1.2 Principles of task-based assessment

Reflect

What do you think are some of the ways in which task-based assessment might differ from more traditional forms of assessment?

The best way to find out if someone can do the kinds of things in List B on p.10, is not to ask them to do a fill-in-the-blank exercise or a multiple choice test, but to have a go at doing the tasks themselves. Did he or she get food and drink or a blank stare from the waiter?

So the first principle of task-based assessment is that it needs to involve some kind of communicative performance. In other words, learners are required to carry out a task that simulates the kinds of tasks they will be required to perform outside of the classroom.

A second important principle, and one that flows naturally from the first, is that teaching and assessment should be in harmony. This has tremendous advantages because it means that, rather than being in conflict, as is the case in some systems, teaching and assessment can be mutually reinforcing. Almost any teaching task can be used for assessment purposes, and vice-versa. The key difference is how the task fits into an instructional cycle, and, crucially, what is done with the learner output from the task.

Task-based assessment, then, is part of a broader approach to assessment called performance assessment. The three essential characteristics of performance assessment are that they must be based on tasks, they should be as authentic as possible, and, because they are based on some kind of performance, must usually be rated by qualified judges (Norris *et al.* 1998:8).

1.3 Features of task-based assessment

Task-based assessment must display three 'critical' features. It must:
- elicit performances that relate to specific learning targets and objectives that are set out in the *CDC Syllabus for English Language (Secondary 1 - 5) 1999*;
- provide learners with the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and what they can do with the language; and
- articulate clearly criteria used for assessing learners' performances on the tasks and provide feedback to learners so that they know how well they are achieving their learning targets and objectives.

> **Reflect**
>
> *In relation to the first feature of task-based assessment listed on the previous page, i.e. elicit performances that relate to specific learning targets and objectives, a teacher wanting to develop a task for assessment purposes must refer to key documents such as **CDC English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 - Secondary 3) 2002** and **CDC Syllabus for English Language (Secondary 1 - 5) 1999**.*
>
> *Match the following assessment tasks to the Dimension Targets for Key Stage 3 (see **CDC Syllabus for English Language (Secondary 1 - 5) 1999,** pp.161-164).*
>
> *Task 1*
> *Leave a message on the answering machine of an English friend saying that you cannot come to his / her party the following day.*
>
> *Task 2*
> *Write a 'Get Well' card to your NET who is sick.*
>
> *Task 3*
> *Your aunt in the U.S. has sent you some money for Chinese New Year. Write her an email thanking her for the money and telling her how you spent it.*

1.4 The place of assessment within the school-based curriculum

The move towards school-based curriculum development in Hong Kong is an exciting one, because it gives greater responsibility (and therefore power) to teachers in areas of the curriculum that were closed to them in the past. Teachers now have to:
- identify and act on learner needs;
- select, modify and adapt goals and objectives;
- select, modify and adapt materials and other learning resources;
- implement their own teaching procedures; and
- develop their own assessment instruments and procedures.

> **Reflect**
>
> *In which areas of the curriculum would you like greater involvement? What skills do you have? What skills would you like to have?*
>
> *Think about the area of assessment. What do you see as the major challenges of developing your own task-based assessment resources? What do you see as the advantages of doing so?*

Assessment has a number of important roles in any educational endeavour. A sometimes neglected role is that of improving learning outcomes. We believe that perhaps the greatest advantage of locating assessment practices within the locus of school-based curriculum development is the potential it has for bringing teaching and