

**CASE 5**

# **Backward Design in Curriculum Design to Strengthen the Learning-Teaching-Assessment Alignment: A Case Study of A Diverse Learner Setting**

**PAOC Ka Chi Secondary School**

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## School

PAOC Ka Chi Secondary School

## Background

As a Chinese Medium-of-Instruction school (CMI) with a multicultural student body, there is huge learning diversity among a single student cohort. Students of the school are allocated to different English classes according to their English abilities, yet the diversity is still great in comparison to many other local schools.

The change in the listening assessment format presents a more challenging level of English learning. The S3 to S4 transition, listening tasks in particular, poses a challenge to students of the school. Teachers reflected that the current S4 core curriculum may not fully address class-based needs.

To make learning and teaching more effective, teachers adopted backward planning in the curriculum design to enhance the alignment of learning-teaching-assessment (L-T-A). The goal was to help students better learn, develop and practise listening skills more specific to short listening tasks. It was hoped students' confidence would also be built gradually if self-improvement would be seen.

## Level

S4<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2020/21 is the second year that the school collaborates with QSIP on CEAL Project. The school obtained permission from the EDB granted for the collaboration to take place in S4.

## Strategies Used

### 1. Review of Student Performance, Curriculum Design and Internal Assessment

At the beginning of Term One, teachers reviewed the 2019/20 marker's report of S3 final examination Paper 3 to analyse students' performance. Along with the observations made by the teachers from their first month of teaching, teachers concluded that there was a need to strengthen the English foundation of the current S4 cohort. Partly due to school suspension, there was insufficient regular listening practice. It was revealed that students had difficulties adjusting to the spelling of commonly used words, theme-specific vocabulary, and thus the demanding Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) listening tasks.

The following shows the analysis conducted by the S4 teachers.

S3 English to S4 English Transition		
ASPECT	S3 English	S4 English
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple and short</li> <li>TSA Practice Tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Longer and more integrative</li> <li>HKDSE Exam Practices</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening to simple data</li> <li>Copying simple information</li> <li>Completing short integrated tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening to key information</li> <li>Note-taking</li> <li>Reading instructional texts</li> <li>Completing writing tasks</li> </ul>
Challenges Collaborative Lesson Planning: PAPER 3 MARKER'S REPORTS + BLOCK 1 T&L REVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weak English foundation</li> <li>Not enough regular practices</li> <li>Slow in listening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficult to adjust to more challenging tasks</li> <li>Spelling/vocabulary become VERY taxing in tasks</li> <li>Time management</li> </ul>
Teaching strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class-based strategies</li> <li>Selective short tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exam Paper Practices</li> </ul>

Below is the sample of questions selected in Part A listening examination for item analysis.

## Item Analysis

Remarks
to much
con...
to much
cum...tion
to mich
...tion
to much
per...
com...tion
co...tion
communication
commuitcation

### Observation:

- **communication** written as cum...tion/ com...tion/...tion
- **too much** written as to much

Positive reflection	Negative reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to catch the pronunciation</li> <li>• Tried to make use of the phonic skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not able to manage some <b>core vocabulary</b></li> </ul>

## Item Analysis

ANS: surprised	ANS: relieved	ANS: thrilled	ANS: fascinated
Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
disappointed	1	fascinated	thrilled
1	1	fascinated	offended
1	1	1	1
disappointed	1	fascinated	surprised
thrilled	1	surprised	1
thrilled	1	fascinated	surprised
thrilled	1	fascinated	surprised
thrilled	1	fascinated	surprised

### Observation:

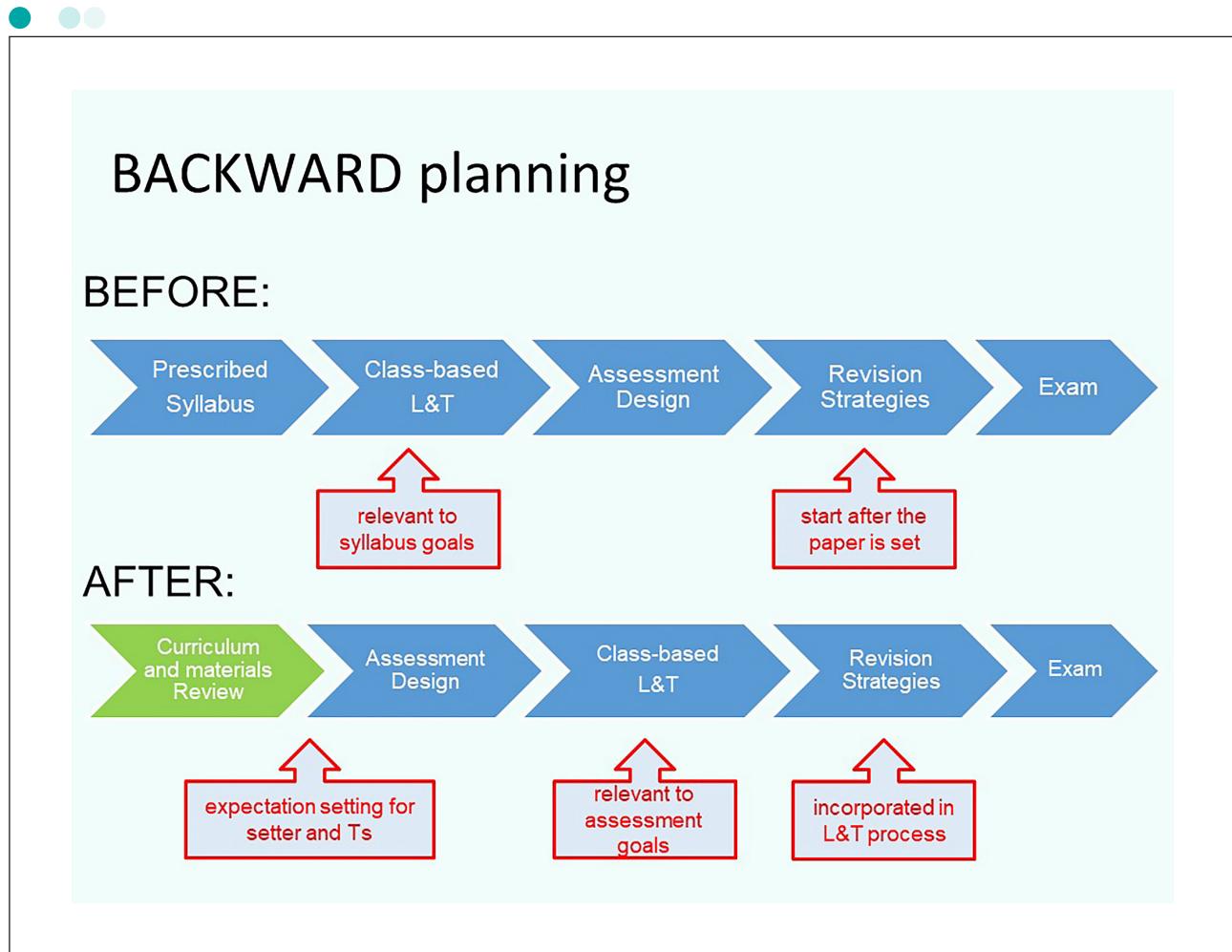
- **Confused meaning:**
  - surprised
  - thrilled
  - fascinated

Positive reflection	Negative reflection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can identify speaker's feeling by speaker's intonation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient understanding of the meaning/context for the feeling</li> </ul>



## 2. Backward Planning

With an aim to help students bridge the gap between learning and assessment, teachers rearranged the steps in planning of Part A in the listening paper. The following shows the difference in steps taken in the 2020/21 school year.



From a team perspective, the use of backward planning allows teachers to be more focused on their teaching priorities, that is, listening skills or items to be taught. In the past, teachers tended to put too much focus on class-based needs which resulted in a misalignment in learning-teaching-assessment.

Instead of solely focusing on the specific class-based needs, teachers could then adjust their teaching focus and pace according to the assessment framework designed prior to learning and teaching.

Since teachers set the examination paper at the initial stage of the planning of the Part A listening curriculum, they were well aware of what would be the essential testing items in the standardised test. The test served as formative assessment for teachers to feedback learning and teaching. Based on the data collected from the standardised test, teachers incorporated skills / items which students' did not do well in the revision. This made teaching focus very clear to teachers.

Teachers found their learning and teaching more closely tied to the assessment. And with the more defined and specific assessment goals, not only are the class-based needs being addressed, the diversity in each class was also addressed.

A summary of the effects of backward planning is shown in the following.

### Effects of BACKWARD planning:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. teaching focus</li> <li>2. L-T-A alignment</li> <li>3. planning for revision</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. misaligned teaching priorities</li> <li>2. Ss' learning difficulties</li> <li>3. Ts' preparation time for revision</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

improved

reduced

### 3. Adaptation of Curriculum, Materials and Assessment Design

Given the major challenges for the students were on spelling and vocabulary, the S4 Paper 3 Exam setter revised the initial draft of the Term One listening examination paper.

Keeping the topics and audio materials at the S4 level, teachers allowed themselves to compromise the levels of answer writing for this first-time HKDSE-format listening paper to

a format that required less spelling or lengthy answer writing. Teachers also simplified the wording in some questions to make comprehension more manageable for students.

### Assessment Design

## S4 TERM 1 EXAM PAPER 3 SETTING

ASPECT	S4 PAPER 3 PARTA (Draft 1)	S4 PAPER 3 PARTA (Final)
Scope and level of difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relevant to topics in textbook teaching</li> <li>authentic conversations* (setter's own design)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relevant topics (KEPT)</li> <li>adaptation of S3 to S4 bridging materials</li> </ul>
Part A Question Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple-choice</li> <li>Blank-filling</li> <li>Table completion</li> <li>Tone/attitude identification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening for numbers</li> <li>one-word blank-filling</li> <li>picture matching</li> <li>authentic conversations* (KEPT as Task 4 for a challenge)</li> </ul>
Collaborative Lesson Planning Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too challenging for students to comprehend the questions (Will students need to process too many words in questions?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most answers relevant to textbook teaching</li> <li>Fewer words in questions (more manageable for comprehension)</li> </ul>

After revising the standardised assessment, as teachers retuned to lesson planning, it became very clear to teachers how to adjust the next step of teaching. They intentionally focus on helping students bridge their learning to assessment.

For example, knowing specifically that there would be several questions related to listening to numbers and figures, students in Stream 2 and Stream 3<sup>2</sup>, then focused more on practices related to listening to numbers.

<sup>2</sup> Stream 2 & 3 were classes consisted of less able students.

Having known what would the testing points be in the assessment, the teacher of Stream 1<sup>3</sup> planned lessons that focused on training students' examination listening skills which the class had yet to master. In this way, teaching was not necessarily bounded by the same focus used in other classes.

Class-based  
L&T

## Intentional Teaching Process

Teaching	Training Tasks
Theme-based vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocabulary inventory list</li> <li>Easily confused word and meaning: e.g., 'winner' vs 'first runner-up'</li> <li>Quizlet flashcards and quizzes</li> </ul>
Exam skills (Stream 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locating key words/phrases in instructions and questions</li> <li>Study example answers</li> <li>Jotting down information /spelling quickly (using abbreviation)</li> </ul>
Remedial (Stream 2-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read tape script together before listening to the audio</li> <li>Repeated practices on listening for common information (e.g., numbers)</li> <li>Simple, very short listening exercises from supplementary resources</li> </ul>
Exam Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HKCEE Past Paper</li> <li>Mock Test Set</li> <li>Exam Practice Exercise</li> </ul>

Instead of focusing on intensive drilling with too much content, teachers wanted to go back to the principle of keeping the listening tasks and revision meaningful for the students. Hence, a series of materials were developed. Some were for students' own revision. Some tasks served as formative assessment tasks. For example, after practicing on Quizlet, an online learning tool, students were to read out the words and record them for their teacher to listen.

<sup>3</sup> Stream 1 consisted of a majority of non-Chinese students (NCS), who are more able in English.



## MEANINGFUL Learning Tasks and Self-Evaluation

- Audio-visual vocabulary aids
- Vocabulary inventory
- Short tapescripts for revision on common dialogue patterns
- Basic, short listening tasks on targeted listening skills



Vocabulary Inventory, Short article reading on targeted topics (words from exam script/questions, targeted themes)
Audio Word Cards (Quizlet)
Short Listening Tasks: (with audio clips, simple listening, reading of tapescripts)
Instruction Reading Practice (revise textbook practice tasks)
Supplementary listening tasks (from online ESL resources)

### 4. Self-reflection

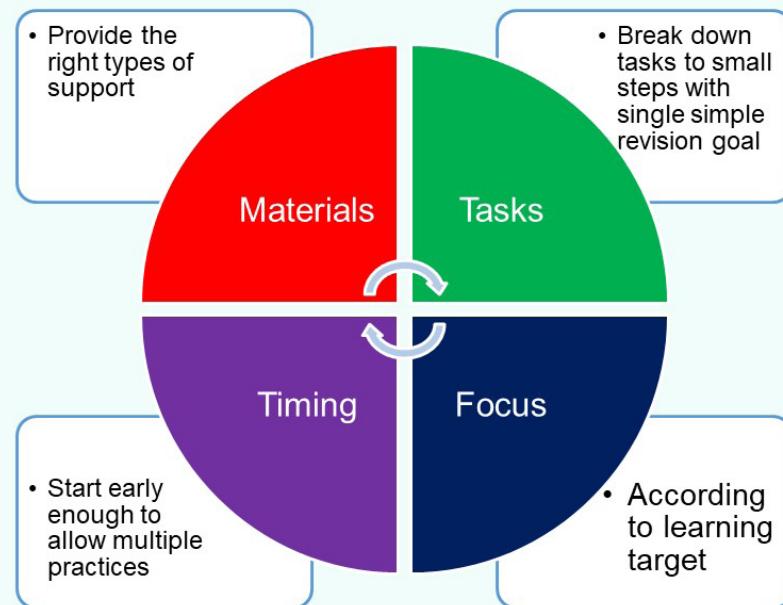
As a reflection of formative assessments, teachers concluded that the Part A listening materials should provide the right types of support, the tasks should be broken down to small steps with just one single, simple learning goal. Rather than having various goals in one task, which overwhelmed the students.

The curriculum design on the part of revision did not stay within the design of revision materials, but it should be a holistic planning of the learning focus, design of materials, presentation of tasks, and schedule of implementation.

The focus of revision should be set according to targeted performance instead of an overly ambitious goal.

With that teachers were able to better plan the time for implementation, allowing sufficient time for repeated practices.

## A holistic planning after evaluation



### Actions Taken

Needs analysis was conducted prior to the commencement of the collaboration to determine the target area for improvement on learning and teaching of listening. External and internal assessment papers, markers' reports and learning and teaching materials were studied.

A workshop on assessment literacy on listening for all English Panel members was conducted. Suggestions on assessment design and how the learning and teaching of listening could be further improved were discussed with teachers of different levels in the session.

### Impact

#### 1. Student Level

As a result of the tryout of using more formative assessment tasks in the lesson, teachers observed that fewer answers were left blank in the mid-term and final exam. This implies that more students were motivated in attempting the listening paper.

The use of tasks like audio-visual vocabulary aids, vocabulary inventory tasks, short tape scripts for revision have helped students, less able ones in particular, tremendously in building up habits of prioritising their focus and better preparing themselves for the tasks ahead.



Students' confidence in doing listening tasks is slowly but gradually being built.

## 2. Teacher Level

Teachers who have been collaborating in the CEAL project for two consecutive years are apparently highly aware of the importance and effectiveness of using backward design when mapping the curriculum. Accumulating two years of experience, teachers are gradually developing the use of backward design in curriculum design and aligning L-T-A in their daily lesson planning.

The use of a vocabulary inventory list (*see Appendix 1*), for example, has become a regular formative assessment activity in lessons. Teachers find it a very useful and easy-to-use tool to collect information about students' learning to feedback teaching methods.

Teachers have been much better informed about students' strengths and weaknesses with backward planning in place. Designing the examination paper prior to teaching proved to enhance the effectiveness in learning and teaching.

## 3. Curriculum Level

The L-T-A cycle has been strengthened through a review of internal assessment papers and learning and teaching materials. Teachers then decide on the challenging parts for students and testing points be assessed in the examination. By adopting backward design in the curriculum planning, teachers set the examination paper during lesson planning, that is prior to teaching of the relevant listening skills.

## 4. Department Level and School Level

The internal change agents, teachers who collaborated in the CEAL project, have been promoting and leading the implementation of strategies like backward planning in the different junior forms. They also practised strengthening the L-T-A cycle in listening and other language items.

At the internal dissemination session conducted towards the end of the academic year, the assessment practices tried out in other subject departments were shared. Item analysis were tried out in the Mathematics panel. Provision of immediate feedback to students by engaging them in formative assessments in the classroom were adopted in some junior form Chinese lessons.

## Way Forward

Senior forms:

- For less able students, consolidation of common spellings by regular short, multiple dictations on the same targeted words is essential.
- Better L-T-A aligned assessment tasks on listening skill practices are to be used for more effective learning, teaching and students' self-evaluation.
- Instead of repeated revision tasks, more frequent and regular formative assessment tasks of the appropriate level and with more scaffolding as learning support are to be designed for revision and more effective feedback purposes.
- Backward planning to be adopted in curriculum planning across all four skills for horizontal alignment.

Junior forms:

- Further alignment of learning, teaching goals with assessment goals.
- Plan listening curriculum from a more holistic perspective, e.g., not to compartmentalise learning and teaching of listening.
- Set learning goals to beyond fulfilling Territory-wide System Assessment (TSA) and textbook-task requirements.
- More emphasis on enhancing students' awareness of English word pronunciation and common English dialogues when teaching reading, writing, and speaking.

If readers are interested in learning more about assessment literacy, the following books could be useful resources.

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A S. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. Oxford University Press.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge.

Regier, N. (2012): *Book two: 60 formative assessment strategies*. Regier Educational Resources.

Tileston, D. W. (2004). *What every teacher should know about student assessment*. Corwin Press.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Vocabulary Inventory List



# Vocabulary Inventory List

#### Vocabulary Inventory (WS 2)

- Put a "+" in the box if you know the meaning.
- Put a "O" in the box if you don't know the meaning.
- Put a "?" in the box if you are not sure of the meaning.

#### Useful adjectives

	Vocabulary	+ / O / ?
1	complicated	
2	cowardly	
3	demanding	
4	depressing	
5	encouraging	
6	happy	
7	mean	
8	practical	
9	satisfactory	
10	serious	
11	silly	
12	stressful	
13	unbearable	
14	unhappy	

#### Listening Exam Revision

#### Vocabulary Inventory (WS 1)

- Put a "+" in the box if you know the meaning.
- Put a "O" in the box if you don't know the meaning.
- Put a "?" in the box if you are not sure of the meaning.

#### Words talking about problems

	Vocabulary	+ / O / ?
1	bullying	
2	challenges	
3	commit crimes	
4	complaints	
5	fail	
6	family problem	
7	language problem	
8	little pocket money	
9	materialism	
10	peer pressure	
11	poor communication	
12	stress	
13	study	
14	temptation	
15	too much homework	

