NAME: _____ CLASS: _____ DATE: _____	
TASK: Giving directions	
<u>Content:</u> I can give directions that are understandable	Yes / To some extent / No
<u>Communicative strategies:</u> I have strategies to check that the person I am talking to understands me	Yes / To some extent / No
<u>Pronunciation and fluency:</u> I can use my voice to communicate meaning and interest	Yes / To some extent / No
<u>Grammar and structure:</u> I can give directions grammatically (e.g. Take the second on the left)	Yes / To some extent / No

2.5 Providing feedback to learners on formative assessment tasks

We have already indicated that providing feedback to learners is central to successful formative assessment. Ensuring feedback is comprehensible to learners is of fundamental importance as this will not only help in their learning, but will also contribute to their ability to self and peer assess. At the same time, it is necessary to design feedback mechanisms that are not too time-consuming to complete.

The form of feedback provided to learners will vary according to the objectives of the task being assessed and the purpose of the assessment. It is important to remember that feedback does not always have to come at the end of a task or activity. Teachers should provide ongoing feedback so that their learners perform to the best of their ability. While a class is working in groups, for example, the teacher may go around the class, note strengths, weaknesses and points the groups should pay particular attention to, provide oral feedback at an opportune moment, and then let the groups continue with their discussions.

Reflect

Here is a list of mechanisms which you can use to provide feedback. Which forms of feedback do you use? When? How frequently?

Observation sheets
Feedback sheets
Conferencing
Journaling

Let us look at each of these in turn, before we discuss how to select the most appropriate feedback mechanism for a particular task.

2.5.1   Observation sheets

Observation sheets allow you to make notes while the learners are working and then provide feedback to the whole group. It is non-intrusive in that you do not have to interrupt the flow while learners are working.

There are literally dozens of different types of observation sheets focusing on different aspects of learner performance. The following sample sheet is designed to record a learner's mastery of the conversation strategies he or she will need in order to take part successfully in small group discussion, problem-solving or decision-making tasks.

Contribution to small group discussion observation sheet

Key:
5 – outstanding
4 – above average
3 – average
2 – below average
1 – unsatisfactory

Name: …………………….… Class: ……………………….. Date: ……………..

1. The learner participates in discussions	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
2. The learner uses appropriate non-verbal signals	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
3. The learner's contributions are relevant	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
4. The learner is able to negotiate meaning	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
5. The learner is able to convey factual information	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
6. The learner can give personal opinions	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
7. The learner can invite contributions from others	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
8. The learner can agree/disagree appropriately	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)
9. The learner can change the topic appropriately	(1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5)

(Adapted from Nunan, 1988: 142 – 3)

The above observation sheet would be appropriate for a task such as the following:

> Task:
> You are going to organize a class outing for the end of term.

Decide with your group members:
  – where you would like to go
  – what you would like to do there
  – what you think classmates should bring
  – what you would like the school to provide

Give 3 reasons for your choice of outing.

Reflect

What changes would you make to the observation sheet if it were to be used during a jigsaw listening task?

2.5.2   Feedback sheets

Feedback sheets vary considerably depending on whether they are designed to provide feedback on written or oral performance, the aims of the assessment and the level of learners. Overly complex sheets should be avoided as they often detract from the purpose of the assessment. If the aim of the assessment is to determine whether learners are able to ask for and give directions, then the focus of the feedback sheet should be on the degree to which they are able to accomplish this. Similarly, when giving feedback on a piece of writing, the teacher may decide first to focus on content and have learners work on that aspect of their writing before moving on, at a second stage, to comment on their language and mechanics.

The EMB provides a number of generic feedback sheets for teachers' use in documents such as *CDC English Language Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 - Secondary 3) 2002*. Teachers, however, must remember that these generic feedback sheets need to be adapted if they are to provide useful feedback to learners. They need to be adapted to meet the specific needs of any particular assessment.

Reflect

Study the following sample feedback sheets from **CDC English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 - Secondary 3) 2002**. *Appendix pp. A19 – A22.*

How might these feedback sheets be used? What do you see as the pros and cons of using such feedback sheets?

Feedback Sheet (Generic)
Speaking: Conversations & Discussions

Underline the appropriate item, tick the appropriate box and add comments below.

	Needs Improvement	**Satisfactory**	**Well Done**
Content • Adequate overall content • Clarity of ideas • Relevance of ideas • Originality / Creativeness / Insightfulness of ideas	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Communicative Strategies
• Ability to use strategies such as:
   ❖ Making an opening
   ❖ Explaining
   ❖ Clarifying
      ➢ Restating
      ➢ Offering examples
   ❖ Agreeing
   ❖ Disagreeing
   ❖ Taking turns
   ❖ Questioning
   ❖ Self-correcting
   ❖ Suggesting
   ❖ Summarizing
   ❖ Making a conclusion
	☐
	☐
	☐
	
	☐
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			☐
			☐

• Demonstrating
   ❖ Confidence
   ❖ Interest in conversation / discussion
   ❖ Respect for others
   ❖ Open-mindedness
   ❖ Effective use of non-verbal features (e.g. eye contact, gestures, movement, pauses)
	☐
	☐
	☐
	☐
	☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐

Genre & Task Requirements • Observing time-limit • Authenticity of speech (e.g. no memorized speech / utterances)	☐ ☐	☐ ☐	☐ ☐

	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Well Done
Pronunciation & Fluency • Audibility • Pace • Correct pronunciation • Intonation • Stress	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Language & Style • Choice of words • Variety of expressions • Degree of formality • Range of vocabulary	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Grammar & Structure • Accurate use of: ❖ Tense ❖ Word order ❖ Subject-verb agreement ❖ Connectors (e.g. but, and, so) ❖ Modals (e.g. can, must, may) ❖ Prepositions ❖ Pronouns ❖ Articles ❖ Imperatives ❖ Gerunds & infinitives ❖ Sentence structure	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Comments	Grade

Feedback Sheet (Generic)
Writing: Stories

Underline the appropriate item, tick the appropriate box, and add comments in the 'Comments Box' at the end.

	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Well Done
Content			
• Ideas relate to the title of the story	☐	☐	☐
• Ideas are original and creative	☐	☐	☐
Organization			
• The story has a beginning, a middle and an end	☐	☐	☐
• The beginning is made up of at least one paragraph that			
❖ tells where and when the story takes place	☐	☐	☐
❖ introduces characters	☐	☐	☐
• The middle has paragraphs that			
❖ tell what happens	☐	☐	☐
❖ are logically ordered	☐	☐	☐
❖ are connected to each other	☐	☐	☐
• The end is made up of at least one paragraph that			
❖ concludes / offers a solution	☐	☐	☐
Task Requirements			
• Word limit is followed	☐	☐	☐
Language & Style			
• A story telling style is used	☐	☐	☐
• Voice is consistent	☐	☐	☐
• Descriptive language is used	☐	☐	☐
• Meaning is clear	☐	☐	☐
• Use of words is appropriate	☐	☐	☐
Grammar & Mechanics			
• The story is accurate in			
❖ Tense	☐	☐	☐
❖ Word order	☐	☐	☐
❖ Subject-verb agreement	☐	☐	☐
❖ Connectives (e.g. but, and, so)	☐	☐	☐
❖ Modals (e.g. can, must, may)	☐	☐	☐
❖ Prepositions	☐	☐	☐
❖ Pronouns	☐	☐	☐
❖ Articles	☐	☐	☐
❖ Gerunds and infinitives	☐	☐	☐
❖ Sentence structure	☐	☐	☐
❖ Punctuation	☐	☐	☐
❖ Spelling	☐	☐	☐

Comments	Grade

35

At its most superficial level, the sheets can simply be used as a checklist to provide an overview of learners' strengths and weaknesses. In this case, you would check off each item and add specific suggestions in the "Comments" box to help learners to make improvement in areas that need to be improved before handing the feedback sheet back to the learners. The feedback sheets on the previous pages are intended to serve as a template. Teachers are strongly encouraged to modify the feedback sheets to meet the specific assessment needs.

Both feedback sheets are quite comprehensive, covering a range of skills. However, this comprehensiveness can be a drawback, particularly if you need to provide feedback to a large number of learners.

Reflect

Develop a feedback sheet for the following writing task. Use the same main criteria (i.e. Content, Organisation, Task Requirement, Language & Style, Grammar & Mechanics) as in the feedback sheet above.

Task: Write a short article for the school magazine about your class outing to Shek O.

When constructing your own feedback sheets you need to consider the following.

a. Feedback sheets serve several important functions:
- They facilitate formative assessment by expediting the gathering and dissemination of feedback for learners
- They ensure that feedback is deliberately and systematically solicited / disseminated on a range of criteria (general or specific)
- They facilitate learner development by contributing to the learners' ability to reflect on and communicate about their own learning

b. Feedback sheets typically have three features:
- Categories of feedback
- Individual comments
- A scoring / grading component (optional)

c. Feedback sheets should allow for:
- A degree of flexibility in how learners might approach the assessed task
- A wide variety of users

d. Feedback sheets should take into account:
- The language level of the learner
- Training given to learners which can assist them in
    - preparing for and reflecting on a task
    - communicating about their performances

2.5.3 Conferencing

Conferencing may be done with individual learners or in groups. This is a very effective means of providing feedback to learners as they may ask questions and the teacher may also ensure that they understand the comments being made about their work. As Genesee and Upshur (1996: 109) point out, conferences may help teachers understand 'the processes, strategies, and approaches learners use in the performance of their school work and language-related tasks'. However, they are very time-consuming. It is therefore important that conferences are focused and have a realistic goal. As the teacher you will need to make some decisions in advance. The first is how you will conduct the conference. Will you do it with individual learners or groups of learners? Conducting group conferences saves time. Also, how often will you conduct conferences? Will you rotate around the class so that you have a face-to-face conference with each learner once a year or once a term? Obviously you should spread the conferences out rather than have all of them within a week or a day.

Another area to which you will need to give some thought is the focus of the conference. Will you focus on discussing the content of a piece of writing, the language used so that the learner can improve on it, or on learners' progress on, for example, a project. It is also important that you keep a record of all conferences you hold.

Teacher-Student Conferencing
Record Sheet

Name: Class: Date:

Goals:

Summary of discussion:

Progress noted:

Follow-up:

Alternatively the conference record may take the form of answers to a number of specific questions such as those below:

- What do you like about this work?
- What do you think you did well?
- How does it show improvement from previous work? Can you show me the improvement?
- Did you have any difficulties with this piece of work? Can you show me where you had difficulty? What did you do to overcome it?
- What strategies did you use to figure out the meaning of words you could not read? Or, what strategies did you use when you wanted to use a word you did not know how to write?
- Are there things about this work you do not like? Are there things you would like to improve?
- When you are reading and come across a word or something that you do not understand, what do you do? When you are writing and have difficulty in writing what you want, what do you do? (Genesee and Upshur, 1996:110)

Conferencing is a way for teachers and learners to communicate about individual or group learning needs and for teachers to assess how well learners are understanding and applying what they have learnt. The following practical guidelines should help you ensure that the conferences you hold with your learners are effective.

a. **Determine your purpose in holding the conference.** Conferences are generally held to give feedback and open up communication between the teacher and learner(s).

b. **Set realistic goals.** Effective conferences should be focused and have specific achievable goals. Trying to go over too much in one conference is unrealistic and unproductive. Not focusing on goals can also lead to confusion and cause the learner to respond passively. The following are some examples of focused conference goals:
    - to improve the grammar of an essay;
    - to revise a letter in order to make a better connection with the intended reader; and
    - to discuss progress on a particular task or project.

c. **Set guidelines.** Make sure learners know where, when and what they need to bring with them to the conference. Set and keep time limits and actively manage the time, otherwise you won't be able to get through all your conferences.

d. **Reflection before the conference is essential.** Learners and teachers need to consider questions they have in light of the goals that have been set for the conference. If you are conferencing about a script you might give back a first draft of the script with a few questions written on it for the learner to reflect on before coming to the conference.

e. **Focus on practical issues.** Whenever possible, have learners bring in the items they are working with, whether that be a piece of writing, a set of notes, a recording or a piece of reading, so that you can focus on practical issues.

f. **Keep focused but don't ignore other important issues.** Although goals are very important, don't let them blindly get in the way of important learning opportunities that may spontaneously arise.

g. **Don't get caught up in the trees and forget about the forest.** Make sure that you don't get bogged down in small details. Prioritize and focus on the most significant points. If you spend your time on insignificant matters (e.g. discussing all the various rules of article usage when you should have been focusing on improving the overall vocabulary of the writing), the conference may feel like a waste of time to both the learner and you.

h. **Be encouraging.** Don't just focus on the negative. Make sure that when conferencing you reinforce the positive things the learner has done. Without this, conferencing can very easily become a dreaded event for both the learner and teacher. A good rule is to start with the positive. A nice opening is "Let me tell you what I liked about your …" Whenever possible try to return to positive ideas at the end of the conference too. For example, "It sounds like you have lots of good ideas you can include in your next draft."

i. **Ask open-ended questions that encourage discussion.** Don't limit our conference questions to ones that only elicit yes-no responses. For example, instead of asking "Did you like doing this project?", ask a question that will elicit more of a response such as, "Tell me what you liked about the project."

j. **Give learners ample opportunity to ask questions and / or bring up issues.** Conferencing is not interrogation. It must be two-way. Not all learners will want to take the initiative to ask questions or bring up issues so you will need to encourage them to do so.

k. **Don't get caught in a teaching trap.** Some learners may want you to just re-teach them individually in a conference, but this is the time for you to elicit from them what they know and what they have learned. If you find yourself talking all the way through a conference, you've fallen into the trap.

l. **Provide appropriate responses.** This will vary depending on the conference goals and the individual needs of learners. Responses may include:
   - referring learners to supplementary or Self-access Language Learning (SALL) materials;
   - discussing problem-solving or time management techniques;
   - explaining misunderstood information;
   - modeling a revision / editing technique;
   - offering feedback on ideas and language; and
   - discussing options for revising.

m. **Summarize what's been covered before ending the conference.** Remind learners of the purpose of the conference and what has been achieved in the course of it.

n. **Set plans for follow up actions.** Before ending the conference, the teacher should help learners set realistic post-conference plans / goals. For example:
   - to check and, if necessary, revise the tenses in his / her script;
   - to rewrite several sentences in the letter to create a better connection with the reader; and
   - to write up the progress on a project thus far and write up an action plan for the remaining work.

   Make sure you as well as the learners record post-conference plans so that you can follow up with the learners and ensure accountability.

o. **Reflect on and record learner progress.** If the purpose of the conference was to elicit a performance, score it. Consider what you've learned about individual learners and make notes. If trends emerge, incorporate what you've learnt into your teaching plan.