

Paradigm shift: Teachers' classroom assessment practices in Hong Kong and the PRC

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Abstract

In some countries, examination systems are extremely durable and resistant to change; in others, they are undergoing substantial, even rapid, restructuring (Ekstein & Noah, 1992; 1993). Increasingly, the effect of public examinations on classroom practices is well documented and has been labeled as 'washback'¹ (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons 1996; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng, 1999). A number of studies of the assessment practices used by teachers in regular K-12 classrooms have been completed (Rogers, 1991) or are ongoing (Wilson, 1998). In contrast, very little is known about the assessment practices employed by teachers of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) in schools. This paper explores this group of teachers' assessment practices, which were investigated in Hong Kong, where teachers have experienced changes in the examination system, and in the People's Republic of China (PRC), where teachers have not. The findings provide an initial comparative knowledge of ESL/EFL teachers' assessment practices within the two educational contexts.

1. Introduction

As Hong Kong prepares to implement a new school curriculum and concomitant assessment system, it is essential to understand the current classroom assessment practices particularly in comparison

¹ Washback, commonly used in applied linguistics, refers to 'the extent to which the introduction and the use of a test influences language teachers and learners to do things they would not otherwise do that promote or inhibit language learning' (Messick, 1996:241).

with those of other countries, some of which have introduced similar innovations, others which have not, in order to provide a basis for comparison. The aim of this study was to begin the process of comparison by investigating the assessment practices of Hong Kong and PRC teachers of English in order to better understand the central role that assessment plays in the teaching and learning process. It is also intended that this study will inform us about levels of preparedness of Hong Kong secondary teachers of English for the new forms of assessment which have already been introduced into primary schools but which will soon be introduced into secondary schools. It is hoped that the study will be of use in providing evaluative feedback in order to assist education planners in their preparations for orientation courses for the assessment procedures of the new curriculum.

Research on teaching in regular mainstream K-12 classrooms has revealed that the day to day assessment of student learning is unquestionably one of the teachers' most demanding, complex, and important tasks (Shulman, 1986; Calderhead, 1996). Teachers view student evaluation as a central teaching function in their classrooms. They spend between 20% and 30% of their instructional time on assessment-related activities, including developing and selecting instruments and observation procedures, marking and recording, and synthesizing results in formal and informal reports.

Several studies, in which teachers and students in regular classrooms were surveyed or interviewed and/or were observed in regular classrooms, have revealed a series of consistent findings (see Rogers, 1991). Briefly, while teachers value classroom assessment as an instructional tool and feel assessment benefits their students, formative purposes give way to summative purposes with increasing grade levels. Furthermore, while they feel they are in charge and prefer to create their own assessments, external expectations, often in the form of mandated external testing, color many of their data gathering activities. Consequently, although they use a variety of techniques, they most frequently use objectively scored (e.g., multiple choice, true/false) and short answer/completion paper and pencil tests, formats most often used in external testing. They tend to focus their items on knowledge and lower order skills; their assessments often provide little indication of the attainment of higher cognitive processes. Grades reported to students are based more on low level functioning and less on high level functioning. Very often reports other than those of interest (e.g., effort, attitude, vs. knowledge and skill) are included in a grade, thereby leading to ambiguous interpretations.

Compared with the above studies, the study of teacher assessment practices in ESL/EFL classrooms is very limited. Further, what has been done has focussed on the influence of external testing on ESL/EFL teachers. Andrews and Fullilove (1993, 1994), Li (1990), Qi (2000) and Yang (1999) found that ESL/EFL teacher assessment practices are often influenced by external testing in Hong Kong and the PRC. Assessment practices are observed to follow the formats of external testing, especially towards the end of the term. The higher the stakes, the more frequently those formats are used by teachers (Cheng, 1997a, 1997b, 1999; He, 1996).

Although teachers' beliefs and practices have been studied by researchers (Brousseau, Book & Byers, 1988; Calderhead, 1996; Floden & Klinzing, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Richards, Tung & Ng, 1992), there is very little empirical data on teachers' actual assessment practices, especially how they might be influenced within two separate educational assessment contexts in Hong Kong and the PRC. Sengupta (1991) examined teacher preparedness for the introduction of Task Oriented Curriculum (TOC) in Hong Kong and concluded that it would fail without adequate teacher preparation. More recently, Morris et al. (1996), reported on an evaluation of the initial stages of the implementation of TOC in primary schools and concluded, as did Sengupta earlier, that a too hasty implementation, a top-down bureaucratic approach and inadequate teacher preparation might cause major difficulties for the introduction of the new curriculum.

The TOC and its new assessment practices were introduced into the first three years of all Hong Kong primary schools in September 1996. It was planned to introduce the new curriculum into secondary schools in 2000. In curricular and assessment terms, the TOC initiative represents a paradigm shift from a quantitative learning/assessment pattern to a qualitative framework. Teachers will have to:

- 1) prepare for a completely new form of assessment and
- 2) become heavily involved in the assessment process.

Knowledge of and sensitivity to the key issues involved will be required by all teachers to allow for the new forms of assessment to be introduced, implemented and adopted successfully in their day to day classrooms.

2. Current trends in assessment approaches and practices

Recent trends in assessment have been manifested in a number of countries in the last decade (e.g. the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand). The major methodological changes have involved a shift of emphasis from a teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning to a more student-centered approach. In assessment terms, this has meant assessing what students *can* do rather than what they *cannot* do (Gipps, 1994). This has also meant that success is gauged not only on the basis of once and for all tests (in the past, this often meant tests of a summative, psychometrically-based nature) at the end of a term/semester or year, but also on the basis of continuous assessment throughout a student's career. Assessment tasks (often task-based performance tests using criterion-referenced descriptors) rather than norm-referenced discrete-point assessment tests have become common in those school systems, which subscribe to the new assessment paradigm. Biggs refers to the effect of paradigm changes in Hong Kong when he states:

Assessment practices in Hong Kong have tended to be very quantitative and norm-referenced, but there are now signs, for example in the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) initiative, and in some tertiary institutions, that these recent developments in learning and assessment theory will affect local practice (1995: 1).

In discussing why these changes have come about, Biggs describes how the school-as-selection-device was, and still has to be, used in many countries as they undergo the processes of development, especially when resources for education are scarce. In this socio-economic context, education is elitist - geared for the few - and assessment is used to select the few. As economies develop, as educational opportunities develop, so do parental and societal aspirations. These aspirations have led to parental involvement in schools and a focus on what the student can do rather than on what s/he cannot do, thus encouraging student-centered teaching and learning curricula and student-centered assessment procedures. Such approaches have also been strongly influenced by changes in theories of learning, which focus on a constructivist view of learning where learners construct knowledge purposefully (student-centered) rather than having it fed to them incrementally.

In Hong Kong, however, in spite of the new learning theories and assessment methods, which have been espoused, assessment practices are still selection-focused, even though there are currently more tertiary places than students and even though Hong Kong is

considered to be the seventh most successful economy on earth with the fourth highest per capita income. Biggs says:

We may live in an age of electronic learning, but our assessment practices are driven by steam (1995: 2).

Given Hong Kong's ingrained practices of assessment greatly influenced by its traditional values in education, this study is timely in its attempts to gauge how ready teachers are for the new curriculum and its assessment methods.

3. The research context

In a discussion of the qualifications and quality of Hong Kong teachers of English in secondary schools (Falvey, 1996), it was revealed that less than 14% of secondary school teachers of English possess both a relevant degree (defined as one in English Language or Literature, Linguistics/Applied Linguistics, or Communication Studies) and a teaching qualification. The chances of changing deeply ingrained practices through curriculum reform are lessened when the teachers themselves are unprepared by qualifications and training to implement the changes (see Borko, Flory & Cumbo, 1994). As Borko and Putnam (1996:685) state:

Teachers with greater subject matter knowledge tend to emphasize the conceptual, understanding, problem solving, and inquiry aspects of their subjects. Less knowledgeable teachers tend to emphasize facts, rules and procedures and to stick closely to detailed lesson plans or the text, sometimes missing opportunities to emphasize important ideas or connections among ideas.

Morris et al., in a summary of primary classroom practices carried out during the implementation of the first phases of TOC, comment:

The patterns of assessment used during lessons tended to retain the characteristics of formal, norm-referenced and summative tests. Teachers showed a limited understanding of the nature and purpose of formative and criterion-referenced assessment (1996: 243).

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the assessment practices of secondary teachers of English in Hong Kong, which has adopted approaches such as the Target Oriented Curriculum (with its task-based focus and its criterion-based, task-oriented assessment practices), and has initiated a review of public examinations (Fung, 1999), and compare these practices with those of

teachers of English in the PRC, which has not experienced these forms of alternative assessment.

The aims of the study are:

- to determine whether or not there are special characteristics (e.g. personal data, beliefs/attitudes and/or practices) which differentiate the two groups (those who know about and can deal with the alternative forms of assessment and those who do not and can not). And, if so,
- to determine whether or not Hong Kong teachers can be “placed” in one of the two groups so as to inform the Hong Kong teachers’ levels of preparedness for the introduction of new forms of and approaches towards assessment.

It is particularly important to ascertain how prepared Hong Kong teachers are at the moment, given the massive input in terms of financial resources and training, which the government has allocated to the implementation of the new curriculum, and the uncertainties that some teachers have expressed about the new forms of assessment.

In this paper, we will report on survey data obtained for groups of teachers of English from:

- Hong Kong
- the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

4. Methodology

The survey study reported here was initially carried out to investigate the differences in teachers’ beliefs about the impact of public examinations on their teaching, and the differences in the assessment practices they employ in their daily teaching. It was conducted in two co-located but very different educational contexts - Hong Kong and the PRC. It was intended that, after the initial analysis of the survey results, follow-up interviews would be carried out, based on the major theoretical and empirical constructs arising from the survey results.

With the help of several teacher educators in both regions, the initial survey study was administered in the two educational contexts to in-service teachers studying at the time of the research in three major Teachers’ Colleges – one in Hong Kong, one in Xian, and one in Nanjing, the People’s Republic of China. This group of teachers was

not meant to be representative of teachers of English in the two educational contexts. They were selected using purposive sampling (Patton 1987), the main purpose was to select teachers based on whether or not they could provide a rich variety of information about classroom assessment practices within the two contexts, and whether the data could identify a relevant research problem in the area of classroom assessment. For the purpose of simplicity and clarity in discussion of the data, we have kept the discussion around teachers in the PRC, and teachers in Hong Kong. We do not, however, intend to generalize the findings about all teachers of English within the two educational contexts.

The survey questionnaire consisted of three parts:

Part One	Teachers' demographic information	(10 items)
Part Two	Assessment beliefs and knowledge	(33 items)
Part Three	Assessment practices	(31 items)

Part One provided demographic information about teachers, such as gender, age, teaching experience and the school context in the two different regions. Part Two provided information on teachers' beliefs about and knowledge of assessment principles. Part Three dealt with teachers' daily assessment practices. Only Part One and Part Three of the survey are reported here in order to focus the discussion on teachers' classroom assessment practices.

Part One, *Teachers' demographic information*, was designed according to major categories, which required quantitative responses. Part Three, *Assessment practices*, was designed to allow teachers to record information on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 = *Always* to 1 = *Never* in their teaching (see Appendix).

5. Results and discussion

The survey was carried out in Hong Kong and the PRC on the campuses of Teachers' Colleges, and was administered by teacher educators before or after scheduled in-service courses. Ninety-four valid responses (cases) from the PRC were obtained out of 120 questionnaires administered, making 78% the return rate. Fifty-three responses from Hong Kong were obtained out of 80 questionnaires, making 66% the return rate. The questionnaires collected from the PRC were mailed to Hong Kong, and all the questionnaires from both regions were centrally analyzed by the two researchers working in Hong Kong at the time of research.

5.1 Teachers' Characteristics

Part One of the questionnaire provided teachers' demographic information in both regions (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Characteristics of Teachers Who Responded to the Questionnaire

No. of Returns Items	Variables	N=94/PRC PRC (%)	N=53/Hong Kong Hong Kong (%)
1. Gender	Female	64.9	86.3
	Male	35.1	13.7
2. Age	20-30	75.5	45.1
	31-40	23.7	43.1
	41-50	1.1	11.8
3. Academic qualifications	Diploma	90.2	26.5
	Bachelor	9.8	69.4
	Master's	0	4.1
4. Teacher training	Yes	61.3	73.6
	No	38.7	26.4
5. Years of teaching	1-3 years	14.4	30.0
	4-6 years	55.8	16.0
	7-9 years	17.6	14.0
	10 years and above	12.2	40.0
6. Medium of instruction	English	23.6	47.8
	E & C	76.6	41.3
	Chinese	0	10.9
7. Class size	31-40	13	81.3
	41-50	31.2	18.8
	Above 50	55.8	0
8. Lessons per week	10-20	98.9	4
	21-30	1.1	78
	Above 30	0	18

Two categories in the questionnaire - grades and school types - are not listed in Table 1, as there were too many differences in these categories in the two regions for meaningful comparisons to be made. In the PRC, teachers taught either at the level of Junior Secondary 1-3 or Senior Secondary 1-3. In Hong Kong, teachers usually taught in distinct year levels, e.g. Secondary 1-3, Secondary 4-5 (O Level) and Secondary 6-7 (A Level). In the PRC, school types consisted of: 1) key schools (which have the best in-take of students and possess the best facilities), 2) ordinary schools, and 3) newly established private schools. In Hong Kong, schools were banded from Band One (the top band in terms of student in-take) to Band Five (with the lowest level

of in-take). (For an explanation of the Hong Kong Banding System, see the Hong Kong SAR education web page for January 2000: http://www.info.gov.hk/ed/english/student/places_allocation/sspa_aim.htm).

As to the Age category, it was discovered that the sampled teachers were younger in the PRC than in Hong Kong. 75.5% of the teachers in the PRC in the study were clustered around the age range 20-30 compared with 45.1% around the same age range in Hong Kong. The in-service teaching force tended to be younger in the PRC. One possible reason might be the break in tertiary education in the PRC, which occurred during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976; a break that produced a generation gap in the teacher work force. A further contributing reason could be ascribed to the influence of economic development in the 1980s, when many graduates left teaching to pursue better-paid careers. It is likely that both of these factors have contributed to the imbalance in age in the teaching force in the PRC.

A further finding revealed that in the PRC, teachers were less academically qualified. It was revealed that 90.2% of teachers were educated at diploma level - a three-year program at the college level. In Hong Kong, 69.4% of the teachers had a bachelor degree compared with only 9.8% of teachers in the PRC. However, it is worth pointing out that the bachelor degrees of teachers in Hong Kong might not be in the subject area of English (see Falvey 1996, and earlier discussion in the paper). More teachers were teacher-trained in Hong Kong (73.6%) than in the PRC (61.3%). The category related to the years of teaching experiences showed that 55.8% of teachers in the PRC had 4-6 years' teaching experience. However, in Hong Kong, 30% had 1-3 years' experience whereas 40% had 10 years experience or above.

The most obvious differences observed from Table 1 above involve class size and teacher workload in terms of the number of lessons taught per week. In the PRC, the average class size was much bigger, with 55.8% of classes containing 50 students or more. However, such very large classes were not observed in Hong Kong. The majority of classes (81.3%) contained 31-40 students. Teachers in Hong Kong had a much heavier workload, with 78% of them teaching 21-30 lessons per week. Almost all teachers in the study from the PRC (98.9%) taught 10-20 lessons per week.

It can be seen from the results of Part One of the questionnaire that teachers' characteristics in relation to teachers' subject qualifications, professional qualifications, and teaching experience, as well as their actual teaching situations in schools, are different. Given that teachers' knowledge and practices are affected by their subject

training and experience (Burko & Putnam, 1996), it would be reasonable to assume that teachers in the PRC, who are less well qualified and less experienced than their Hong Kong counterparts, would opt for traditional assessment methods in preference to alternative or innovative assessment methods. We will discuss definitions of these methods, and this hypothesis below. In addition, it is also revealed that the most obvious differences in the teaching environment are that, while teachers in the PRC have bigger classes, teachers in Hong Kong have a heavier workload.

5.2 Teachers' Assessment Practices

Part Three of the questionnaire deals with the assessment practices, which ESL/EFL teachers employ in schools. There are three major questions related to teachers' assessment practices in their daily teaching (see Appendix). The first two questions ask teachers about the frequency using a list of methods to 1) record their students' results, and 2) give feedback to their students on their academic performance.

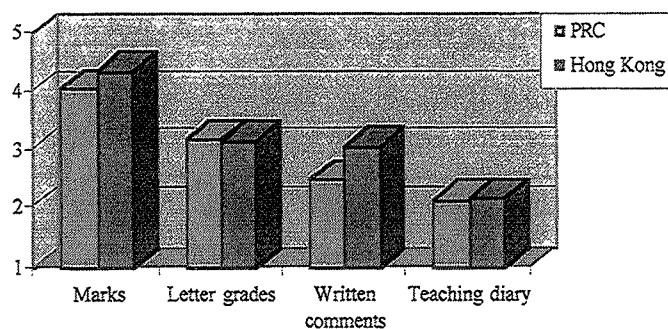
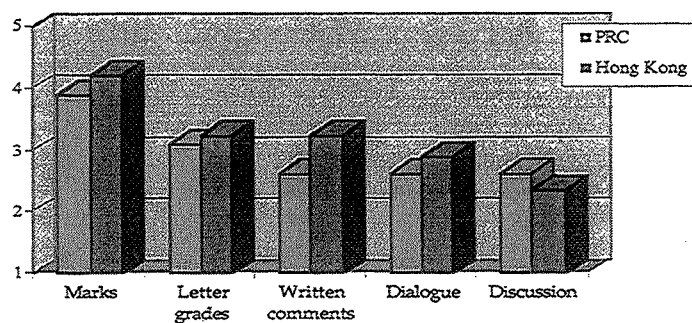
The third question asks how often teachers use the list of twenty assessment practices in their teaching. Theoretically and conceptually, two different kinds of assessment practices - traditional and alternative - were constructed. They were, however, listed in the questionnaire from the most commonly used to the least commonly used practices. Detailed explanations were also provided for the kind of practices that might be interpreted differently. In addition, local educators who conducted the survey were there in person to explain the kind of practices to teachers if ambiguity occurred in the definition of the terms.

Methods Teachers Use to Record and Give Feedback to Students

This question intended to discover how often teachers in both regions record their students' results in their teaching using different kind of methods. Table 2 shows the methods teachers prefer to use in order to record results and to give feedback to students in terms of mean comparison. In general, traditional methods such as marks and letter grades are among the most commonly used. Other methods such as the provision of written comments, teaching diary/log, oral assessment through dialogues/conferencing with students and assessment based on discussion were employed less often (see mean scores in Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2).

Table 2. Methods Teachers Use to Record and Give Feedback to Students

Items	Variables	PRC Mean	N	HK Mean	N	Sig. (2-tailed)
How often teachers record students' results	1. Marks	4.04	90	4.33	51	.037
	2. Letter grades	3.17	86	3.14	51	.816
	3. Written comments	2.49	86	3.06	51	.001
	4. Teaching diary/log	2.13	85	2.14	50	.959
How often teachers give feedback on students' academic performance	1. Marks	3.92	88	4.24	51	.024
	2. Letter grades	3.12	86	3.27	51	.321
	3. Written comments	2.66	85	3.27	51	.000
	4. Dialogue/conferencing	2.66	87	2.90	51	.194
	5. Discussion	2.66	87	2.35	51	.081

Figure 1: Methods Teachers Use to Record Students' Results**Figure 2: Methods Teachers Use to Give Feedback to Students**

From a comparative perspective, Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2 reveal that, according to the mean scores, teachers in Hong Kong tend to use all the assessment methods described above more frequently than teachers in the PRC except the method of discussion. In both regions, the practice of using *marks* and *letter grades* for recording students' results and giving feedback to students are favored more than methods such as *written comments*, *teaching diary/log*, *assessment through dialogue/conferencing* and *discussion* in the teachers' daily teaching practices. Teachers in the PRC used *discussion* strategies more frequently than teachers did in Hong Kong. In addition, independent sample t-tests were carried out to find out whether there are any statistical differences between HK and the PRC teachers answering the above two questions. A probability ($p < .05$) was used for the analysis. The t-test results showed a statistical significant difference in the way 1) teachers record students' results using *marks* and *written comments*, and 2) teachers give feedback to students' academic performance using *marks* and *written comments* in both regions. In both cases, teachers in Hong Kong use those two methods significantly more than teachers do in the PRC (see Table 2 for details).

Methods Used in Teachers' Daily Teaching

The third question in Part Three invited teachers to state how often they employed, for assessment purposes, the methods (both traditional and alternative) listed in the Appendix. They are, according to the responses given, categorized into two major underpinning concepts in assessment practice. Mean comparison and independent sample t-tests were then conducted to look at the traditional and alternative assessment methods used by teachers in the two regions.

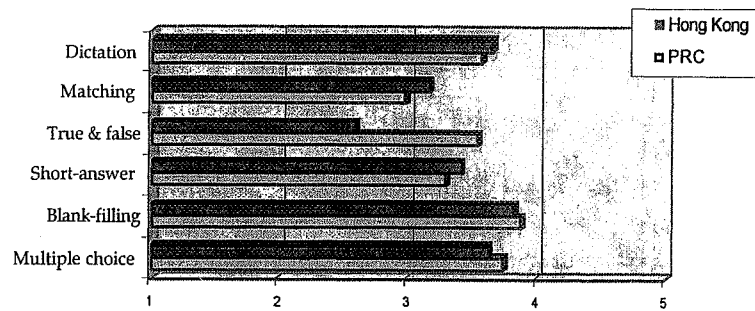
A comparison was first conducted between Hong Kong and PRC teachers' traditional assessment methods used in their classroom teaching. It was discovered from the mean scores that teachers in the PRC used the methods of *blank filling* and *multiple choice* slightly more frequently than the teachers in Hong Kong. In addition, according to the independent sample t-tests (see Table 3), teachers in the PRC use dichotomous *true/false questions* significantly more frequently than teachers in Hong Kong ($p < .05$). Teachers in Hong Kong, on the other hand, use the remaining traditional methods such as *dictation*, *matching* and *short answer questions* more frequently than teachers in the PRC, though no significant differences were found. Overall, looking at the means, teachers in both regions use traditional assessment methods more than alternative assessment methods (see Table 3 and Figure 3 below). However, it is felt by the researchers that

a survey study at this level cannot answer why or why teachers do not prefer certain assessment methods, and the rationale behind their choices.

Table 3. Assessment Methods Teachers Use in Their Teaching in Both Regions

Variables	PRC Mean	N	HK Mean	N	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Multiple choice	3.74	90	3.63	51	.493
2. Blank-filling	3.87	89	3.82	51	.756
3. Short-answer questions	3.28	89	3.41	51	.402
4. True and false questions	3.54	89	2.59	51	.000
5. Matching questions	2.97	88	3.16	51	.223
6. Essay questions	2.41	87	2.68	50	.132
7. Dictation	3.57	88	3.65	51	.623
8. Book reports	2.31	87	2.67	51	.029
9. Role play	2.38	88	2.61	51	.168
10. Group discussion	2.45	88	2.61	51	.373
11. Oral presentation	2.74	87	2.75	51	.955
12. Observation	2.34	88	2.46	50	.526
13. Peer/group assessment	2.42	89	1.78	51	.000
14. Student self-assessment	2.56	88	1.65	51	.000
15. Exhibitions	1.98	89	1.78	50	.220
16. Simulations	2.24	89	1.63	49	.000
17. Structured questions	2.24	89	2.48	50	.130
18. Project	2.36	85	2.51	51	.435
19. Data analysis questions	2.29	85	2.10	51	.298
20. Portfolio	2.22	85	1.65	51	.001

Figure 3: A Comparison of Traditional Methods Used by Teachers



In terms of alternative assessment methods, Figures 4 and 5 below present findings of the methods preferred by the Hong Kong teachers and the methods preferred by teachers in the PRC. The purpose of this presentation is to give a clear picture from a comparative perspective the kinds of methods preferred by teachers in Hong Kong, and in the PRC.

Figure 4: Alternative Methods Preferred by Teachers in HK

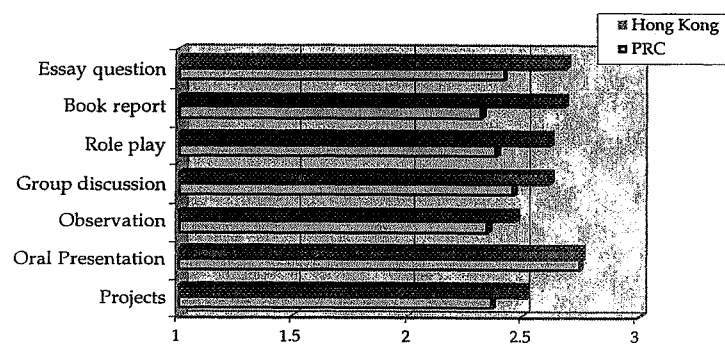
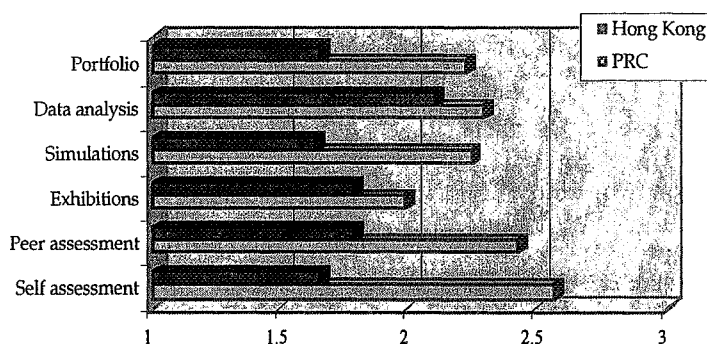


Figure 5: Alternative Methods Preferred by Teachers in the PRC

In comparing the methods that teachers prefer to use in their teaching, it can be seen that the teachers in Hong Kong use *projects*, *essay questions*, and *book reports* more frequently than their colleagues in the PRC, with *book report* showing a significant difference ($p < .05$). Teachers in the PRC tend to use *self* and *peer/group* assessment, *simulations*, *portfolios*, *data analysis* and *exhibition* more frequently, all initial four methods showing significant difference ($p < .05$) except for *data analysis* and *exhibition*. One of the reasons might be the fact that *self* and *peer/group* assessment have been traditionally highly regarded in schools in the PRC.

It can be also seen that *role-play* and *group discussion* are used slightly more frequently among the teachers in Hong Kong than in the PRC, though the t-test does not show a significant difference. This might indicate a growing awareness of the TOC, or, more likely, an awareness of these assessment methods arising from the washback effect of recent changes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education (HKCEE) exam syllabus on teaching and learning (see Cheng 1997a; 1997b; 1999). One of the major exam format changes in the new HKCEE examination in English in Hong Kong is in the oral paper, where role-plays and group discussions have been introduced; replacing the former read aloud and structured conversation assessment methods (see Hong Kong Examinations Authority, 1994a, 1994b). This might also suggest that this external examination has some influential effect on classroom assessment.

Summarizing the findings above, teachers in both regions tend to use more traditional assessment methods than alternative methods. In terms of alternative assessment methods, teachers in the PRC use

assessment methods such as *self* and *peer/group assessment*, *simulations* and *portfolios* significantly more frequently than HK teachers. Whereas the methods that HK teachers use more are *essay questions*, *book report*, *role-play*, *group discussion*, *observations*, *oral presentations*, and *project*, with only *book report* showing a significant difference.

6. Conclusion

One interesting finding is that although teachers from both regions preferred to use traditional assessment methods, the hypothesis raised earlier was not proven. Although teachers from Hong Kong were more experienced and better qualified, scrutiny of Table 3 reveals that teachers from Hong Kong do not necessarily use assessment methods associated with alternative forms of assessment more frequently than teachers from the PRC. In fact, teachers in both regions seem to have their preferred alternative assessment methods. Methods of assessment such as self-assessment, peer/group assessment, simulations, and portfolio were reported to be used significantly more frequently by teachers from the PRC than teachers from Hong Kong. There are methods that HK teachers tend to prefer mentioned above, but there is no significant difference compared with the PRC teachers.

One reason for this may be that two separate but parallel sets of assessment practices co-exist in the PRC. One is the influence of psychometric assessment methods and their associated test types during the past four decades, where discrete-point assessment methods such as multiple-choice items are employed. The other is so-called alternative assessment methods such as self-assessment, peer/group assessment, simulations and portfolio which have a long history (c.f. the viva voce for Ph.D. candidates in many countries, the public defense of theses in Italy and simulations employed in oral assessment tests used as long ago as 1913 by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate) and can be found in examination papers set decades ago in long-established examinations in places such as the PRC and UK (Arnove, Altbach, & Kelly, 1992; Hu, 1984; Spolsky, 1995). We may be witnessing a case of *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*² as the growing emphasis on assessment methods, which focus on issues of validity, supercede or complement former overwhelming pre-occupations with test reliability.

² *Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose* is a French phrase meaning: the more things change, the more they remain the same.

As this survey study only investigated teachers' assessment practices using a relatively small sample, the implications of the research for Hong Kong secondary school teachers cannot yet be foreseen. It is not clear through this initial survey study what the level of preparedness is of Hong Kong teachers of English for the new target-oriented curriculum and assessment in schools. However, it is recommended that a future combined study of ethnographic data from Hong Kong teachers using multi-perspectives such as in-depth interviews and classroom observations will provide valuable information and feedback for further education initiatives, teacher education planning, and textbook writing. In the meantime, however, it is clear that a mixture of traditional practices based on long-established existing practices in schools in both regions and more recent practices, influenced by the washback effect of examination change, are the predominant motivating factors in teachers' choice of assessment methods and that the newer forms of assessment associated with task-based syllabuses and criterion-referenced assessment are not yet present in Hong Kong secondary schools.

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Appendix: Teacher questionnaire

PART THREE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Please grade the following on a 5-point scale format where 1= Never, 2= Seldom, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, 5= Always. Put 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 in the brackets provided.

(1) From the list below, state how often you record your students' results:

- 1 [] marks
- 2 [] letter grades (such as A, B, C or D)
- 3 [] written comments
- 4 [] teaching diary/log

(2) From the list below, state how often you give feedback on your students' academic performance by means of:

- 1 [] marks
- 2 [] letter grades
- 3 [] written comments
- 4 [] dialogue/conferencing
- 5 [] discussion

(3) From the list below, state how often you employ the following for assessment purposes?

- 1 [] Multiple choice
- 2 [] Blank-filling
- 3 [] Short-answer questions
- 4 [] True and false questions
- 5 [] Matching questions
- 6 [] Essay questions
- 7 [] Dictation
- 8 [] Book reports
- 9 [] Role play
- 10 [] Group discussion
- 11 [] Oral presentation
- 12 [] Observation
- 13 [] Peer/group assessment
- 14 [] Student self-assessment
- 15 [] Exhibitions
- 16 [] Simulations

- 17 [] Structured questions
(which are items that are clustered together around a particular theme)
 - 18 [] Projects
(which involve work done individually or in groups over a period of time on one topic or theme produce both written (graphic) or spoken product)
 - 19 [] Data analysis questions
(which are questions in which students are provided with multiple stimuli of texts or graphs which requires analysis or synthesis in order to answer the questions set.)
 - 20 [] Portfolio
(which is a collection of separate pieces of work done by students usually on one topic or theme and collected together for an overall assessment purpose)
 - 21 [] Others/Please specify
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