to promote the practice of peer and self-assessment.

Lesson extract 3- CT3-1st cycle (original in Chinese)

- CT3: Before I assess the presentations, I would like you all to select two of the best presentations by your classmates (listed the different presentations on board). Please raise your hand if the first classmate's presentation was interesting....., the second.....
- STD 1: The first student used a lot of formal phrases, the second used more informal language, and had a bit of pronunciation problems.
- CT3: Any suggestions on how to improve?

STD 2: Talk in front of a mirror.

STD 3:

STD 4: My self-reflection is that my own time management wasn't good enough.

CT3: Ok, you have done some self-reflection, any more comments? Ok, it's my turn to give some feedback. When you do a presentation, you need to attract the audience's attention, your voice needs to be loud, and you must have a rich content. There is one thing most classmates didn't pick up on, it is that some of you forgot to address the audience before making the presentation, this [greeting the audience] is to let your audience and yourself get ready for the start of the presentation, and also this is a gesture of politeness. And today, you have been very serious and engaged about the speaking task, this is excellent.

Note: CT3- Chinese Language teacher 3; STD- Student

Table 10.1 Overview of classroom assessment: practice of individual speech

| Time (minute) | Lesson flow | Remark (AfL strategies) |
|--|--|--|
| Class: 1A Topic: individual speech No. of students: 40 Duration: about 35 min Using "a piece of memorable news" or "a memorable TV programme" as a topic, the teacher guides students to prepare a 1-min speech at home before the lesson. | | |
| 5 | Introduction – explaining the requirement of the activity (focusing on "content" and "volume"); Teachers' demonstration – "a piece of memorable news"; Distributing assessment forms; | Questioning, Sharing the assessment criteria |
| 3 | Students practise the speech they have prepared at home on their own. Then every one of them fills in the self-assessment part of the assessment form; | Self-assessment |
| 12 | Students work in pairs and take turns to talk on prepared topics. Then they fill in the peer-assessment part of the assessment forms; | Peer-assessment 1 & 2 |
| 1 | Teacher briefly concludes the activity; | – |
| 12 | The teacher picks 3 students to demonstrate to the whole class; When each student finishes, the teacher invites other students to comment on the performance; | Peer-assessment Questioning |
| | The teacher fills in assessment forms and gives feedback to the students who have just given a speech to the class; | Feedback (peer + teacher) |
| 2 | Conclusion – the teacher stresses the learning objectives and asks students to tidy up their assessment record; | – |

The above extract, as well as lesson extract 4, also shows the provision of feedback by the teacher on students' performance. As illustrated, the teacher's feedback focused on the presentation content, language use and strategies for oral communication. This practice was prevalent in many other lessons. Table 10.1 illustrates an overview of lesson procedures in which AfL strategies were incorporated in classroom assessments.

Lesson extract 4- CT1 – 2nd cycle (original in Chinese)

- CT1: Although this student was reading off her speech due to nervousness at first, once she got used to it, she had lots of eye contact, she put in emotions well, had used adverbs like last but not least etc, she used evidence to back up her argument. Here is the third presentation.
(Another student presents)
- CT1: All three students did very well. For the third presentation, although the student was 4 seconds short of the 1:15 mark, his pace was pretty fast. His content was rich, his voice was loud and clear, his eye contact..... (students interrupted).
- STD1: His voice was loud enough, his content was rich. He projected his emotions well; he had used evidence and also adverbs.

Note: CT1- Chinese Language teacher 1; STD- Student

Table 10.1 illustrates an overview of lesson procedures in which the above AfL strategies were incorporated in classroom assessments.

10.6 Impact on Student Learning

One of the valuable outcomes of this project was a notable cultural shift from a pervasive tradition of formal and standardized examinations in schools, where evaluative judgment was exclusively in the hands of teachers with students given limited information about the basis of the judgment or opportunities for self-assessment, to a classroom environment where assessment was experienced as a learning event with students developing an expanded awareness of achievement standards, and enriched capacities for self- and peer-evaluation, and for qualifying such evaluation with constructive feedback in relation to the set achievement goals. Through learning-oriented assessment procedures of co-construction of achievement goals, assessment criteria-sharing, provision of quality feedback and student assessment, students acquired the knowledge, confidence and capabilities to assess their performance, monitor progress, and regulate and take ownership of their learning. To critics such as Torrance (2007) who lamented the use of explicit learning objectives, assessment and criteria as promoting instrumentalism, the cultural shift, albeit to a limited extent, in the classroom assessment practices would seem to have been a welcome change. Black & Wiliam (1998b) and Berry (2005) point out that through self- and peer- assessment, students learn how to monitor their own learning, develop the ability to evaluate their own and their peer's work, as well as think about what to do next. What should be applauded as a commendable effort

in this project was the increase in student engagement in the process of assessment which helped to close the achievement gap, and boost the self-confidence of under-achieving students.

Both the teachers and students in the project reported improvements in students' performance in skill areas selected as foci of investigation. Following the AfL practices, both teachers and students found the contents of students' speaking in Chinese, and both speaking and writing in English richer. Some teachers also reported that the improvements in the performance among weaker students were more noticeable than among the more capable students, but in the long run, they believed that all students would benefit from a sustained and wider implementation of AfL.

Very impressive, never thought that their improvement would be so great. Their improvement in speaking was most noticeable. Through AfL, their confidence in speaking was strengthened to a great extent. When they have the confidence, they are more motivated to continue. This is what we wished to achieve through AfL, because you need to motivate them to become active learners. First of all, they need to be confident in learning English. Therefore, [the results] were quite impressive. (Interview- English teacher A)

Self-assessment was perceived to be useful in that it enabled students to identify their own strengths, and peer-assessment alerted them to the weaknesses that they were not aware of. Specifically they mentioned that students benefited from peer assessment and teacher-guided performance analysis of exemplars showing different levels of student performance in key domains of assessment.

In fact the students' English was not very bad, but their organizational skills were weak. That is, they had a lot to say, but couldn't organize [their ideas]. . . . Through AfL, they saw how well others did in the presentation tasks, what was meant by a composed performance, and then how ideas were expressed. . . . Through analyzing the use of linking words, we showed them how to organize ideas, how paragraphing is done in compositions, their organizational skills have improved. When they know what they are saying, they rely less on cue cards. They began to have eye contact with the audience, they did better in all areas, this was most noticeable in my class. . . .

[Peer assessment] benefits students, because they are their peers, i.e., when they saw May performed at level 5, [and they knew that] they performed at level 4, they would think that they could do better. (Interview- English Teacher A)

To the surprise of this teacher, some of her students were able to point out ways in which they did well, and ways in which they would improve on in their next performance.

That's already very impressive. I thought they would say "bad", or "ok", but I never thought that they could say what was wrong with their performance; they were only S1 students, shy, possibly not knowing much, but some were brave enough to say they were good. . . . (Interview- English Teacher A)

This was corroborated by students who were interviewed about their experiences in the AfL project.

My friends commented [through peer assessment] that I provided a lot of useful details in my essay, and that I was fairly clear in expressing my ideas. (Interview-IE Student 2)

Similar points were made in all the interviews with the students who highlighted the learning they gained through the AfL practices.

Through peer-assessment, we knew about our strengths and weaknesses. We also learnt from our classmates through observing their performance. (Interview-2B Student 1)

My friends suggested that I should improve in ways that I organized my ideas. (Interview-1E Student 3)

Many students attributed improvements in their performance to the assessment criteria and performance analysis provided by the teachers.

We also understood the goals of the oral presentation task through the assessment criteria [provided by the teacher]. (Interview-1E Student 2)

I like the AfL project, because through self-, peer- and teacher assessment, I understand more about my performance. (Interview-1B Student 2)

As described above, performance analysis was part of the teachers' attempt to share assessment criteria with students, and this enabled students to tell what the next higher level of performance for them would be like. With enhanced understanding of the basis of assessment, some students were found to have developed stronger abilities to monitor their own performance.

Besides, after I had tried it for half a semester, after the first writing task when I assigned the second writing task and distributed the evaluation form, students were already very much on task, noticing problems in their writing, even when they were in the process of writing. Therefore, I feel that they did benefit from it. (Interview- English Teacher A)

10.7 Impact on Teacher Development

The teachers felt that they had benefited from the project in the following ways:

1. They now had an expanded teaching repertoire to include new strategies such as criteria-sharing, the use of exemplars for illustrating different performance levels, and the use of peer and self assessment with students. One teacher mentioned her attempt in applying the strategies with students in other classes at senior secondary level, which though proved to be less effective owing to lack of teacher preparation, yet was worthy of further exploration.

Perhaps it's easier to implement AfL in junior classes, because in senior classes, we had to finish the syllabus. . . . AfL emphasizes the importance of the process of development, the learning process. . . . , it's worth giving it a try. (Interview- English Teacher A)

2. They had developed enhanced techniques in providing students with feedback on their performance with clear focus and specificity, and using questioning techniques to encourage deeper and reflective thinking and analysis.

In some of the lessons, after the presentations, I noted down some of the mistakes, and then let the whole class do some practice. I think that's a kind of feedback for the whole class. . . . With practice with the whole class, they are aware of their problems, and will do better next time. (Interview- English Teacher A)

Through assessment, I see what they have done well, and know whether certain strategies are okay or not. And then we [teachers] have the confidence to explore other things, and then realize how some other things don't work. [We]don't give up. (Interview-English Teacher B)

3. They were now using assessment to inform and structure future teaching to address areas of difficulties in student learning, and students' needs.

In regard to teaching, I have learned a lot from my colleagues and even from my students. They might tell me what they wanted to learn and how they liked to learn. I then could work to meet their abilities. I think this is very useful for teaching. (Interview-Chinese Teacher B)

4. They had strengthened their skills in curriculum design through improving the linkage between teaching, learning and assessment.

[H]onestly, I might not gain similar experiences in other schools. Through this project, I realize that I can progressively make use of self- and peer-assessments. The students would be more serious too. Telling them the procedures can let them understand our requirements. . . . Although it was quite time-consuming, knowing how to do this systematically is good. (Interview-Chinese Teacher A)

10.8 Conditions for Sustained and Wider Use of AfL

Despite the many benefits cited as the positive impacts of the project on student learning and professional development, the teachers did have to contend with the following challenges.

First of all, although the school had obtained external funding for employing a teaching assistant for the project, her role was limited to providing logistic support such as lesson recording and questionnaire administration. It would therefore be more useful if additional resources and staffing could be provided for assisting the project teachers with materials development as well as reducing the teaching load of these teachers, so that educational initiatives would not be viewed as simply more work for the teachers.

The second challenge related to the professional development needed to equip the teachers with both the skills and confidence for designing and enacting AfL strategies (see Fontana & Fernandes, 1994) in the following areas in particular:

1. the use of high-level, reflective questions to gauge students' understanding of assessment criteria;
2. ways to help students to get to a higher level of performance which required pedagogical tact;
3. transfer of assessment skills from one skill area to another;
4. adapting the AfL strategies for use in public examination classes, which was perceived by project teachers to be particularly challenging, as these classes had a very packed teaching syllabus to ensure the students were adequately prepared for public examinations;

5. the use of peer and self- assessment with less capable students particularly in grammar-focused assessment tasks which generally demanded a relatively higher level of grammatical knowledge for students to be able to identify their and others' grammatical errors.

Several suggestions were put forward by the project teachers for creating a conducive environment and support for enhancing the use of AfL strategies:

1. Implementing small-class teaching (the teachers currently have more than 40 students per class) with relevant, corresponding pedagogical techniques would enable teachers to monitor student progress and provide feedback on individual students' performances in assessment tasks;
2. Involving more teachers in the subject departments for wider and sustained implementation, lest when the project teachers leave the school, AfL can continue and be further embedded into the regular practices of the teachers;
3. Changing school based assessment policies by incorporating continuous assessment but reducing summative assessment, so that students take their daily tasks for formative assessment more seriously, and allowing more time and space for practising AfL.

The third recommendation listed above is particularly relevant to the contexts which have a strong examination culture and where most teachers and students consider only formal examination to be "assessment" and therefore take other forms of assessment less seriously. In Hong Kong, many schools rely heavily on using paper-and-pencil tests for summative purpose and the papers are designed in a way that memorization of facts is made an obvious focus (Pong & Chow, 2002; Berry, 2010). This AfL reform was situated within a culture which has a strong tradition of didactic pedagogy in which classroom teaching is mostly expository, and sharply focused on preparation for external examinations which are highly competitive and exert excessive pressure on teachers and students (Morris, 1992, 1995). In Hong Kong, in addition to large-scale public examinations at the end of secondary schooling, there are the TSA at the levels of Primary 3, 6 and Secondary 3 (at the age of 8, 11 and 15 respectively) and the Pre-Secondary 1 Hong Kong Attainment Test at the end of Primary 6. In addition to these examinations, every year, the student has to take at least two school-based examinations and numerous tests and quizzes, which in some schools are held weekly.

The Head of the English Department was keenly aware of the concerns of the school's academic development team, which was responsible for quality assurance, and which might want to maintain formal, summative assessment, believing that such assessment would make teachers do their jobs properly, providing repeated examination "drills" for students, and make students concentrate on studying for high-stake public examinations.

I think they [academic development team] would be worried. They would like to have some control, they think that it's necessary... to get students to study their books... Besides, it's for control, for administration, for monitoring... and for fairness. (Interview- Head of English Department)

It would take the academic development team great courage to implement changes when the school had a good reputation for doing well in public examinations. Without corresponding changes in school assessment policy and mechanism – for instance making student participation in AfL contributory to their actual academic results – it would be difficult to persuade his teachers and students that it was worth exploring new teaching and learning initiatives.

Given the critical impact that examination cultures have on the pedagogical and assessment practices in Hong Kong as an Asian city, the pockets of success reported in this chapter could be read alongside the cultural sensitive view of Kennedy, Chan, Fok, and Yu (2008), who argued that if formative assessment (or AfL) is to be taken up in Asian cultural contexts, it may need to be indigenized in order to match more readily with local needs and priorities.

Appendix

Form 1 English: Writing – An Event That Happened in My Secondary School

Student Exemplar 1

-
- 1 Last week, Karen had a school camp with Tiffany. “Karen, we go to camp now” Karen and Tiffany shouted happily.
- 3 At night, they reached the camp site with teachers and other students. It was very dark with some breeze. It was very spooky. Tiffany and Karen went to their room. “Oh, this room is very old” Karen exclaimed. That room was very old and dirty. The things were all broken or old. Nothing is new. They felt very unhappy.
- 7 At twelve o’clock, Tiffany woke up in a sudden and asked Karen “I want to go to the toilet, can you accompany me?” Karen answered “Of course”.
- 9 They went to toilet. But they felt something wrong. Because no any body in the toilet but have some water sound. “I think there is a monster in the toilet” said Tiffany. Karen answered, “Don’t scare me, please.” “Ah” They screamed. They felt very scared and ran out the toilet. They ran very fast than before. They quickly rushed into their bedroom and slept.
- 13 They wouldn’t go to camp anymore, because after this camp. They were scared.
-

Text Analysis

| | | |
|----------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Time Indicator | L1 Last week | L3 At night |
| | L7 At twelve o’clock | L12 quickly |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Direct Speech | L1 “Karen, we go to camp now.” |
| | L4 “Oh, this room is very old.” |
| | L7 “I want to go to the toilet, can you accompany me?” |

| | | | |
|----------------|---|--------------|-----------------|
| | L10 "I think there is a monster in the toilet." | | |
| | L11 "Don't scare me, please." | | |
| Past Tense | L1 had | L3 reached | L5 were |
| | L6 felt | L7 woke | L9 ran |
| | L12 rushed | L13 were | L13 wouldn't go |
| | | | |
| Speaking Verbs | L2 shouted | L5 exclaimed | L7 asked |
| | L8 answered | L10 said | L11 screamed |

References

- Adamson, B., & Davison, C. (2003). Innovation in English language teaching in Hong Kong primary schools: One step forwards, two steps sideways. *Prospect*, 18, 27–41.
- Adamson, B., & Davison, C. (2008). English language teaching in Hong Kong primary schools: Innovation and resistance. In *Planning change, changing plans. Innovations in second language teaching* (pp. 11–25). Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.
- Adamson, B., & Tong, S. Y. A. (2008). Leadership and collaboration in implementing curriculum change in Hong Kong secondary schools. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 9(2), 181–190.
- Allison, D. (1999). *Language testing and evaluation*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Assessment Reform Group (1999). *Assessment for learning: Beyond the black box*. Cambridge: School of Education.
- Assessment Reform Group (2002). *Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.
- Bacon-Shone, J., & Bolton, K. (1998). Charting multilingualism: Language censuses and language surveys in Hong Kong. In M. Pennington (Ed.), *Language in Hong Kong at century's end* (pp. 43–90). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Berry, R. (2005). Entwining feedback, self and peer assessment. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 9(3), 225–229.
- Berry, R. (2008). *Assessment for Learning*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Berry, R. (2010). Teachers' orientations towards selecting assessment strategies. *New Horizons in Education*, 58(1), 96–107.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998a). Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(2), 139–144.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998b). Assessment and Classroom Learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7–74.
- Carless, D. (2005). Prospects for the implementation of assessment for learning. *Assessment in Education*, 12, 39–54.
- Cheng, N. L. (2004). Hong Kong SAR. In K. W. Ho. & R. Wong (Eds.), *Language policies and language education: The impact in East Asian countries in the next decade* (pp. 100–114). Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.
- Cheung, W. W. (1996). The implications of implementing the Target-Oriented curriculum (TOC) for teacher education. *Journal of Primary Education*, 6(1–2), 37–44.
- Chow, A., & Li, B. (2008). Task-based Assessment. In A. Ma (Ed.), *Practical guide to task-based curriculum planning and assessment* (pp. 102–127). Hong Kong: City University Press.
- Chow, A., & Mok-Cheung, A. (2004). English language teaching in Hong Kong SAR: Tradition, transition and transformation. In W. K. Ho & R. Wong (Eds.), *English language teaching in East Asia today. Changing policies and practices* (pp. 150–177). Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.

- Chow, A., Tse-tso, Y. W., & Li, B. (2005). Learning English or learning through English: Evaluating an English enrichment programme in post-colonial Hong Kong. In S. May, M. Franken, & R. Barnard (Eds.), *LED2003: Refereed conference proceedings of the 1st international conference on language, education and diversity*. Hamilton: Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato.
- Clarke, D., & Hollingsworth, H. (2002). Elaborating a model of teacher professional growth. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(8), 947–967.
- Coome, C., Folse, K., & Hubley, N. (2007). *A practical guide to assessing English language learners*. Michigan: University of Michigan.
- Curriculum Development Council (1983). *Syllabuses for secondary schools: English (Secondary 1-5)*. Hong Kong: Education Department.
- Curriculum Development Council (1999). *Syllabuses for secondary schools. English language secondary 1-5*. Hong Kong: the Printing Department.
- Curriculum Development Council (2001b). *Syllabuses for secondary schools. Chinese language secondary 1-5*. Hong Kong: The Printing Department.
- Curriculum Development Council (2002a). *English language education. Key learning area curriculum guide (Primary 10- Secondary 3)*. Hong Kong: The Printing Department.
- Curriculum Development Council (2002b). *Chinese language education. Key learning area curriculum guide (Primary 10- Secondary 3)*. Hong Kong: The Printing Department.
- Curriculum Development Council (2007a). *Chinese language education key learning area English language curriculum and assessment guide (Secondary 4-6)*. Hong Kong: The Printing Department.
- Curriculum Development Council (2007b). *English language education key learning area English language curriculum and assessment guide (Secondary 4-6)*. Hong Kong: The Printing Department.
- Fontana, D., & Fernandes, M. (1994). Improvements in mathematics performance as a consequence of self-assessment in Portuguese primary school pupils. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 64, 407–417.
- Ho, M. S. (2003). *A critical review of Hong Kong Chinese language education reform at the turn of the century*. Hong Kong: Cultural Education Publishing (In Chinese).
- Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (2005). 2007 HKCE English language examination. In *Introduction to the school-based assessment component*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority.
- Kennedy, K. J., Chan, K. S. J., Fok, P. K., & Yu, W. M. (2008). Forms of assessment and their potential for enhancing learning: Conceptual and cultural issues. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 7(3), 197–207.
- Lai, M. L. (2005). Language attitudes of the first postcolonial generation in Hong Kong secondary schools. *Language in Society*, 34(4), 363–388.
- Lai, M. L., & Chow, A. (2010, June). Medium of instruction policies in postcolonial Hong Kong – the national or international agenda? In *The international conference on who needs languages? Micro and macro perspectives into language education policies*. (pp. 7–10). Finland: University of Jyväskylä.
- Lee, K. S. (1995). The trend of Chinese language teaching in the 90's. *Modern Education Bulletin*, 19, 46–49.
- Lord, R., & Cheng, H. (Eds.) (1987). *Language education in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Morris, P. (1992). Preparing pupils as citizens of the special administrative region of Hong Kong: An analysis of curriculum change and control during the transition period. In G. Postiglione (Ed.), *Education and society in Hong Kong: Towards one country and two systems* (pp. 117–145). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Morris, P. (1995). *The Hong Kong school curriculum*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Morris, P. (2000). The commissioning and decommissioning of curriculum reforms: The career of the target-oriented curriculum. In B. Adamson, T. Kwan, & K. K. Chan (Eds.), *Changing the*

- curriculum: The impact of reform on Hong Kong's primary schools* (pp. 21–40). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Morris, P., Lo, M. L., & Adamson, B. (2000). Improving schools in Hong Kong: Lessons from the past. In B. Adamson, T. Kwan, & K. K. Chan (Eds.), *Changing the curriculum: The impact of reform on Hong Kong's primary schools* (pp. 245–262). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Pong, W.Y., & Chow, J.C.S. (2002). On the pedagogy of examinations in Hong Kong: *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(2), 139–149.
- Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) (2009). Accessed August 3, 2009, from http://www.systemassessment.edu.hk/sec/eng/index_eng.htm/
- Torrance, H. (2007). Assessment as learning? How the use of explicit learning objectives, assessment criteria and feedback in post-secondary education and training can come to dominate learning. *Assessment in Education*, 14(3), 281–294.
- Torrance, H., & Pryor, J. (1998). *Investigating formative assessment*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Tse, S. K. (2009). Chinese language education in Hong Kong: Twenty five years of educational research in Hong Kong. *Educational Research Journal*, 24(2), 231–255.
- Tse, S. K., Chan, W. S., Ho, W. K., Law, N., Lee, T., Shek, C., et al. (1995). *Chinese language education for the 21st century: A Hong Kong perspective*. Hong Kong: Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (2004). Medium of instruction in Hong Kong: One country, two systems, whose language? In J. J. W. Tollefson & A. B. M. Tsui (Eds.), *Medium of instruction policies: Which agenda? Whose agenda?* (pp. 97–116). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Watkins, C., Carnell, E., Lodge, C., Wagner, P., & Whalley, C. (2002). Effective learning, *ISIN. Research Matters*, 17, 1–8.
- Wong, H. W. (2000). *In search of the knowledge base of curriculum design and teaching*. Hong Kong: Institute of Educational Research, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. (in Chinese).
- Wong, H. W., & Lee, Y. Y. (2006). *Developing student potentials in a collaborative culture: A case study of implementing the newly revised Chinese language syllabus for secondary schools*. Hong Kong: Institute of Educational Research, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. (in Chinese).