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

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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

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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

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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 …

1. Reading a dialogue

2. Qs on a picture (tourist in HK)

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

Format: two examiners ‘interrogating’ one student
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)
‘Organising swimming competition’
Major changes to oral – enhanced validity
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”

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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’)

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A practical example

TELL YOUR GROUP

• a board game incorporating ‘oral presentation / individual response’ skills
• From a PGDE Tchr
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

environment
jobs and careers
money
school
charades
holidays
health and beauty

TELL YOUR GROUP

START

FINISH

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Question card themes

- environment
- jobs and careers
- money
- school
- holidays
- health and beauty
- charades
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
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1. Rules briefly explained  
2. Basic presentation skills revised |
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2. T observes students' performance |
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| 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