



# 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



# 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 ...



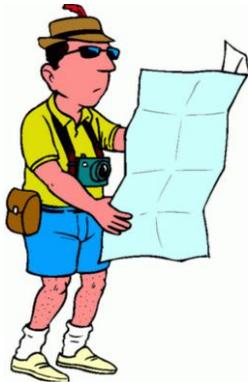
# Yr 11 English Oral (1974-1995)

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'



# Yr 11 oral 1996 – Group discussion

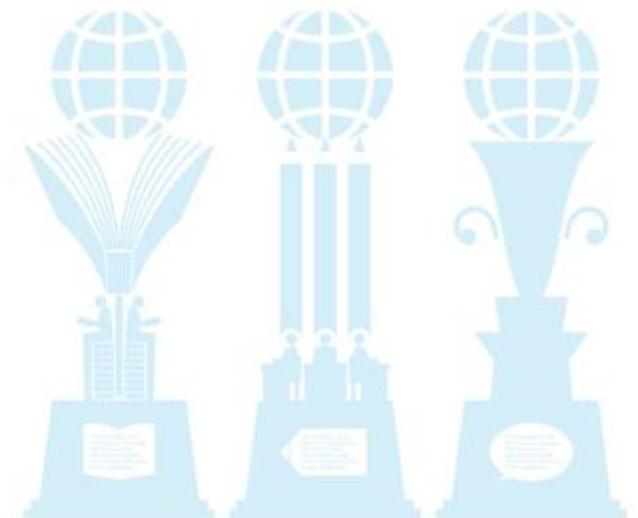


Major changes  
to oral –  
enhanced  
validity



# 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

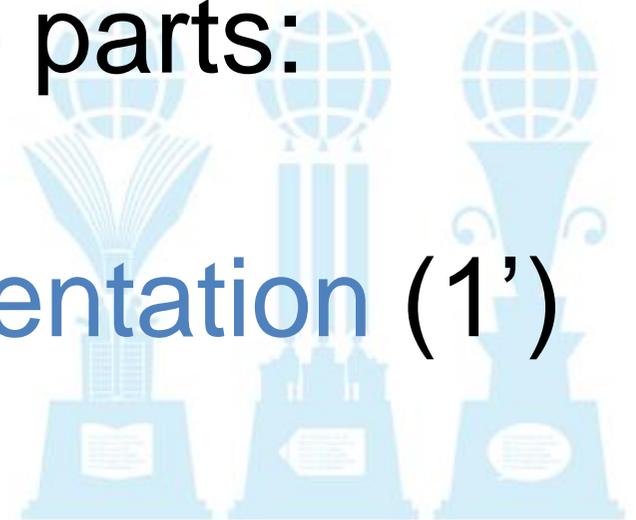
SBA in all HK public exams from 2007  
(English led the way) 😊

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



# 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')



# A practical example

## TELL YOUR GROUP

- a board game incorporating 'oral presentation / individual response' skills
- From a PGDE Tchr

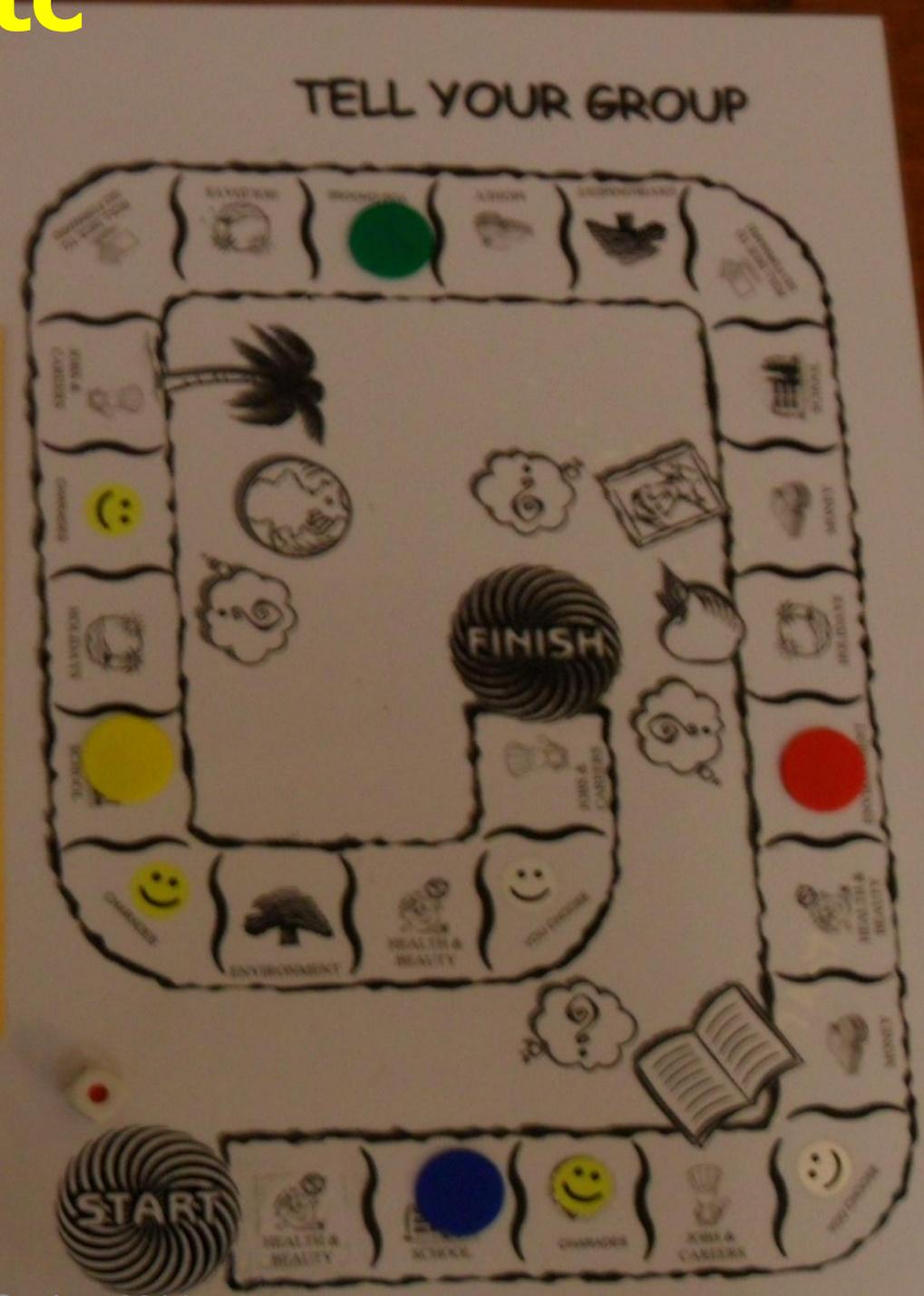
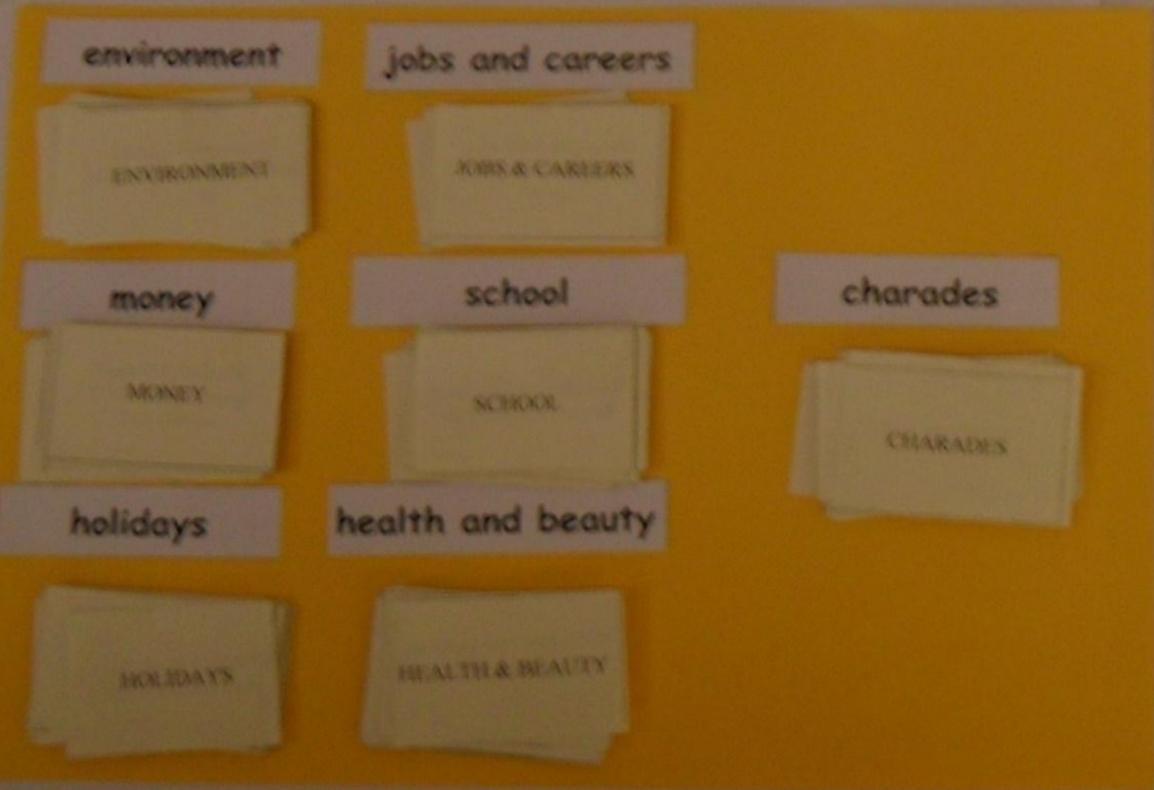


# TELL YOUR GROUP

- 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



# 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**

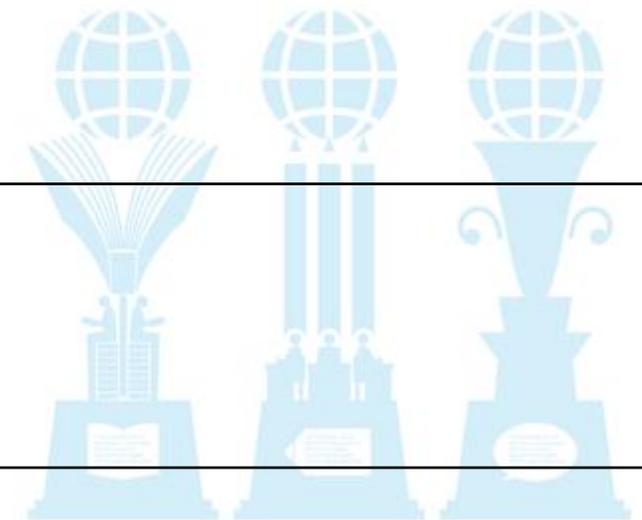
**Chinese New Year**

**Eating breakfast**

charades

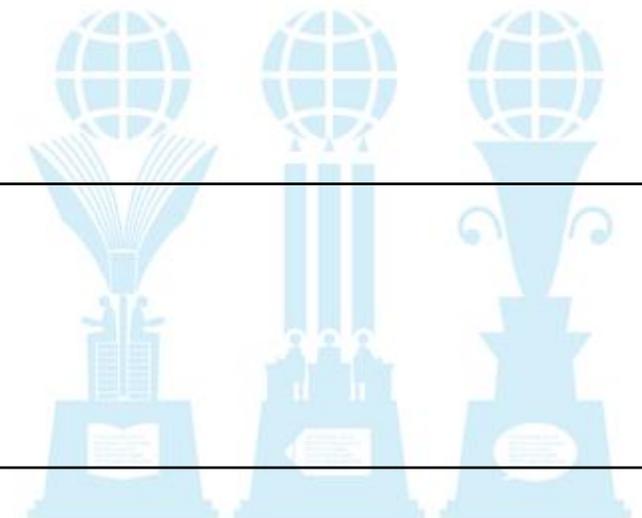
# Lesson run-down (60')

Time	Procedure
15'	<b>Brainstorming</b> Students brainstorm vocabulary for a theme



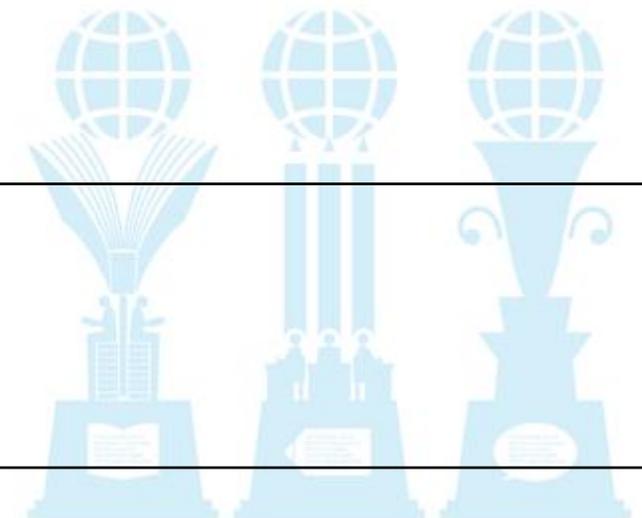
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10'	<b>Debriefing</b> Highlight common strengths and weaknesses



# Board, cards etc

environment	jobs and careers	
ENVIRONMENT	JOBS & CAREERS	
money	school	charades
MONEY	SCHOOL	CHARADES
holidays	health and beauty	
HOLIDAYS	HEALTH & BEAUTY	

## TELL YOUR GROUP

The board game board is a large, irregular shape with a path of icons. The path starts at a 'START' token (a spiral) and ends at a 'FINISH' token (a spiral). The path is surrounded by icons representing different topics: environment (palm tree, globe), jobs and careers (person at desk, graduation cap), school (book, school building), health and beauty (apple, person at mirror), and money (dollar sign, piggy bank). There are also several smiley face icons. The board is titled 'TELL YOUR GROUP' at the top.

# 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'



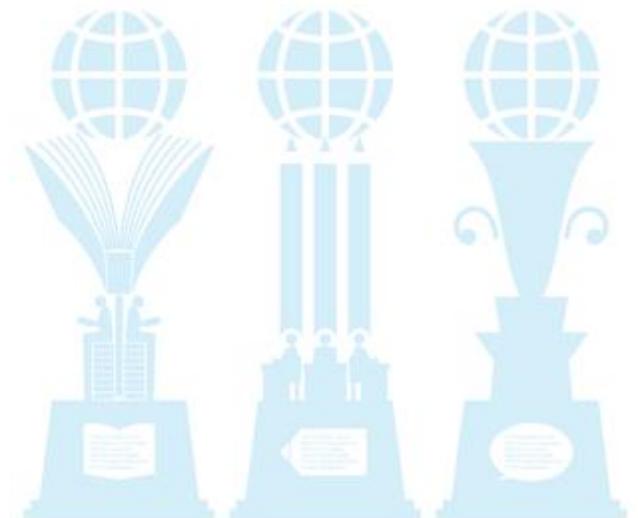
# Good teaching / AfL

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



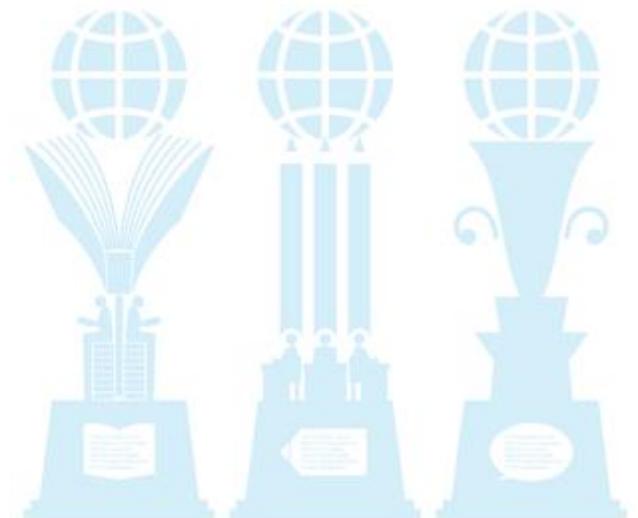
# Wrapping up

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



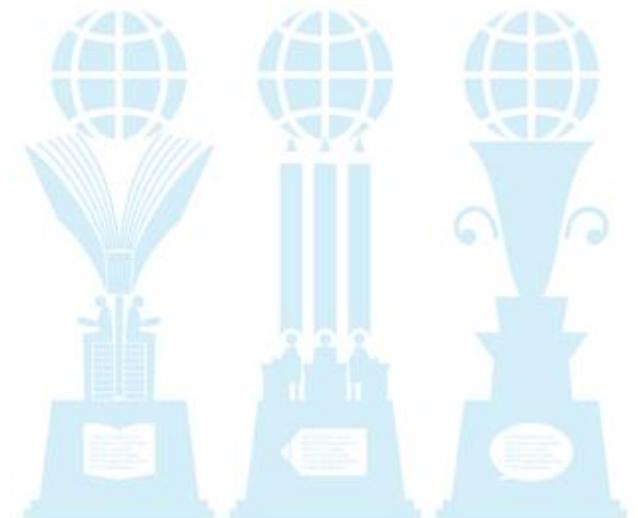
# In closing

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



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# Thank you



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If you want the TYG  
materials, contact Chie

