Whatever the source of evidence, teachers construct or devise ways to elicit responses from students that reveal where they are in their learning and to use the evidence to move learning forward (Sadler 1989). Teachers are clear about the short-term learning goals (e.g., for a lesson) that cumulatively lead to students' attainment of one or more standards. They are also clear about the success criteria for the lesson goal—how students show they have met, or are on the way to meeting, the lesson goal. Teacheres then align the evidence-gathering strategy to the success criteria.

*Teachers are clear about the short-term learning goals (e.g., for a lesson) that cumulatively lead to students' attainment of one or more standards. They are also clear about the success criteria for the lesson goal . . .*

Questions that formative assessment can answer include the following:

- Where are my students in relation to learning goals for this lesson?
- What is the gap[2] between students' current learning and the goal?
- What individual difficulties are my students having?
- Are there any missing building blocks in their learning?
- What do I need to adjust in my teaching to ensure that students learn?

Information from formative assessment is used to make instructional adjustments in real time: to continue with the planned lesson or to provide feedback to students that helps them take steps to advance their learning. (Feedback to students is discussed in the student involvement section of this chapter.)

Importantly, teachers' inferences from formative assessment evidence and their resulting actions focus on individual students. The implication is not that instruction is necessarily provided on a one-to-one basis, but rather that individual needs are addressed in the context of a class of students. This orientation to individuals is necessary for students to have the opportunity to learn and progress equally (Heritage 2013). Accordingly, instruction is contingent on each student's current learning status. In other words, instruction is matched to where the students are so that they are assisted to progress and meet desired goals.

*Importantly, teachers' inferences from formative assessment evidence and their resulting actions focus on individual students.*

While formative assessment evidence is not aggregated in the same way as medium- and long-cycle assessment information, teachers can categorize individual student responses to look for patterns across the class or for particular students who are outliers. For example, after students have responded to a question about a text, a teacher can quickly categorize responses into those that demonstrate understanding, those that demonstrate partial understanding, and those that do not demonstrate understanding. The next day's instruction is then planned accordingly.

Teachers of ELs should take great care when making these formative assessment decisions. Depending on their level of English language proficiency, some ELs may not be able to fully express their ideas orally about a topic during a class discussion; however, this does not necessarily mean that they do not understand the topic. In addition, an informal observation indicating that ELs are not orally proficient in English should not determine how the students are taught reading in English.

2 The gap refers to the distance between where the students' learning currently stands at particular points in the lesson (a lesson can be several periods or days long) and the intended learning goal for the lesson. The purpose of short-cycle formative assessment is to close this gap so that all students meet the goal (Sadler 1989). This should not be confused with the term *achievement gap*, which refers to differences in summative educational outcomes among different subgroups of students.

English learners do not have to be proficient in oral English before they can learn to read in English (Bunch, Kibler, and Pimental 2012). Teachers use a combination of observations (e.g., during collaborative conversations among students about texts read) and informal inventories of reading (e.g., listening to students read aloud during small reading group time, asking specific comprehension questions to elicit student understandings) to determine how best to instruct their ELs and provide *just-in-time* scaffolding in reading. Furthermore, the CA ELD Standards indicate that all ELs, regardless of their level of English language proficiency, are capable of engaging in intellectually rich tasks at the same cognitive level as their English-proficient peers. With this aim, teachers use in-the-moment formative assessment practices to determine appropriate levels of scaffolding for ELs. (For more information on scaffolding, see chapter 2 in this *ELA/ELD Framework*.)

*Teachers of ELs should take great care when making these formative assessment decisions. Depending on their level of English language proficiency, some ELs may not be able to fully express their ideas orally about a topic during a class discussion; however, this does not necessarily mean that they do not understand the topic.*

Using the formative assessment process in an EL student's primary language, in contexts where teaching and learning use this resource (e.g., in an alternative program), may also offer instructionally actionable information. For example, newcomer ELs at the Emerging level of English language proficiency (e.g., students who have been in the U.S. for less than a year) may find it difficult to respond (in writing or orally) to a question about a science or history topic in English with the same level of detail as they are able to do in their primary language. Teachers can ask their newcomer EL students to quickly write responses to text-based questions first in their primary language (if they are literate) before they respond in written English. The two pieces of writing are then compared to identify similarities and differences between content knowledge and literacy in the primary language and English.

This technique is applied strategically so that teachers understand clearly what students know about particular topics and how well they are able to express their knowledge in English. Teachers also use this type of evidence to explicitly draw their EL students' attention to ways they can express through English writing or speaking what they already know and are able to convey in their primary language. While all teachers may not be able to provide this type of support themselves (e.g., when they are not proficient in students' primary languages), they can collaborate with other teachers, EL specialists, or community members to do so.

The use of technology that enables students to give immediate responses to teachers (e.g., clickers, mobile devices) helps teachers with large numbers of students gain an ongoing sense of students understanding during a lesson. For example, halfway through a lesson, a tenth-grade teacher asks three or four questions related to multiple-meaning words and word phrases in a literary text the class is analyzing. The results immediately appear as a pie chart on the Smart board. The teacher and students quickly see how the class responds and decide together if more work is needed in this area before the lesson progresses.

*The use of technology that enables students to give immediate responses to teachers (e.g., clickers, mobile devices) helps teachers with large numbers of students gain an ongoing sense of students understanding during a lesson.*

The following snapshots provide additional concrete examples of formative assessment in action.

## Snapshot 8.1. Formative Assessment in Grade Five

Fifth graders are working on the following CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: (a) applying the reading standard for informational text: *explaining how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which particular points* (RI.5.8); (b) the writing standard: *produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience* (W.5.4); and (c) the language standard: *vocabulary use* (L.5.4-6), particularly transition words to help their writing flow logically. Students are writing an argument to encourage their readers to take more care of the natural environment. In their reading instruction, they analyzed a text to identify the location of *arguments*, *counterarguments*, and supporting *evidence*. In their writing, they are learning how to organize their arguments effectively.

While the students are involved in the independent writing part of the lesson, Ms. Hatwal sits with Bobby to discuss his writing progress. She has a ring binder open to a page with these headings at the top: *Child's Name/Date, Research Compliment, Teaching Point,* and *What's Next for this Child?* Further down the page is a self-adhesive note that lists five students' names, including Bobby's. She plans to meet with each of them during today's writing session.

Ms. Hatwal's initial purpose with Bobby is to follow up on feedback she provided him two days ago based on evidence she elicited from an interaction with him; in that interaction she determined that he needed to provide stronger sources of evidence to support his argument. On this occasion, she wants to see how he has used her prior feedback:

Ms. Hatwal: You're working on evidence? Tell me about it.

Bobby: I found good information in the book of the Environmental Protection Agency and on the Internet.

Ms. Hatwal: And what do you think about what you found so far? Do you think that it supports your argument?

Bobby: I guess . . . .

At this point, Ms. Hatwal reminds Bobby that the purpose of the evidence is to support his argument. She explains the meaning of "supporting an argument" in a way that is understandable to a fifth grader, by telling him: *You have to prove it with what is in the text or the readers may not believe you*. She asks him to read his argument aloud. Having established that the focus of his argument is to "stop dumping in the ocean because all the beautiful animals we see are going to start vanishing,"

Ms. Hatwal: So, what evidence did you find to support that claim—that all the animals will die if we don't stop dumping? What evidence did you find that will help you to strengthen that argument, or prove it to your readers?

Ms. Hatwal then helps Bobby recognize which of the information he has located is from a reliable source and is effective in supporting his argument. Satisfied that Bobby can move forward on his own to incorporate his evidence, she then asks him to review the organization of his argument and to let her know where he will place the evidence. When Bobby does this, it is evident to Ms. Hatwal that he has some confusion about the overall structure and that his writing needs to be reorganized. This is a moment in the interaction when she targets a teaching point for him. She reviews the organization with him and writes the organizational elements on a self-adhesive note and includes specific instructional support, such as putting the evidence in order to help the flow or adding transitional sentences.

### Snapshot 8.1. Formative Assessment in Grade Five (cont.)

Throughout this interaction, Ms. Hatwal makes notes in her ring-binder file. Under *Research Compliment* she writes that Bobby recognizes the reliability of his source. In the section labeled *Teaching Point* she writes that she explained how evidence supported his argument. Under the heading *What's Next for this Child?* she writes "organization and transitional sentences," noting that Bobby has problems organizing his writing to effectively convey his argument to the reader. By gathering evidence in the course of this interaction, Ms. Hatwal is able to match her teaching points to the individual student's needs. Additionally, after several interactions of this kind, she finds that there are common needs among several students and decides to pull them together for a mini-lesson.

### Snapshot 8.2. Formative Assessment in Grade Two

In a second-grade classroom that includes native English speaking children and children who are ELs, the children have been working on retelling folktales they have read together in class to convey the central message of the tale (RL.2.2). The EL children, in particular, have been working on using the past tense to indicate that the tales happened in the past (ELD.PI.2.3). In this lesson students are engaged in small group work, and during this time the teacher, Mr. Elfert, selects groups of three students to recount one of the folktales the class has read that week. In this situation, he wants to give each student sustained opportunities to use language while he and the others in the group listen. He asks the first student to begin, then after a while asks the second child to carry on and so forth. When the students have completed the retelling, Mr. Elfert asks them to say what they think the main message of the story is. Each child offers an opinion and a discussion follows about whether there is agreement on the main message. From the activity, Mr. Elfert has evidence that one student uses the past tense consistently and mostly with accuracy, while the other two do not. Two of the children are able to convey the message of the text, but another has not grasped it. After his discussion with the group, he makes quick notes about each student and briefly records his thoughts about subsequent instruction. He repeats this process with one additional group before the small group work time is over, and he plans more opportunities during the week to assess other small groups in the same way.

## Snapshot 8.3. Formative Assessment with Secondary EL Newcomers

In a secondary designated English Language Development (ELD) class, with newcomers whose experience in the U.S. ranges from three months to one year, Mrs. Rogers-Tsai works collaboratively with the science teacher, Miss Goodwin, to create a five-week unit on animal behavior with the purpose of guiding students through a deep exploration of the content through the language resources used to convey meaning. The two teachers have agreed that during science instruction, Miss Goodwin will provide appropriate and strategic support so EL students can fully participate in the science activities, gain understanding from the science textbook, and engage in collaborative discussions about the text and content. This strategic support includes using graphic organizers, providing increased opportunities for the students to discuss their ideas in small groups or pairs, and primary language support, including drawing attention to cognates and using texts in students' primary languages.

Mrs. Rogers-Tsai has agreed to analyze the science textbook and the activities the science teacher has designed in order to identify the language demands they present and then address the language demands more intensively during designated ELD instruction. This is the third class of the first week on the unit. Having formulated questions they would like to explore around the science topic, students perused a variety of texts on the topic to identify meanings and charted language (including phrasing and general academic and domain-specific vocabulary) they think is critical for conveying their understandings of the topic. They now work in pairs to collaboratively write a description about what they have learned so far about one aspect of animal behavior, using as much of the language they have charted as they can. The pairs write their description drafts on large sheets of paper, which they read to the class. Their peers are invited to ask questions and make comments. When one pair shares their description about animals and language, an animated conversation develops on whether animals have language. Julio explains the thinking that went into the description that caused the lively discussion.

Julio: First of all, I think that language is a way to *inform* others around you, your feelings or just a simple thing that you want to let know people what is the deal. And it can be *expressed* by saying it, watching a picture, or hearing it, you know what I'm saying? I don't know if you have heard about the kangaroo rat that stamps its feet to *communicate* with other rats. It's really funny cause we humans have more *characteristics* to *communicate* to each other, but we still have problems to understand other people. Characteristics like sound, grammar, pitch, and body language are some of them, while the rat only uses the foot (he stamps the ground).

Mrs. Rogers-Tsai, who has been recording in her notebook the language students use in the conversation, notes that Julio is using some of the academic language from the class chart in both his writing and speaking and has, more importantly, done an effective job of conveying his understanding of the information from his research and persuading his peers with evidence. Mrs. Rogers-Tsai decides to examine more closely the students' written descriptions, as well as the language they use in their conversations, in order to make decisions about what language features of the science texts to focus on as she progresses in the unit. She also plans to make a copy of her notes to share with Miss Goodwin when they meet later that week during collaboration time.