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Assessing Formatively in the English Language Classroom

Sherwin Rodrigues

Abstract: The area of ‘assessment’ – and particularly that of ‘formative assessment’ – has attracted the increasing attention of educational researchers within the last decade. This article presents the findings of a qualitative research study that was conducted in a primary school in Oxford, UK. Data were gathered through classroom observations that were videotaped. The assessment strategies used by the teacher were the foci of observations. It was found that *questioning* and *feedback* were two key elements characteristics of a teacher’s formative assessment practice in the English Language primary classroom. Extensive questioning for assessment purposes invited pupils to contribute ideas, checked for understanding of concepts, clarified learners’ responses and extended pupils’ thinking. At other times, the teacher’s questioning acted as prompts that cued pupils for a viable response. Teacher feedback praised students’ efforts and correct answers; pointed out incorrect responses; and, more importantly, explained why specific responses were incorrect. Additionally, feedback extended pupils’ learning on a number of occasions through verbal prompts, visual clues and supplementary information provided by the teacher. The implication is that teachers need professional training and on-going support so that they can use *questioning* and *feedback* in a formative way to foster pupils’ learning in the classroom.

Keywords: formative assessment, observations, feedback and questioning, on going support, multicultural learning experience

Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative research study which I conducted in a primary school as part of my Master of Science course in Educational Research Methodology¹. The study² investigated a primary school teacher’s assessment practice in a school in Oxford, UK. It aimed to identify the teacher’s formative

¹ In this one-year course students are taught different approaches to conducting research and engage in a dissertation project as partial fulfilment of the course.

² The study was conducted in 2002.

assessment practices and explore its implications for other teachers, educators and researchers. The paper presents a brief literature review and then several vignettes from the teacher's classroom experiences that illustrate her common practices of using formative assessment.

Background

My interest in the area of 'assessment' stems from three sources: my role as a primary school teacher, as a Master's student and later as a Professional Development Teacher³ (PDT) at the Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development⁴ (AKU-IED), Karachi. As a teacher I taught English and Mathematics for about 10 years to pupils (grade 5) in Pakistan and assessed children through formal tests and examinations. As a Master of Education⁵ (M.Ed.) student at AKU-IED, I was once again exposed to 'assessment' which was interwoven in the pedagogical aspects of the programme. Later, when I became a PDT, I assessed teachers and teacher educators in formal (such as providing detailed written feedback to learners) as well as informal ways (e.g. conversing with the learner about how s/he was fairing).

These experiences have familiarized me with the way students are generally assessed. The dominant form of assessment in my experience has been traditional in which the heavy emphasis was on testing, examining and marking of pupils' work

³ After having graduated from a two-year Master in Teacher Education programme from the Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED), the graduates are referred to as Professional Development Teachers (PDTs). A PDT is contractually bound for three years with AKU-IED, sharing teaching responsibilities with the University and their 'home' schools.

⁴ AKU-IED was established in July 1993, in Karachi and works for the development of educational systems in the developing countries of the world, particularly Pakistan. The major focus of the university is to improve the performance of teachers and other stakeholders through professional development leading to school improvement.

⁵ The aim of the two-year M.Ed. programme is to produce graduates who are exemplary teachers and effective teacher educators, and who can contribute to ongoing research and development when they return to their own contexts.

(Airasian, 1994). The traditional mode of assessment is also referred to as ‘summative’; that is, when assessment takes place at the end of unit, semester or course. Assessment is carried out at the end of instruction to determine pupil learning and assign grades (Airasian, 1994). Pupils are regularly tested to find out what they have achieved over the length of a term and promoted on the basis of their performance in relation to the norm (Capper, 1996). This mechanism appears to provide a means of sorting out those at the ‘top’, the ‘middle’ and the ‘bottom’, and of directing them towards ‘an appropriate niche in society’ (Brown, 1990). Additionally, in this kind of traditional assessment, pupils learn to pass examinations by memorizing. They also experience anxiety and stress during paper-and-pencil based forms of traditional assessment. Thus, I recognize that assessment plays a very important role in pupils’ learning, and unfortunately in a traditional assessment setting, learning is not as effective as it could be.

In Pakistan, as in many other developing countries, assessment practices are heavily based on summative processes (Shamatov, 1998). Little, if any, attention is given to approaches which are more ‘formative’ (i.e. continuous, improvement-oriented) forms of assessment. As a result, this traditional form of assessment is mostly detrimental to pupils’ learning and development opportunities. I believe that assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process, and it can (and should) be used to enhance the process rather than hinder it.

When I began my M.Sc. dissertation in the UK, I was interested in studying how teachers in UK schools are using formative assessment practices, what achievements or difficulties they are having, and how they are dealing with those difficulties. I wanted to understand whether any good practices of those teachers could be replicated to my school context in Pakistan and what could be the implications of using formative assessment in my context. That is the reason why I embarked on a small-scale study to seek knowledge and understanding about this important aspect of teaching and learning by examining the assessment practice of a teacher in the UK. Thus, this study is about the formative assessment practices of one primary school teacher.

Educational Assessment

Rowntree (1987) notes that, “assessment in education can be thought of as

occurring whenever one person, in some kind of interaction ... with another, is conscious of obtaining and interpreting information about the knowledge and understanding, or abilities and attitudes of that other person” (p. 4) – a ‘human encounter’ where teachers attempt to get to know pupils by finding out about them.

According to Wiliam (2000) the reasons for conducting educational assessment are for supporting learning (formative); certifying individuals (summative); and holding educational institutions accountable (evaluative). He argues that for classroom assessment to be perceived as effective it needs to be both diagnostic and formative in function.

Therefore, all assessment in the context of education involves making decisions about what is relevant evidence for a particular purpose, how to collect the evidence, how to interpret it and how to communicate it to intended users (Harlen, 2005). The principal idea is that assessment is not an end in itself in the process of teaching and learning but must provide feedback to both teachers and students.

Current Issues in Assessment

The area of ‘assessment’ – and particularly that of ‘formative’ assessment – has attracted the increasing attention of educational researchers within the last decade (Hall & Burke, 2003; Tierney, 2006). Considerable advancements in assessment have occurred owing to substantial contributions from a large body of research (e.g. Crooks, 1988; Black, 1993; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Black et al., 2002; Wiliam et al., 2004). Based on the empirical work of Black & Wiliam (1998a, b) the focus has shifted from traditional standardized testing towards a broader assessment of learning (Swaffield, 2003). A summary of how assessment has evolved over the past two decades is presented next.

In the 1980s the traditional notion of ‘assessment’ typically conjured up a vision of ‘tests or examinations, certificates and grades or lists of marks’ for selection purposes (Brown, 1990). This traditional view of assessment was questioned as being too narrow in its reflection of educational achievement (Murphy & Torrance, 1990; Gipps, 1994). Since then, an evolving view of ‘assessment’ has come to encompass the multiple purposes of ‘fostering learning’, ‘improving teaching’, ‘providing valid information about what has been done or achieved’ and ‘enabling pupils to make sensible choices

about courses, careers and other activities' (Freeman & Lewis 1998; Hall & Burke, 2003; Swaffield, 2003). These two 'cultures' of assessment differ in function and are referred to as Assessment *of* Learning (AoL) and Assessment *for* Learning (AfL). AoL (summative assessment) denotes 'summing up' what has been learned and usually takes place at the end of a course. Conversely, AfL (formative assessment) occurs during the course of a study to ascertain what has been learned, what is being learned and what the next learning steps may be (Lambert & Lines, 2000). A key element in AfL or formative assessment is *feedback*, since through this learners can 'close the gap' between current and desired performance (Stobart, 2003).

Two key aspects of formative assessment – feedback and questioning – will now be reviewed in the context of the literature as these were the foci of the present study.

Feedback

Many argue that feedback comes in its least useful form as a mark or grade (e.g. Black et al., 2003; Stobart, 2003; Morgan et al., 2004; Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005). Research studies provide evidence consistent with this view (Butler, 1988; Gipps, Mccallum & Hargreaves, 2000; Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2002; Wiliam et al., 2004). Feedback is seen as an essential component of formative assessment where the intention is to support learning (Perrenoud, 1998; Sadler, 1998). Research has shown that feedback from assessment that includes verbal comments tends to be more useful than grades (Broadfoot, Winter & Weeden, 2002). Research has also shown that learners benefit most from rapid feedback (Black & Wiliam, 1998a). The timing of the feedback provided is crucial. The longer the time lag between performance and feedback, the less effective the feedback is likely to be in correcting errors and enhancing future performance (Brooks, 2002).

Questioning

In addition to feedback that tells learners what they need to do to improve and how to go about it, effective questioning is another key element that characterizes formative assessment (Wiliam, 2002). Research has shown that a teacher's questioning that accepts varied pupils' responses instead of specifically 'correct' ones, has a positive influence on learners – it provides pupils with 'safety nets' by helping them respond to

questions without any cause for fear or ridicule (Treagust, Jacobowitz, Gallagher & Parker, 2001). Questions that elicit children's thinking are perceived by pupils as 'helpful and non-threatening' and are likely to develop their confidence (Torrance & Pryor, 2001). Furthermore, teachers are able to build on pupils' responses when they take the time to listen carefully to what students have said and are able to maintain a high level of interest in the lesson through 'brisk' questioning and by providing opportunities to all pupils to be involved (Clark et al., 2000).

Methodology

Exploring a primary school teacher's existing assessment practice within 'natural settings' of the classroom was a vehicle to shape my understanding of the ways and purposes that exemplified ongoing teacher assessment. Idiosyncrasy and depth characterized my investigation, which lent itself to a qualitative case study (Yin, 2003).

Context

School

I conducted my investigation in a multi-cultural school in Oxford, UK. The school is located in a predominantly Asian community. The 220 children that attend the school come from a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The National Curriculum (UK) is followed throughout the school. The pupils are taught by their class teacher in all areas of the curriculum. English is a vital means of communication in the school and developing the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing is emphasized.

Teacher

I worked with a primary school teacher because of my interest and prior teaching experience at that level. I opted to work in grade 4 because the students are similar in age (9 to 10 years) to those whom I have taught in classrooms in Pakistan. Katherine (pseudonym), a white, female, primary school teacher in her mid-30s had been teaching in the school for 8 years. She had previously taught in a multi-cultural setting for five years and had found the experience both enjoyable and enriching. When an opportunity to teach in the present multi-cultural school presented itself, Katherine had

applied and was appointed.

Classroom

There are 30 students in the class. Children are assessed regularly through observations of day-to-day activities and their responses. Regular marking of children's written work helps teachers to record students' progress while formal assessment tasks, such as tests and examinations, take place at various times throughout the year.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through classroom observations, interviews and informal discussions. I had 10 observations (two observations per week for five weeks) of Katherine's Literacy Hour⁶ sessions. All observations were videotaped⁷ to provide a rich and relatively permanent record for numerous viewings and to help 'pick apart' the complex interactions taking place (Ruhleder & Jordan, 1997). Field notes were also maintained. The assessment strategies used by the teacher were the foci of observations. Additionally, an interview and several discussions with the teacher were also held to validate data. The interviews were audio-taped by the teacher's consent. Analysis was through linking the themes that emerged from the field and the concepts that took shape from readings of literature on assessment.

Findings

Katherine's teaching of the Literacy Hour sessions was divided into three

⁶ Literacy Hour is a classroom-based initiative popularly known as "The National Literacy Strategy" (NLS). It is a unique intervention in classroom teaching methods as it represented the first England-wide policy on the teaching of reading. The Government introduced NLS into primary schools in England because "an unacceptable number of eleven year olds were failing to reach the standard of literacy expected for their age" (Barber, 2001, p. 1). From September 1998 all primary schools in England were expected to teach the Literacy Hour – a daily English lesson for an hour where pupils were taught for the first half as a whole class, while for the last half of the lesson they worked in groups.

⁷ Prior consent was obtained from the teacher.

phases: the introduction, main phase and the conclusion.

At the start of the Literacy Hour (LH) Katherine beckoned pupils to sit near her on the carpeted floor while she sat on a chair facing the class. After glancing around to ascertain that everyone was seated comfortably, she announced the topic of the session. This was followed by an activity. For example, Katherine read aloud from the text, asked questions based on it and then assigned students the task of reading the text individually. Thus, the teacher appeared to be the one in control of this phase as she guided the students through her step-by-step instructions. The students needed to be active listeners – the teacher often called upon them randomly and asked them to explain the subject under discussion, in their own words. The end to this phase of the lesson was characterized by Katherine giving instructions about the tasks that students were required to perform in their respective ‘groups’: green, blue, black, red and yellow⁸. Before the students moved to their respective desks to begin work, the teacher gave them an opportunity to ask questions in case anything was not clear.

During the main phase of the LH students appeared to have more autonomy than the teacher as they worked in their respective ‘groups’. The teacher visited them periodically to check on their progress, for instance, by asking them to explain what they were doing. Students appeared to use the teacher as an accessible resource person because they often approached her to ask for guidance or support. The teacher gave some verbal feedback to students on their work and praised them for their effort. She also responded to students’ queries by either furnishing the required information or posing questions that encouraged students to seek the answers themselves.

For the final phase of the Literacy Hour students reconvened on the carpeted floor. In this concluding phase, the teacher’s purpose was to obtain feedback regarding students’ progress by getting them to talk about their learning experiences in the class.

⁸ Students in the class are categorized according to their ability level. This is done by putting them in different colour ‘groups’: green / blue (top), black (good), red (average) and yellow (below average). This ‘grouping’ is done at the start of the academic year.

Analyses of Critical Incidents

Ongoing classroom observations of Katherine's assessment practice yielded rich data about how she typically assessed learners during the LH. I discussed my findings in the context of critical incidents⁹ that occurred during her teaching. These critical incidents demonstrated the teacher's use of one or another method of formative assessment. Several excerpts from video transcripts of the teacher and pupils' interaction in the classroom were presented. Each excerpt was preceded by a brief background that stated the topic and the classroom events under discussion. In using these excerpts I intended to reconstruct formative assessment episodes that were evident in the teacher's practice.

In one of the sessions, I observed the following. After having read the story 'Horrible Monday' to the class, Katherine had instructed her pupils to work on different tasks in their respective 'groups'. Excerpt 1 is where the teacher and some students were working together later in the session.

The teacher had elicited the meaning of an 'apostrophe in contraction' from the class. After that, pupils were required to skim through the story 'Horrible Monday' to locate some words with apostrophes. Ahmed¹⁰ (one of the students) attempts to give an example of an apostrophe in the following episode:

⁹ "Critical incidents concentrate upon episodes ... which identify specific pedagogic practices and can be used to begin reflections upon the origins of these practices" (Thomas, 1995, p. 5).

¹⁰ Actual names of students have been replaced by pseudonyms.

Excerpt 1

	<p>Key: ... refers to a short pause [] description/my interpretation - - - indicates that a word is being spelt out ___ original emphasis</p>
1.	<p>[The teacher noticed that Ahmed had half-spoken aloud and he had also moved forward.] Teacher: Right. Have you got another one?</p>
2.	Ahmed: You're.
3.	Teacher: Good boy, right ... Could you spell that for me?
4.	Ahmed: Y-o- ...
5.	Teacher: Because I can't spell today [teacher remarked jokingly].
6.	Y-o- ... [another student started to spell the word out of turn]
7.	Teacher: No, Ahmed's doing it for me [teacher reminded the pupils general].
8.	<p>Ahmed: Y-o-u [followed by a slight pause. The teacher had written 'you' on the whiteboard and Ahmed looked back at his text and then continued] Ahmed: ... r ...</p>
9.	Teacher: r? ... [prompted the teacher.]
10.	Kashif: Apostrophe
11.	<p>Teacher: Aaaah [as she motioned with the forefinger of her right hand to Kashif: I'm asking Ahmed.</p>
12.	Teacher: Y-o-u
13.	Ahmed: d? [he offered incorrectly.]

14.	[The teacher leaned forward and looked at the text as Ahmed pushed his sheet towards her. The teacher leaned closer to look at the text that Ahmed was pointing to, then turned towards the whiteboard and spelled aloud as she wrote] Teacher: y-o-u-r-e.
15.	Teacher: Now where does the apostrophe go?
16.	Ahmed: On the top.
17.	Teacher: On the top? [repeated the teacher with a slight questioning intonation in her voice.] What here? [she had put the apostrophe immediately before ‘y’ [‘y], the very first letter in the word ‘youre’.]
18.	Ahmed: No [and with that Ahmed reached forward to the whiteboard and pointed with the pencil in his right hand, between the letters ‘u’ and ‘r’ in ‘youre’ that were written on the board. Kashif too had pointed at the same instant to indicate the place of the apostrophe in the word ‘youre’. However, the teacher was looking at Ahmed as he responded to her query.]
19.	Teacher: [The teacher spelled] y-o-u ... apostrophe ... r-e. ... What, here? [pointing to the space between ‘u’ and ‘r’ in the word ‘youre’ written on the board.]
20.	Ahmed: Yeah.
21.	Teacher: Ok. Start again [and with that the teacher crossed out (‘youre) that was written on the board. The teacher spelled out] Y-o-u ... apostrophe ... r-e. So, we’ve got ‘you’re’ ... Let’s find that sentence.
22.	[At this point Saima started to say something.]
23.	Teacher: Wait, we’re finding that sentence first. Where is it, Ahmed?

24.	[Ahmed looked in his text and Kashif moved towards him and quickly pointed with his finger to where the word was and then moved to the teacher's text and did likewise.]
25.	Teacher: <i>Then it's your own fault</i> ... [read the teacher.] That one, yeah?
26.	[Ahmed nodded in agreement.]
27.	Teacher: So we're going to read it. [Teacher read] <i>Then it's your own fault because you're not supposed to kick balls in the playground.</i> What Ahmed ... I'm going to ask Ahmed now ... is actual for 'because <u>you're</u> not ...?' [The teacher looked at Ahmed and waited for him to respond.]
28.	Ahmed: You're not ... [repeated Ahmed.]
29.	[The teacher nodded expectantly.]
30.	Ahmed: ... kicking [Ahmed answered.]
31.	Teacher: You want to think of the word 'you're' [prompted the teacher pointing with the little finger of her left hand]. We put that apostrophe [pointed with right hand finger] and we've got rid of one letter in there [pointing again with the forefinger of the right hand]. So it's 'you' [pointing yet again with the forefinger of her right hand] ... something [teacher underlined 're' in 'you're' with her finger and looked at Ahmed for a response.] You ... you're not allowed.
32.	Ahmed: You're not allowed [Ahmed repeated.]
33.	[The teacher gave a sweet smile to Ahmed and then turned to the whole group and asked:] Would anyone like to help us out?
34.	[Saima muttered something incoherently and Kashif quickly interposed with:] I know ... I know! You're not allowed to ... um ...

35.	Teacher:	Slow down [the teacher told Kashif.] What's this short for? [the teacher pointed to 'you're']. What's it telling you? You're? It's 'you' ... This apostrophe? [referring to the apostrophe (') before the letters 're' in 'you're'].
36.	Kashif:	You are [he correctly replied.]
37.	Teacher:	Good boy. 'You are' [referring to what the contracted form 'you're' was. The teacher wrote 'you are' besides 'you're' on the whiteboard and then said to the class in general:] We got there eventually [smiling humorously]. You are [repeated the teacher, one last time.]

As seen in excerpt 1 the teacher used questioning and feedback on different occasions and for different purposes. However, I analyze the examples which were for assessment purposes.

Questioning

Katherine used questioning for assessment purposes. For example, her initial question, "Right. Have you got another one?" (excerpt 1: line 1) invites a particular pupil's response. Having noticed that the pupil had spoken and leaned forward, the teacher invited him to respond in the group. Another example of the teacher using this type of question was when she asked the class, "Would anyone like to help us out?" (excerpt 1: line 33). Here she seemed to be inviting other pupils' responses after sustained questioning with Ahmed had not yielded a correct answer.

Other examples of the types and purposes of teacher questioning were observed. For instance, checking a student's understanding of the correct use of an apostrophe was evident when Katherine asked, "Now where does the apostrophe go?" (excerpt 1: line 15) and later when she responded to Ahmed's statement, "On the top" (excerpt 1: line 16) with a question, "What here?" (excerpt 1: line 17). It appeared, therefore, that the teacher was ascertaining if Ahmed thought the apostrophe – that she had inserted before the letter 'y' in the word 'you're' (excerpt 1: line 17) – was in the correct place or not.

Feedback

Likewise, verbal teacher feedback to pupils was offered for different purposes. For example, “Good boy, right” (excerpt 1: line 3) is indicative of the teacher praising Ahmed for his correct response. But teacher feedback was not limited exclusively to verbal comments. That is to say, when the teacher nodded her head expectantly to Ahmed (excerpt 1: line 29) she appeared to be encouraging him to formulate a possible response to her question. Thus, facial expression (the expectant look that the teacher gave Ahmed) and gestures (the teacher’s nod that accompanied her facial expression) both indicated to the learner that he needed to come up with an answer that was the correct one.

Feedback to students reminding them of the need to use social skills was another aspect that was evident in this teacher’s assessment practice. For example, Katherine reminded her class, “No, Ahmed’s doing it for me,” (excerpt 1: line 7) suggesting that pupils had to wait their turn to offer responses. Later, the teacher gestured by motioning the forefinger of her right hand, “Aaaah ... I’m asking Ahmed” (excerpt 1: line 11) to remind Kashif that he was speaking out of turn.

Another excerpt from the same session is offered to highlight other aspects of Katherine’s formative assessment practice. In this episode, the students were offering examples of words having apostrophes from ‘Horrible Monday’. Excerpt 2 opens with the teacher calling upon Munira to share an example with the group.

Excerpt 2

Key: ... refers to a short pause	
[] description/my interpretation	
- - - indicates that a word is being spelt out	
____ original emphasis	
1.	[The students were offering examples of apostrophes from the story ‘Horrible Monday’ (see appendix 1)].
2.	Teacher: Munira? [the teacher invited her for a response after observing that she had raised her hand.]

3.	Munira: She'd.
4.	Teacher: She'd [repeated the teacher]. How do you spell it, please?
5.	Munira: S-h-e-apostrophe-d [spelt out Munira as the teacher wrote it on the board.]
6.	Teacher: Ok. Could you read the sentence to me, please? [This query was directed at Munira.]
7.	Munira: <i>She'd found for my Dad.</i>
8.	Teacher: Oh, here ... <i>she'd</i> ... <i>she'd</i> ... <i>sent</i> ... [The teacher looked at Munira's work, then turned her page and located it in her text as well]. Come on then, carry on ... <i>she'd</i> ... [trailed off the teacher.]
9.	Munira: <i>She'd send for my Dad ...</i>
10.	Teacher: ... <i>if</i> ... [the teacher read the next word leading Munira to read further]
11.	Munira: ... <i>if I'm bad again to ... today, and you know what he's like.</i>
12.	Kashif: I got another one [Kashif piped in.]
13.	Teacher: Wait a minute. We need to sort this one out first. [The teacher said this while touching Kashif's arm and apparently restraining him]. <i>She said she'd send for my Dad</i> [read the teacher]. So have they put an apostrophe there? Look what they've got rid of ... quite a lot of letters, actually. It's not just one letter they've got rid of.
14.	[Ahmed raised his right arm.]
15.	Teacher: Are you telling me the answer to this, Ahmed, or are you giving me another one?
16.	Ahmed: Another one [Ahmed replied, smiling sweetly.]

17.	Teacher:	Right, wait a minute then please, for your turn.
18.		[Saima raised her right hand.]
19.	Teacher:	Saima, what's it short for ... 'she'd'?
20.	Saima:	Um ... she ... will? [Saima inquired tentatively while her hand stayed raised throughout this process.]
21.	Teacher:	She said 'she will?' Well, there's not an 'l' there, is there? [Saima shook her head in the negative] So what's another word instead of 'will'. She said she ... [prompted the teacher.]
22.	Kashif:	I know what that means ... [said Kashif in quick succession as he pointed to the word 'she'd' on the whiteboard. The teacher indicated that he should reply.] Kashif... did [Kashif responded.]
23.	Teacher:	It's not ... well, let me read it to you ... She said she <u>did</u> send for my Dad. Does that make sense?' [Kashif shook his head in the negative.]
	Teacher:	Right. Ok. Let's try another one then? She said she ...? [trailed off the teacher.]
24.	Laila:	... would [Laila completed correctly.]
25.	Teacher:	Thank you, Laila [said the teacher as she looked in her direction.]

Questioning

Instances of the teacher's questions serving as prompts were evidenced (excerpt 2). For example, the teacher prompted Munira: "Come on then, carry on ... she'd ..." (excerpt 2: line 8) and then Kashif with, "Let's try another one then? She said she ...?" (excerpt 2: line 23).

Feedback

Verbal teacher feedback by Katherine (excerpt 2) not only indicated to students their incorrect answers but also pointed out why these were incorrect: “Well, there’s not an ‘l’ there, is there?” (excerpt 2: line 21) and “‘She said she did send for my Dad.’ Does that make sense?” (excerpt 2: line 23).

Additional purposes of teacher questioning and feedback were unveiled in excerpt 3 which is taken from a different session. The teacher had read the poem ‘Big Fears’ⁱⁱ and subsequently instructed her pupils to listen carefully for repetitions in the poem as she re-read it. Excerpt 3 depicts students answering the teacher’s questions that were about the poem.

Excerpt 3

	Key:	... this refers to a short pause. [] description/my interpretation - - - indicates that a word is being spelt out ___ original emphasis
1.	Teacher:	Why was she ... um ... Sian frightened of these big electricity pylons? What did she think might happen? ... Nancy? [to a pupil who had her hand raised.]
2.	Nancy:	When snaps and falls ... it will electrocute everybody in the building. [The pupil was referring to the electricity pylons that were mentioned in the first verse of the poem.]
3.	Teacher:	Yeah. You’ve probably all seen these ... great big electricity pylons? ... go through the ... [the teacher held her left hand up for ‘silence’ as soon as students began to confirm her question of having seen electricity poles with a vociferous ‘yes, yes’] ... countryside ... er ... she’s frightened that these might snap. And if they snap obviously the electricity is ... live ... She’s frightened they might fall on the house ... What about Matthew

		then? [A pause for about 4 seconds]. What's he frightened of and why? Teacher: Asma? [the teacher asked Asma who had raised her hand].
4.	Asma:	He's frightened that the tree is gonna fall over the house.
5.	Teacher:	Yeah and what? [the teacher probed.]
6.	Asma:	And ... em ... it might ... [the teacher's copy of the poem fell to the floor and Asma picked it up and handed it to her] ... kill him and his cat.
7.	Teacher:	Yeah. Kill him and his cat. It's very important. He thinks it's going to kill his cat ... What about the last one? How is that different? ... How's the last [pointing with left finger to the second verse of the poem on the whiteboard] ... well, call it a verse ... How's the last verse different from the previous two? Walter? [the teacher asked a pupil who had raised his hand.]
8.	Walter:	Well, as far as only you can see ... all around you is basically like ... erm ... so you can only see night or something [the pupil replied]
9.	Teacher:	Erm ... something you can only see at night and possibly? ... look at it more than that, I think, because there's a real big difference here.
10.		[Larry was waving frantically to get the teacher's attention.]
11.		[The teacher looked towards Larry which was a cue to him to respond.]
12.	Larry:	Um ... when ... those two look out the window it's ... when she looks out the window it's all peaceful ... calm.
13.	Teacher:	So where's the fear? ... What's ... where's the fear coming from?

14.	Larry:	Um ... the shadows.
15.	Teacher:	Y—e—s ... From the shadows ... We're getting there.
16.	Kashif:	[Kashif was seated beside the teacher's feet and mumbled something to her of which only the words 'different shapes' were audible]
17.	Teacher:	She sees shapes, doesn't she? [Kashif nodded].
18.	Mehreen:	Inside her room.
19.	Teacher:	Inside her room [the teacher repeated] ... But also inside her ... [the teacher trailed off.]
20.		[Asma was incoherent.]
21.		[The teacher then pointed with her left finger to her left temple while still looking at Asma.]
22.	Asma:	In her mind [Asma answered correctly after having caught on to the clue provided by the teacher.]
23.	Teacher:	In her mind [the teacher repeated]. Thank you, Asma. A lot of ... [the teacher pointed with her left hand to the poem 'Big Fears' that was pasted on the whiteboard] ... these two are <u>real</u> fears. They're fears ... they're fears that, I suppose, could happen ... if you're really, really unlucky. This one [indicating the last verse of the poem with her left forefinger] these are fears inside her head. I mean ... she's making up these fears. You know, when she thinks the shadows have shapes and in that case there's a real difference between those three. Nancy? Have you got something to add? [the teacher asked a pupil who had raised her hand.]
24.	Nancy:	Um ... she heard noises when the pipes were dried up.

25.	Teacher:	What did she think the noises were? ... because, sometimes ... in my house, actually ... if you turn the tap on, you hear this CLUG. What did she think ... erm ... these noises were? Can you remember? [the teacher prompted Nancy.]
26.	Nancy:	No [she replied.]
27.	Teacher:	I'll read the line [the teacher offered but the pupils interrupted her.]
28.		[The pupils could be heard saying 'I know, I know' even before the teacher could actually get down to reading the line.]
29.	Teacher:	Does anybody else know the answer? [referring to anyone other than Nancy].
30.		[Asma raised her hand and the teacher invited her to respond.] Is it the monster screeching on the pipes? [Asma inquired.]
31.	Teacher:	Erm ... you've got the word 'screeching', that's right. [The teacher then pointed with her left hand to Rita who had her hand up.]
32.	Rita:	Screeches and groans [responded Rita.]
33.	Teacher:	Yeah, screeches and groans of attic skeletons [the teacher completed.]

Questioning

Specific instances of teacher questioning that aimed to extend pupils' responses were noted in excerpt 3: "Erm ... something you can only see at night and possibly? ... look at it more than that, I think, because there's a real big difference here" (excerpt 3: line 9). Besides acknowledging the response as partially correct "look at it more than that" the teacher attempted to push a student's thinking further "because there's a real big difference here" (excerpt 3: line 9). A little later the teacher asked, "So where's the fear? ... What's ... where's the fear coming from?" (excerpt 3: line 13). A student answered,

“Um ... the shadows,” (excerpt 3; line 14) to which the teacher’s long drawn out, “Y—e—s ... From the shadows ... We’re getting there” (excerpt 3: line 15) suggested that she was seeking additional information. Teacher’s questions that probed students’ responses were also evident. For example, when a student stated that the boy in the poem was afraid of the tree falling over the house, the teacher probed, “Yeah and what?” (excerpt 3: line 5).

Feedback

Subtle gestures on the teacher’s part also provided feedback to students. The teacher had trailed off in her question: “Inside her room ... But also inside her ...?” (excerpt 3: line 19) and Asma had correctly responded, “In her mind” (excerpt 3: line 22). The teacher had pointed with her left forefinger to her left temple while still looking at Asma (video recording). Hence, the teacher’s gesture was a visual clue to a student – it provided feedback to the pupil and helped her come up with the correct answer.

Later during the session the teacher allocated pupils different verses of the poem ‘Big Fears’ to read. Excerpt 4 highlights detailed teacher feedback provided to a student on his reading.

Excerpt 4

1.	Teacher: [The teacher invited James to read the last verse of the poem.] James?
2.	[James read.] James: <i>Outside Karen’s bedroom there’s nothing But a pleasant view, meadows, hedges, sheep And some distant gentle hills. There’s nothing sinister, nothing to worry about.</i>
3.	Teacher: Erm ... Lovely, James [said the teacher turning towards him and speaking to him in the whole class]. You put a bit of expression ... there is punctuation in there ... and you need to

	look for it. Some of the sentences are quite long ... ok ... and there are commas ... sort of ... interspersing it. You need to look for those the next time you read.
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Discussion

Both questioning and feedback were interwoven in Katherine's formative assessment practice. She used questioning extensively to tap into pupils' prior knowledge and extend their learning. Pupils did not have to be embarrassed or fear a reprimand if they were unable to offer correct answers. For example, when Ahmed, after the teacher's sustained questioning, was still not able to respond correctly, the teacher merely offered him a smile and asked the remaining pupils in the group, "Would anyone like to help us out?" (excerpt 1: line 33). The manner in which the teacher phrased her question – "Would anyone like to help us out?" – indicated that she identified the event as a 'helping' moment for the learner and herself. The word "us" in her question (excerpt 1: line 33) suggested that, besides Ahmed, the teacher too was in need of help. This provided the student with a kind of 'safety net' (Treagust et al., 2001) where he could see the event as a learning opportunity instead of feeling ashamed because of not providing the correct answer.

In addition, verbal feedback to pupils was also an integral part of Katherine's formative assessment practice. Her feedback included both general and specific comments. For example, recognition of students' effort in general (excerpt 1: line 37), verbal praise to particular pupils for correct responses (excerpt 2: line 25; excerpt 4: line 3) and specific feedback to a learner (excerpt 4: line 7). While providing specific feedback to a learner, Katherine appeared to use 'modelling' (Clark et al., 2000) as a way of inspiring other pupils and communicating task expectations. For example, the teacher's, "You need to look for it ... the sentences are quite long ... there are commas ... interspersing it" and "You need to look for those next time you read ..." was addressed specifically to James but also to the remaining pupils in the group (excerpt 4: line 7). James' excellent reading style was being modeled as a criterion towards which other students could aspire. Hence, the teacher employed 'modelling' within her feedback and appeared to use James' style of reading "as a way of reinforcing methods, ideas and

approaches to tasks, and inspiring further efforts” (Clark et al., 2000).

Conclusion

As described, questioning and feedback were two key elements of formative assessment that Katherine employed consistently in the LH. Each was used for a variety of purposes. For example, teacher questioning invited pupils to contribute ideas in the classroom. It also checked for pupils’ understanding of concepts, clarified learner’s responses (for the teacher and the whole class) and probed pupils’ thinking. At other times, the teacher’s questioning acted as prompts that cued pupils for a viable response.

Teacher’s feedback not only acknowledged and praised students’ efforts/correct responses but also pointed out incorrect ones and why these were so. In addition, feedback by the teacher extended pupils’ learning on a number of occasions through verbal prompts, visual clues and supplementary information provided by the teacher.

A key implication of this study is the need for professional training and on-going support for teachers in the use of effective questioning and feedback for assessment purposes so that teachers can use these assessment strategies in a formative way to foster pupils’ learning in the classroom.

Notes

1. ‘Horrible Monday’ is a story about a girl, Emma, whose day at school starts off badly – she arrives late; is scolded by the teacher; detained during the recess and assigned ‘additional’ tasks to do in the classroom. However, Emma’s day ends on a brighter note after she completes all the assigned tasks before finally going outside to play with her friends in the school playground.
2. ‘Big Fears’ is a poem about three pupils’ fears of things in their environment. Some of these fears are ‘real’ ones – e.g. the possibility of being electrocuted by a live cable that snaps and falls on a windy night – while others are more ‘imaginary’; such as, seeing ghostly shapes as darkness falls at night.

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