

# SEAB-ling

A newsletter produced by Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board



Integrity ● Value People ● Commitment ● Professionalism ● Teamwork

ISSUE 16 ● JANUARY 2013



**B**right and beautiful costumes! The photograph above shows staff of SEAB decked out in outfits representing different cultures and nationalities. And the occasion? Well, they were participating in fun-filled activities during our annual SEAB Day.

Underlying the joyous celebration is acknowledgement that SEAB, as an organisation, is now eight years old. Since our inception on 1 April 2004 as a Statutory Board, we have been developing and providing quality assessment products, services and training in Singapore and abroad.

As part of our efforts to constantly create and enhance value for our stakeholders, an organisation-wide seminar was conducted.

Themed "SEAB 2022: Innovating for a Better Tomorrow", the seminar provided opportunities for staff to collectively re-examine and ideate how SEAB

should look like in ten years' time. Highlights of this event and more are reported in this issue. Also featured are valuable nuggets of insights from three SEAB staff on different aspects of assessment. Read on to understand their views on what constitutes a meaningful assessment, the link between learning gaps and assessment, and primary Science assessment.

Wrapping up, details of upcoming assessment workshops and training are provided for interested teachers and schools. There is also a special update on the Specialist Diploma in Educational Assessment (SDEA) course.

We hope you will enjoy this issue of our newsletter. As always, your comments and feedback are warmly welcome.

*The SEAB-ling Editorial Team*  
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# SEAB Day



30 March 2012

This year's SEAB Day was held on 30 March 2012, when we commemorated our 8th Anniversary since SEAB was incepted in April 2004. At this joyous occasion, staff and management of SEAB gathered to celebrate SEABlings' achievements, as well as to bond and strengthen friendships.

Through fun-filled, team-building activities, SEABlings gained crucial insights about the personal and team qualities which were necessary for inculcating a mindset and culture of innovation in SEAB.

The activities also drove home some thinking points for SEABlings to consider, i.e., about themselves, relations with colleagues and aligning personal goals with the organisation vision and missions.

The highlight of the event was an in-house performance by more

than 50 SEABlings from various divisions, who stepped out to showcase their innate entertaining talents amidst cheers from their fellow colleagues. This brought the celebration to a climax and a joyous closure.

“

*(The celebration) has indeed exemplified the spirit and synergy of great teamwork.*

”

- Ms Tan Lay Choo,  
Chief Executive

*Contributed by the  
SEAB Day Organising Committee*



# SEAB 2022

## Innovating for a Better Tomorrow

Contributed by the  
SEAB Seminar Organising Committee

The SEAB Seminar was held on 2 July 2012 at the Tong Bahru Examination Centre. The theme of this year's seminar was "SEAB 2022 - Innovating for a Better Tomorrow". Here are the highlights of our in-house facilitated seminar.

### SEAB THEN

The seminar began with a video montage 'SEAB's Got Ideas' that showcased SEABlings' ideas on improvements and innovations since SEAB's inception in 2004.

The montage featured assessment products such as iPSLE, Specialist Diploma in Educational Assessment as well as processes which led to improvements in our services such as a Listening Comprehension CD checking programme, the electronic

access for examiners' report, an IT security message video (which received appreciation at PS21 Excel Awards 2011). It also included our green initiatives such as installing energy-saving bulbs at our exit door areas, recycling carton boxes for examination materials, the Green Office Label Award which we received in 2012, and many more. All these happened and are still happening because we believe all SEABlings have got ideas!

### SEAB TODAY

The seminar inspired us with **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE IS INNOVATION**. Our minds were opened as we watched the interesting presentations and video clips showing innovations in transport (from a caveman on foot to a flying car) and the anti-piracy water-gun (that turned seawater from an obstacle into a resource).

We inquired **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ORGANISATIONS ONLY TRIED TO INNOVATE**, reflecting

on the local brand Rediffusion and international brand Kodak, and thereafter reflecting on **OUR CURRENT CHALLENGES**.

We concluded that **INNOVATION** is about **MAKING CHANGES** and **CREATING VALUE** for our stakeholders. Using the Innovation Protocol, we envisioned **SEAB 2022** by re(perceiving), ideating, and evaluating ideas and strategies to position ourselves for a better tomorrow.



# SEAB 2022

Innovating for a Better Tomorrow



Our Chief Executive, Ms Tan Lay Choo, led SEABlings in envisioning SEAB ten years from now and the strategies to realise our visions (as captured in the above drawing board).

“

**I**nnovation is what that would give value to an organisation.

This is especially so in the planning for our future. We should create the future for SEAB from within and way in advance rather than to allow the future to be imposed upon us.

To innovate, we have to start by asking “what if” and “what could be possible”. We have to initiate and be engaged in conversations about change.

Change is risky. But the risk of not changing can be even more costly. Today, if we create the vision

of SEAB for the year 2022, we can work progressively towards this vision in the years ahead.

Also, if we have some clarity of what is possible 10 years down the road, we would be more ready to embrace change and enjoy the journey ahead.

”

# SEAB Active Day



The SEAB Active Day cum National Day celebrations was held on 8 August this year. This year's programme, filled with intellectually stimulating and creative activities, was aligned to the 2012 National Day theme, "Loving Singapore, Our Home".

For the first half of the programme, SEABlings were taken on a heritage tour of Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam.

The tour provided SEABlings with the opportunity to learn more about Singapore's heritage and history of our forefathers. We also had a short stop-over at Kampong Glam to experience the way of life and heritage which was passed down from generations to generations.

The afternoon segment of the programme began with the reading of the 2012 National Day Message, followed by the presentation of National Day Awards to Ms Yap Wah Choo and Mr Lee Kiah Wah, and the Certificate of Retirement to Mrs Doreen Kee.

This was followed by the highlight activity - construction of booths by SEABlings to reflect what it means to love Singapore, what they appreciate about Singapore and how they could express their love for Singapore. To fulfil the National Education objectives of the programme, SEABlings answered quizzes based on the morning's heritage tour, as well as past National Day themes and songs.

The programme ended with a prize presentation to the winning groups. These groups were chosen by SEABlings themselves, based on the groups' creativity and craftsmanship in constructing their booths, relevance to the NDP theme, and the 'X-factor', which was defined as the entertainment value of the groups' booths.

*Contributed by the  
SEABlings Committee*



# *Meaningful Assessment: Global Trends and Local Challenges*

*- Ms Tan Lay Choo, Chief Executive*

As educators, you may be pre-occupied with setting classroom-based, continual assessments for your pupils from time to time. Have you ever paused for a moment and asked, "What constitutes a meaningful assessment?"

Indeed, countries and examination authorities are grappling with what to assess which will be useful for the school leaders, teachers, and students. And this was the focus of the keynote address by Chief Executive Ms Tan Lay Choo during the inaugural West Zone Mathematics & Science Symposium on 14 November 2012.

Highlighting the recent calls for reforms in the education and assessment systems of UK and US, as well as a fundamental restructure of HK's education system, Ms Tan shared that a common impetus behind this global trend of reform was to better prepare students for the workplace or the institutions of higher learning, which entailed the imbue of 21st century skills and competencies. International studies have also shown that educational achievements were increasingly seen as a lead indicator of a country's future economic competitiveness, which propelled the need to constantly review one's education system. Singapore was no exception.

Nonetheless, a study conducted in local schools by NIE showed that teachers' assessment practices were strongly influenced by preparations for high-stakes examinations; while the assessment focused on basic knowledge and skills, it tested little on conceptual understanding, knowledge application and problem solving. Students were often oblivious of how they were being assessed, and what the assessment criteria were.

Drawing from the experiences of US, UK, HK and other global education systems, Ms Tan shared three points which could be useful for school leaders and teachers on what constitutes meaningful assessment:

### **1. Integrated System.**

Singapore's strength in its education system, resides in having an integrated system whereby the three areas, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, are closely aligned to support quality student learning. Going forward, our education system must remain integrated in order for us to continue reaping gains due to the synergies from this systemic approach.

### **2. Balanced Assessment System.**

A balanced assessment system entails having a good balance of examinations - milestones at pupils' key stages of progression in learning, and also instructional tools for providing feedback to pupils. More importantly, attention must be given to three purposes of assessment - 'of learning', 'for learning' and 'as learning'. There should be a balance of assessment 'of learning' which documents what students have achieved; assessment 'for learning' which provides feedback to students and teachers; and assessment 'as learning' where assessment is part and parcel of a student's learning process.

### **3. Rigorous and Forward-looking Curriculum and Pedagogy.**

Behind a meaningful assessment system, we must ensure that our curriculum remains rigorous and forward-looking, and is delivered through strong pedagogy for classroom learning. Examinations must also be maintained at high standards to ensure a strong alignment with the purpose and learning outcomes.

In conclusion, Ms Tan quipped that assessment was akin to a "wicked problem", which had little consensus about what the problem was, let alone how to resolve it. However, together as a community of educators, it is hoped that we could continue to build up our assessment literacy and develop a system of meaningful assessment.

*Attention must be given to three purposes of assessment – 'of learning', 'for learning' and 'as learning'.*



## Assessment: Effective for Learning, Fit for Purpose - Mr Toh Poh Guan, Director of Assessment and Research

**A**s an educator or student, what does a test score of 7 out of 10 mean to you? How useful is the score?

This was a simple yet interesting question which Director of Assessment and Research, Mr Toh Poh Guan, posed to more than 100 teachers during the West 6 Cluster Learning Festival 2012 on 16 November 2012 at Greenridge Secondary School.

Mr Toh explained that assessment was not just about setting a test and producing a test score. A gap of 3 marks in the above-mentioned example could tell a lot of stories about a student's learning gap, be it due to oversight or carelessness, lack of understanding, misconceptions, or a combination of the above factors.

In this vein, Mr Toh highlighted four key messages on the role and effectiveness of assessment. Firstly, the role of assessment is primarily to support students' learning. Therefore, good assessment, especially classroom tests, must be able to tell the teachers more; not just the size of students' learning gaps but also the nature of the gaps.

A learning gap is the difference between a desired response and what a student provides. To this end, Mr Toh advised teachers to devise intermediate learning outcomes throughout students' learning journey, to ensure that they are on the right track.

Secondly, assessment at the classroom level should aim at identifying and closing students' learning gaps. Teachers are often caught in the dilemma between perceiving formative and summative assessment.

Formative assessment is traditionally perceived as assessment for learning whereas summative assessment is perceived as assessment of learning.

In this aspect, Mr Toh provided a more useful approach, whereby in formative assessment, the primary objective should be to provide valuable feedback to students, i.e., assessment for learning.

The secondary objective would then be for teachers to take stock of students' achievements, i.e., assessment of learning. In summative assessment, the primary purpose would be, opposite to formative assessment, to take stock of students' achievements, followed by the secondary objective of providing a valuable learning experience for the students.

This said, and as highlighted in the third message, classroom examinations should not be seen in the same light as national examinations.

This is because classroom assessment, akin to assessment for learning, is narrower in content coverage as the purpose is to ascertain the learning gaps in the learning of a certain topic after teaching. It covers the learning outcomes, as well as other intermediate learning outcomes.

On the other hand, national examination, more akin to assessment of learning, is broader in content coverage as it is typically conducted at the end of the course.

Lastly, effective learning will bring consistent positive outcomes in the examinations. To this end, Mr Toh outlined the basic steps for teachers to note in facilitating effective learning among students:

- *Know and decide on goals*
- *Teach*
- *Identify learning gaps and the causes*
- *Design activities to close learning gaps*



# Assessment for Science in Primary Schools

**- An Interview with Mr Tan Yap Kwang, consultant and former Chief Executive of SEAB**

**Q:**

Please share your thoughts about assessment in the context of Science teaching and learning in primary schools.

**A:**

Over the past 30 years, Science education in Singapore has evolved from one which focused on recall of facts to one which emphasises the application of concepts and process skills. This shift is similar to those happening elsewhere and has contributed to our pupils' strong performance in international studies such as the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

At the primary level, the Science curriculum seeks to inculcate in pupils the spirit of scientific inquiry.

According to the Science syllabus,

“Teaching science as inquiry must therefore go beyond merely presenting the facts and the outcomes of scientific investigations. Students need to be shown how the products of scientific investigations were derived by scientists and be provided opportunities to: ask questions about the knowledge and issues that relate to their daily lives, society, and the environment; be actively engaged in the collection and use of evidence; and formulate and communicate explanations based on scientific knowledge.”

**Q:**

SEAB-ling understands that you have been actively promoting Science assessment literacy amongst primary school Science teachers in the past few years. What challenges have you encountered? Are there any fruitful lessons?

**A:**

To align to the Science curriculum, assessment must measure the extent to which pupils have acquired these skills. Herein lies the challenge of assessing pupil learning, as we cannot be testing only on pupils' ability to recall facts and concepts. Designing assessment activities may require teachers to go beyond the textbook. For example, to assess if pupils can apply a concept, we may need to construct an item based on an “unfamiliar” situation but which is still understood by pupils.

To help teachers develop appropriate assessment activities, SEAB developed the “Ideas to Items”, or “i2i” workshop in 2008. Since then, SEAB has conducted 24 workshops and reached out to 592 school participants!

The i2i workshop focused on basic principles of test design, the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, the STAR framework and how to generate ideas for test items. Usually, participants leave the workshop with plenty of ideas for test items. However, ideas alone do not make good test items. A good test item must pass the STAR test, i.e.,

- *Science Content Accuracy*
- *Technical Quality*
- *Alignment to the curriculum*
- *Rationale for the item*

**Q:**

How do you see Science assessment in primary schools evolving in the future?

**A:**

Going forward, we would like to develop professional development activities on “Assessment for Learning” (AfL) strategies in the teaching of science. Research by Black and William has shown that AfL is effective in raising pupils' achievements. Incorporating AfL strategies in our classrooms will make the learning of science more interesting and effective. However, as in many other countries, AfL is not yet widely practised.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Almost 600 primary Science teachers have benefitted from our i2i Workshops over the past 4 years.

## WOW!

More than 85% of primary schools have participated in our i2i Workshops.



# Training Calendar

## January - June 2013

In collaboration with the Academy of Singapore Teachers (AST) to build the assessment literacy of teachers, SEAB is pleased to confirm the following workshops in 2013.

### For Primary School Teachers:

WORKSHOP TITLE	DURATION (DAYS)	SUBJECT	DATE OF TRAINING
Introduction to Assessment for Beginning Teachers	1	English Language	Class 1: 28 Feb 2013 Class 2: 05 Mar 2013
P4 Assessment Literacy	1	English Language	Class 1: 23 Apr 2013 Class 2: 25 Apr 2013
Introduction to Assessment for Beginning Teachers	1	Chinese Language	9 Apr 2013
P4 Assessment Literacy	1	Chinese Language	11 Apr 2013
Introduction to Assessment for Beginning Teachers	1	Science	18 Apr 2013
P4 Assessment Literacy	1	Tamil Language	25 Apr 2013

### For Secondary School Teachers:

WORKSHOP TITLE	DURATION (DAYS)	DATE OF TRAINING
Assessment - English Language	1.5	23 Apr & 7 May 2013
Assessment - Chinese Language	1.5	16 Apr & 14 May 2013
Assessment - Science	1.5	Class 1: 4 Apr & 25 Apr 2013 Class 2: 11 Apr & 2 May 2013

For more information about the above trainings, please refer to TRAISI.

### IDEAS TO ITEMS WORKSHOP (i2i)

*Specially for Primary Science Teachers to design good test items*

DATES OF TRAINING	TIME & VENUE	TRAINER
14 & 15 March 2013	9:00 AM to 5:00 PM	Mr Tan Yap Kwang
27 & 28 March 2013	Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board	
11 & 12 April 2013		
25 & 26 April 2013	298 Jalan Bukit Ho Swee Block D, Training Room (D1-4)	

To register, please go to [www.seab.gov.sg/services/l2i\\_WorkshopApplicationForm.pdf](http://www.seab.gov.sg/services/l2i_WorkshopApplicationForm.pdf) to download the registration form. Return to fax number: (65) 63774229.

\* The training information provided in this publication is accurate at the time of printing.

# Customised Trainings

## We can customise the course to suit your organisation's needs

SEAB conducts workshops on educational assessment methods for clients with some or no prior knowledge or experience in assessment. Our workshops are delivered with a balance of "minds-on" knowledge presentation and "hands-on" skills acquisition.

We deliver customised trainings to organisations, both locally and internationally. We are pleased to share some highlights of customised courses conducted in 2012.

### • CONSTRUCT VALIDITY, ITEM WRITING AND SCORING RUBRICS (PRIMARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

A workshop was conducted in Manila for Ateneo de Manila University - Grade School. It was designed to help participants acquire knowledge about validity in test construction, writing good test items, and scoring rubrics for oral and writing assessment.

### • AN INTRODUCTION TO ASSESSMENT (PRIMARY SCIENCE)

A workshop was conducted in Manila for Ateneo de Manila University - Grade School. It covered the purpose and principles of assessment, writing of good Multiple Choice Questions and Open Ended Questions.

### • TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR BOTSWANA EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL (BEC)

Test Development Officers from BEC specially flew in to attend a three-day training programme at SEAB. The delegation, led by Ms Magolegwa Kwele, PSLE Level Coordinator (Manager), had a discussion cum sharing session with SEAB Management Team and Assessment Officers on issues related to examinations, assessment and grading.

We received some valuable feedback from participants who attended our programmes. In brief, they shared that they had gained significant benefits from the training which impacted them and their organisations. Hear it from the following participants:

*"It was an eye opener in almost all the areas of assessment and very enriching."*

- Ms Lechani Rammoni,  
Botswana Examinations Council

*"My major takeaway was knowing how to construct test questions efficiently through hands-on experience. The workshop was really helpful, thank you!"*

- Ms Ella Marie C. Balsa,  
Ateneo de Manila University

*"I learnt how to construct test items and use assessment tools appropriately. The trainer was informative and shared very useful readings and discussion."*

- Ms Yna Marie Mendiola,  
Ateneo de Manila University

We will be pleased to meet up to discuss your organisation's needs on assessment issues. Please email us at [SEAB\\_CATS@seab.gov.sg](mailto:SEAB_CATS@seab.gov.sg) for further information.

# Congratulations to our 2012 SDEA Graduates!

SEAB would like to extend our heartiest congratulations to six educators who graduated from the Specialist Diploma in Educational Assessment (SDEA) course.



Graduates from left: Tang Chee Onn (Dunearn Secondary School), Lim Kia Yin Jassie (Raffles Girls' School, Secondary), Lie Fun Fie (CHIJ Katong Convent), Lee Mei Choo (Raffles Institution), Tan Hui Leng (Raffles Girls' School, Secondary) and Cheong Yun Yee (Punggol Secondary School)

## Other Graduates' Testimonials:

*“Through the SDEA course, I am better equipped with skills and knowledge in educational assessment. I found the practical module very useful as it provided me with the opportunity to translate theoretical principles into practice. With enhanced competency in assessment literacy, I believe I can make better decisions to plan, improve and support teaching and learning at classroom and school level. I would recommend the SDEA course to educators who are passionate in initiating assessment innovations in schools.”*

- Mdm Seow Joo Hwang, HOD Science, Pioneer Primary School

*“SDEA by SEAB is a most practical, “down to earth” yet most insightful and multidisciplinary course. It allows me to learn from numerous assessment modes in other disciplines, and to have deep understanding of the practical and theoretical issues of Singapore’s actual examinations. As an organiser of teacher training courses, as well as a lecturer for teacher training, I know very well how tough it is to be insightful yet engaging and student-centred. However, SDEA prepares us very well for work, research and teaching in the specialisation of educational assessment. I am most happy to recommend this demanding but most fulfilling course.”*

- Dr Tan Chee Lay, Deputy Executive Director, Singapore Centre for Chinese Language

## Coming up...

### Intake for 2014 Specialist Diploma in Educational Assessment (SDEA) Course

This diploma programme is specially designed to equip teachers with knowledge and skills in educational assessment to function as effective facilitators, coaches or mentors in assessment in schools. It comprises four 60-hour modules conducted over a 12-month period. The four modules are Assessment and Curriculum, Principles and Practices of Assessment, Techniques in Assessment, and a Practical Module. Please refer to our Course Infopack ([www.seab.gov.sg/services/sdea.html](http://www.seab.gov.sg/services/sdea.html)) for more information about the modules.

For more information about the SDEA, check out the next issue of the SEAB-ling Newsletter!

# Some last words...

Have you applied for our courses?  
Look out for our first workshop of the year,  
"Introduction to Assessment for Beginning  
Teachers – English (Primary)" on 28 Feb 2013.

Sign up now at TR AISI!

• For more information on SEAB's  
products and services, visit our  
website at [www.seab.gov.sg](http://www.seab.gov.sg)

• For enquiries on training and  
consultancy services, please email  
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topics to include in future issues are  
also welcome. Let us know how to make  
SEAB-ling a publication worth reading.

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