

## Unit Two

### Formative Assessment

In this unit, we turn our attention more specifically to formative assessment. This unit is divided into two parts: Part 1 provides an introduction to and rationale for formative assessment alongside techniques for designing / using formative assessment instruments and giving feedback to learners; Part 2 includes four exemplar assessment tasks to illustrate how different assessment tasks can be used to promote assessment for learning.

### Part 1 Designing and Using Formative Assessment

#### 2.1 Validity

Validity is as important in formative assessment as it is in summative assessment. Validity is particularly important because it relates to whether the content and design (construct) of the assessment task reflects the purpose of the assessment. If, for example, we are interested in finding out whether our learners can ask for and provide directions in English, does the assessment task require them to do so in contexts that are familiar to the learners and related to real life?

#### **Reflect**

*Comment on the validity of the following oral tasks which have been included in a unit on Tourist Sites in Hong Kong in which asking and giving directions is the main language function.*

#### **Task A**

With your partner, practise the following dialogue:

A: I'm having a barbecue on Sunday. Would you like to come?

B: Sounds great. Where?

A: We have a barbecue site at the back of our building.

B: How do I get there?

A: The quickest way is to come to school and walk from there. You carry on along Bonham Road, and turn left when you get to the barrier. I live in Royalty Gardens which is the first building on your left.

B: Should I go straight to the barbecue site?

A: Sure. Be there at noon.

B: See you there.

#### **Task B**

You are going to have a barbecue on Sunday. Tell your partner how to get to your house for the event.

You will notice that both tasks try to relate to the learners' own experiences, but if you are interested in finding out whether learners can ask for and give directions, then

the task should elicit language from the learners, not just have them rehearse using it. For this reason, Task B would be more valid for assessment purposes.

## 2.2 Characteristics of formative assessment

Review the definition of formative assessment in Unit One (section 1.6.4) and complete the following reflection task.

### **Reflect**

*What is the relationship between teaching and formative assessment?*

In Unit One, we described formative assessment as:

- ongoing – carried out during a course
- intended to provide feedback

Given these two characteristics, it should be evident that formative assessment is an integral part of the learning and teaching process, not separate from it. Formative assessment, therefore, needs to be built into one's scheme of work. It should be part of the planned developmental process.

Regarding the second characteristic of formative assessment, which is to provide feedback, it is important to remember that the feedback is for a variety of stakeholders and purposes.

### **Reflect**

*Brainstorm, preferably with a partner or in a group:*

*Who are the potential stakeholders in the learning process and what are the purposes for providing feedback?*

The primary stakeholders of formative feedback are teachers and learners, but parents should not be forgotten. Let us look at each group in turn.

- a. **Teachers** need to ascertain how well their learners are progressing. Feedback informs them about the progress their learners are making and helps to close the gap between actual and desired performance. It is a means of diagnosing problems and ultimately of improving learning and teaching.
- b. Feedback helps **learners** understand their progress and is a way of building their confidence. It should focus on what they can do and what they have mastered so as to motivate them. Since learning is likely to be incremental, learners are unlikely to see improvements in their marks or scores from one assignment to the next, even when they are making progress. Providing learners with feedback allows them to see that their effort does not go unnoticed.