USING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TO FACILITATE LEARNER SELF-REGULATION: A CASE STUDY OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS IN HONG KONG

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ABSTRACT

One of the key aims of formative assessment in higher education is to enable students to become self-regulated learners (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) framework, this exploratory study investigates which formative assessment practices proposed by them were used by one college EFL writing teacher to facilitate learner self-regulation in a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) setting (i.e. Hong Kong) and student perceptions of these practices in relation to self-regulation. Five formative assessment practices were found to be implemented by the teacher to support learner self-regulation. The students seemed to be more positive about teacher-and-student-directed practices than student-directed ones. Suggestions have been provided to maximize the potential of these practices in facilitating learner self-regulation.

Key Words: formative assessment, learner self-regulation, EFL writing

INTRODUCTION

Formative assessment is defined as "the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there" (Assessment Reform Group, 2002, p. 2). Originating from western contexts (Chen, Kettle, Klenowski, & May, 2013), it has been increasingly incorporated into Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) settings, which include mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore (Carless, 2012), to promote student learning. For example, in tertiary level EFL writing classrooms in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, teachers have been using practices such as

teacher feedback, peer-, and self- assessment to help students improve their writing (e.g. Lee & Coniam, 2013; Min, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006; Zhao, 2010). The positive influence of formative assessment on student learning has now been well established (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Moreover, in higher education, one of the key aims of formative assessment is to enable students to become self-regulated learners who can actively monitor and regulate their own learning processes (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). However, relatively little attention has been given to teachers' formative assessment practices and student perceptions of them in relation to learner self-regulation in tertiary level English writing classrooms. This exploratory case study seeks to investigate these two issues in the context of an EFL academic writing course in a self-financing tertiary institution in Hong Kong. To do this, this paper draws on key principles of good formative assessment practices proposed by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) as the conceptual framework. Building a picture of one writing teacher's formative assessment practices and student perceptions of them can provide insights into how best to use formative assessment to facilitate learner self-regulation in similar CHC contexts as depicted in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Formative Assessment Practices in EFL Classrooms in CHC Settings and Student Perceptions

Assessment tends to be summative in all CHC settings, which have an exam-oriented educational system (Carless, 2012). However, recent years have seen a promotion of formative assessment in these settings, such as questioning, feedback, peer- and self- assessment and the formative use of summative tests (Thanh-Pham & Renshaw, 2015). In particular, a review of the literature shows that EFL teachers in CHC classrooms have increasingly incorporated formative assessment practices into their classes, including clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success, teacher written feedback, teacher student conferencing, peer assessment, self-assessment, portfolios, formative use of summative tests, and so on (e.g. Carless, 2012; Hu, 2005; Lee & Coniam, 2013; Min, 2005; Ng, 2013; Wicking, 2016; Yang et al., 2006; Zhao, 2010).

Particularly in EFL writing classrooms in Hong Kong, research on teachers' formative assessment practices has been limited (Mak & Lee, 2014). At the elementary level, English teachers have been found to use focused and coded corrective feedback, criterion-referenced peer assessment and teacher feedback, error logs, goal setting, and reflection activities in process-oriented writing classrooms (Mak & Lee, 2014). At the secondary level, writing teachers fostered a closer link between teaching and assessment by giving students input and sharing with them task-specific assessment criteria before writing; required students to write multiple drafts; organised peer and self-feedback activities; used feedback forms reflecting assessment criteria; selectively marked student errors; and deemphasised scores or grades (Lee, 2011; Lee & Coniam, 2013). At the tertiary level, much remains to be known about writing teachers' formative assessment practices in a CHC context like Hong Kong. Even less is known about teachers' use of formative assessment to facilitate learner self-regulation, despite the argument that one of the key aims of formative assessment in higher education is to facilitate learner self-regulation (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This is the case not only in Hong Kong, but also in other CHC contexts. In answer to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) call for examining teachers' current assessment practices with regard to developing students' self-regulative capacities, this exploratory study seeks to fill this void by exploring in depth one college EFL writing teacher's implementation of formative assessment practices that may facilitate learner self-regulation in a CHC setting (i.e. Hong Kong).

Compared with research on EFL writing teachers' formative assessment practices, student perceptions of them are relatively less explored. Notably, studies that probe into student perceptions in CHC settings indicate that the students in Chinese mainland or Hong Kong contexts tend to regard their teacher as an authoritative figure and have a more favourable opinion of teacher than peer feedback (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006). This may be explained by the hierarchical relationship teachers have with students in CHC settings (Biggs, 1996) and the perception that teachers' main role is to be a source of authority that imparts knowledge to students, and students' role is to absorb information from teachers (Carless, 2012). Despite research on student perceptions, little is known about how EFL students in CHC contexts perceive formative assessment in their writing classrooms from a self-regulatory perspective. Greater attention needs to be paid to students'

perceptions because they are one of the key stakeholders in formative assessment and their perceptions may reveal its benefits and problems of implementation, which may throw light on how to maximize its potential in fostering learner self-regulation. This study intends to fill this gap by gauging the perceptions of a class of first year college students in Hong Kong.

Conceptual Framework

Every person attempts to self-regulate his or her functioning in relation to some goals in life and it is inaccurate to speak about un-self-regulated persons (Winne, 1997). In academic settings, students self-regulate their learning to varying degrees to reach their goals. Self-regulated learning is defined as "an active constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning, and monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features of the environment (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002, pp. 64-65). In this active constructive process, students exercise a suite of powerful skills: setting goals based on an interpretation of the properties and requirements of an academic task assigned by the teacher; approaching goals by applying tactics and strategies that generate products, both internal (e.g. cognitive states such as increased understanding or affective/motivational states such as increased self-efficacy) and externally observable (e.g. a paragraph in a piece of writing); monitoring the processes of task engagement and accumulatively produced outcomes at the cognitive, motivational and behavioural levels and generating internal feedback that may lead students to have a reinterpretation of the task, set new goals or adjust existing task goals, reexamine tactics and strategies, etc.; and actively engaging with external feedback (e.g. provided by teacher, peer or other means) to produce an effect on internal processes or external outcomes of self-regulation (Butler & Winnie, 1995).

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) put forward seven principles of formative assessment practices that teachers may use to help facilitate learner self-regulation in higher education, including:

1. Helps clarify what good performance is;

Students' goals serve as the criteria for self-regulation. A good understanding of task goals and expected standards enables students to select appropriate strategies to achieve desired goals. To help students

obtain a good understanding, teachers may clarify goals and standards through practices such as describing and explaining assessment criteria, providing students with exemplars, and so on.

2. Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;

Students are already engaged in self-monitoring when performing tasks. To foster systematically their self-regulative capacities, teachers may provide organized formal opportunities for self-assessment and self-reflection.

3. Delivers high quality information to students about their learning;

In the context of self-regulation, high quality external feedback needs to be related to pre-defined criteria and help "students troubleshoot their own performance and self-correct" so that they can regulate themselves to close the gap between "their intentions and the resulting effects" (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 208). Quality feedback should also communicate to students an appropriate conception of the goal so that students can develop a better understanding of task goals and choose more appropriate strategies to reach them.

4. Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;

For external feedback to help foster learner self-regulation, it has to be understood and internalized by students. Feedback should thus be conceptualized as a dialogic process in which students engage their teachers or peers in discussion about that feedback. Having a feedback dialogue (Nicol, 2010) with the teacher enables students to better understand teacher feedback as well as teacher expectations, correct their misunderstanding and obtain instant teacher feedback on difficulties. This helps students become clearer about task goals and choose the most suitable strategies to achieve them.

Peer dialogue can contribute to learner self-regulation in several ways. For example, it provides learners with alternative tactics and strategies to achieve task goals. Commenting on peers' work in relation to standards helps students become more familiar with assessment criteria and develop detachment of judgment, which is useful for them to conduct self-evaluation to monitor their own work.

5. Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem

Motivation and self-esteem play a very important role in self-regulated learning. Teachers can exert a positive influence on students' motivation and self-esteem so that they can set appropriate goals (e.g. learning goals rather than performance goals) and become more committed to those goals during task performance.

6. Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;

For external feedback to help regulate learner behaviours, students can be offered opportunities to use it to close the gap between current and desired performance either during or after task performance. For example, they may receive feedback on work-in-progress or may be allowed to resubmit their work based on feedback on the finished product. In this way, they can recognize the next steps of actions and how to take them in relation to the current or next assignment.

7. Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching.

Teachers need to obtain information regarding students' level of understanding and skills through such means as questioning or observing student behaviours. Based on the information, teachers can tailor their teaching to support learner self-regulation by, for example, clarifying students' conceptual misunderstandings and addressing their difficulties with study methods.

According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), the above seven proposed formative assessment practices are actually good feedback practices that can be used by teachers to support the development of students' self-regulative capacities. This is consistent with a Vygotskian perspective of self-regulation that highlights the importance of interacting with more skilled others (e.g. teachers or parents) to help learners to guide, plan, and monitor their own activities (Vygotsky, 1978). This paper thus takes the position that teacher assistance is crucial in helping foster learner self-regulation. Meanwhile, students also need to work in partnership with the teacher and play a significant role in formative assessment to realize its full potential in cultivating autonomous and self-regulating learners (Hawe, Dixon, & Watson, 2008; Hawe & Parr, 2013).

This paper employs Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) framework to explore one college EFL writing teacher's formative assessment practices in relation to self-regulation and student perceptions of them for the following reasons: (1) their framework is about using formative assessment to enhance learner self-regulation in a higher education context, while this study was also situated in a tertiary educational context. (2) It is suggested that there is a need to incorporate self-regulated learning into EFL writing instruction (Xiao, 2007). In EFL writing classrooms, various practices can be employed to enhance learners' self-regulated

learning including training students to develop self-monitoring skills, carrying out interactive and reflective writing activities such as learning journals and self-editing tasks, and so on (Lam, 2014). However, little is known about how to utilize formative assessment practices to achieve this purpose. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) framework can be used to explore this issue, thus contributing to limited research on self-regulation in second language learning (Liu & Lee, 2015). (3) In EFL writing classrooms in Hong Kong, a process approach to writing has been increasingly implemented, as is the case in the current study. This pedagogy typically includes formative classroom practices such as multidrafting, teacher-, peer- and self-assessment, and revision (O'Brien, 2004). These practices are compatible with what is proposed by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) and provide teachers with opportunities to enhance learner self-regulation.

Two research questions were thus pursued in this study:

RQ1. Based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) framework, which formative assessment practices did the teacher implement in the current study?

RQ2. What were her students' perceptions of the teacher's formative assessment practices in relation to facilitating learner self-regulation?

THE STUDY

Context

As a CHC setting, Hong Kong's education system has a competitive exam-oriented culture reflected by the dominance of summative assessment, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. The beginning of the millennium witnessed a new curriculum reform that promoted formative assessment or assessment for learning (Curriculum Development Council, 2001) to change the exam-oriented culture. In English learning, the local English curriculum encouraged the use of such practices as peer- and self-assessment, conferencing, and portfolio assessment (Curriculum Development Council, 2007). In English writing classrooms in Hong Kong schools, however, assessment practices have still been found to be mainly summative in nature (Lee & Coniam, 2013). Nevertheless, writing teachers have begun to experiment with formative assessment in their own classrooms (e.g. Lee, 2011; Mak & Lee, 2014).

At the tertiary level, the pressure of high stakes English tests on college teachers and students may not be as heavy. However, little is known about writing teachers' formative assessment practices. This provides an impetus for the current study.

The study was conducted in a 14-week English for Academic Purposes course in a self-financing tertiary institution in Hong Kong. It was a compulsory course for first year non-English majors. The major assessment tasks comprised an informative essay (20%), an argumentative essay (40%), and a group presentation demonstrating students' analysis of academic texts (30%). The major focus of the course was on academic writing. There were 20 students in the class, and they were all Hong Kong local students aged 18 to 19. The class met twice each week and each session lasted for one and a half hours. The teacher, Y, holding a PhD degree in English, had read extensively on her research topic related to peer feedback and L2 writing assessment during her doctoral study. She was purposefully selected as the research participant because she showed great enthusiasm for participating in this research and her academic background made her an information-rich case. At the time of the study, she had been teaching English for about one and a half years.

Methods of Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were triangulated to answer RQ1, including lesson observations, teacher interviews, collection of documents and student questionnaire. A total of six lessons were purposefully chosen for observation based on the teacher's plan to incorporate formative assessment practices into her writing classroom. The lessons were video recorded and notes were jotted down during observation and developed into full notes afterwards. Teacher interviews were held at the beginning of the semester and after each lesson observation to gauge teacher rationale for and opinions of her assessment practices. The interviews were conducted in English and were audio-recorded (see Appendix B for teacher interview questions). Teacher written feedback on all her students' work was collected for analysis. A 17-item end-of-course questionnaire, which included the students' experience (items 1.2, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, and 5.1, Tables 1 and 2—see Appendix A) and perceptions of formative assessment in their writing classroom, was also administered. The questionnaire included 6-point Likert Scale items (1 being strongly disagree and 6 being strongly agree), close-ended and

open-ended items. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was .85.

To answer RQ2, questionnaire and focus group interviews were utilized. An end-of-course questionnaire was conducted to obtain a general picture of student perceptions of the teacher's formative assessment practices (items 1.1, 2.5, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 5.2 and 5.3, Table 1). Focus group interviews were held both during and at the end of the semester to gain an in-depth understanding. A total of eight students were interviewed based on their willingness to participate in the study and English proficiency levels. The interviews were conducted in English because the students were able to express themselves well in this language, but they could switch to their native tongue, Cantonese, whenever necessary. Each interview lasted from 1.5 to 2 hours and was audio recorded (see Appendix C for student interview questions).

Data Analysis

For RQ1, the lesson observation notes were read several times and assigned codes. Guided by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) framework, the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to identify emerging themes concerning which formative assessment practices were implemented by the teacher to facilitate student self-regulation. Teacher interviews were transcribed verbatim and underwent the same analytical process. Teacher written feedback and questionnaire data were also analyzed for triangulation. After data analysis, a member-checking interview was conducted with the teacher to hear her comments on the researcher's interpretation.

To answer RQ2, the questionnaire data were subject to statistical analysis using SPSS to illustrate the students' general perceptions of the teacher's formative assessment practices. For example, Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was performed to gauge differences in student perceptions regarding two particular issues (i.e. items 2.5 and 3.2; items 3.5 and 5.2). Focus group interview data, transcribed verbatim, were coded first and emerging themes concerning the identified assessment practices (e.g. usefulness of teacher feedback for helping students improve their next essay, students' concerns about their own evaluative capacities in peer feedback, etc.) were explored based on the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to provide an in-depth understanding of student perceptions. A member-checking interview was also conducted with the student interviewees after data analysis.

FINDINGS

Formative Assessment Practices Used by the Teacher

Based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) framework, the teacher was found to use the following formative assessment practices, which had the potential to facilitate student self-regulation:
(1) Helping clarify what good performance is;
(2) Providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
(3) Delivering high quality information to students about their learning;
(4) Encouraging peer dialogue around learning;
(5) Facilitating the development of self-assessment in learning.

Helping clarify what good performance is. Classroom observation shows that Y clarified student understanding about criteria for good English academic writing through teaching elements for inclusion in academic writing (e.g. thesis statement, topic sentence), using samples, and explaining the assessment criteria. This corresponds with student perception that the teacher mainly used the above-mentioned three means to familiarize them with what constituted good academic writing (item 1.2, Table 2). Y pointed out:

> "I really buy into the idea of outcome-based learning assessment, because it actually gives me a really clear guideline, a signpost for what I have to teach." (TI-1, 27012015)[1].
> "Yes, last week I did show them some samples of writing body paragraphs." (TI-1, 27012015).
> "I will actually design one more form [evaluation form].... I will distribute the forms to them, and then go through this form again, the criteria." (TI-1, 27012015).

Particularly concerning the use of samples, the teacher analyzed samples for the students rather than asking students to do sample analysis themselves.

Providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance. To help the students improve their work-in-progress, the teacher created opportunities for them to receive teacher feedback before essay submission. The students agreed that teacher support was given to

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[1] TI-1, 27012015 refers to the first teacher interview conducted on January 27, 2015.

help them approach the assignments in the module (item 2.1, Table 1). One notable practice was the face-to-face consultation for each essay in which the teacher would provide feedback on the students' thesis statements, topic sentences and main ideas. The teacher commented:

"one-to-one consultation, I usually carry out the consultation before they hand in their assignment…" (TI-1, 27012015).
"Yes, comments on their topic sentence, and also their ideas… usually I would just…ask them to think more, 'do you think writing in this way is logical?' I try to challenge them." (TI-1, 27012015).

One salient feature of the face-to-face consultations, as gleaned from classroom observation, is that the teacher talked for most of the time, with her students giving short responses during the consultation. For example, when the duration of teacher and student talk during face-to-face consultations is calculated, the teacher was found to talk for 83% and 90% of the time for the informative and argumentative essays, respectively. The teacher explained:

Of course, I asked them [students] to think about this [a particular problem]. Usually they would say 'yes'. And then I can keep going. I am pretending I am democratic. But then usually I ask them this question, they would…pause for one or two seconds, 'yes', and then I continue. (TI-2, 12022015)[2].

As can be seen, the face-to-face consultations cannot be regarded as a dialogue between the students and teacher because of teacher domination.

Delivering high quality information to students about their learning. This section focuses on teacher written feedback on the informative and argumentative essays. For each essay, Y designed an evaluation form based on the assessment criteria. Document analysis revealed that she relied on the form to point out student strengths and weaknesses as well as give suggestions when providing written feedback on the final drafts of each essay. Here are two examples of her feedback:

The organization of the essay leaves much to be desired. You have not included any clear thesis statement outlining the rest of the essay. The conclusion has to summarise the major arguments in a more orderly manner.

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[2] TI-2, 12022015 refers to the second teacher interview conducted on 12, February, 2015.

Y mentioned:

> I distribute them to the students…as a checklist whenever you check. I think this is really useful when I actually correct their…essays. So…I will be very sure this is thesis statement, and this is topic sentence…. It…serves as a really good signpost for them to follow. (TI-1, 27012015).

Questionnaire data showed that the students tended to agree that teacher written feedback on assignments indicated whether the work had met assessment criteria or not (item 2.3, Table 1) and that they agreed that teacher written feedback on assignments indicated how to further improve in accordance with assessment criteria (item 2.4, Table 1).

Encouraging peer dialogue around learning. One week before the students needed to submit their argumentative essays, Y organized a writing workshop in which a peer feedback activity was carried out. The students needed to read each other's essay and to write down comments based on the evaluation form she created (see the previous practice). In the interview, Y expressed her hope that the students could use peer comments to improve their writing:

> If time allows, I actually buy into the idea of process writing as well. Like the first draft, …their peers give them feedback according to their assessment form…. And then, if time allows, then I will ask… students to take the form from their peers, …and then they can actually improve, based on the comments written down on the form. (TI-1, 27012015).

Although the peer feedback activity also exemplifies the principle of providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance, it is discussed in this section because one salient feature is that Y encouraged her students to talk to each other during the activity for clarification or advice giving:

> I strongly recommend you to talk to your peer, try your best to talk in English…. Ask him or her to clarify something. If you don't understand something you can just ask him or her to clarify. You can also actually give suggestions to your peer, like "I don't think this one is…. Maybe you can…do this..." So that can really help your peer to improve. Alternatively your peer can help you to improve as

well. (Ob-5, 31032015)[3].

All the students acknowledged in the questionnaire that opportunities for peer feedback were provided in the course (item 3.1, Table 2).

Facilitating the development of self-assessment in learning. As mentioned in the previous section, an evaluation form was used in the peer feedback activity for the argumentative essay, but Y also hoped that the students could refer to it for self-assessment: "…This is for their reference… make sure before you turn in your assignment, you self-evaluate it." (TI-1, 27012015). Although she did not organize a formal self-assessment activity in her class, based on the peer evaluation form some students took the initiative to conduct self-evaluation. This is probably why 61.5% (not all) of the students perceived that opportunities for self-evaluation were provided in this course (item 5.1, Table 2).

Student Perceptions of the Formative Assessment Practices

The following shows student perceptions of each assessment practice as reported above. Questionnaire data were used to reflect a general picture and interview data were employed for further elaboration.

Helping clarify what good performance is. As shown by item 1.1 (Table 1), the students agreed that the teacher made clear to them what counted as successful achievement of the assessment tasks in this course. Interview data further revealed that the students particularly appreciated the usefulness of teacher analysis of informative essay samples, as illustrated in the following:

> Je: I think it is really helpful because in that three sample, only one is good, and two is bad…, so in this example *I know…what I should write and that is too broad, and this is too narrow* [emphasis added]. I think it is quite useful, … (SI, 13042015)[4].
> Ce: Yes*, I also refer to her example* [emphasis added]. Because she gave us…a few essays…. Some of them is really great job, and some of them not that good, not that suitable for us to write our formal essay, so *I avoid [problems in] the poorer [ones]* [emphasis added]… (SI, 13042015).

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[3] Ob-5, 31032015 refers to the fifth teacher observation conducted on 31, March, 2015.

[4] SI, 13042015 refers to student focus group interview conducted on 13, April, 2015.

The first quote indicates that teacher explanation of samples enabled students to understand the goals of the writing task (e.g. *I know…what I should write*) and teacher criteria for good work (e.g. *that is too broad, and this is too narrow*). This seems to suggest the usefulness of using exemplars plus teacher explanation to clarify goals and standards (Sadler, 1989). As shown by the second quote, an understanding of the criteria could facilitate learner self-regulation by enabling students to select appropriate strategies or to take or avoid certain actions to achieve their goals. For example, Ce referred to the example(s) when writing the informative essay, which is a physical environment regulation technique (Zimmerman, 2000), and she also tried to avoid the problems in the poor samples.

For the argumentative essay, Y did not use samples and the students complained:

> Je: "Because just like the informative, …at least she has three essay to explain to us what is a good thesis statement, *but in the argumentative, no, she didn't* [emphasis added]." (SI, 13042015).
> Cy: "*I don't know how to do it well* [emphasis added]." (SI, 13042015). A lack of samples might prevent students from developing a clear understanding of goals and criteria for the writing task, without which they might find it difficult to regulate their writing activities by choosing appropriate strategies to write a good essay (e.g. *I don't know how to do it well*).

Providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance. This section focuses on student perceptions of the face-to-face consultations. Interview data revealed that the students generally held a favourable opinion of this practice:

> Cy: "I have write a draft for her, and *she would give me some idea, and some suggestion how to write it* [emphasis added], I think it is good." (SI, 13042015).
> S: "This is a good way to *let me know to improve my informative essay* [emphasis added]. Because she have tell me all the details and…my mistakes, so…the final version I have handed to her is…better." (SI, 16042015)[5].
> Ce: …she just focus on what I have given to her, and just correct the

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[5] SI, 16042015 refers to student focus group interview conducted on 13, April, 2015.

idea, maybe she think that *it is not that suitable for me to write, or it is difficult for me to do the essay…with this idea. So she would tell me and I would correct it* [emphasis added]. So it is quite useful. (SI, 13042015).
Je: "She have requested but this is your own choice, you can choose not to…, *but you won't know how bad will you get* [emphasis added]…" (SI, 13042015).

The above quotes suggest that the face-to-face consultations in class facilitated learner self-regulation by serving as an opportunity for the students to use external feedback (i.e. teacher oral feedback) to guide their next steps of actions (e.g. how to write an idea; how to improve the informative essay; the need to change an unsuitable idea) so that they can improve their writing. It can be inferred that based on teacher feedback the students would regulate their writing behaviours (e.g. *I would correct it*) by using regulation strategies, defined as regulation processes that may adjust learner behaviours in relation to task goals (Pintrich, 1999), to close the gap between current and desired performance. Without teacher help they may not adjust their writing behaviours because they may not know "how bad will you get".

However, the students also had concerns about the face-to-face consultations. For example, it was suggested that the teacher should refrain from directly giving writing ideas to students during the consultation, as illustrated by the following quote:

Je: "…she just *tell* [emphasis added] us, maybe this is better…. B idea is good. Your A idea is not bad enough…. She just *tell* [emphasis added] me directly… *I need to use my brain* [emphasis added], I think." (SI, 13042015).

The above concern reflects writing teachers' tendency to dominate writing conferences by telling students their problems and ways for improvement (Wong, 1998).

Delivering high quality information to students about their learning. As mentioned earlier, high-quality feedback in the context of learner self-regulation should be criterion-referenced and provide corrective advice to help students to bridge the gap between their current and desired performance. Analysis of teacher feedback and questionnaire data showed that teacher written feedback did reflect this feature (see the section related to this practice). Regarding student perception, the students tended to agree that teacher written feedback given on their

work during the module helped them improve their learning of English academic writing (items 2.5, Table 1). This means that teacher feedback was useful in enabling them to bridge the current and desired performance.

Student interview data suggest that teacher written feedback on the informative essay helped them avoid possible problems and perform better for the next assignment:

> H: "It is good, because we can revise…the informative essay, and we can *avoid the mistakes* [emphasis added] into the argumentative essay." (SI, 16042015).
> Jy: I think what she has written down is quite clear and I can *pay more attention to that point* [emphasis added] when I am writing my argumentative essay…. Yes, because what she has written down is that she saw that my topic sentence and the elaborations is not quite related. I *always bear in mind* [emphasis added] that I should relate my main idea, my body paragraph to the topic sentence. (SI, 13042015).
> Cy: "I have followed her suggestion… *to improve in the second essay*, *and just do it* [emphasis added]." (SI, 13042015).

The quotes above indicate that teacher written feedback on the informative essay did deliver high quality information that contributed to the students' regulation of their writing processes for the next essay: Based on teacher feedback, they could monitor and evaluate progress towards writing goals to self-correct potential problems in the argumentative essay. Teacher written feedback can thus be regarded as feedforward, which the students could use to bridge future gaps.

According to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), students need to actively engage with external feedback for it to produce an effect on learner self-regulation. Questionnaire data suggest that the students agreed that teacher written feedback on assignments was understandable (item 2.2, Table 1) and 92.9% of the students acted on suggestions to improve their coursework after receiving it (item 4.1, Table 2). This indicates that they engaged with teacher feedback through interpreting its meaning and then used it to close the gap between current and desired performance.

Encouraging peer dialogue around learning. The students seemed to have mixed feelings about peer feedback. As student writers, they were somewhat positive about the usefulness of peer comments. For example,

they tended to slightly agree that peer feedback provided on their writing was useful (item 3.2, Table 1), with 64.3% of the students acted on peer feedback after receiving it (item 4.2, Table 2). As mentioned by S: "So we know about what we are missing, …we can improve our assignments." The students also tended to slightly agree that they trusted their peers' ability to evaluate their work" (item 3.4, Table 1). As student reviewers, they remained almost neutral concerning the statement that "I can learn from the experience of evaluating my peers' work." (item 3.3, Table 1), and tended to slightly disagree that they trusted their own ability to evaluate their peers' work." (item 3.5, Table 1). Interview data further revealed students' lack of confidence in their evaluative capacities:

> Cy: "I think the peer review also has the problem…that we don't know our essay have what problem, so how can we…give some suggestion to my partner?" (SI, 13042015).
> Ce: because we are not the teacher, and we are not professional…. Maybe I will be very afraid that if I provide this kind of suggestion, and it is not good, …I may make her [my peer's] essay worse, and he [my peer] will have trouble. (SI, 13042015).

Probably due to peer dialogue, the students could engage with peer feedback and use it for revision, indicating that peer feedback enabled them to regulate their writing behaviours for essay improvement. However, possibly due to a concern about their own evaluative capacities, they did not seem to realize how evaluating peers' work could develop the ability to make objective judgement against standards, which can be transferred to their own writing and self-regulatory processes (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 1999).

Compared with teacher feedback, peer feedback was not considered as useful in terms of its power to regulate students' writing behaviours to improve text quality. A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test revealed a statistically significant difference in the perceived usefulness of teacher and peer feedback for essay improvement (items 2.5 and 3.2), $z = -2.354$, $p < .05$, with a medium effect size ($r = .43$). The median score decreased from 5 for item 2.5 to 4 for item 3.2. This is consistent with the finding that students, especially those in CHC settings, tend to favour teacher feedback more than peer feedback (e.g. Tsui & Ng, 2000; Yang et al., 2006).

Facilitating the development of self-assessment in learning. Based on the evaluation form distributed for the peer feedback activity, some students took the initiative to self-evaluate their writing before submission. In the

interviews, the students mentioned the problems they detected in their essays according to the assessment criteria, and actions taken to address these problems.

> S: Because the workshop…because she gave out the peer assessment form on the workshop, and then the peer assessment form has the…assessment criteria. *So I just followed that…and see whether I have…shown what the criteria asked me to do…and I have add the rebuttal* [emphasis added]. (SI, 16042015).
> H: "… I found my…argumentative essay…*not enough reference to support my essay, so after I checked the requirements I can [add them]* [emphasis added]..." (SI, 16042015).

The quotes suggest that the peer evaluation form enabled the students to perform self-monitoring, which is pivotal in self-regulated learning (Butler & Winnie, 1995). That is, the students conducted self-evaluation and generated criterion-referenced internal feedback to guide themselves to work towards their goals.

Questionnaire data showed that the students slightly agreed that self-assessment was necessary (item 5.3, Table 1) and interview data further revealed the preference for self-assessment to peer feedback:

> Cy: "Because you just look at the mark sheet, you can know it…"
> Je: "The marking sheet, you can mark yourself."
> Cy: "Don't need to…"
> Ce: "When you revise it, 'I have missing some thesis statement', and I will add it. No need to tell…"
> Je: "Yes, *no need to tell it by a peer* [emphasis added]." (SI, 13042015).

The students' preference for self-assessment to peer feedback could probably be explained by different levels of confidence for being reviewers in these two activities. Despite a perceived lack of self-evaluative capacities reported in the previous section, they overall were more confident in conducting self-assessment than peer feedback. For example, while they tended to slightly disagree that "I trust my own ability to evaluate my peers' work." (item 3.5, Table 1), they tended to slightly agree that "I trust my ability to evaluate my own work in accordance with the assessment criteria" (item 5.2, Table 1). A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test revealed a statistically significant difference in their perceived confidence in conducting peer- and self-assessment, $z = -2.489$;

$p < .05$, with a medium effect size ($r = .47$). The median score increased from 2 for item 3.5 to 4 for item 5.2. The students' different levels of confidence seem to suggest different levels of self-efficacy when it comes to peer- and self-assessment. Here self-efficacy is defined as individuals' beliefs about their performance capabilities in a particular domain (Schunk, 1985).

DISCUSSION

In answer to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) call for examining teachers' assessment practices in relation to the proposed seven principles of formative assessment, this paper explored which practices one college EFL writing teacher implemented in a CHC setting like Hong Kong (RQ1). The following practices were identified, including:

(1) Helping clarify what good performance is;
(2) Providing opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
(3) Delivering high quality information to students about their learning;
(4) Encouraging peer dialogue around learning;
(5) Facilitating the development of self-assessment in learning;

The first three practices are teacher- and- student- directed in that the students still need to rely to some extent on teacher input (e.g. teacher explanation of samples, teacher feedback) to develop their self-regulatory capacities. The last two practices are mainly student-directed because the students were given an opportunity to develop by themselves the ability to self-monitor their work through evaluating practices and feedback generation.

Given the importance of understanding the affective dimension involved in assessment processes, this study also examines students' perceptions of the teacher's formative assessment practices (RQ2). The following discusses their views of each type of formative assessment practice (i.e. teacher- and- student- directed and student-directed) and offers suggestions on maximizing the benefit of each.

Firstly, the students seemed to have a more favourable opinion of teacher-and-student-directed practices (i.e. practices 1, 2 and 3) than student-directed ones (i.e. practices 4 and 5). For example, while they held quite positive opinions about how teacher clarification of goals and standards as well as how her written feedback contributed to learner

self-regulation (see questionnaire items 1.1, 2.5 and interview data), they seemed to be less sure about the impact of peer feedback and self-assessment activities in this regard (see items 3.2, 3.3, 5.3 and interview data). This finding can probably be explained by the students' deeply entrenched views about the roles teachers and students should adopt in teaching and assessment processes. That is, in Hong Kong teachers are usually regarded as figures of authority who pass information to students who receive it (Carless, 2012) (e.g. allowing the teacher to dominate the face-to-face consultation and only giving short responses during consultation; "we are not the teacher"). Despite a theoretical shift in the conceptualization of learning and assessment from a transmission to a constructivist process (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), the transmission framework together with associated teacher and learner roles can still be found in current teaching and assessment practices (e.g. Dixon, Hawe, & Parr, 2011). This may be particularly the case for a CHC context like Hong Kong. Therefore, the students in the study were likely to prefer receiving information about assessment criteria or their performance from an authoritative figure such as the teacher and then use it to support self-regulation and to be less willing to assume a "teacher" role to evaluate their peers' or their own work to develop self-regulatory skills.

Although the students' positive perceptions of the teacher-and-student-directed formative assessment practices reveal the benefits of the teacher's current assessment practices in relation to facilitating learner self-regulation (see "Findings" section), it does not mean that her practices were without problems. It has been suggested that teacher and students need to work in partnership in formative assessment to promote learner self-regulation, and students need to play a significant role in this process if its potential is to be fully realized (Hawe et al., 2008; Hawe & Parr, 2013). Given that teachers are crucial in the successful implementation of formative assessment practices (Dixon et al., 2011), the teacher in the study needs to scaffold a more active learner role when implementing the teacher-and-student-directed practices to exploit their full potential. For practice 1, instead of being given the samples and listening to the teacher's explanation, the students could be asked to analyze samples exemplifying different levels of quality and then to construct the assessment criteria by themselves or co-construct the criteria with the teacher. In this way the students can play a more powerful role in formulating goals and criteria to regulate

their writing activities. For practices 2 and 3, instead of being directly provided with teacher oral or written feedback to act upon, the students could be given opportunities to actively engage with teacher feedback by discussing with the teacher their writing problems and making their own decisions on ways for improvement. To do this the teacher should reconceptualize the feedback process as a dialogic rather than a transmission process. In this way the students' role will not be downplayed. Through having a feedback dialogue (Nicol, 2010) with the teacher and actively engaging with teacher feedback, the students may understand teacher feedback and expectations better, and they can regulate their writing behaviours better by determining the most appropriate strategies to reach task goals.

Secondly, the students seemed to have a less favorable opinion of student-directed formative assessment practices. This may indicate an overreliance on the teacher to promote their self-regulative capacities. Since involvement in authentic evaluative experience is necessary for developing students' evaluative expertise and intelligent self-monitoring (Sadler, 1989), it is important to foster a central student role in student-directed formative assessment practices. In the case of peer feedback in this study, the students were not quite confident in being peer reviewers, which means that they held a relatively low level of self-efficacy in writing evaluation. Therefore, the teacher needs to find ways to enhance their self-efficacy beliefs in developing a central student role. Given that a learning goal plus feedback about progress may enhance learner self-efficacy (Schunk & Swartz, 1993), the teacher may ask her students to adopt a goal of learning how to evaluate others' writing (in contrast to a performance goal of just getting the task done) and give progress feedback on their evaluation performance when conducting peer feedback. This may make the students more confident in their ability to evaluate writing, and they probably will be more willing to shoulder the responsibility of a peer reviewer in subsequent peer feedback tasks. Linking peer feedback to teacher feedback in this way may move students away from an overreliance on the teacher (Nicol, 2010). In the case of self-assessment, the students seemed to enjoy a higher level of self-efficacy in evaluating themselves than their peers. This indicates a need for the teacher to understand the students' different levels of self-efficacy when it comes to peer- and self-assessment. Based on this understanding, she can probably make self-assessment a compulsory element of her classroom and sequence self-assessment before

peer-feedback. Successful participation in self-assessment may boost the students' confidence in evaluating writing and enable them to assume a more powerful role not only in self-assessment, but also in peer feedback.

The above discusses how to help students assume a more powerful role in teacher-and-student-directed as well as student-directed formative assessment practices. To achieve this purpose, it is equally important for the teacher to challenge her own views about teacher roles (e.g. "I am pretending I am democratic" in the face-to-face consultation; teacher analysis of samples rather than giving students opportunities to discuss samples) and change it by suspending her identity as an authoritative figure and giving students more space to exercise their agency in the assessment processes. Teacher professional training programmes need to address the issue of teacher perceptions of teacher and learner roles, especially in CHC contexts, and how teachers can be assisted to change their own roles and cultivate appropriate student roles to maximize the potential of formative assessment in developing self-regulated learners.

CONCLUSION

Based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) framework, this exploratory paper has investigated which formative assessment practices proposed by them have been implemented by one college teacher to support learner self-regulation in an EFL writing classroom in a CHC context (i. e. Hong Kong) and student perceptions of such practices. Two major findings are that the teacher employed teacher-and-student-directed formative assessment practices as well as student-directed ones, and the students seemed to hold a more positive opinion of the former than the latter. The following key issue emerged from a discussion of the findings, that is, despite the presence of certain formative assessment practices as recommended by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) and their perceived benefits, their potential can only be brought into full play if both the students and the teacher reform their traditionally adopted roles deemed to be highly acceptable in CHC contexts such as Hong Kong. For example, the students need to be helped to assume a more powerful learner role in the assessment process and the teacher needs to suspend her role as a figure of authority. Suggestions have been provided in this regard.

This paper only focuses on one teacher's formative assessment practices and her students' perceptions of them in one college EFL

writing classroom in a CHC setting, and it does not intend to generalize its findings. However, readers in similar contexts are still able to make naturalistic generalizations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Formative assessment has recently been advocated in CHC settings (Thanh-Pham & Renshaw, 2015). This study highlights the issue of learner and teacher roles for tertiary level EFL teachers in CHC classrooms who would like to adopt practices similar to those employed by the teacher in the current study to maximize the benefit of formative assessment in enhancing students' self-regulatory capacities. Future studies may examine EFL writing teachers' formative assessment practices and student perceptions in relation to facilitating learner self-regulation in different contexts. The suggestions provided in this paper, if relevant, may also be experimented with to gauge their usefulness. The paper mainly collected self-reported data (i.e. questionnaire and interviews gauging student perceptions) to understand the perceived influence of the teacher's formative assessment practices on the students' self-regulation. To obtain a more comprehensive picture of how formative assessment may impact learner self-regulation, future studies may examine students' writing processes and products in addition to their perceptions. Although this study is small in scale, it has made a small step towards examining formative assessment and student perceptions with regard to learner self-regulation in an EFL writing classroom in a CHC setting (i.e. Hong Kong) and charting directions for future research.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A. Tables

Table 1

Student Questionnaire Results for Likert Scale Items

Item	*M*	*SD*
1.1 The Teacher made clear to me what counts as successful achievement of the assessment tasks in this course.	5.00	0.555
2.1 Teacher support was given to help me approach the assignments for this module.	5.20	0.941
2.2 Teacher written feedback on assignments was understandable.	5.13	0.640
2.3 Teacher written feedback on assignments indicated whether the work had met assessment criteria or not.	4.73	0.704
2.4 Teacher written feedback on assignments indicated how to further improve in accordance with assessment criteria.	5.00	0.756
2.5 Teacher written feedback given on my work during the module helped me improve my learning of English academic writing.	4.93	0.594
3.2 Peer feedback provided on my writing was useful.	3.86	1.460
3.3 I can learn from the experience of evaluating my peers' work.	3.40	1.595
3.4 I trust my peers' ability to evaluate my work.	3.87	1.642
3.5 I trust my own ability to evaluate my peers' work.	2.80	1.320
5.2 I trust my ability to evaluate my own work in accordance with the assessment criteria.	3.92	1.115
5.3 Self-assessment is necessary.	4.15	1.214

Appendix A. Tables (Continued)

Table 2

Student Questionnaire Results for Multiple Choice and Yes or No Questions

Item	Response
1.2 The teacher made clear to me what counts as successful achievement of assessment tasks through showing _____	A: elements for inclusion for the assignment (73.3%) B: marking scheme (53.3%) C: samples (60%) D: Others (0%) _____
3.1 Opportunities for peer feedback were provided in the course.	Yes: __100%_____ No: __0%____
4.1 After I received teacher feedback, I_____	A. ignored teacher feedback (0%) B. acted on suggestions to improve my coursework (92.9%) C. made a mental note of teacher feedback hoping that I can remember it next time when I do a similar task (21.4%) D. Others (0%)
4.2 After I received peer feedback, I _____	A. ignored peer feedback (21.4%) B. acted on suggestions to improve my coursework (64.3%) C. made a mental note of peer feedback hoping that I can remember it next time when I do a similar task (14.3%) D. others (0%)
5.1 Opportunities for self-assessment were provided in this course.	Yes_61.5%_____ No _38.5%___

Appendix B. Teacher interview guide

1. How many years have you taught?
2. What is your educational qualification?
3. What courses are you teaching this semester? Are they of different levels?
4. How many hours are you teaching per week this semester?
5. Have you taken any courses or participated in workshops related to assessment and evaluation?
6. What is your understanding of the word "assessment"? Can you use a metaphor to further explain?
7. What do you feel is the best type of student assessment technique to use?
8. How do you know your students are learning?
9. What are the assessment tasks/methods that you will use for this writing course in this semester?
10. Could you talk about the purposes of each assessment task?
11. What are the sources of these assessment tasks? Are they designed by yourself or from other sources such as textbooks?
12. Given the mini assessment tasks in the writing course, any additional assessments you would like to implement in your classroom?
13. Do you adjust your assessment techniques from time to time?
14. What's your understanding of the word "feedback"?
15. What value do you believe feedback has in learning?
16. Do you think it is useful to provide written or oral feedback on student writing? Why or why not?
17. Will you provide written or oral feedback on student writing?
18. How do you expect students to respond to or learn from your feedback?

Appendix C. Student interview guide

I.   Perceptions of peer feedback
   1. Have you had any previous experience of peer feedback?
   2. What do you think is the purpose of the writing workshop for the informative essay?
   3. Do you find written and/or oral peer feedback useful? Why or why not?
   4. Do you trust your own ability or your peers' ability to evaluate writing? Why or why not?
   5. Do you refrain from providing over critical comments to your peers? Why or why not?
   6. How would you feel if you obtain over critical comments from your peers?
   7. What did you do with the peer feedback received?
   8. What kind of written or oral peer feedback do you prefer to get?
   9. How to make the peer feedback more useful?
II. Perceptions of the criteria for the informative essay
   1. What are the goals of learning in this course according to your teacher? How does she explain these to you?
   2. Are you clear about the requirements of the informative essay task? What are the requirements according to your teacher? How does she explain these to you?
   3. How do you know what counts as a good informative essay?
III. Perceptions of teacher feedback
   1. How do you find teacher written feedback on your informative writing?
   2. How would you feel if you obtain critical comments from your teacher?
   3. What did you do with the teacher feedback received?
   4. What kind of written or oral teacher feedback do you prefer to get?
   5. How to make the teacher feedback more useful?
IV. Other comments
   1. Any comments on your teacher?
   2. How is writing course different from the ones you have taken?
   3. What have you learned from this writing course?
   4. After you take this course, do you feel that you like writing more because of the assessment tasks done in class/teacher or peer feedback? Why or why not?
   5. After you take this course, do you feel that you can write better or you are a better writer because of the assessment tasks done in class/teacher or peer feedback? Why or why not?
   6. After you take this course, do you feel that you know how to improve your writing because of the assessment tasks done in class/teacher or peer feedback? Why or why not?
   7. After you take this course, do you feel that you can write well when you are given a writing task because of the assessment tasks done in class/teacher or peer feedback? Why or why not?

Ma Jing Jing

運用形成性評估幫助學生自主學習：
來自香港的個案研究

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在高等教育領域內開展形成性評估的關鍵目標之一是培養能夠自主學習的學生。本探索性研究基於 Nicol 和 Macfarlane-Dick 於 2006 年發表的框架，在儒家文化環境中（即香港）調查了一位教授以英語為外語寫作課程的大學教師運用了哪些形成性評估實踐促進學生自主學習以及學生對此的看法。研究發現該老師運用了五種形成性評估手段促進學生自主學習。相對於以學生為主導的形成性評估，學生更肯定教師和學生共同主導的實踐。本文提供了一些建議，以便最大程度發揮這些實踐培養學生自主學習的作用。

關鍵詞：形成性評估、學生自主學習、以英語為外語的寫作語言