

Fostering positive washback in the English language classroom – the teaching-testing nexus

David Coniam

The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Washback

“Backwash”, “Impact”

- Effect of test upon teaching, learning, what happens in class, attitude to language etc
- Positive washback, negative washback



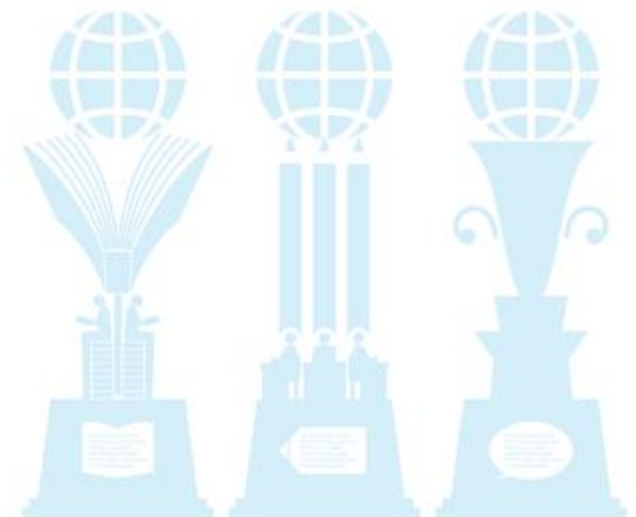
Washback, teaching ↔ testing

- Washback – influence of exam on teaching
- Good teaching AfL



Positive washback

- ➔ The system
- ➔ The teacher



HK public exams

- Brief bit of background to ELT in HK

Before 2012 (Sec. ed. 5+2)

- Public exams – Year 11, Year 13

Since 2012 (Sec. ed. 3+3)

- One public exam only – Year 12

- Sec schools banded by ability: H-M-L



Negative washback

- Pre-1986, Year 11 public exam – no listening
→ Ss did no listening in class
- Pre-1989 Yr 13, a lot of MC
→ Ss did a lot of MC practice
- Pre-1994, Yr 13 public exam no oral –
→ Ss did no oral work
- Tertiary ‘exit’ test – IELTS
→ wasted effort in IELTS preparation ...



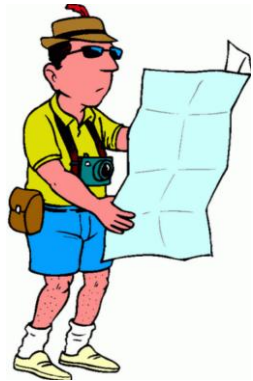
Yr 11 English Oral (1974-1995)

1 Reading a dialogue

Format: two examiners
'interrogating' one student

2 Qs on a picture
(tourist in HK)

3 Conversation with
the examiner(s)
(– going abroad
– shopping in HK)



Washback – oral

- ‘Interrogation’ format
 - ➔ Ss did a lot of ‘interrogation’ orals
- Altho still ‘noise’ in English
 - ➔ A bit of positive washback



Changes to oral

- 1996, Yr 11 oral – group discussion
- 4 candidates in a group,
2 examiners (who only scored)



Yr 11 English Oral 1996-2011

'Organising
swimming
competition'



Copyright © David Coniam 2014

Yr 11 oral 1996 – Group discussion



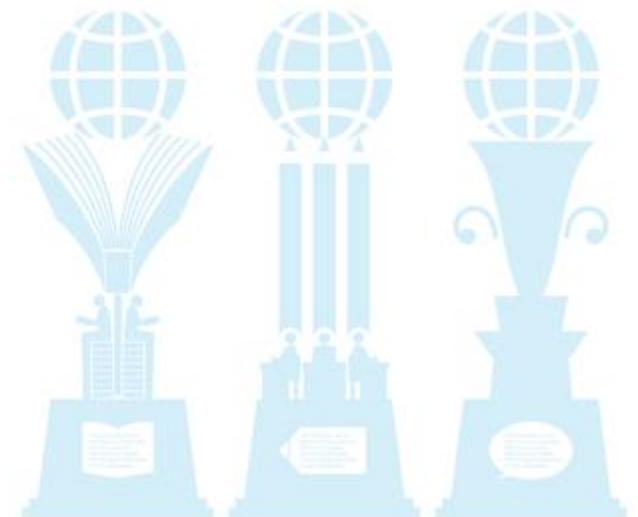
Major changes
to oral –
enhanced
validity



Copyright © David Coniam 2014

Positive Washback?

- As practice for the Yr 12 oral test, some Ss spend 3 years doing 'oral discussions' in the test format
 - OK, it may get dull, but it's 'good speaking noise' in English
- ➔ reasonably positive washback



School-based Assessment

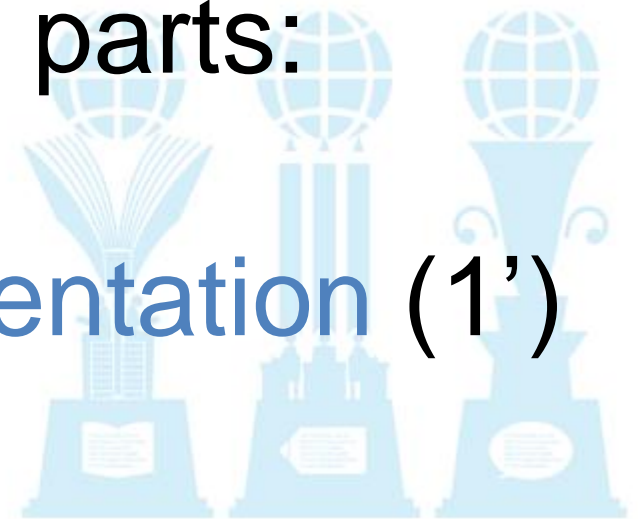
SBA in all HK public exams from 2007
(English led the way) 😊

- SBA group discussion – ‘Forrest Gump’
- “Choosing a gift for a character”



Washback, teaching-testing fit

- OK, how can you do activities in class:
 - that encourage the use of English
 - that show a teaching-exam fit
 - that students enjoy ...
- Yr 12 public exam oral – two parts:
 1. group discussion (8')
 2. individual response / presentation (1')



TELL YOUR GROUP

- ## TELL YOUR GROUP

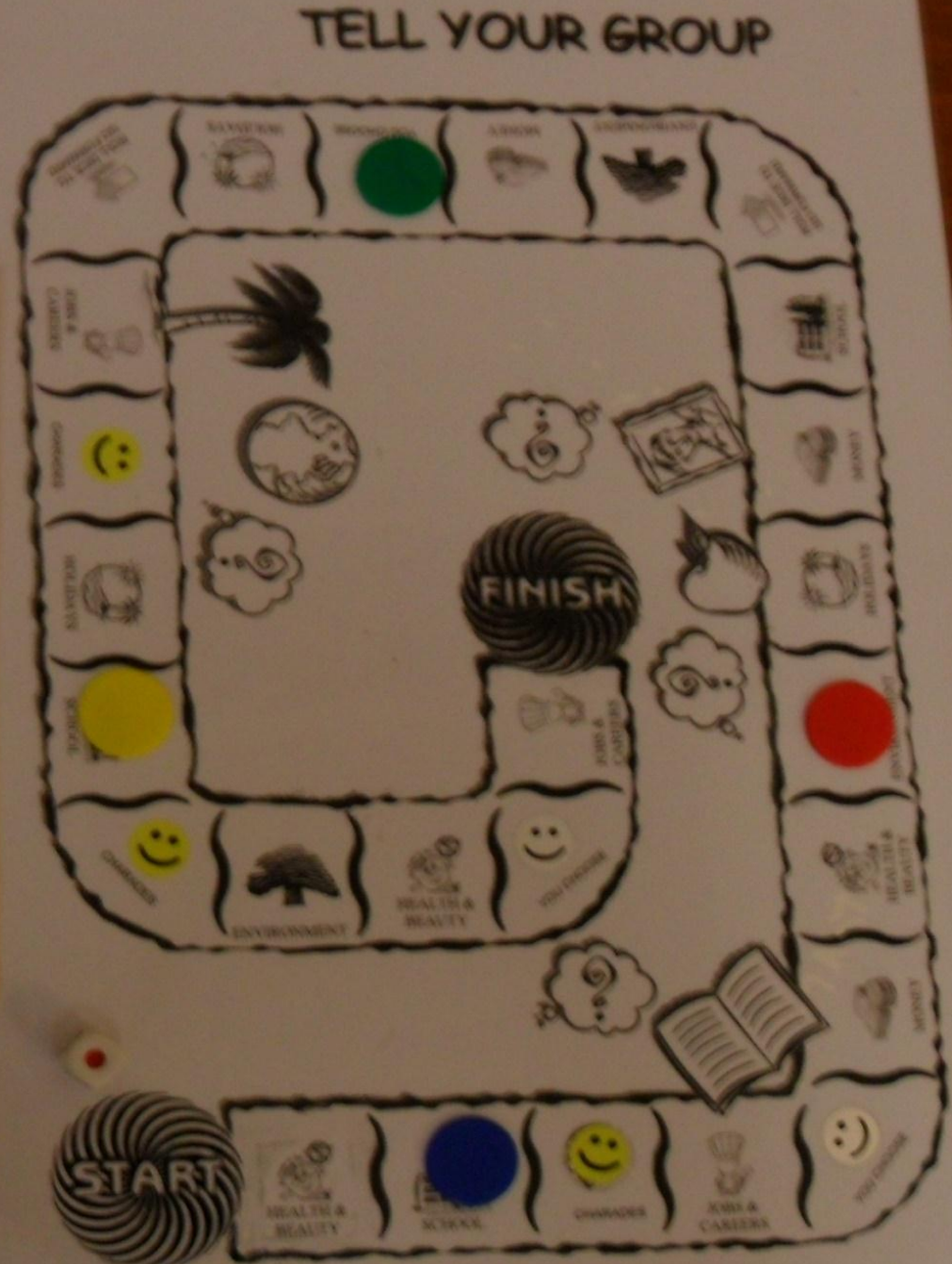


TELL YOUR GROUP

- Oral activity board game – groups of 5
 - One S makes presentation; others draw cards, keep time, be ‘judges’
- ➔ first to *Finish* square



Board, cards etc



Question card themes

environment

jobs and careers

money

school

charades

holidays

health and beauty

A few question cards: 'School'

Do you enjoy learning
Putonghua?

What is the most
common reason why
students are sometimes
late for school?

What punishments are
used at your school?

What is your favourite
subject?

Are school uniforms a
good idea?

What is the best thing
about a casual dress
day?

Charades – a bit of fun

Ms. Chan

Garfield

Ice-skating

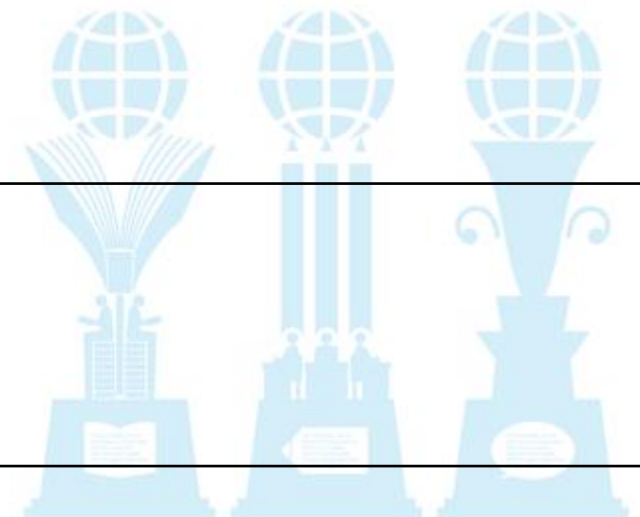
Chinese New Year

Eating breakfast

charades

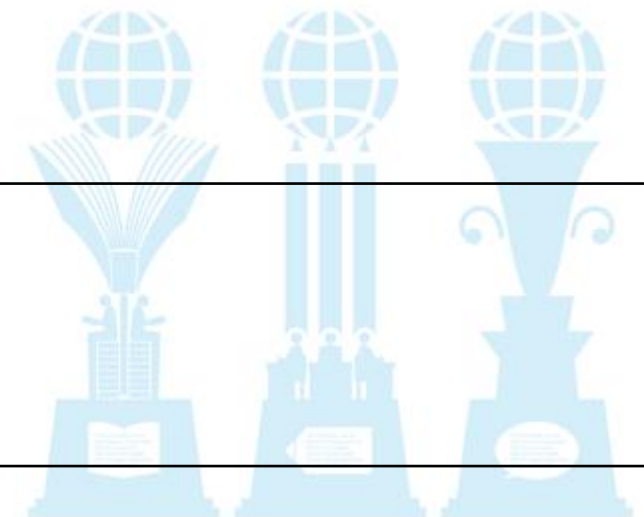
Lesson run-down (60')

Time	Procedure
15'	Brainstorming Students brainstorm vocabulary for a theme



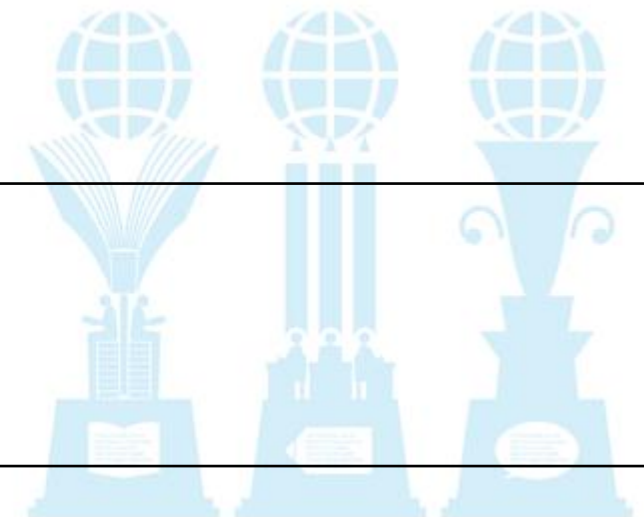
Lesson run-down (60')

Time	Procedure
15'	Brainstorming Students brainstorm vocabulary for a theme
15'	Briefing 1. Rules briefly explained 2. Basic presentation skills revised



Lesson run-down (60')

Time	Procedure
15'	Brainstorming Students brainstorm vocabulary for a theme
15'	Briefing 1. Rules briefly explained 2. Basic presentation skills revised
30'	Do "Tell your group" activity 1. Students in groups of 5, do activity 2. T observes students' performance

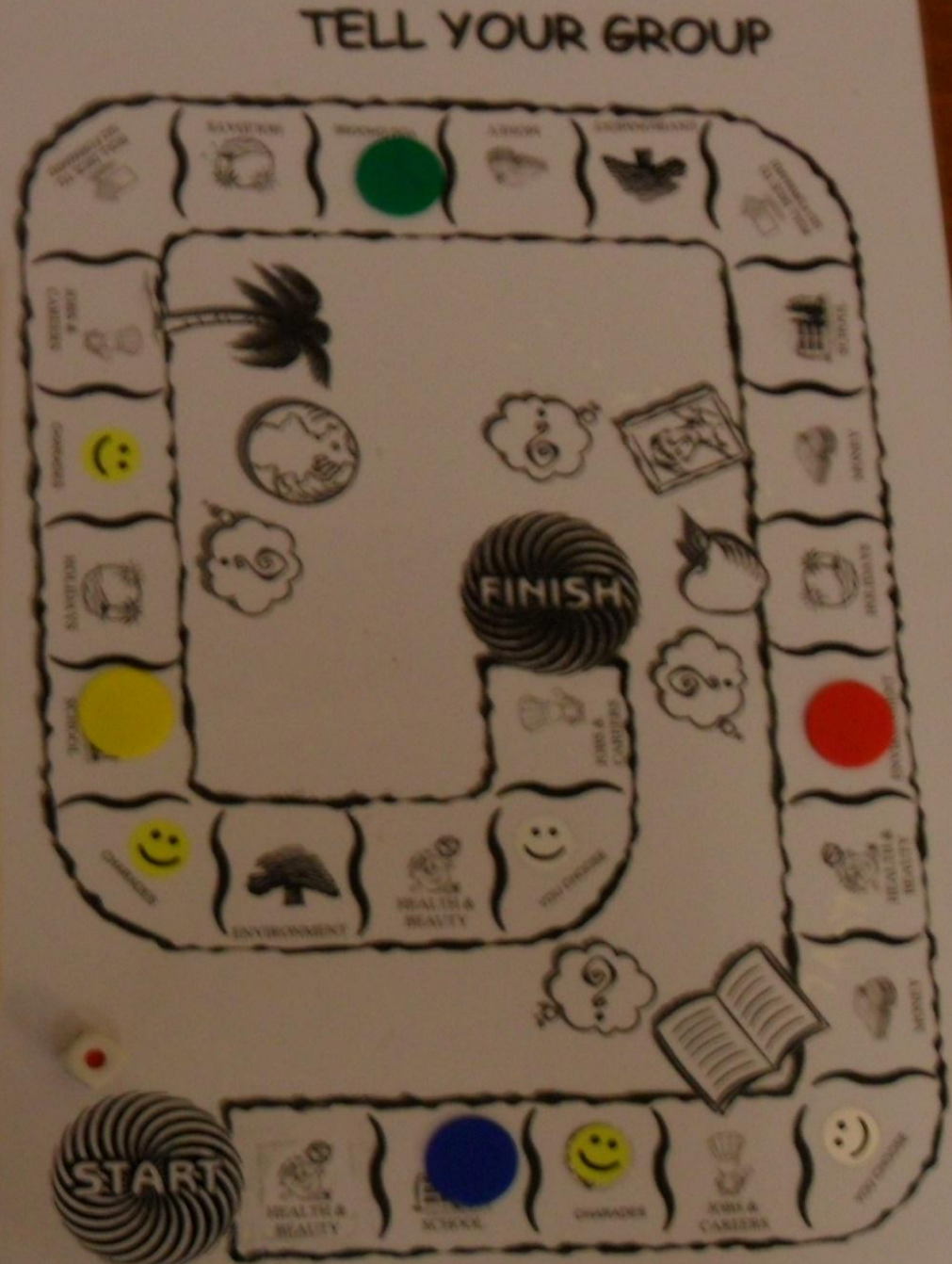


Lesson run-down (60')

Time	Procedure
15'	Brainstorming Students brainstorm vocabulary for a theme
15'	Briefing 1. Rules briefly explained 2. Basic presentation skills revised
30'	Do "Tell your group" activity 1. Students in groups of 5, do activity 2. T observes students' performance
10'	Debriefing Highlight common strengths and weaknesses



Board, cards etc



One group

- Low ability school
- Y 11 class (a more able class)

A (in white shirt)
is going to do the
oral presentation



One boy talking on a 'Health and beauty' question



‘Plastic surgery’



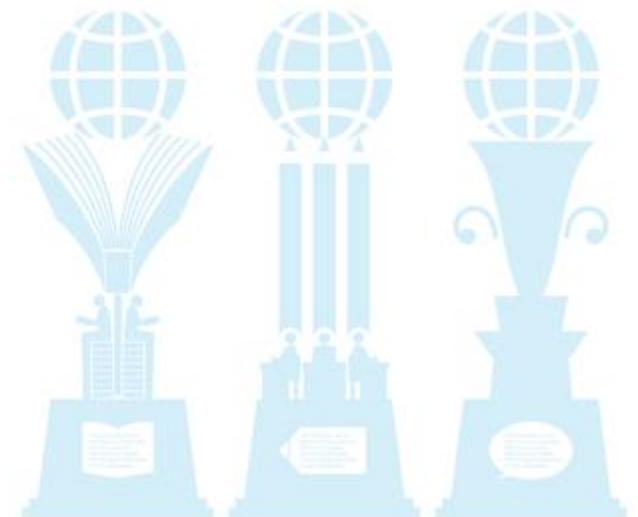
Good teaching / AfL

- TELL YOUR GROUP –
teaching / exam ‘practice’ activity
- With a rubric, could easily be an AfL tool
– scored by T – or even by Ss ...



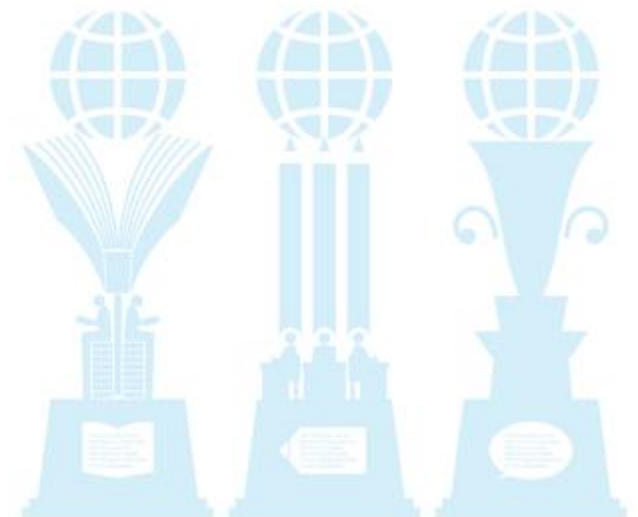
Wrapping up

- Yes, HK is an exam-driven system
- But the exam does encourage 'communication'
- Positive washback is possible 😊

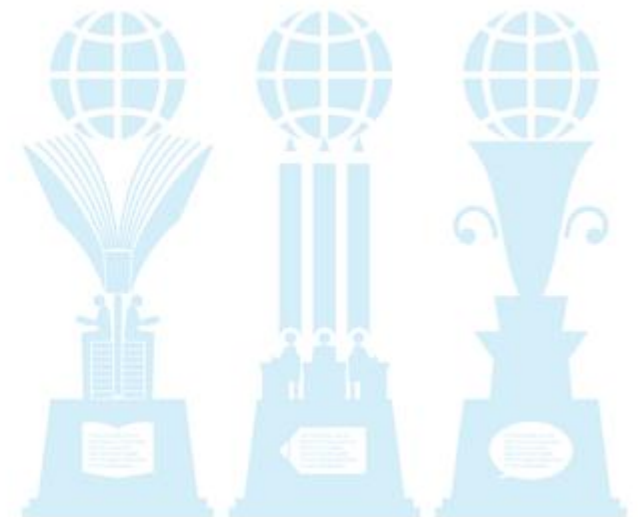


In closing

- Positive washback needs:
 - ‘support’ from the system:
 - communicative tests
 - SBA in the public exams
 - school support
 - good teaching
 - a bit of inventiveness 😊



Thank you



If you want the TYG
materials, contact Chie

