

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.

- c. Other stakeholders, particularly **parents**, depend on feedback to know that the children are making progress.

2.3 Roles of teachers and learners

2.3.1 Role of teachers

Reflect

Brainstorm, preferably with a partner or in a group:

In what ways do you think the teacher's role in the assessment process has changed with the introduction of formative task-based assessment?

In formative assessment the classroom teacher plays a much more pivotal role in the assessment process than in the past. It is the classroom teacher who determines the *how*, *what* and *why* of assessment, rather than an administrator or outside body (such as the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA)). It is, therefore, imperative that teachers understand how to design assessment tasks and how to give feedback to learners on their performance.

Teachers face a number of challenges when introducing formative assessment into their classes. They need to strike a balance between teaching and assessment, and at the same time provide adequate and meaningful feedback without creating an undue workload for themselves. They can achieve this if they recognize that assessment is a collaborative task which should involve their learners as well as themselves.

2.3.2 Role of learners

Reflect

Brainstorm, preferably with a partner or in a group:

How can learners be involved in assessment?

Why is it important to involve learners in the assessment process?

What implications does involving learners have on the design of assessment?

Learners can be taught to assess their own performance, i.e. to self assess and to assess their peers' performance. To do this they need to understand the criteria used to assess them. It is therefore important that criteria used are made explicit to learners and are drawn up using language that is understandable to them. This helps to demystify the assessment process, and by being transparent the assessment process should ultimately help learners learn.