Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Adults

IMPROVING FOUNDATION SKILLS

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation

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by
Janet Looney

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Foreword

In many OECD countries, large portions of populations do not have the skills needed to function fully and effectively in daily life. Adult foundation skill learning for those with low language, literacy and numeracy skills has therefore become an increasingly urgent policy issue. However, it is less certain that this issue is receiving the attention and priority it merits.

Large-scale surveys, such as the International Adult Literacy (1994-1998), the Adult Literacy and Life Skills surveys (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005), and the new Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) provide vital data on adult skills in populations and the dimensions of the challenge. OECD publications such as *Beyond Rhetoric* (2003) and *Promoting Adult Learning* (2005) have provided analyses of how systems can make more effective investments and promote access to learning opportunities.

This study complements these macro-level analyses, bringing a much-needed focus to effective teaching, learning and assessment within classrooms. With a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the quality of provision and outcomes, policy makers can provide more effective leadership and support.

The study is part of the "What Works in Innovation in Education" series of the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). The series was initiated in 1993 to examine innovations related to common policy concerns across a small number of countries (between six and ten). The reports are aimed at a broad audience of educational policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

As with the previous "What Works" study (*Formative Assessment: Improving Learning in Secondary Classrooms*, CERI/OECD, 2005), this study includes reviews of research from different linguistic traditions. The reviews provide insight into different conceptual approaches to common challenges, and make accessible a broader range of empirical research. This approach has been particularly important for the understudied area of adult foundation skill learning. The combined reviews provide a clearer picture of

the state of the art in this sector, and directions for future research and development.

Seven countries identified case studies of exemplary classroom practice: Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, England, France, Norway, Scotland and the United States. Nine countries contributed background reports detailing the challenges and policy responses for adult foundation skill learners. They include Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, England, Norway, New Zealand, Scotland, Spain and the United States.

For the first time, the international case studies and reviews of literature prepared for this report are available in their entirety on the Internet (see list of annexes in the Table of Contents).

Within the CERI Secretariat, the report was prepared by Janet Looney. Delphine Grandrieux and Jennifer Gouby prepared and edited the text for publication.

Barbara Ischinger
Director, Directorate for Education

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We would like first, to thank the numerous individuals at the case study sites featured in this report who so generously offered their time and shared insights gained through many years of experience and reflection.

We would also like to extend thanks to country-based experts who contributed to the development of country background reports and case studies. *Australia:* Josie Misko, National Centre for Vocational Education Research; *Belgium (Flemish Community)*: Inge De Meyer, University of Ghent; *Denmark:* Michael Andersen, Danish Evaluation Institute/EVA, and Kirsten Baltzer, Danish University of Education; *England:* John Vorhaus, National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy; *France:* Elie Maroun, Agence nationale de lutte contre l'illetrisme; *New Zealand:* John Benseman and Alison Sutton, independent consultants; *Norway:* Anne Husby, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Tove-Dina Røynestad, Vox/Norwegian Institute for Adult Education; *Scotland:* John Leavey, Scottish Government, Learning Connections and Lynn Tett, Moray House School of Education; *Spain:* Jordi Planas and Maria Montoriol, Autonomous University of Barcelona; *the United States:* Sandra Baxter, National Institute for Literacy. In addition, Ursula Howard of the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy, and Jean-Pierre Jeantheau of the Agence nationale de lutte contre l'illetrisme provided valuable guidance on the design and implementation of the study.

This report draws extensively upon reviews of the international literature developed for this study. For the *review of the English-language literature*, we thank Jay Derrick, independent consultant, and Kathryn Ecclestone, Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University. For the *review of the French-language literature*, we thank Stéphane Daniau and Paul Bélanger, University of Québec at Montréal. Anke Grotlüschen and Franziska Bonna of the University of Bremen contributed to the *German-language review of literature.* Florentino Sanz of the National

University of Distance Education contributed to the *review of literature in Spain.*

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(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172034035238*)
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(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172137717827*)
France by Benoît Michel and Elie Maroun
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Norway by Janet Looney, Anne Husby and Tove-Dina Røynestad
(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172200736572*)
Scotland by Anne Sliwka and Lynn Tett
(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172212187274*)
United States by John Benseman and John Comings
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(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172251338713*)
The French-language Literature on foundation training at work by Stéphane Daniau and Paul Bélanger
(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172252366268*)
The German-language Literature by Anke Grotlüschen and Franziska Bonna
(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172255303131*)
The Literature in Spain by Florentino Sanz
(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172280657610*)

Annex 4. Overview of Policies and Programmes for Adult LLN Learners (available on the Internet)
(*http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/172281885164*)

Executive Summary

The challenge

Too many adults still fail to acquire even basic skills, with enormous effects on their individual lives and on their countries' economic and social well-being. In the majority of the 23 countries participating in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), between 14 and 23% of adults were able to meet only the lowest standards of literacy and numeracy proficiency (Level 1). Among the countries participating in this study, the percentage of adults not meeting this standard ranges from a low of 8% to a high of 43% (OECD and Statistics Canada, 1997). The more recent Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005[1]), which included six countries and regions, found that between one-third and two-thirds of adult populations do not attain Level 3, considered by many as the "suitable minimum" for meeting the demands of daily and work life (see Annex 1 for an explanation of proficiency levels in these international surveys).

The consequences of low foundation skills[2] span the economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities. Communities as well as individuals with foundation skill needs are thus likely to realise significant economic and social benefits in addressing these challenges.

In the last decade, countries have developed new pathways for progression, defined key competencies, and developed new curricula. But for the most part, policies to shape classroom teaching and learning are

[1] OECD and Statistics Canada (1997), *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society: Further Results from the International Adult Literacy Survey*, OECD, Paris. OECD and Statistics Canada (2005), *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, OECD, Paris.

[2] The term "foundation skills" is used interchangeably with "language, literacy and numeracy skills" in this report.

limited to blunt instruments. The classroom is thus seen as a "black box" – because so much of the activity and interface of teaching, learning and assessment is literally hidden from wider view beyond the classroom door. This study aims to get inside the black box of adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) provision.

The main report includes three sections:

- Section I presents the *context and conditions* of adult LLN provision. It draws upon country background reports from nine countries, including Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, England, New Zealand, Norway, Scotland, Spain and the United States. International surveys, including the IALS and the more recent Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005), also help to set out the scale of the challenge across countries.
- Section II delves directly into the *black box of teaching, learning and assessment*. It draws upon *case studies* of exemplary practice and *literature reviews* from four linguistic traditions (English, French, German and Spanish). Seven countries contributed cases studies, including Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, England, France, Norway, Scotland and the United States.
- Section III offers a *broad framework for strengthening policy and practice* across the sector and for *building the evidence base*. It also suggests ways in which policy might support the effective practices identified in this study across the adult LLN sector.

The full-length country background reports, case studies and literature reviews are available on the OECD website (see list of annexes in the Table of Contents).

Section I: Context and conditions

Chapter 1 lays out the motivation and methodologies for the report. The study's initial foray into the black box started with a focus on "formative assessment" within adult language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) classrooms. Formative assessment refers to the frequent assessment of learner understanding and progress to identify needs and shape teaching. The interest in formative assessment follows on very positive results in the compulsory school sector. The effects are consistent across different age groups (school-age and university learners), subjects and in the different countries included in major reviews. Yet there have been few efforts to date to study the impact or implementation of formative assessment in adult LLN contexts.

Understanding the population of adult LLN learners

Chapter 2 highlights findings from different international and national surveys and studies, emphasising the overall scale of the challenge for systems. These studies have also provided valuable information on the *features of populations* most in need. Other studies have identified the *consequences of low foundation skills* on economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities.

Aligning policy and practice

Adult LLN provision has traditionally been set apart from mainstream education at the compulsory and university levels, and has been largely independent of policy oversight. More recently, policies have turned attention to shaping learning content and progression, and holding programmes accountable for results. These newer policy approaches attempt to create greater *programme transparency* and *coherence*. But critics charge that these newer, more standardised approaches also set out narrowly defined learning objectives. Learners may miss the chance to develop capacities for dealing with increasing levels of complexity and for greater independence.

Chapter 3 explores the different approaches countries participating in the OECD study have taken to balancing and aligning policies that create greater *standardisation* with those that promote greater *individualisation* of teaching, learning and assessment.

Strengthening professionalism

Chapter 4 explores the *conditions of employment, training* and *wider staff support.* Instructors need strong subject-matter and pedagogical expertise and skills in assessment, as well as softer skills, such as humour, patience, flexibility, and empathy.

Building an instructional workforce that can meet such high expectations is particularly challenging, given:

- Constrained financial resources in this sector.
- Precarious employment situations for many instructors, leading to high turnover.
- The relative lack of instructors holding specialist qualifications for teaching adult LLN learners (although some countries and regions have recently introduced new qualification requirements).

- A heavy dependence on volunteer staff.
- The part-time status of many instructors, making it difficult for staff to find time to discuss innovation or to reflect on practice.

Section II: Inside the black box

The chapters in Section II delve directly into the black box of adult LLN learning. They draw upon the reviews of literature and case studies of exemplary practice conducted for this report. This research underlines the combined importance of different elements – rather than discrete practices or tools – in promoting learner progress. It can be seen as a process, which begins as soon as learners enter a programme and continues throughout a series of steps. The chapters are organised to reflect learner progression.

The steps of the learning journey include:

- *Diagnosis of learning needs*, and establishment of learners' motivations and goals.
- The development of strong *relationships within the classroom*, through dialogue and peer assessment.
- The use of *assessment to provide information on learning*, and to be used as feedback by learners and instructors to modify teaching and learning activities. Instructors develop effective questioning techniques, and set tasks and challenges at the right level to help learners address gaps.
- A focus on *building learner autonomy*, including skills for self-assessment and for addressing the literacy and numeracy tasks of daily life independently.
- *Tracking of learner progress* toward goals and recognition of achievement.

The case study sites

Chapter 5 introduces the OECD case studies of exemplary practice. They include programmes offering primary or secondary school certification; community-based programmes not providing formal certification; programmes for immigrant and refugee learners; and, a prison-based programme.

First steps: diagnosing learning needs and setting goals

When adult LLN learners first enter a new programme, they very typically have an initial interview to discuss their goals and motivations for learning, and how they expect they will use new skills in their daily lives. This first meeting may also include a diagnostic assessment to identify learners strengths and any potential barriers to learning (such as a disability), and to place them at an appropriate level. As a follow-up instructors and new learners set out goals for learning in a written document (an individual learning plan or contract). These first steps in the learning journey set the tone and direction for learning.

Relationships within the classroom: dialogue and peer assessment

The second step of the OECD staircase highlights the centrality of relationships within the classroom, including dialogue and peer assessment in adult LLN learning. The following five elements emerge from the OECD case studies and reviews of the international literature as important for effective dialogue in adult LLN settings:

1. Building rapport and creating a "safe" environment
2. Using dialogue to promote participatory and democratic learning
3. Negotiating learning goals and methods
4. Structuring dialogue to meet specific learning goals
5. Using dialogue to establish what learners do and do not know and to adjust teaching to meet identified learning needs.

Together, the five elements help to ensure that dialogue enriches the learning process.

Techniques: feedback, questioning, and scaffolding

The third step in the OECD staircase explores the formative assessment techniques of feedback, questioning and scaffolding in the adult LLN context. These techniques are used to uncover learner understanding, to help instructors pitch learning to the right level, and to help learners progressively improve their skills.

Research drawing on controlled studies at school and university levels points to the significant learning gains associated with these techniques. The lack of research featuring controlled studies in the adult LLN sector, on the other hand, has meant that little is known about the impact of different formative assessment techniques, or how they should be adjusted to meet the needs of learners in this population.

Developing learner autonomy

The fourth step in the OECD staircase explores the development of learner autonomy. Efforts to build autonomy begin with learners' partnership in the assessment and learning process. Instructors in the OECD case study sites emphasised the importance of helping learners to "own" the assessment and learning process, and to develop the confidence to use their own judgment regarding the quality of their work, and for identifying gaps in their learning. These skills are also important as learners engage in non-formal and informal learning.

Recognition of learner progress

Recognition of learner progress is the final of the five steps for learning in the OECD staircase – although of course not the final step in the learning journey. The chapter starts with an exploration of "theories of adult learner progression" – how learners move toward higher-level skills for critical analysis and autonomy. The adult LLN programmes featured in the study place the focus on "measuring the distance travelled" throughout the learning journey.

Policies regarding summative assessment and certification vary from country to country. Summative assessments are usually criterion-referenced – measuring learner progress against established standards, rather than against peers. In all countries, learners have the option of taking tests when they are ready, or to re-take a test if necessary. Thus, they are able to improve upon results in a formative way. The summative assessments themselves may rely upon standardised examinations, or may allow programmes to assess learner attainment of individual goals.

Section III: Conclusions

The study identifies seven interrelated principles, which may serve as a broad framework for strengthening policy and practice and for building the evidence base. They are to:

1. *Promote active debate on the nature of teaching, learning and assessment.*
2. *Strengthen professionalism.*
3. *Balance structure and flexibility: formative assessment as a framework.*
4. *Strengthen learner-centred approaches.*

5. *Diversify and deepen approaches to assessment and programme evaluation for accountability.*
6. *Devote the necessary resources: people, time and money.*
7. *Strengthen the knowledge-base.*

Section I
The Context and Conditions
of Adult Foundation Skill Learning

Chapter 1
Inside the Black Box
Language, Literacy and Numeracy Classrooms

This chapter introduces the motivation and methods for the study. The study brings an important focus to effective teaching, learning and assessment processes. With a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the quality of provision and outcomes, policy makers can provide more effective leadership and support. The chapter also describes the overall approach of the study.

The scale of the challenge

Too many adults still fail to acquire even basic skills, with significant effects on their individual lives and on their countries' economic and social well-being. In the majority of the 23 countries participating in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), between 14 and 23% of adults were able to meet only the lowest standards of literacy and numeracy proficiency (Level 1). Among the participating countries, the percentage of adults not meeting this standard ranged from a low of 8% to a high of 43% (OECD and Statistics Canada, 1997). The more recent Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL), which includes six countries and regions, found that between one-third and two-thirds of adult populations do not attain Level 3, the level considered by many as the "suitable minimum" for meeting the demands of daily and work life (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005).

The consequences of low foundation skills span the economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities. Policies targeted to adults with foundation skill needs may therefore bring significant economic and social benefits.

In response to these challenges, countries and regions have made major new investments to improve access and quality in adult foundation skill

programmes for language, literacy and numeracy (LLN). But how well are these programmes working? Much of the burden of meeting these large-scale needs comes down to the quality of provision in programmes and classrooms. For the most part, policies to shape classroom teaching and learning are limited to blunt instruments. The classroom is thus seen as a "black box" – because so much of the activity and interface of teaching, learning and assessment is literally hidden from wider view, beyond the classroom door. It is also apt because policy inputs and structures are often developed without understanding what takes place within classrooms.

Inside the black box: teaching, learning and assessment

This study aims to get inside the black box of adult LLN classrooms in order to better understand the process of learning.[1] With a better understanding not only on *what* works, but also *how* it works, policy makers can develop more effective support for the complex work of teaching, learning and assessment. The ultimate goal, of course, is to improve outcomes for learners.

Our own look into the black box started with a focus on "formative assessment" in adult LLN classrooms. Formative assessment refers to the frequent assessment of learner understanding and progress to identify needs and shape teaching. Formative assessment is sometimes referred to as assessment *for* learning, distinct from assessment *of* learning (tests and examinations). Black *et al*. (2005) propose that:

> *Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning… An assessment activity can help learning if it provides information to be used as feedback, by teachers, and by their students, in assessing themselves and each other, to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Such assessment becomes "formative assessment" when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet learning needs. (Black* et al.*, 2005)*

[1] The use of the term "black box" in reference to classroom practice has also been popularised by formative assessment researchers Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. Their "Inside the Black Box" publications have been enormously influential with compulsory level teachers and policy makers in school education in the United Kingdom.

A similar definition is proposed within the francophone literature, which considers as formative:

> *...all assessment practices which contribute to adjustment of teaching, no matter the setting or the specific approach to individualisation... (Perrenoud, 1988)*

The OECD (2005) further distinguishes the importance of *systematic* practice, where formative assessment is an integrated feature of teaching and learning.

The interest in formative assessment for adult LLN learners follows on very positive results in the compulsory sector. The precursor to the current study, *Formative Assessment: Improving Learning in Secondary Classrooms,* found that, when practiced systematically, formative assessment promotes greater equity of student outcomes, and builds skills for "learning to learn" (OECD, 2005). In their 1998 review of the English-language literature, Black and Wiliam described the achievement gains associated with formative assessment as "among the largest ever reported for educational interventions" (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Other reviews confirm the consistency of effects across ages (school-age and university learners), subjects and countries (see also Brookhart, 2001; Crooks, 1988; and Gibbs and Simpson, 2003 for research on formative assessment in higher education). Yet there have been few efforts, to date, to study the impact or implementation of specific formative assessment approaches and techniques in adult LLN learning contexts (see also Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet).[2]

The research on school-age and university learners of course holds lessons for adult LLN learners. But it is also important to pay attention to the context of adult learning, including differences in adult learners' motivations, and the impact of prior learning experiences. Indeed, one of the conclusions of prior research on formative assessment is that it should be used as a tool to identify the needs of the individual, and tailor learning.

[2] There are efforts to correct the gap in research on formative assessment for adult LLN learners. See, for example, Ecclestone *et al.* (forthcoming) for a description of a two-year project exploring different learning cultures of formative assessment. The project is led by Kathryn Ecclestone, and funded by the National Research and Development Centre, the Nuffield Foundation and the Quality Improvement Agency in the United Kingdom.

It is important to emphasise that formative assessment represents a sea change in how we think not only about assessment, but also teaching and learning:

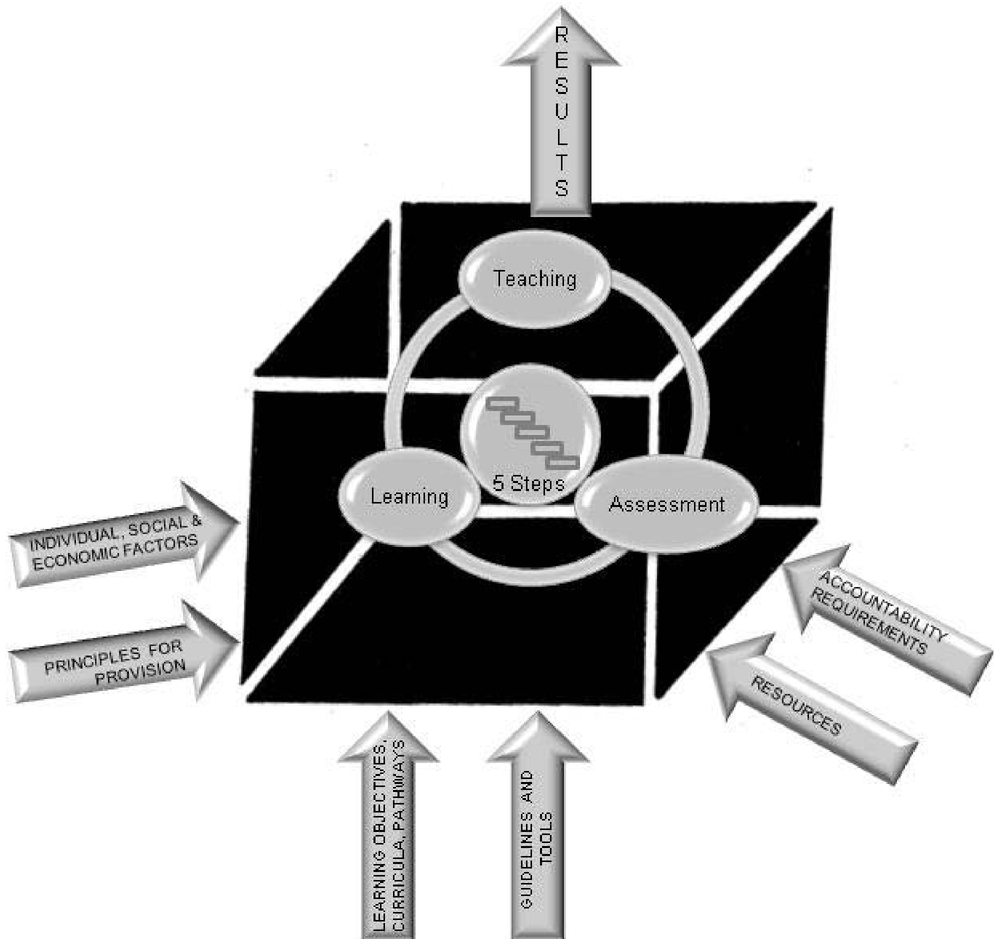
- *The underlying assumption of formative assessment is that each learner can succeed*. Assessment is a means to identify individual needs and tailor teaching. This is a profound change from approaches where assessment is used as a means to identify and promote the most able learners.
- *In classrooms featuring formative assessment, the instructors' primary role is to facilitate the learning process*. This implies that instructors have developed skills for uncovering learning gaps, correctly identifying the source of misconceptions, and offering useful learning tasks and challenges to promote learning. Instructors need strong subject-matter and pedagogical expertise, as well as softer skills, such as empathy.
- *Learners are actively engaged in the learning and assessment process, and developing skills for self- and peer-assessment.* They may also negotiate teaching goals and methods. The focus is on the process of learning as well as on outcomes.

The focus on the individual learner, the shaping of the educational process to draw on the information about how well learners are progressing, and the engagement of learners in the learning process go well beyond techniques of "traditional" student assessment: it is about the whole approach to shaping teaching and learning. In short, formative assessment represents a fundamental shift in classroom relationships, and how instructors and learners work toward successful outcomes.

But what do we know about the impact of different teaching, learning and assessment practices for adult learners? How are innovative programmes addressing the very diverse needs and goals of adults with low foundation skills in language, literacy and numeracy? What can we learn from exemplary practices, and how can we get effective practices to happen on a wider basis? How do policies support or hinder effective practice? This study aims to address these questions by looking more closely into exemplary classroom practices, international research, and the broader policy environment.

Figure 1.1 illustrates our conceptualisation of the classroom as "black box". The arrows pointing toward the black box indicate the mix of policies and individual, social and economic factors that shape teaching, learning and assessment within the classroom.

Figure 1.1. Inside the black box: teaching, learning and assessment



Source: Authors.

The following are among the key policy inputs shaping adult LLN provision in classrooms.

- *Principles for provision*, such as for social justice and learner self-determination, set the tone and direction.
- *Official curricula, key competency definitions, and pathways for progression* are intended to shape the content and progression of learning.

- *Measures for programme accountability* help to ensure that programmes adhere to a certain structure and set of standards.
- *Guidelines and tools for practice, including formative and summative assessment,* support instructors working inside the classroom. Instructors may use formative assessment to tailor teaching to individual needs and goals, and to fully engage learners in the learning process.
- *Resources (financial and human)* support increased programme capacity and professionalisation of the instructional workforce.

These policies are intended to improve the quality of provision and outcomes. However, the different inputs may receive uneven emphasis, or may not be well aligned. Measures for programme accountability may focus on a narrow range of acceptable outcomes, weakening principles of learner self-determination. Similarly, official curricula or key competency definitions may focus on limited objectives, ignoring goals for learner autonomy, and the development of higher-level skills. Instructors may face challenges in balancing more standardised approaches to teaching and assessment with formative assessment and tailoring of provision to meet individual learner needs and goals.

Policies that build on a firm understanding of effective teaching, learning and assessment can better anticipate the kinds of challenges and complexities instructors regularly address. Policy makers can make more effective investments in professional development, in the development of valid and reliable guidelines and tools for assessment (diagnostic, summative and formative), on research to build the evidence-base, and in opportunities for innovation. They can also ensure that specific objectives for learning are effectively aligned with overall objectives for learner progression and autonomy.

The five steps at the centre of Figure 1.1 delineate the process of teaching, learning and assessment identified in the case studies of exemplary practice and reviews of literature developed for this study. The steps are:

1. Diagnosing learning needs and setting goals.
2. Developing relationships within the classroom through dialogue and peer assessment.
3. Using specific formative assessment techniques to uncover and address learning needs – including feedback, questioning and scaffolding.
4. Developing greater learner autonomy.
5. Recognising learner progress.

These five steps are also at the centre of our study, and explored in depth in Section II of the report.

The approach of the study

This study explores the state of the art in this field, drawing upon:

- International research.
- Innovative cases in a range of adult LLN learning settings, where teaching, learning and assessment have been adapted to meet the needs of this population.
- Policies that support or inhibit effective practice.

The research reviews

The international reviews of literature from different linguistic traditions (English, French, German and Spanish) examine the conceptualisation of formative assessment and related teaching strategies in adult LLN education, the breadth and quality of evidence in the field, and what is known about the impact of specific approaches and techniques for different learners.

The four reviews commissioned for this study identified a range of literature, including:

- Guidelines and principles for teaching and learning based on practitioner wisdom and experience.
- Debates on how values and goals for adult LLN learning – such as learner self-determination and autonomy, or democratic learning environments – should shape classroom relationships and approaches.
- Interviews and surveys reflecting learner and instructor views on effective teaching and learning.
- Case studies and classroom observations.
- Evaluations and monitoring of specific assessment tools, including portfolios, recognition of prior learning, ICT programmes.

It is important to note that the existing research in this sector does not include a significant number of controlled studies measuring the impact of specific formative approaches on adult LLN learning. In the compulsory sector, studies demonstrating the impact of formative assessment on achievement have been vital for garnering the support of policy officials as

well as practitioners. The reviewers contributing to this study hypothesised that the absence of research specifically on formative assessment or related approaches for adult LLN learners (including the absence of controlled studies) is the result of several factors, including:

- The compensatory mission of adult LLN education, which is seen as being incompatible with the selection process associated with assessment at the end of the learning process. Researchers pay little attention to the impact of assessment, including *alternative* forms of assessment (Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet; Grotlüschen and Bonna, Annex 3 on the Internet).

- Awareness of the fear and frustration experienced by many low achievers, leading to a certain over-protectiveness, and hesitation in regard to testing and validating innovative methods (Grotlüschen and Bonna, Annex 3 on the Internet).

- The assumption that research from compulsory settings on issues such as motivation and feedback can be easily transferred to the adult LLN setting (Grotlüschen and Bonna, Annex 3 on the Internet). This wholesale adoption of school models developed for school-age learners, our reviewers counter, has stifled research as well as the development of interactive models of teaching and learning for adult LLN learners (Sanz, Annex 3 on the Internet).

- A focus on advocacy. Funding and institutional instability in the adult LLN sector have meant that much of the literature has focused on advocacy, and arguing for the benefits of adult learning (including equity, access, and so on) rather than pedagogy (Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet).

- Limited research on specific pedagogies for adult LLN education within the workplace as well. Instead, this literature has tended to focus on issues such as learners' attitudes, motivation to participate, competencies for work, professional development for instructors, or resistance within the workplace to the development of foundation level training (Daniau and Bélanger, Annex 3 on the Internet).

While much of the research on adult LLN teaching, learning and assessment is descriptive, it is nevertheless important for clarifying concepts and concerns, and providing insights into the nature and quality of interactions in learning settings (something that studies conducted in controlled environments cannot necessarily achieve). It can provide a valuable foundation for future research examining impact of different approaches on learner progression and autonomy.

The case studies

The case studies of exemplary practice in the adult LLN sector were conducted in seven countries, including: Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, England, France, Norway, Scotland and the United States. The exemplary cases, which were are the heart of the research, were chosen according to the following criteria:

- *The programmes were targeted to adults with foundation skill needs.* The cases were drawn from a range of settings (*e.g.*, community centres, work-based programmes, prison-based programmes, and initiatives aimed at non-traditional learners in further or higher education).
- *Instructors used formative assessment as a deliberate strategy for identifying the needs of individual learners and tailoring teaching.* The studies provided examples of interactive assessment of learner progress and understanding, and tailoring of teaching to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners.
- *The programmes provided evidence of "what works".* Key informants shared insights, evidence and indicators of ways in which the formative assessment process has improved teaching and learning, including increased learner self-efficacy, and improved rates of persistence. Case study researchers gathered learner and instructor views on the impact of assessment methods on progress toward learning goals.

By focusing on "what works" (as opposed to what doesn't work – also a valid approach), the case studies highlight how programme leaders and instructors have identified and addressed the challenges of introducing new practices. The exemplary case studies allow a close examination of effective teaching, learning and assessment, including how instructors respond to a variety of learner needs. The study also examines what conditions at programme and policy level have facilitated successful implementation.

The exemplary cases also provide a glimpse into how research and innovation are disseminated within the adult LLN sector. There is a relative dearth of information in this field regarding effective programme and organisational management, networks for professionals, professional development programmes, the development of new training programmes, or tools and support for assessment and instruction.

Country background reports

Nine countries submitted country background reports. They include: Australia, Belgium (Flemish Community), Denmark, England, Norway, New Zealand, Scotland, Spain and the United States. The nine reports provided information on:

- *The nature and scale of challenges facing countries in regard to adult LLN education*, including socio-demographic information, the percentage of individuals identified as having foundation skill needs, and known impact on social and economic development.
- *Any major national or regional programmes or policies developed to meet the needs of adults with low foundation skills,* the principles and goals shaping adult basic skills education, their scope and scale, and any ongoing debates.
- *Profiles of instructors,* including descriptions of instructors' professional status, working conditions, as well as opportunities for training and professional development.
- *Gaps in provision and take-up,* identifying major gaps in provision and barriers to addressing identified needs.
- *Assessment policies/structures,* including information on formal assessment for adults with low foundation skills, qualification examinations, participation and performance targets, and so on.
- *Formative assessment*, including any information on studies, major programme evaluations and/or inspectorate findings regarding the "state of the art" in instruction and formative assessment in adult LLN education. The reports also surveyed promising innovations or research directly informing policy and practice in teaching and formative assessment for adults with foundation skill needs.

A note on terminology

The country background reports have also revealed debates on terminology within the field of adult learning, illustrating an evolution in thinking and approach. The field has moved away from use of the term "basic skills" because it is thought to focus only on technical skills of decoding letters, words and figures, without reference to context or values. Countries now refer to "foundation skills", or "adult language, literacy and numeracy" (both terms are used in this report).

While there is some variation in how countries define "literacy", generally it refers to the ability to read, write, use numbers, interpret information, make decisions, and solve problems in personal, work and community life. Several countries identify "functional" literacies, or competencies, in each of these areas. A "social practices" approach to literacy is based on similar premises, but also pays attention to the context of literacy practices, including the feelings and values that people have about those activities. These distinctions may well be blurred to some extent in practice, as both functional and social practice approaches pay careful attention to the learner's prior knowledge and experience and literacy practices in daily life.

In addition, the term "learner" is often preferred to "student", "programme" to "school", and "instructor", or "tutor" to "teacher", as terms associated with compulsory schooling may conjure up negative images. In Scotland and France, the term "tutor" is preferred to "instructor". The latter is seen as implying a one-directional learning process (that is, the instructor imparting knowledge to the learner).

The knowledge base supporting adult LLN provision is growing rapidly and we will likely see many changes in the field in the coming years. The hope is that this study will provide a strong foundation for understanding the fundamental issues at stake, and can guide future policy, practice and research.

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Chapter 2
Who are the Learners?
Data from International and National Surveys on Adult Foundation Skill Learners

This chapter highlights selected findings from international and national surveys on adult literacy. These data have been important for identifying populations most in need as well as the consequences of low foundation skills. While the data are gathered from a range of sources and are not directly comparable, they do demonstrate important patterns across countries.

The prevalence of low foundation skills: who is over-represented

The causes of low foundation skills are diverse and learners in any given programme usually have a range of learning needs, as well as "spiky" profiles (that is, they may have particular weaknesses in one or more domains, such as language or numeracy, but not necessarily across all domains. Several of the countries participating in this study have conducted national-level surveys to gather more detailed information on the characteristics of adult learners and their skill levels in order to improve outreach and provision. These surveys include:

- The Survey of Adult Literacy (SAL) in Australia, which was initially conducted in 1996, and then again in 2006. The SAL measures literacy at five levels, which are roughly commensurate with the five levels measured in International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1994-1998) and Adult Literacy Life Skills Survey (ALL) (2005).
- The 2003 Skills for Life Survey in England, which draws upon data from the British Market Research Bureau interviews with 8 730 randomly selected adults between the ages of 16 and 65. It

distinguishes five levels of competence corresponding with National Standards for adult literacy and numeracy. These include Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3 (equivalent to primary school levels) and Levels 1 and 2 (equivalent to the different levels of the General Certificate of Secondary Education, or GCSE levels, in England).

- The 2002 Survey on Daily Life in France, conducted by the Institut national de la statistique et des études economiques (INSEE, or National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) and the Agence nationale de lutte contre l'illetrisme (ANLCI, or the National Agency for the Fight Against Illiteracy). The survey draws upon a representative sample of 10 000 adults between the ages of 18 and 65. It includes tests on reading, writing and numeracy, as well as home-based interviews (see *Illetrisme: les chiffres*, ANLCI and INSEE, 2006). In addition, France administers a literacy test for all 17-year-olds, as part of the Journée d'Appel pour la Défense (Recruitment Day for Military Preparation and National Defence).

- Seven different research projects commissioned by the Scottish government following publication of IALS results. The different studies explored the factors associated with low literacy and numeracy skills, skills gaps within the workforce, and employer needs in Scotland.

- The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) in the United States, which was first conducted in 1992, and then again in 2003. It includes measures of prose, document and quantitative literacy at four levels (Below Basic, Basic, Intermediate, and Proficient). The NAAL also includes surveys of adults in federal and state prisons, state level assessments of adult literacy (SAAL), a health literacy component, and other specific literacy assessments (NCES, 2006a; 2006b; 2007a; and 2007b).

- The 2005 National Qualifications Survey in Denmark provides data on lifelong improvement of qualifications and participation in education for those in the labour market (Danish Ministry of Finance, 2006).

Across countries, survey results show that adults with low foundation skills are overrepresented among:

- Minority populations.

- Immigrants and speakers of other languages (that is, other than the majority language).

- Those with low levels of education, including early school leavers.
- Older learners.
- Individuals with disabilities.
- The unemployed or those having low incomes.
- Prison-based populations.
- Individuals living in socially excluded areas (urban or rural).

Some surveys also identify gender-based differences in performance in the different literacy domains.

Selected findings from these different surveys are described below. This discussion is followed by brief overview of some of the known impacts of low foundation skills on individuals and communities, and findings from research on participation of foundation skill learners in lifelong learning opportunities.

Minority populations

Surveys conducted in Australia, New Zealand and the United States revealed an overrepresentation of adults from minority populations, including indigenous groups, at the lowest literacy levels. In the United States, for example, the 2003 NAAL survey identified 7% of Whites as having Below Basic prose literacy skills, as compared with 24% of Black, 44% of Hispanic and 14% of Asian/Pacific Islander respondents. The survey identified 25% of White respondents at the Basic prose literacy level, as compared to 43% of Black, 30% of Hispanic, and 32% of Asian/Pacific Islander respondents (NCES, 2006a) (see also Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997, 1999; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2004).

Immigrant non-native speakers

Surveys also show an overrepresentation of immigrant adults in the lower skill categories in several countries, although the pattern varies. Analysis of the 2005 ALL survey results shows that even those who have earned education credentials in another country may not perform at functional levels of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in the host country. This is more likely to be the case if the credentials were obtained in a language other than that of the host country.

At the beginning of 2005, one in three immigrants to Norway had lived in Norway for less than five years. These recent immigrants, on average, had

lower scores than established immigrants. ALL survey results for Norway found that within the immigrant population, 69% are at risk (Level 1 on at least one of the literacy tests), as compared to 12% of the total adult population (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Vox/Norwegian Institute for Adult Education, 2008).

By contrast, the French Survey on Daily Life (ANLCI and INSEE, 2006) found that 74% of adults identified as having low basic skills speak only French at home from the age of 5 years on (although this may include immigrants from francophone countries). Spain reports that the average age in the immigrant population is younger than in the general Spanish population, and new immigrants may have higher levels of education than the average Spaniard, due, in part, to uneven training opportunities across the generations in Spain (Planas and Montoriol, 2008).

Low levels of education, including early school leavers

Those with low levels of education, including early school leavers, are a significant percentage of the foundation skill population across countries.

- In Flanders, 73% of those performing at the lowest levels in at least one of the IALS domains had not completed upper secondary school. More than 1 in 10 Flemish students leaves school without a qualification (in Belgium, students attend compulsory schooling to the age of 18) (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).
- In the United States, the 2003 NAAL found that adults who had not completed upper secondary school had the lowest level literacy skills as compared to adults at all other educational levels across all three scales – prose, document, and quantitative (NCES, 2007a).
- In Denmark, almost a third of early school leavers (those without any education beyond 9th or 10th grade of the Danish *Folkeskole*) have poor reading, writing and mathematics skills. Of these, 24% never use reading, writing or numeracy skills in connection with their work (Danish Ministry of Finance, 2006).
- In Spain, the picture is slightly more complicated as initial levels of compulsory education increased from four to eight years as recently as 1970. Nevertheless, the percentage of early school leavers is still high; between 25 and 30% of Spanish adults have not completed secondary school (Planas and Montoriol, 2008).

Even those who have completed secondary school may find that they do not have adequate foundation skills. For example, Foley and Cavallaro (2007) point out that in Australia, an increasing number of school leavers are participating in LLN programmes. In Flanders, 22% of adults performing at the lowest level in at least one of the IALS domains have completed upper secondary education, and 4% have completed tertiary education. Norway, reporting on ALL findings, notes that some adults with higher education score below Level 3.

Older learners (use it or lose it)

Several of the country-based surveys found a larger proportion of those with low foundation skills were in older age groups. In Flanders, the IALS found that about 75% of adults with low foundation skill levels were 35 years or older (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008). The French Survey on Daily Life found that half of adults with low foundation skills were 45 years or older (ANLCI and INSEE, 2006). The 2003 US NAAL survey found adults 65 and older had the lowest average prose, document and quantitative literacy scores of any age group. However, average scores for this group, as well as for the next oldest age group (50 to 64), increased between 1992 and 2003 (NCES, 2007a).

By contrast, the English Skills for Life Survey did not identify age as a strong factor in performance on either literacy or numeracy tests. The survey did find, however, that the youngest (16-24-year-olds) and oldest (55-65-year-olds) respondents performed at a slightly lower level than those in other age groups – particularly in numeracy. For example, only 26% of men aged 16-24 reached Level 2 or above in the numeracy assessment, as compared to 37% of men aged between the ages of 25 and 34 (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

Some research shows a negative association between age and cognitive skills such as reasoning, working memory capacity, spatial ability, and so on (Smith and Marsiske, 1997). But there is also evidence suggesting that cognitive performance may be enhanced through accumulation of knowledge and skills until an advanced age (known as the "practice effect") (Horn and Hofer, 1992; Schaie, 1994; Marsiske and Smith, 1998 cited in OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005).

Individuals with disabilities

Data from the United States and Australia show that adults with low foundation skills are more likely to have a disability. For example, the US NAAL Survey found that 6% of adults reported they had been diagnosed or

identified as having a learning disability. Of those adults, 24% had Below Basic prose and Below Basic document skills. Thirty-eight per cent of adults with learning disabilities had Below Basic quantitative skills. These figures compare to 13% of adults without a learning disability, who scored at the Below Basic level on the prose scale, 12% at Below Basic on the document scale, and 20% at Below Basic on the quantitative scale (NCES, 2007a).

Australia reports a disproportionate number of low foundation skill learners have a disability (physical, mental, learning). In 2004, 11.7% of adult LLN learners in vocational education and training (VET) programmes, and 4.1% of adults participating in LLN distance learning reported having a disability (Australian Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004; Foley and Cavallaro, 2007; NCES, 2007a).

In general, however, international and national surveys do not provide detailed information on disabilities and skill levels. The existing information points to a need for more thorough investigation of these factors.

Employment and income status

Adults with low foundation skills are also more likely to have a lower socio-economic status and to be unemployed. In England, adults living in households in social class 1 (professional status) were approximately four times more likely as those in social class V (unskilled status) to reach Level 2 or above on the Skills for Life literacy test (67% compared to 16%). More than one third of those in the unskilled class were classified at Entry Level 3 or below (12% were classified at Entry Level 1 or below). England reports similar outcomes for the numeracy test (DfES, 2003). Flanders reports unemployment rates of 17.7% among low skilled adults – twice as high as for adults with medium to high skills (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).

Prison-based populations

The US NAAL includes a survey of adult prison populations. The 2003 survey found small differences in the percentages of incarcerated adults and adults living in households scoring at the Below Basic level in prose and document literacy. For example, 16% of incarcerated adults scored Below Basic in prose literacy and 15% in document literacy compared with 14 and 12%, respectively, of adults living in households. Greater differences were found at the Below Basic level in quantitative literacy (39% of the incarcerated population as compared to 22% of adults living in households), and at the Basic level in prose and document literacy

(respectively, 40% and 35% of incarcerated adults as compared with 29% and 22% of adults living in households) (NCES, 2007b).

A 2004-05 survey of the prison population in France found that 51% of respondents did not have a diploma, 55% did not have any professional qualification, and 53% were unemployed or out of the labour market at the time of their incarceration. The survey also found that 12% had left school at the primary level, 5% had been in special education, and 5.9% had severely low levels of literacy while nearly another 12% had reading difficulties (Ministère de la Justice, 1997).

In Norway, a 2005 Government White Paper on education and training in the correctional services (Report to the Storting, No. 27, 2004-5) found that 7.6% of inmates had not completed primary or lower secondary education, and 49% had not completed upper secondary education. England reports that the majority of those who break the law repeatedly have very low foundation skills (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2005). Similarly, Australia reports an over-representation of low foundation skills among prisoners (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

Socially excluded areas

Countries report that adults who live in socially excluded areas (urban or rural) are at a particular disadvantage. For example, in Scotland, a third of adults who live in socially excluded areas have low literacy and numeracy skills, and are six times more likely to be unemployed (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008). In England, adults in the more disadvantaged Northeast tend to perform at a lower level than those in the less disadvantaged Southeast area. Ten per cent of adults with low LLN skills in England live in distressed urban areas (DfES, 2003). France reports that 50% of adults with low LLN skills live in rural or low populated areas. Similarly, in New Zealand, there are concentrations of adults with low foundation skills in some rural areas (the far North and eastern North Island), as well as in the Auckland metropolitan area (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2004; Workbase, 1998).

In Australia, many Indigenous Australians living in remote areas may speak English as a second, third or fourth language. Many adults in this region have not have had adequate access to schooling, and there may also be a lack of skilled literacy practitioners in these rural areas. Other adults living in remote areas may have not reached functional literacy standards equivalent to year 10 (Kral and Falk, 2004; Misko, 2008).

Gender

International and country-level surveys show small differences in performance between men and women. The IALS (1994-98) finds that where differences are statistically significant, they tend to be in favour of men for quantitative and document literacy, and in favour of women for prose literacy (cited in OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005).

Based on findings from recent surveys, Australia (except for women between 55 and 74 years of age) and Flanders, report that women have lower average literacy than men (women also have lower levels of initial education), and men perform better on quantitative tests. In the United States, women have higher average prose and document literacy than men, and men have higher average quantitative literacy than women (Misko, 2008; Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008; NCES, 2007a).

Similarly, in England, men and women have similar levels of literacy, but men appeared to have higher levels of numeracy (this was the case across levels of educational attainment as well as employment status). Thirty-two per cent of men performed at Level 2 or above in the numeracy assessment of the Skills for Life Survey, compared to 19% of women (DfES, 2003).

Combined factors

Several countries report that a combination of factors may explain variances in skill levels. In Flanders, IALS data show that levels of education, home language, age, and whether or not the respondent reported reading at home together, explain 43% of the variance in literacy proficiency (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008). Spain notes that levels of education are related to both age and gender (Planas and Montoriol, 2008). In Scotland, the three most important factors associated with low literacy and numeracy skills are having left education at age 16 or earlier, being on a low income, and being in a manual social class group (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008). In France, of the 3.1 million individuals with low levels of literacy, half are more than 45 years old, half are employed, and more than 30% live in rural areas, and 10% in distressed urban areas (ANLCI sand INSEE, 2006).

Further international research

Further international and national surveys will provide important longitudinal data on adult skill gains and skill loss. Among these is the new

OECD Programme for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies (PIAAC), now in the design phase. PIAAC aims to identify and measure differences between individuals and countries in competencies considered as important to personal and societal success; the impact of these competencies on social and economic outcomes; the performance of education and training systems in promoting required competencies; and the policy levers that could contribute to enhanced competencies.

Box 2.1. The economic impact of low foundation skills: selected results from the 2005 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL)

The first Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005) measures adults' prose, document, numeracy and problem-solving skills across five broad levels of proficiency. ALL denotes Level 3 as the suitable minimum for managing the demands of work and daily life. Data for the survey were gathered in Bermuda, Canada, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United States and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon. The survey examines the impact of low skills on civic engagement, health and economic participation.

Employment/unemployment

- Individuals who score at Levels 1 and 2 (the lower end of the scale) in the numeracy domain are two to three times more likely to be outside the labour force for six or more months than those with higher scores.

- For young adults, proficiency in document literacy and numeracy is strongly associated with finding employment; young adults scoring at Levels 1 and 2 have a lower chance of exiting unemployment and tend to be unemployed for longer periods of time.

Education and skill levels and skill loss/skill maintenance

- In all of the ALL survey countries, higher levels of educational attainment are associated with higher average scores on the survey test; early school leavers are the most likely to score at Levels 1 or 2.

- "Practice engagement" (learning by doing, or informal learning) tends to have a significant relation to skills, even after taking initial schooling into account.

- ICT increases the productivity of capital and labour and drives inequality in wages. Efforts to help individuals to develop ICT skills must first address shortcomings in literacy and numeracy.

Box 2.1. The economic impact of low foundation skills: selected results from the 2005 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) (*continued*)

Immigration status/language

- In all of the survey countries, more immigrants whose mother tongue is different than the language of the test scored at Levels 1 and 2.
- In all of the survey countries, recent immigrants are more likely to have completed higher education. Education credentials, however, do not necessarily translate into functional levels of literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills in the official language(s) of the host country, particularly when the credentials were earned in another country.

Social transfers/savings

- ALL data indicate that adults in several of the participating countries who score at Levels 1 and 2 on the numeracy scale are more likely to receive social assistance.
- Individuals with higher skill levels are more likely to have investment income. More schooling is also associated with having more savings.

The impact of low foundation skills

Low foundation skills affect the economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities. Adults with low LLN skills are more likely to be unemployed and to earn less over their lifetimes. An emerging body of evidence indicates a causal relationship between years of education and voter registration, voting and some other forms of civic participation (Feinstein *et al.,* 2006).

In the United States, US NAAL data show differences of at least 79 points between the average prose document and quantitative scores of adults with annual incomes of less than USD 10 000 and adults with incomes greater than USD 100 000. In addition, the NAAL found that adults who were employed full-time had average prose scores 16 points higher than unemployed adults, and 30 points higher than adults not in the labour force. Comparable differences were found on the document and quantitative scales (NCES 2006a). US NAAL data found that 35% of adults with Below Basic prose literacy and 34% with Below Basic document literacy reported

that their reading skills limited their job opportunities "a lot" (NCES, 2006a).

Denmark reports that on average, early school leavers will earn 15% less over their lifetimes than those with more education, and are at greater risk of being in a marginal position in the labour market. Women and immigrant adults are at greatest risk. In total, 33% of early school leavers in Denmark do not participate in the labour market[1] (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008). In Flanders, adults with low literacy skills are twice as likely to be unemployed, and are more likely to be in the group of long-term unemployed. Sixty-three per cent of those who have been out of a job for two years or more do not have a secondary school certificate (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).

In England, while both literacy and numeracy skills are associated with good wages, survey data show that numeracy skills may be particularly important. The Skills for Life Survey (2003) found that while those with good numeracy skills (Level 2 or above) earned an average of GBP 20 000 a year before tax, those with poor numeracy skills (Entry Level 3 or lower) on average, earned approximately GBP 8 000 less per year (DfES, 2003).

Low literacy is also correlated with poor health and shorter life expectancy. For example, approximately 49% of adults who had never attended or had not completed secondary school in the United States had Below Basic health literacy, as compared to 14% of those who had attained a secondary school certificate, and 3% of those with a 4-year university degree (NCES, 2006b). In Flanders, adults with more years of education report healthier life styles (*e.g.*, fewer heavy smokers, and fewer women who had not had a cervix smear within the past three years) (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).

A UK study analysing data from 30-year-olds born in 1958 found that 36% of women and 18% of men with very low literacy skills suffered from depression as compared to 7% of women and 6% of men with good literacy skills. Eighteen per cent of women and 11% of men with low numeracy skills suffered from depression, as compared to 5% of women and men with good numeracy skills (Bynner and Parsons, 2005).

These statistics point to significant costs for medical systems. The American Medical Association has found that adults with lower levels of literacy incur medical expenses up to four times those of adults with adequate literacy skills, costing the system billions of dollars per year (National Institute for Literacy, 2008).

[1] The 2005 National Qualifications Survey, Chapter 18: "Early school leavers", p. 235.

Individuals with low foundation skills are also more likely to have poor "social health". In Flanders, individuals with lower levels of education report having less frequent social contacts, and a negative perception regarding the availability and quality of support, as compared to those with higher levels of education. Adults with lower levels of education are also less likely to participate in community activities (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).

The National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy in England notes that numeracy has a stronger relationship than literacy with a range of social engagement attributes: not voting, lack of political interest and not being a member of a voluntary or community organisation. Women with poor numeracy skills appear to be exceptionally disadvantaged. Such women tend to be out of the labour market in full-time home caring roles; to live in a non-working household; not to vote nor have any expressed political interest; to be in poor physical heath; to be depressed; and to feel they lack control over their lives (NRDC, 2008).

Persistence of low literacy and intergenerational impacts

Results from OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures skills of 15-year-olds in OECD and partner countries, suggest that the problem of low skills is likely to persist in many countries as young adults performing at the low end of the PISA scale (Levels 1 and 2 in the domains of reading, mathematics and science) leave compulsory schooling. According to PISA 2000, which focuses on reading skills, between 10 and 44% of 15-year-old learners in OECD countries perform at or below Level 1 on the PISA scale (with the exception of Finland and Korea[2]) (OECD, 2001b). PISA 2003 found that across different mathematical domains, from 10 to 13% of students perform at or below Level 1 (OECD, 2004b).

PISA results from 2000 and 2003 confirm previous research identifying parental education as a significant indicator of student performance. In all OECD countries, mean scores for reading, mathematical and scientific literacy are, on average, about 45 points lower for students whose mothers had not completed upper secondary education (OECD, 2001b).

Results from the 2003 PISA show that, in the majority of countries, at least 25% of immigrant students do not demonstrate basic mathematics proficiency they will need in their work and personal lives (OECD, 2004b).

[2] In Finland and Korea, around 5% of learners perform at Level 1, and fewer than 2 % below that level.

However, a separate analysis of PISA data in 17 OECD countries with large immigrant populations found that there are significant international differences in how well immigrant students perform across the PISA domains (OECD, 2006).

The UK 1970 Birth Cohort Study (BCS70) finds moderate correlations between parents' and children's literacy and numeracy skills. The correlations were the strongest for children whose parents' literacy was at Entry Level 2 or 3. The study finds that children's basic skills acquisition is highly fluid in the early years, but there is a "strengthening component" that can be attributed to parents' skill levels (NRDC, 2008). In Flanders, data show that young adults whose mothers had not completed upper secondary education are 5.5 times more likely to fail in obtaining a certificate of upper secondary education than students whose mothers had completed secondary education (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).

The NRDC reports that respondents with low levels of literacy or numeracy tend to watch more TV and to have fewer books (NRDC, 2008). These findings are consistent with PISA data from 2000 and 2003, identifying a significant positive relationship between problem-solving performance of young learners, and possessions related to "classical" culture – such as classical literature, poetry and works of art – in a student's family (OECD, 2001b, 2004b).

Impact on economies and firms

Several studies identify adult learning as having a strong positive impact on the overall productivity and innovation of economies, as well as the employment chances of individuals (OECD, 2001a; OECD, 2004a; Ok and Tergeist, 2003). Coulombe, Tremblay and Marchand (2004) have found that raising overall foundation skill levels can have a larger impact on economic growth than investments in further skill-improvement for high-skilled adults (cited in OECD, 2005).

Workplaces are also likely to demand increasingly sophisticated language, literacy, and numeracy skills. The major drivers of change include new legislation related to the occupational health and safety of workers, rapid changes in technology, and supply chain requirements. In addition, workers increasingly need skills to work in team environments (for example, see Misko, 2008).

An employers' survey in Scotland echoes these findings. Nearly a third of the employers surveyed reported increasing demands on employees' literacy and numeracy in the previous five years; nearly a third expected

increasing skills demands in the following five years; and, a fifth reported that employees' poor or moderate skills had been a barrier to productivity (MORI, 2000a).

Patterns of participation

Many of the countries participating in this study experience the "Matthew-effect"[3] that is, those with higher levels of education are most likely to receive further training while those with skill deficits are more likely to be excluded from it (Planas and Rifà, 2003). Moreover, those with higher level skills have more opportunities to engage in informal learning at work, while those with low skills have only limited opportunities to use literacy and numeracy in the workplace. The 2005 National Qualifications Survey in Denmark found that just under half of early school leavers work in jobs where they are not required to do any reading or writing; these individuals may therefore have less incentive to participate in learning opportunities (Danish Ministry of Finance, 2006).

A number of factors may prevent adults with low foundation skills from joining or persisting in formal educational programmes. Lack of self-efficacy[4] and prior negative experiences with schooling are major factors. Another significant factor is that adults with foundation skill needs may not identify their skill deficits as a problem. The English Skills for Life Survey found that very few people regarded literacy and numeracy skills as below average. Over half (54%) of those with Entry Level 1 or lower literacy said their everyday reading ability was very or fairly good; two thirds (67%) of those with Entry Level 1 or lower level numeracy felt that they were very or fairly good at number work; 2% felt their weak skills had hindered their job prospects or led to mistakes at work (DfES, 2003). A Workforce Survey in Scotland found that those who are out of work are more likely to rate their skills as poor or moderate than those in work. Moreover, two-fifths of unemployed workers were unclear about the skills they needed for the job of their choice (MORI, 2000b).

Patterns of participation also vary according to context and location. In New Zealand, for example, those participating in workplace learning are

[3] The term "Mathew Effect" is a reference to the Gospel of Matthew "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath". (Matthew XXV: 29, King James Bible).

[4] Comings, Parella and Soricone (2000) note that "self-efficacy" is focused on the ability to accomplish a specific set of tasks, while "self-confidence", might be described as a global feeling of being able to accomplish most tasks.

predominantly male, while those in community-based programmes are predominantly female. While Pacific Island learners are under-represented in LLN provision overall, they are proportionally over-represented in workplace programmes. Participation may also be low in rural areas and small towns, even though need is high (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

For some learners, participation is obligatory. For example, the Introduction Act in Norway, as amended in 2005, states that non-EU immigrants receiving their residence permit after 1 September 2005[5] (and who intend to apply for permanent resident status and later, for citizenship) have both a "right and an obligation" to participate in Norwegian language and social studies courses. These individuals are required to participate in 250 hours of language training, and 50 hours of social studies taught in a language they can understand. Learners may apply for up to 2 700 additional hours of class-time (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Vox/Norwegian Institute for Adult Education, 2008).

Another major challenge in this sector is helping learners to persist. Many learners who are trying out new programmes may stay only a short time. In the United States, mean attendance for adult learners was found to be between 80 and 100 hours (Educational Testing Service, 2007). New Zealand reports that many learners in foundation skills programmes participate in short courses and receive less than 100 hours of instruction per year, although funding guidelines for specialist funds now favour programmes of sufficient intensity to ensure learner gain (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

Concluding remarks

International and national surveys have been invaluable for gaining a better understanding of adults' skill levels and the prevalence of those with foundation skill needs. Ongoing surveys will provide important longitudinal data. Studies on the impact of low foundation skills on individuals, families, communities and economies underscore the urgency of addressing needs.

The remainder of this study complements these macro-level findings with a focus on meso- and micro-level strategies for improving learning and outcomes. It is through these strategies that communities can begin to address larger-scale challenges.

[5] Immigrants and refugees granted a residence permit prior to 1 September 2005 are required to participate in Norwegian language training over a transitional period of 5 years. Since 1 September 2007, asylum seekers have also received 250 hours of Norwegian training. The courses are free for these groups. EU citizens are exempt from these requirements.

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Chapter 3
Aligning Policy and Practice

This chapter draws upon the country background reports prepared for this study to describe the current policy context for teaching, learning and assessment in adult LLN programmes. While it does not provide a full summary of policy developments in this field, the policies discussed here are nevertheless illustrative of the different approaches that set the content and context for teaching, learning and assessment in adult foundation-skill programmes.

The context of adult LLN provision

Adult language, literacy and numeracy provision has traditionally been set apart from mainstream education at the compulsory and university levels. Provision has been largely independent of policy oversight. At the same time, the sector has suffered from underinvestment and little attention to its effectiveness.[1]

A number of elements have distinguished the development of adult LLN provision. These include:

- *The voluntary nature of most programmes* and the consequent need to build on each learner's motivations for starting and staying with a learning programme.

[1] While the chapter provides a broad overview of policy developments in this field, it is necessarily incomplete as a full summary. For example, the does not explore regulations that govern programme administration in any detail, and touches only briefly on discussion of the resource base within this field. These issues are explored in greater depth in prior OECD studies, including *Beyond Rhetoric* (OECD, 2003), and *Promoting Adult Learning* (OECD, 2005a).

- *The diversity of learner backgrounds, experiences and learning needs,* implying the need for instructors to individualise, or tailor teaching. While all sectors of education serve diverse learners, adult LLN classrooms often include learners in a wider age-range, with different life histories, often a wide range of linguistic capabilities (2nd and 3rd languages), idiosyncratic goals and motivations for learning. Adult learners also tend to have "spiky" profiles (that is, particular weakenesses in one or more domains, such as language or numeracy, but not necessarily across all domains).

- *The compensatory mission of adult LLN provision*, where education is seen as a chance to level the playing field, and to provide social justice for adults who may not have been well-served by education systems in the past. There is a strong focus on ensuring that that all learners are helped to succeed.

- *A strong sensitivity within the adult LLN sector toward ensuring that provision is not tied too closely to the economic needs of government and businesses.* The primary goal in this sector is to engage (or re-engage) learners in learning. Learners should therefore be allowed the freedom to define their own goals, whether tied to certification for employment and/or further education, or not. Learning should be an enjoyable experience.

These features have influenced the development of learner-centred approaches, emphasising flexibility of programme delivery as well as tailoring of content to meet individual needs.

In the last decade, as the scale of need and impact of low foundation skills on individuals, communities and economies have become apparent, countries have developed a range of new policies to improve access, learner progression and outcomes, while preserving a focus on individual needs.

Balancing content and accountability requirements with learner-centred provision

To some extent, adult LLN policies preserve and promote the elements of learner-centred provision that are the tradition in this sector. In the last decade countries have also introduced new pathways for progression, key competencies, curricula and accountability requirements. The aim is to ensure the quality of provision and outcomes while meeting diverse needs and goals. But critics charge that the newer, more standardised approaches often define learning objectives and outcomes too narrowly, undermining goals to develop learner's higher-level skills and autonomy.

Our own view is that tensions between individualised, learner-centred approaches and more standardised systems are not inevitable. Policies that maintain the focus on the overall goals for learner development and autonomy, and that also provide flexible tools, guidelines and training to support instructors working "inside the black box" of the classroom can help to counteract these concerns. A clear policy focus on formative assessment as a means to fully engage learners in the process of learning may also counteract narrowly defined learning objectives and standardised summative assessments that discourage independent thinking and self-direction.

The following discussion outlines how different systems attempt to balance these different policy priorities. The discussion is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on:

- Policies setting out the principles of learner-centred provision and establishing it as a priority.
- Pathways for learner progression, official curricula and key competencies.
- Guidelines and tools to support and provide structure for teaching, learning and assessment.
- Alternative approaches to certification and summative assessment.
- Resources.

[A separate chapter is devoted to the subject of human resources – that is, the instructional workforce (see Chapter 4).]

The second part of the discussion centres on how countries hold programmes accountable for results. Accountability is a particularly challenging area for adult LLN. The task of gathering outcome information is made more difficult by the fact that learners have idiosyncratic goals and may participate in programmes for limited or non-continuous periods of time. In addition, key stakeholders, including community advocates, instructors, programme leaders, policy officials, employers and learners may have very different views of what counts as success, and how to measure it.

Policies setting out principles for learner-centred provision and establishing it as a priority

Several countries set out learner-centred provision as a high-visibility priority for adult LLN programmes. These policies are important for communicating values and goals for provision. They are also important for encouraging debate and reflection on how best to address learner needs.

In Scotland, the Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum Framework places an explicit focus on learner self-determination, and the use of formative assessment to tailor learning and meet diverse needs. "Self-determination" is defined as "learners developing confidence by reflecting on and assessing their own progress" (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2005, p. 27). Ongoing goal setting and self-assessment are seen as central to effective teaching. Within this framework, assessment is based on progress toward individual goals, application of new skills and knowledge without reference to the instructor, as well as transfer of learning to new situations in daily life.

In England, adult LLN provision is part of a larger agenda for the "personalisation" of learning. This approach to programme delivery is based on the belief that a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not suit the needs of individual learners or of the knowledge society (OECD, 2006). The report *Fresh Start* (also known as the Moser report) (Moser, 1999), which established the foundations for the current Skills for Life strategy, was supportive of formative assessment for tailoring learning to the needs of individual learners. It was also seen as an element of quality improvement. However, the government has not had any formal policy on formative assessment. The revised national strategy *Focus on Delivery to 2007* (DfES, 2003) provides a higher profile to formative assessment practices.

Spain promotes the concept of "autonomous learning". Autonomous learning was originally introduced in the 1990 *Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE, or in translation, the Law on the General Ordering of the Educational System). Learners are to be responsible for their own learning process; instructors provide support and guidance.

The 2006 *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (LOE, or the Organic Law on Education) provides additional guidance, stating that the organisation and methodology of adult education should be based upon the individual learner's experiences, needs and interests. The first step is to carry out an initial assessment of the learner – a *Valoración Inicial del Alumnado* (VIA) – which may also be used also to recognise informally acquired knowledge. The LOE and LOGSE serve as framework laws, establishing general principles to be further developed by each Autonomous Community.

Learners may also be more involved in setting the agenda not only as to what they will learn, but how. In Denmark, the Ministry of Education policy for preparatory adult education (FVU) states that strategies and working methods are to be adapted based on ongoing assessment of learner needs and progress. Instructors and learners jointly organise the plan for teaching and learning of reading and mathematics. This includes the choice of topics and

educational material, which is to be based on the learner's experience and interests.

Countries acknowledge that there is a need for further customisation of training that recognises the cultural sensitivities and obligations of diverse learners. For example, in Australia, the Adult Migrant English Programme offers a Special Preparatory Programme for refugee learners who have entered the country on humanitarian grounds, and have special needs arising from their pre-migration experiences (for example, torture, trauma, and limited or no prior schooling) (Misko, 2008).

Pathways for progression

Pathways for progression are intended to facilitate learner advancement through systems. They are learner-centred in that learners can design their own pathways, choosing among different modules, bridging academic and vocational programmes, and so on. Goals for learning at each step of the process may be tied to official competency definitions.

New pathways have created greater coherence and transparency in systems. But for several systems, it is difficult to assess the degree to which the new pathways truly facilitate learner progress. This is partly due to the lack of good outcome data – particularly over the longer-term (discussed in more detail in the subsequent section on accountability). But there is also a need for closer evaluation as to whether and how these pathways build learners' higher-level skills and capacity for independent judgement. In many cases, the knowledge and skills developed in individual modules and courses are taught as discrete elements. Learners do not necessarily have the chance to build their understanding of how these discrete elements fit into a larger, more complex sets of competencies.

While new pathways may be subject to some level of criticism, it is nevertheless important to recognise that systems have made important strides in defining new learning trajectories. Systems have also made progress toward building better bridges between foundation and higher-level studies (vocational, academic, other adult education).

The Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) sets out qualifications at 12 levels, ranging from access learning (Level 1) and core skills (Level 2) to doctorates (Level 12). The complexity and depth of knowledge, understanding, range of application and independence increase at each level. Official curricula provide frameworks for teaching and learning, but instructors should guide the teaching and learning process in LLN programmes (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008).

New Zealand has developed draft standards for literacy, language and numeracy competencies, which draw heavily on the OECD DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) (OECD, 2005b) and the American Equipped for the Future (EFF) standards (see *http://eff.cls.utk.edu/* for more on the EFF). The aim is to create a shared understanding among government, programme providers, learners and employers of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to participate in society (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

In Denmark, there are five general programmes for adult LLN (including primary and secondary levels and language and other training for immigrant learners, and special courses for adults with dyslexia).[2] These five programmes are complementary and, although the educational levels are different, to some extent, overlapping (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008).

Modular systems in both Flanders and Denmark allow learners to navigate across academic as well as vocational courses. Flanders' system incorporates standardised goals and key competencies to help facilitate learners' progress from foundation learning to vocational training. Basic courses aim to build learners' social autonomy, but higher-level courses are oriented toward work-related initiatives or further learning. Learners are assessed not only on cognitive accomplishments, but also on their attitudes and skills, requiring greater attention to how learners engage in the learning process itself (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008; Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008). The Danish government is also promoting active co-operation between providers of adult education and workplace organisations so that it will be easier to tailor pathways for progression for individual learners across the two sectors (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008).

Australia has developed pathways for learners in different foundation skill programmes to move to employment (full-time, part-time or casual) and/or further education. Learners participating in the New Apprenticeship Access Programme may also move into apprenticeship programmes (Misko, 2008).

The United States does not define pathways for progression in the same way as other countries participating in this study, although there is strong emphasis on certification, and/or preparing learners for work and further education. Learners may participate in preparatory instruction in reading, writing and mathematics or begin studying for the General Educational

[2] Danish for immigrant learners is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Integration; all other programmes are under the Ministry of Education.

Development (GED) test, a high school diploma or high school equivalence (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet). Increasingly, the GED is seen not only as an end in itself, but also as a stepping stone toward enrolment in two or four-year college programmes (Reder, 2007). (See the country background report submitted by National Institute for Literacy [2008] for a more detailed discussion of instructional levels in adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English as a Second Language [*www.oecd.org/edu/whatworks*]).

Systems may also consider whether and how they can better support learners who have discontinued formal learning for a period of time, but are engaged in self-study as part of their individual "pathway". Comings (2007) suggests that programmes develop individual learning plans for learners to engage in self-study when they must discontinue formal instruction. When the learner is ready to return to provision, an instructor can track his or her independent progress and start instruction at that point. Programmes might also develop procedures to stay in contact with learners when they are not attending classes regularly, and encourage them to re-engage with the programme when they are ready. Comings proposes that policy makers could support this approach through performance measures that examine whether programmes provide "persistence support".

Guidelines and tools

Guidelines and tools provide direct support for instructors working in classrooms ("inside the black box"). They may include diagnostic assessments, curriculum guidelines, individual learning plans, learner portfolios, checklists, logbooks, and so on. Well-designed guidelines and tools help instructors to be more systematic in identifying and responding to learner needs, but may also be adapted to individual and local circumstances. Guidelines and tools that are aligned with clear principles and goals also help instructors to balance official curriculum requirements and learning objectives with individual learner goals.

The Scottish Executive makes a number of guidelines and tools available to instructors as they put the principles of learner self-determination into practice. The *Curriculum Framework for Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland* (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2005) sets out the key principles for teaching, learning and assessment in adult LLN, and provides a toolkit with case studies and examples. The curriculum framework does not include pre-set objectives for learning. Rather, learners and instructors negotiate goals for learning as part of an individual learning plan. There is a clear focus on formative assessment as learners and instructors track progress toward individual goals. Instructors

are to relate learners' work to the different performance levels set out in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. Policy officials in Scotland acknowledge that this approach places heavy demands on instructors. On the other hand, programmes have a great deal of flexibility for tailoring learning to meet individual and local needs (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008).

Two Spanish communities – Aragon and the Canary Islands – have built upon the principle of autonomous learning as set out in national law, developing explicit strategies promoting formative assessment. In Aragon, the regional policy notes that assessment should be an integrated part of the training process, providing the opportunity for learners to express opinions and make decisions. In addition, assessment is to be used to "… diagnose, orient, regulate, re-elaborate and build up knowledge and attitudes throughout the teaching-learning process" (Law 16/2002 of June 28, Aragon). In the Canary Islands, the regional policy requires that assessment "…be formative, continuous and integrating…of a process-like nature" (Order 1998/114, of September 7, 1998. The Canary Islands) (Planas and Montoriol, 2008).

New Zealand is in the process of revamping adult foundation learning. Draft Foundation Learning Quality Assurance (FLQA) requirements for adult LLN have been piloted and are being implemented. In general, the FLQA are intended to shift the focus from programme management to the needs of individual learners. They include a range of tools for formative assessment linked to learning progression, and adaptation of learning plans based on those assessments. The FLQA recommend that assessment tools be "suitable for, and integrated with, the adult learners' experiences, culture and learning contexts". The FLQA also require the development of individual learning plans, although providers have considerable latitude as to how these are developed. Work has also started on the development of an on-line assessment tool for LLN, e-asTTle, based on a highly successful tool developed for compulsory level schools (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

In England, adult LLN programmes are required to conduct an initial assessment to determine which level class is most appropriate for new learners. However, programmes may choose which tools they will use. DfES does not mandate or recommend specific assessment tools, but it does provide a list of commercially produced diagnostic assessments and has also created its own tools. If learners appear to have weak skills or low self-efficacy, the assessment may be more informal. Learners and instructors in the Skills for Life programme develop an individual learning plan (ILP) defining learning goals. The ILP is used as a tool for tracking progress over time (National Research and Development Centre [NRDC], 2008).

The Danish Ministry of Education has established aims and standards for adult LLN curriculum and for provision. Diagnostic assessments, official checklists to track learner progress, and final assessments for certification are all aligned with these aims and standards. For example, diagnostic assessments are intended to identify learning gaps between the learner's level upon entry into the programme, and course objectives. Official checklists indicate the minimum levels for achieving standards. Instructors may adapt the checklist to local or regional needs (or in the case of work-based learning, to the needs of the enterprise). However, whether the checklists are used formatively – to identify learning needs and adapt teaching – depends upon the training and skill of the individual instructor (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008).

Norway provides relatively detailed curriculum guidelines which embed many elements of formative assessment (although there is no explicit strategy to promote formative assessment practices). For example, the guidelines for adult basic education recommend mapping the skills of individual learners in order to identify learning needs, build on motivation, and provide learners with positive feedback on steps toward mastering knowledge and skills. The guidelines also recommend the use of learner portfolios to assess learner accomplishments, as well as performance of "open-ended tasks". Innovative programmes can build on these guidelines to develop deliberate strategies. The 2003 Introduction Act, which governs language training and social studies for immigrant and refugee learners granted residence permits, requires that instruction be adapted to each learner's background and qualifications, and all learners are to have an individual plan. The guidelines are very general however, and instructors have a lot of room for interpretation (which may be seen as both a strength and a weakness). The European Language Portfolio which has recently been adapted for teaching Norwegian language to immigrant learners includes a range of formative assessment tools and processes that build on the learners' experiences, culture and learning contexts (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Vox/Norwegian Institute for Adult Education, 2008).

Australian learners entering the Language Literacy and Numeracy Programme (LLNP) system take an extensive test, which maps their capacities against those in the National Reporting System.[3] Learners may complete the test with or without the assistance of the assessor (Fitzpatrick,

[3] The National Reporting System [NRS] in Australia incorporates standards for the measuring of outcomes and is mandated for reporting on outcomes of specific government-funded national programmes. It is also often used in other language, literacy and numeracy programmes to inform the development of training and assessment processes.

Wignall and McKenna, 1999). Test results are used to place learners at the appropriate level. The Australian Quality Training Framework for Vocational Education and Training (VET) requires accredited providers to identify and support clients who may require or request support for language, literacy and numeracy skills. Training for LLN competencies is to be integrated with vocational training ("built in, not bolted on"). Trainers and assessors are encouraged (but not required) to use multiple forms of information and reality-based tasks for diagnostic, formative as well as summative assessments.

At the same time, Australia points to an intentional lack of government prescription related to classroom practice. The philosophy is that instructors should have the flexibility to decide how they will help learners to meet competency standards, to adjust teaching to individual and local needs, and to experiment and innovate. Instructors may draw upon a number of teaching resources – including several that promote formative assessment. These are available in on-line and other formats, such as DVDs, publications. However, whether instructors take advantage of these resources depends upon awareness of their existence, as well as understanding of how to integrate the different resources into teaching, learning and assessment processes (Misko, 2008).

Similarly, in the United States, programmes have latitude to design services in any way, as long as they meet content and programme performance standards and regulations. Programmes receiving federal funds are encouraged but not required to use instruction methods based on evidence from scientific research. Scientific research is defined as studies that use a rigorous methodology, particularly experimental or quasi-experimental, and have been peer reviewed. There is very little adult education research that meets these standards, and practitioners must therefore rely on practitioner wisdom, a concept that has not yet been rigorously defined. There is nothing in federal, state or local policy or regulations that prohibits or discourages the use of formative assessment (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Approaches to certification and summative assessment

Countries use different approaches to certification and summative assessment. Some countries rely upon standardised examinations, which are administered under specific conditions in order to ensure reliability of the results. There are also a range of alternative approaches, which are tied to curricula or individual goals. These different approaches are discussed below.

Adult LLN programmes in England and the United States use standardised tests. In both England and the United States, learners may take tests when they and their instructors feel they are ready, and may re-take them if necessary.

In England, examinations are developed by external providers, such as the LCCI Examinations Board, National Open College Network, Northern Council for Further Education, Open College of the Northwest, and the Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts (RSA) Exams, and so on. These institutions also administer and score the tests. Reading literacy is assessed through either paper or computer-based tests. Writing skills may be assessed through tests but also through portfolios procured by instructors as well as evaluators from one of the testing organisations. English language learners may demonstrate listening and speaking skills through structured dialogues assessed by a trained evaluator, either in-person or by audio tape. The tests are criterion-referenced, meaning that learners are judged against specific standards, rather than in comparison with peers (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In the United States, the General Educational Development (GED) test is the most common way for adult learners to earn a high school certificate.[4] The GED is a set of five different tests measuring writing, social studies, science, interpretation of literature and the arts, and mathematics. These are standardised tests, which are skills-based rather than tied to a curriculum. This means that instructors may focus on preparing learners to succeed in this kind of test, but they cannot deliberately "teach to the test". The test was revised in 2002 in order to place more emphasis on cross-disciplinary skills, including problem solving, communication, information processing, and writing (test takers are now required to write an essay). The mathematics test places more emphasis on data analysis, statistics and probability.

The GED is norm-referenced.[5] The passing score for GED subject tests is determined by testing high school graduates; the passing level is set at the point where 40% of high school graduates do not pass the test. States may

[4] In California, the acquisition of a GED does not allow students to earn a high school diploma, and the GED is not always considered to be the equivalent of a high school diploma, but post-secondary institutions do consider it as such.

[5] Learners also have the option of taking qualifications other than the GED. In Maryland (and in 12 other States) learners may prepare for an Adult External (or Adult) High School Diploma. The programme is aimed at mature-age students, and includes recognition of prior learning (including both non-formal and informal learning such as home management, or literacy and numeracy skills used in a current occupation or trade).

also set their own passing levels (meaning that the passing level may vary from state to state).

In addition to the GED, learners in adult LLN provision in the United States take other standardised tests. These include the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)[6] and the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Tests such as these are required in programmes receiving federal funding[7] (which may be as much as 50% of state funding, or a relatively small amount) and are used to measure learner progression and to monitor progress in meeting goals set out for each state in the National Reporting System (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Other approaches

Several countries also allow for development of summative examinations for certification at the programme level. Programmes may develop traditional paper and pencil examinations, with content tied to curriculum requirements. Learners may also have the opportunity to demonstrate skills they have acquired through presentations or in portfolios. The latter approach may be used to measure gains made toward individually defined goals.

In Denmark, school leaving examinations at the Grade 9 level are prepared by instructors and are based on subjects the learner has studied during the year. The Grade 9 and 10 certificates provide the learners with identical rights of access to further education as learners who have earned certificates within the lower secondary system. The instructors in programmes prepare the school leaving examination for learners. Learner performance is judged by a jury of "censors" (that is, instructors from other programmes). Learners do not have the test questions in advance (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

For the Grade 10 examination, questions are developed by the Ministry of Education. The examinations include both oral and written tests, and are aligned with standards and aims set by the Ministry. Approximately 40% of learners in Danish adult LLN programmes decide to participate in the school

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[6] CASAS, or the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, is a widely used system of standardised testing for assessing basic reading, math, listening, writing, and speaking skills of adults. English as a Second Language (ESL) tests are described in *http://www.ncsall.net/?id=521* CASAS and all other tests are described at *http://www.ncsall.net/?id=574*

[7] The balance comes predominantly from state funding, based on daily attendance data.

leaving examination (a number still too low for the Ministry) (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Learners in Flanders have a choice as to how they will earn their certificate. In 1999 the Flemish government moved from a system where learners in "second chance" education were required to take standardised tests to earn their secondary school degrees, to a system where they have the option of taking the test, or of completing requirements in classes with no tests. This policy has created space for innovation at the programme level, allowing programmes to make decisions as to how they will approach teaching, learning and assessment (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).

There are no tests for certification in Scotland. Instead, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has developed very open evidence requirements. Learners have a range of options for demonstrating competencies tied to specific learning outcomes defined in the SQF framework. For example, learners who are following the accredited Core Skills course in Communications may give a talk on a subject of personal interest that lasts for at least two minutes, with an audience of at least one other person. The learner then responds to questions for at least another two minutes. The whole presentation can be recorded on tape or video and this provides the evidence that it has taken place. This would satisfy the outcome requirement that the learner be able to "speak so that others can understand". This approach to gathering evidence of learner achievement is in line with the Scottish philosophy that learners achieve success when they recognise their own achievements and begin to make changes in their life, or to identify new goals for learning.

Instructors may also develop their own assessment instruments but these must be approved in advance by the SQA as meeting their standards of fairness, consistency and transparency. Participants in the same course may achieve accreditation in Communications, Numeracy, Information Technology, at a level appropriate for them. In other words, learners in the same course may achieve different levels of accreditation. An external verifier moderates the achievement of the learning outcomes and examples of suitable forms of assessment are available to instructors (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Resources

In addition to supports such as guidelines and tools, instructors need adequate time and resources if they are to devote attention to the needs of individual learners. Several countries have significantly increased resources available to this sector in the last decade. Nevertheless, these new

investments are often still insufficient to meet needs. In many cases, programmes operate with small budgets and are largely dependent on part-time and volunteer instructional staff. The level of funding available to serve individual learners is also often minimal. For example, the Educational Testing Service (2007) in the United States notes a median expenditure of USD 626 per learner each year. Most programmes offer classes 40 weeks per year, with 4 to 6 hours of instruction per week as the most common category of class-time. Programmes, unable to meet demand, may also have long waiting lists (NIFL, 2008).

There may also be a mismatch between funding criteria and local area needs. For example, England notes that in some rural areas, it may be difficult to bring together the minimum number of learners (usually between eight and ten) to be eligible for national funding (NRDC, 2008).

Programme performance for accountability

Programme performance measures for accountability are vital for understanding the quality of programme delivery, and ensuring that public investments are yielding results. Countries and regions have:

- Established *targets* for participation and/or number of learners to earn certification (England and Scotland).
- Developed *national reporting systems* (Australia, Scotland, Spain and the United States).
- Created or strengthened *inspectorates* (Flanders, England, Scotland and Spain).
- Commissioned *external evaluations* (Denmark), or *guidelines* for programme self-review (New Zealand).

Adult LLN policies generally identify a wide range of acceptable learning outcomes, including certification, attainment of individual goals, further education and/or employment. But accountability systems do not always give equal weight to these outcomes. Outcomes such as increased learner autonomy and confidence, or how learners are using new skills in their daily lives may pose challenges for measurement systems. It may also be difficult to track learners' longer-term outcomes related to participation in further education or employment.

Education systems are often criticized for a tendency to "teach to the test" or to other narrow objectives. This tendency is even stronger in systems where accountability measures have implications for programme rankings and/or funding levels (Derrick, Ecclestone and Merrifield, 2007). If

accountability systems are poorly aligned with goals for learner-centred provision, do not measure progress toward higher-level skills and autonomy, or focus on a narrower range of outcomes, then classroom practice may also be significantly narrowed.

Ideally, measurements of programme performance developed for purposes of accountability will also help programmes to identify areas for improvement, as well as what is working well. Not all measures are appropriate for this purpose, however, and programmes thus miss a significant opportunity for their own "formative" learning (see OECD, 2005c; St. Clair and Belzer, 2007).

Targets

England has established a very ambitious target for 2.25 million adult LLN learners to earn certification over a period of nine years, in increments of 750 000 learners every three years. The first target for 750 000 learners to earn certification by 2004 has been met, although half of this group were 16-19-year-olds. Achievement of successive benchmarks will be increasingly challenging. Indeed, this focus on certification as a measure of programme success is problematic.

In Scotland, the Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS) strategy document defines target groups for services, and as well as final attainment levels and development objectives, based on trends. Targets are thus focused on learner participation, with special emphasis on underrepresented priority groups, rather than numbers of learners to earn certification. Targets are further refined in each of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities, where Community Learning Strategy Partnerships decide collectively how to use resources, and monitor programmes (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008).

National reporting systems

Australia and the United States have developed National Reporting Systems (NRS). The Australian NRS enables providers to monitor and record progress over time, as well as outcomes. It also describes the types of assessment principles that must be observed. For example, there should be a wide range of assessment tasks which are "grounded in a relevant context" and are not "culturally biased". It also allows a nationally consistent means for reporting student outcomes (albeit shorter-term outcomes). Recent improvements to the system are intended to refine measurement and the reporting of learning gains, including for learners who do not complete their training. A key advantage of the Australian NRS is that it provides a means

to link the teaching process with evidence of learner outcomes. On the other hand, the tools are sometimes (mis)-used for a broad range of diagnostic or training contexts which are beyond their intended purpose, and for which instructors do not have training (Misko, 2008).

The National Reporting System in the United States sets out three core indicators for programme performance, including:

1. Demonstrated improvements in reading, writing and speaking English, numeracy, problem-solving, and other literacy skills. The benchmark is to move up one level as defined by the NRS – whether the learner is as close as one point or as far as two grade levels away from the next NRS level. (There are six NRS levels for English for Speakers of Other Languages, and for literacy and numeracy, each equivalent to two grade levels.)
2. Placement in, retention, or completion of post-secondary education, training, unsubsidised employment, or job advancement.
3. Receipt of a General Educational Development (GED), high school diploma, or other equivalent.

States are required to negotiate a set of initial targets as to how many students will make one NRS level gain or pass the GED. The target number increases each year. States may also identify additional performance indicators and annual performance levels in their state plans, so outcomes other than the GED or alternative diplomas may be included in these indicators. The US NRS system does not currently include sufficient detail to link which teaching practices have led to the most successful outcomes, but can help to identify the most successful programmes (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Inspectorates

Inspectorates monitor the quality of the learning process and programme delivery. Flanders established an inspectorate for adult basic education in 1999. The inspectors use a CIPO framework (Context-Input-Process-Output) using indicators and qualitative observations. They also set out standards and expectations for learner assessment, including the use of formative assessment methods. For example, the inspectorate sets out the expectation that assessment results should be used to provide learners with high-quality feedback and to adapt teaching. Learners should be actively involved through peer- and self-assessment. The Flemish adult inspectorate notes that centres do use a range of formative assessment strategies, while also acknowledging that the degree to which formative assessment is used

varies between centres, types of courses, and individual instructors (Ministry of the Flemish Community and University of Ghent, 2008).

In Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE) monitors the quality of programmes receiving literacies partnership funding. HMIE is also responsible for inspecting compulsory level schooling and tracks formative assessment practice in classrooms (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008). In England, the Skills for Life programme also strengthened the quality framework for inspection of programmes within its jurisdiction. The inspection reports have been useful in monitoring teaching, learning, and assessment processes (including formative assessment, even though it has not been promoted as an official government policy) (NRDC, 2008).

In Spain, the Education Ministry is responsible for creating inspection frameworks in adult education and training programmes, and educational administrations in the autonomous regions that carry them out. All training institutions, whether public or private, are subject to inspection. The focus is on compliance with laws and regulations as well as quality improvement. The labour administrations in autonomous regions are responsible for inspections in programmes targeted to unemployed and working people.

The Spanish State Foundation for Employment Training (*Fundación Estatal para la Formación en el Empleo*) carries out an annual evaluation survey on the scope of on-going training for the working population. It also evaluates the adjustment of the schemes to the needs of the market, and the impact of training on the maintenance of employment, the improvement of the competitiveness of companies, as well as on the efficiency and efficacy of the economic resources and means employed. Thus, the results of inspections in this area help to shape improvements in quality at the system and programme levels (Planas and Montoriol, 2008).

External and self-evaluations

In Denmark, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) has conducted in-depth evaluations of the adult preparatory and adult general education, and its recommendations have been used to reform the systems. The newly created Centre of Evaluation is expected to extend these capabilities (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008). As part of the FLQA development process, New Zealand is developing a self-review guide for programmes to encourage continuous programme improvement (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

Key issues and conclusions

This chapter has provided a broad overview of policies setting out the context and content of adult LLN provision. Across countries, the adult LLN sector has traditionally emphasised learner-centred provision. There has been a strong emphasis on the need to tailor provision to the needs of diverse learners, and in helping all learners to succeed. More recent policies preserve elements of learner-centred provision and individualisation, while also introducing more standardised approaches to defining learning pathways, objectives and outcomes.

Some commentators assert that these newer, more standardised approaches often define learning objectives and outcomes too narrowly, leading to equally narrow teaching, learning and assessment. It is argued that such approaches cannot promote real learner progression – including the development of sophisticated critical thinking and problem-solving skills, or learner autonomy.

Our own view is that it is possible for policies to effectively balance traditional learner-centred and newer more standardised approaches to provision. Countries that set out clear policy priorities and goals for the development of learners' higher-level skills and autonomy, and then back these up with well-designed guidelines, tools and accountability measures will be more successful.

Clear principles and priorities are extremely important for communicating overall aims and goals for learner progression and autonomy. Programme leaders and instructors have a better idea not only of what they are doing, but also why. Guidelines and tools can provide the structure and support for instructors working "inside the black box" of the classroom. Of course, guidelines and tools also need to be flexible so that programmes and instructors can tailor them to local or individual learner needs.

Many countries have increased resources for adult LLN programmes in the last decade. As we have noted, a detailed analysis of the resource base is beyond the scope of the present study. The evidence we do have, however, is that in many cases, resources are still insufficient. Many programmes are not able to meet demand, or to support professional, full-time staff.

New resources within the adult LLN sector have also meant increased attention to programme accountability. This is a particularly challenging area – given adult LLN stakeholders' very different views on what counts as success, the difficulty of tracking longer-term outcomes, and so on – but it is nevertheless vital. Accountability measures also shape teaching and learning processes – as programme leaders and instructors inevitably focus on

meeting them. Well-designed programme performance measurements are aligned with goals for teaching and learning, and provide insight into the quality of programme delivery as well as the effectiveness of investments in the sector.

All systems can benefit from a careful analysis as to whether data collected for the purposes of accountability are appropriately aligned with goals. In addition, there is a need to consider whether the information gathered can be used to shape programme improvement, as well as to identify what works.

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Chapter 4
The Educational Workforce for Adult LLN Provision Instructors, Support Staff, Volunteers

This chapter explores policies to foster professionalism in adult language, literacy and numeracy provision. Countries are introducing new qualifications and professional development programmes for those working in the adult foundation skill sector. At the same time, precarious conditions of employment and the marginal employment status of instructors in this field continue to pose major barriers to change.

No element is more important to the quality of provision than the instructional workforce. Instructors need skills to help learners identify their goals and objectives, to identify the source of learner misconceptions or learning gaps, and to offer useful learning tasks and challenges to promote progress and autonomy. This implies the need for strong subject-matter and pedagogical expertise and skills in assessment, as well as softer skills, such as humour, patience, flexibility, and empathy. Indeed, the quality of interactions between instructors and learners, both substantive and personal, are at the heart of effective teaching, learning and assessment.

Building an instructional workforce that can meet such high expectations is particularly challenging given constrained financial resources in the adult LLN sector. Many instructors in this sector have precarious employment situations, and turnover may be high. Many programmes are staffed primarily by volunteers. The fact that many instructors work only part-time means that it may be difficult for staff to find time to discuss innovation or to reflect on practice.

But this is also very much a field in transition. While precarious conditions of employment continue to pose major barriers to change in this field, countries and regions have nevertheless made a great deal of progress in strengthening qualifications and professional development specifically targeted to the field of adult LLN in recent years. Moreover, the field benefits from a cadre of dynamic, committed instructors.

Generally precarious conditions of employment

Several of the countries participating in this study report that instructors in the adult LLN sector have a relatively precarious or marginal employment status. In many cases, instructors work only a few hours a week. Scotland, for example, reports that while there were 452 full-time equivalent (FTE) instructor positions in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy sector in 2005, these positions were actually filled by between 1 200 and 1 800 individuals. Up to 3 700 individuals filled 213 voluntary FTE positions (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008).

In the United States, while the instructor workforce is large (there are more than 12 000 instructors in the California adult education system alone), few are employed full-time. Across the country, part-time staff make up 40% of the workforce, and volunteers make up 43%, (although exceptionally large numbers of volunteers in two states explain the latter figure) (Educational Testing Service, 2007; and, personal communication from staff at Office of Vocational and Adult Education, US Department of Education, 26, June 2007). In Maryland, only 13% of instructors and 47% of administrators are employed full-time. Certainly some proportion of instructors seeks only part-time employment, but many other instructors work for multiple centres in order to reach full-time status – although without the benefits which would come with a regular full-time position (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Local labour market conditions determine whether adult LLN providers are able to attract new instructors and retain those with experience. Programme administrators interviewed for the California case study cited competition from the compulsory sector as one of the main reasons for the high rate of instructor turnover. Instructors are often "poached" by the state's compulsory system, which suffers from a chronic shortage of qualified teachers. Compulsory schools can offer instructors full-time positions with benefits. (Programme administrators in adult LLN sites also note that the fact that their staff are largely part-time means that they cannot easily hold staff meetings, and that instructors may have little or no paid time for professional development. This also often means missed opportunities for professional growth) (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Some countries report a fairly stable workforce, including a larger percentage of full-time instructors and a lower rate of turnover. Australia, for example, reports that over half of the LLN specialist instructors have been in the field for more than ten years. While Denmark reports that instructors' employment is fairly precarious (the number of hours worked in any given year depends on how many learners are enrolled in their courses),

it is nevertheless common for instructors to have been working in the same centre for at least ten years (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2008).

Fostering professionalism

Specialist LLN qualifications?

The kind and level of qualifications required for instructors in the adult LLN field varies by country and sometimes region. Spain and the States of California,[1] Maryland and Massachusetts in the United States all require that instructors hold recognised teacher qualifications for teaching at the primary or secondary level (and appropriate to the level they are teaching in the adult LLN sector) (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet; Planas and Montoriol, 2008). Norway recommends that instructors hold qualifications in general or subject-specific teacher education or vocational teacher education. However, the different municipalities can set their own requirements regarding instructor qualifications. For example, a municipality may hire a person with a university degree but no background in teacher education. Their salary would reflect their status as an "unskilled" instructor (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and Vox/Norwegian Institute for Adult Education, 2008).

Australia, the Flemish Community in Belgium, England and New Zealand have introduced specialist qualifications for teaching in the adult LLN sector. In Australia, instructors often have teaching qualifications as well as postgraduate specialist qualifications. Different Australian States have also introduced specialist qualifications (Misko, 2008). England introduced the Skills for Life qualification in 2001 as part of the new policy framework. All new instructors are required to have a teaching qualification and a Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or Certificate of Education (National Research and Development Centre, 2008).

In Flanders, programmes may recruit individuals without a qualification if they have relevant work experience. However, those hired under such conditions cannot fill a permanent instructional position and will earn less than their colleagues who have a teaching qualification. They thus have a strong incentive to earn qualifications if they want to stay in the sector (Ministry of the Flemish Community Education Department and University of Ghent, 2008).

[1] California requires that adult LLN instructors pass a state basic skills test as well as some having specialist qualifications such as for English as a Second Language.

Of the countries participating in this study, New Zealand is the most recent to introduce specialist qualifications for adult LLN instructors. According to one recent New Zealand survey, instructors currently in the field have an eclectic mix of qualifications and experience. Approximately half of the survey respondents reported that they had university degrees; nearly half had training to teach at the primary or secondary level; and approximately one third had a qualification for teaching adults. Some had multiple qualifications. Very few had qualifications related to either adult education generally or LLN specifically. New requirements for instructor qualifications will bring a greater degree of uniformity to the field (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

In Australia, there are efforts to embed LLN training into Vocational Education Training (so that foundation skills learning is "built-in" to VET training, not "bolted-on"). LLN professionals working in vocational training are now asked to assist content professionals and practitioners to develop easy to understand learning materials and assessment resources for adults with foundation skill needs (Berghella, Molenaar and Wyse, 2004). This approach also provides a "built-in" opportunity to help learners directly apply new knowledge to daily tasks (Misko, 2008).

Professional development

Much of the specialised training for those working with adults occurs through professional development. The US federal government sponsors professional development programmes, such as the new STAR programme (Star Achievement in Reading), which has been trialled in six states. Instructors and programme leaders in California, one of six trial states, say that STAR has enabled programmes to develop more adult-specific expertise, rather than relying on research and practices developed for primary school students.

In the United States, there are also professional development opportunities aimed at helping instructors learn to recognise and use findings from scientific research in their practices. Studies that employ a rigorous methodology, particularly experimental or quasi-experimental, and have been peer reviewed, qualify as scientific research. The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) both disseminate evidence-based research to states and provide training for instructors on how to judge the quality of and to use research to improve instruction. In another example, California has developed its own "research-to-practice" initiative (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet; NIFL, 2008).

Scotland's "Learning Connections" are developing a range of services for professional development, including an irregular programme of seminars, consultations and guidance for key stakeholders in local programmes, and support networks targeted to themes such as youth literacy, disabilities, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and other programmes. There are also specialised training courses, such as the "ESOL Literacies: Teaching Adults Reading, Writing and Numeracy" course offered by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. It is a 10-session course for those who are already qualified teachers of ESOL, providing more in-depth training to work with learners at the most basic levels (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008).

In Flanders, professional development has been compulsory for staff at adult basic education centres since 1995. It is intensive: 1 500 hours over two years, including assisted practical training and independent study. In addition, there are plans to extend support and guidance services currently provided to adult basic education centres (VOCB – *Vlaams Ondersteunings Centrum voor Basiseducatie*) to all adult education providers. Services include general support as well as support targeted to the provider's specific needs. Adult LLN instructors in Flanders may also participate in ad hoc training, including university-based initiatives, training offered by private providers, educational networks, and so on (Ministry of the Flemish Community Education Department and University of Ghent, 2008).

Until recently, most professional development in New Zealand has been ad hoc. A 2003 report, for example, counted over 100 nationally-funded professional development programmes reaching over 2 500 instructors. The only systematic training at a national level had been provided by Literacy Aotearoa for its predominantly voluntary staff (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

New Zealand is just beginning new professional development programmes, including for the workplace, as part of its *Learning for Living* cross-agency project. This project involves the Ministry of Education, the Tertiary Education Commission, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, and the Ministry of Social Development. The project will tie to ongoing research on effective methods for teaching adults, standards, progression and assessment (Benseman and Sutton, 2008).

Professional development may be expensive. For example, the STAR programme in the United States starts at approximate USD 813 per participant for six days of training (*www.startoolkit.org/services.html*). Massachusetts spends on average 10% of its annual adult literacy education budget on its professional delivery system, roughly USD 200 per learner per year (this investment, however, is atypical of states). It should also be noted

that the costs of participation in professional development do not take into account the opportunity costs of the instructor's attendance. Generally, larger centres have more funding for professional development, and may even have in-house programmes (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Innovation opportunities

Involvement in action research projects is also an important form of professional development. In California and Massachusetts, several of the instructors interviewed for the OECD case study reported that they had been involved in action research as well as study circles to improve the teaching of reading, as well as learner retention rates. Two of the sites featured in Section II of this study were involved in action research to better integrate formative assessment in the classroom (note, for example, action research projects at the Ateliers de Formation de Base in Haute Normandie, France, and the Adult Learning Centre, in Arendal, Norway, which was a pilot site for the development of the "I Can" portfolio[2]).

Programme support staff and volunteers

Instructors are also supported in their work by other professional programme staff, including counsellors and programme coordinators, volunteer instructors, and/or a wider network of community- or agency-based service providers.

The Second Chance School in Hoboken, Belgium featured in this study has a staff of 50, including instructors, administrators, and two school psychologists (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet). All programmes visited in the United States had counsellors, programme co-ordinators or assessment teams available for learners (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In Scotland, funding for adult literacy and numeracy is distributed to 32 local authorities, each of which has developed a partnership among providers across four sectors: local authority community based learning, the

[2] The "I Can" Portfolio is the Norwegian version of the European Language Portfolio, which was developed and piloted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe between 1998 and 2000. It is a tool to support the development of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The Norwegian model also draws upon Dutch and Irish models which provide checklists for the progressive development of competencies necessary for English-language fluency.

voluntary sector, further education and the workplace (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008). Each of the programmes featured in the English case study developed for this report had developed partnerships with a range of providers, and had active outreach efforts in the community and with local employers (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Volunteer instructors are essential to the success of many LLN programmes (particularly community-based programmes), and likely will be for some time to come, given the scale of need in this sector and the financial implications of supporting full-time professional staff. For example, in Scotland, a 2005 report showed that nearly half of full-time equivalent instructors were volunteers (452 FTE paid tutors and 213 volunteer tutors) (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008). A 2003 report in New Zealand estimated that there were approximately 1 700 (primarily voluntary) tutors working in adult community education (often only teaching a few hours per week). An additional 3 500 volunteers were providing social support for learners of English as a Second Language, offering primarily social English support (Sutton, Lander and Benseman, 2005).

Several of the OECD case study sites have teams with both professionally qualified instructors and volunteers. Programme leaders have found that this strategy can work well. Qualified instructors with experience in the field are able to provide guidance to newer staff members and volunteers. Volunteers help provide extra support in classrooms (particularly important with approaches that emphasise tailoring of learning to meet individual needs), and help lessen the dependency of learners on a single instructor. Volunteers may also provide extra one-to-one time for learners who need extra support.

Volunteers receive some minimal training and preparation. For example, the Scottish Qualification Authority sponsors the Introductory Training in Adult Literacies Learning (PDA: ITALL is a training course to help tutors new to literacies teaching and volunteers learn how to identify individual learner's specific needs, and to support literacy and numeracy learning) (Scottish Government, Learning Connections, 2008). Volunteers at the Savoirs pour Réussir (SPR) programme in Marseilles, France also receive guidance that helps them to better understand how learners progress (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In some cases, learners become volunteer instructors. Volunteers serving as peer mentors at the "Equal Man" project of the Reading and Writing Circle in Verdal, Norway have previously completed the course. These peer mentors, or Equal Men, explain concepts, encourage learners to keep going, serve as role models, and at the same time reinforce their own learning. Both

instructors and Equal Men from the Reading and Writing Circle participate in a one-and-a-half day training with the National Dyslexia Association. The training focuses on their respective roles and what they can each contribute in the learning setting (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In general, programmes struggle to attract, retain and train effective instructional staff, and this is a major barrier for the sector. Programmes will continue to struggle to meet staffing needs so long as instructors in this sector do not receive the same pay and benefits as instructors working at the compulsory level.

Key issues and conclusions

The adult LLN sector has made a great deal of progress in strengthening qualification requirements in a relatively short period of time. Australia, the Flemish Community, England and New Zealand have all introduced specialist qualifications for teaching in the adult LLN sectors (although it will likely take some time before a majority of instructors in the field hold such qualifications). Language instructors across countries very often have specialist training, as well (for example, to teach English, Spanish, Norwegian or other languages to speakers of other languages). Other countries require that instructors have recognised teacher qualifications for primary or secondary level (appropriate to the level they are teaching in the adult LLN sector). Instructors may augment this training with professional development for working with adult LLN learners.

In spite of this emphasis on strengthening qualifications, the field is likely to continue in its reliance on the volunteer/paraprofessional workforce. Having volunteers/paraprofessionals is a particularly good strategy in classrooms focused on tailoring provision for different learners. Volunteers can give more time and attention to individual learners, and also bring different points of view and knowledge to the task of explaining new concepts and ideas. That said, a volunteer workforce cannot be seen as an appropriate solution to serious shortages in staffing.

It is also important to note that professional development for both paid and volunteer staff working in adult LLN education is often ad hoc and short-term in nature. Moreover, part-time instructors who work in adult LLN programmes to supplement full-time work, or who have pieced together several part-time jobs may not have the flexibility to participate in professional development. Programmes will continue to face challenges in improving instructional quality in the adult LLN so long as these working conditions persist.

A few of the programmes featured in the OECD study have also initiated action research as professional development. This research has not only served as an intensive form of professional development for instructors, but also has helped to build the knowledge base in this field. Nevertheless, dissemination of innovation in this field, where programmes are often only loosely associated, is a challenge. The field thus misses opportunities to learn from exemplary practice and innovation.

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Section II
The Steps of the Learning Process

Introduction

The chapters in Section II draw on the international research reviews and case studies of exemplary teaching, learning and assessment developed for this report. These different contributions highlight the importance of seeing learning as a process. The process begins as soon as learners enter a programme.

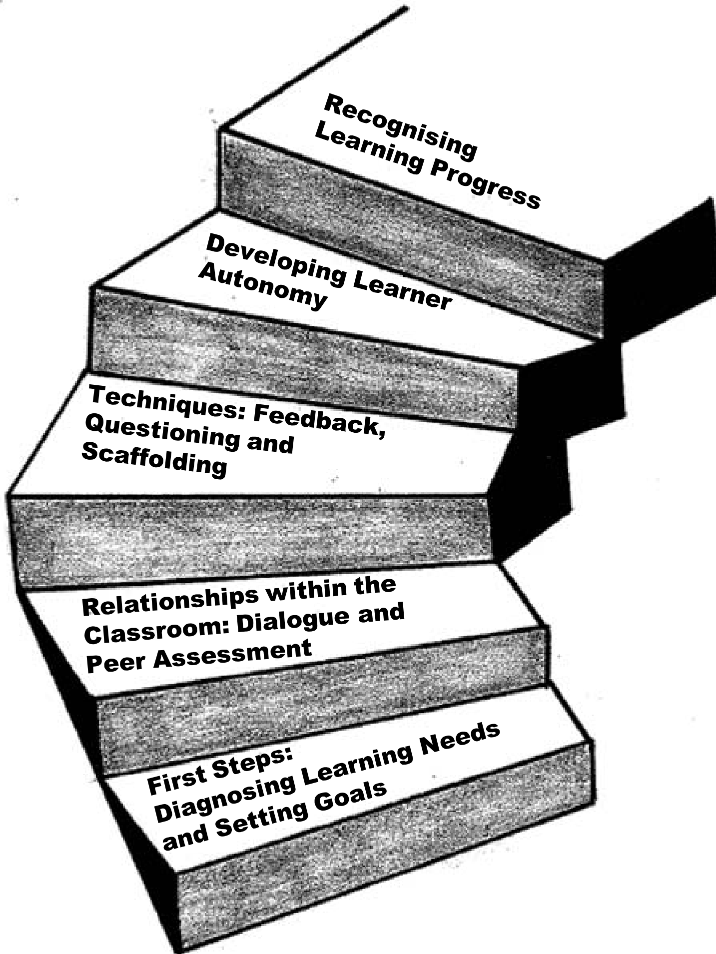
We have organised Chapters 6 to 10 around the different steps of the learning process:

- *Diagnosis of learning needs*, and establishment of learners' motivations and goals.
- The development of strong *relationships within the classroom*, and creation of "safe" environments for learning.
- The use of *assessment to provide information on learning*, and to be used as feedback by learners and instructors to modify teaching and learning activities.
- A focus on *building learner autonomy*, including skills for self-assessment and for addressing the literacy and numeracy tasks of daily life independently.
- *Tracking of learner progress* toward goals and recognition of achievement.

These steps are portrayed as the beginning of a spiral staircase in the figure below. The spiral draws on Bruner's concept of the "spiral curriculum", which proposes that any domain of knowledge can be represented at varying levels of abstractness and complexity (Bruner, 1996). The staircase represents the learner's progression toward higher-level skills and greater autonomy.

Learning is not necessarily a linear process, however, and the steps are not to be taken as such. As emphasised in literature and by the exemplary practitioners participating in this study, instructors and learners may be engaged in several steps of the process at any given time. Researchers and practitioners stress the importance of involving learners in decisions as to what they will learn, and how, as an important step for setting relevant goals (step 1 of the OECD staircase), as well as for developing autonomy (step 4 of the staircase). Learners and instructors track progress toward goals on a regular basis, not just at the end of a unit or course. The literature and case studies also highlight the combined importance of the different elements – rather than discrete steps, practices or tools – in promoting learner progress.

The steps of the learning process



This understanding of teaching, learning and assessment as a holistic process is vital. For example, the techniques of formative assessment are too often seen as teacher-led techniques for giving feedback, practice

examinations or as continuous or modular assessment, with summative assessments given at intervals, rather than only at the end of a course (see Ecclestone, 2002; Torrance *et al.*, 2005). A more holistic approach sees learners as fully engaged in each of the steps of the process: diagnosis, debate, review and decisions as to how to adjust teaching and learning to meet their needs. In this way, learners develop their own skills for self-assessment, and for "sustainable learning" (Boud and Falchikov, 2007).

Chapter 5 provides a brief introduction to the exemplary case studies. The subsequent five chapters (Chapters 6 through 10) describe findings from research and practice related to each of the five steps. There are clear and common themes that run throughout the chapters. These include the focus on formative assessment as a means to identify individual learner needs and tailor teaching, the active engagement of learners in the process of defining goals and next steps for learning, and the emphasis on building learners' higher-level skills and increasing autonomy. The chapters also provide a clear sense of the conditions important for success, and where policy can make a difference.

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Chapter 5
The Case Studies – Innovations for LLN Adults

This chapter provides an overview of the case studies of exemplary practice conducted for this study. It outlines the criteria used for selection of the cases, and then provides brief descriptions of each of the participating programmes. The cases selected represent the range of provision in this field. At the same time, the innovative practices observed at these sites are not necessarily widespread – rather they illustrate what is possible.

Evidence gathered in the case sites for this study provide insights as to *how* new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment have been put into practice. While the programmes are diverse, they also have several features in common. They are all environments appropriate for adult learners, as reflected in the parity of relationships between instructors and learners, and learners' freedom of choice regarding what and how they will learn. They all share a concern with ensuring that learning tasks are relevant to learners' daily lives. And they use assessment to promote learner success, and build autonomy, rather than as a tool for selection.

The exemplary practices explored in the OECD study are not necessarily indicative of wider practice in adult LLN, but they do illustrate how programme leaders and instructors have taken advantage of opportunities to create effective teaching and learning environments (Looney, 2007).

The case studies fulfil specific criteria set out in the OECD protocol:

- *The programmes are targeted to adults with foundation skill needs.* The cases are drawn from a range of settings serving diverse learners.
- *Instructors use formative assessment as a deliberate strategy for identifying the needs of individual learners and tailoring teaching.* The studies provide examples of interactive assessment of learner progress and understanding, and the tailoring of teaching to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners.

- *The programmes provide evidence of "what works".* Key informants shared insights, evidence and indicators of ways in which the formative assessment process has improved teaching and learning, including increased learner self-efficacy, and improved rates of persistence. Case study researchers gathered learner and instructor views on the impact of assessment methods on progress toward learning goals.

The innovative cases in brief

The sites represent a range of provision for the adult LLN sector, and provide a sense of the diversity in this field as well as those approaches which stand out as consistently important to quality teaching, learning and assessment. They include:

- Programmes offering primary or secondary school certification.
- Community-based programmes not leading to formal certification.
- Programmes for immigrant and refugee learners.
- Work-based education programmes.
- A prison-based programme.

Programmes offering primary or secondary school certification

Several of the programmes visited for this study award primary or secondary school certification (although in many programmes, learners may opt not to seek certification). These programmes are much more formal than the community-based programmes described below. There are official curricula, formal timetables, programme regulations, summative assessments (tests or alternative assessments), and stricter requirements for programme accountability. Instructors in these programmes often balance individual learner goals and needs with more official curriculum and certification requirements.

The exemplary sites include:

- *A "second-chance" school in Hoboken, Belgium (the Tweedekansonderwijs or TKO*). The TKO is one of 13 Flemish centres that enable adults to obtain a diploma with exactly the same value as the certificate awarded in the compulsory sector. The TKO serves over 600 learners annually. The majority of learners attend full-time daytime courses; evening courses are also offered two or

three evenings a week. Learners may complete the programme within a few months or over the course of a year, depending on the course they are following, prior learning, and whether they are attending part- or full-time (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *General adult education courses in Frederikssund and Århus, Denmark.* The principles for knowledge and proficiency in these programmes are the same as for the Grade 9 School Leaving Examination, and follow the aims and standards established by the Danish Ministry of Education. Subjects are adapted for adult learners. The programme in Århus is targeted specifically to youth between the ages of 18 and 25, and support services are also targeted to the needs of this age group (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *Three Skills for Life programmes in England.* Skills for Life was initiated by the Department for Education and Skills in 2001 to meet needs of adult foundation skill learners. The three sites featured in this study include the Mary Ward Centre, a non-profit organisation in central London; York College, a further education college in York, England; and, the Continuing Education and Training Services (CETS), supported by the Croydon Education Authority. The Skills for Life programmes at each of these institutions serve between 500 and 700 adults per year (between 4 and 10% of the total student body). There are also innovative outreach programmes to support a range of needs, including work-based provision and family learning (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *An adult returners' course at Jewel and Esk Valley College, Edinburgh, Scotland*. The course, which has only 12 places per term (36 per year), is advertised in the college prospectus and through word of mouth. There is a waiting list. All applicants for the course are interviewed and those who are not admitted to the returners' course are placed in other appropriate courses. The course is aimed at helping learners to develop reading, writing and numeracy skills relevant to their personal, family, community and working lives. Course leaders also aim to build a sense of community among the learners (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programmes in California, Massachusetts and Maryland in the United States.* The programmes visited were in a range of settings, including community and technical colleges, family resource centres, adult schools, and a workforce development centre.

Learners in these programmes typically attend two to four hours per day (morning, afternoon or evening) up to four days a week. The General Educational Development (GED) test or alternative adult high school diplomas (offered at state levels) are the most frequent outcomes for learners. The case study includes observations from several sites in the three states visited (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Community-based programmes, not leading to formal certification

Three of the programmes visited for the OECD study might be described as "grassroots" programmes, established to meet a perceived community need. These programmes do not have official curricula, nor do they offer official certification.

A primary goal in community-based programmes is to help learners to develop stronger self-efficacy regarding their capacity to learn. There is a strong emphasis on relationships within classrooms (including development of trust, and enjoyment of learning) on setting reasonable goals, and tracking progress toward those goals. Learners may later enter more formal programmes. There are no official tests or examinations required at completion of these courses (although instructors may help individual learners prepare for a certificate examination for their work or otherwise).

Community-based programmes included in this study had developed innovative approaches to getting learners "hooked" on learning. They include:

- *The Reading and Writing Circle, Verdal, Norway,* which serves adults with learning disabilities or difficulties. It was initiated in 2003 by a local activist from the Learning Disabilities Association in partnership with the head of the Verdal Upper Secondary School. This site has implemented a unique "Equal Man" project. The Equal Man is a person with learning disabilities or difficulties who has previously completed the course, and who serves as a mentor for newer learners while also reinforcing his or her own learning. The programme serves approximately 20 learners per year. The instructors working in this programme have certificates for teaching primary and/or secondary school (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *The Ateliers de Formation de Base (workshops for foundation skill learners) network in Haute-Normandie, France.* This network brings together the Média Formation and Fodeno (Formation Démocratie Normandie) and other programmes in the region. The

programmes are open to all individuals having difficulties in their personal, social or working lives as a result of low literacy or difficulties with the French language (including knowledge of the French socio-cultural code). Between 2000 and 2003, a group of instructors in the network were involved in an action research project on formative assessment to promote goals for literacy and better learner integration (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *Savoirs pour Réussir (SPR), Marseilles, France.* This programme was founded by the Caisses d'Epargne Foundation in 2003 to serve young adults (16 to 25 years old) with low literacy skills. Most learners participating in the programme are identified through a language and literacy test administered as part of the Journées d'Appel et de Préparation à la Défense. SPR, which is primarily staffed by volunteers, helps learners to attain greater stability in their daily lives, and to build their self-confidence (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).
- *Buddies for Learning, Renfrewshire, Scotland.* The Buddies programme was initiated in 2000 with support of the European Social Fund to provide individualised literacy and numeracy education. Buddies serves adults age 16 and over. There are also programmes to meet the needs of specific groups, such as parents wishing to help their children with homework, or long-term unemployed. The one-to-one teaching is undertaken primarily by volunteers who are supported by the professional staff (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Programmes targeted to immigrant and refugee learners

Programmes targeted to immigrant and refugee learners are designed to meet specific goals and concerns of this population. For example, some learners may have little or no prior education and are learning to read and write for the first time, and doing so in a new language. Others may already have university level qualifications and or prior professional experience. As findings of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) indicate, higher education credentials do not necessarily translate into functional levels of literacy, numeracy or problem solving skills in the official language of the host countries. This is particularly so when the credentials were earned in another country. All immigrant and refugee learners face challenges of social and economic integration (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005).

Typically, learners in these programmes are very diverse (in terms of country of origin, ethnicity, age, life experiences). For example, the two programmes for adult immigrant learners in Norway included learners from Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Chechnya, Congo, Iraq, Iran, Jamaica, Macedonia, Somalia, Syria, Ukraine, Viet Nam, Zambia and other countries – mostly non-western.

OECD case studies in programmes targeted to immigrant and refugee learners include:

- *Two programmes under Norway's "Introduction Act".* All adult immigrant learners receiving their residence permits after 1 September 2005 have "a right and an obligation" to participate in courses in Norwegian language and social studies.[1] The Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger and the Adult Learning Centre in Arendal featured in this study have developed portfolio approaches to help learners track progress and develop skills for learning-to-learn. Learners stay in the programmes from one to three years, depending on need and individual circumstances (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).
- *Two ESOL programmes in California.* Case study visits to two sites in Napa Valley, California included observations of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. ESOL makes up 43% of overall provision in foundation skills in the state of California. The ESOL programmes visited in California reflected culture of seasonal work for many migrants. Attendance levels depend on the fluctuating demands of the viticulture calendar (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

[1] The Introduction Act was implemented in September 2003. The Act states that refugees and persons granted residence on political and humanitarian grounds are to participate in a 2-year introductory programme (since 1 September 2004, participation has been obligatory for persons in these groups). This arrangement also applies to persons who immigrate in order to be united with family members who fall under the requirements of the Introduction Act. The Act was amended in 2005. Under the amendments, non-EU immigrants receiving their residence permits after 1 September 2005 have a "right and an obligation" to participate in 250 hours of Norwegian language, and 50 hours of Norwegian social studies. Courses in social studies must be taught in a language the participants can understand. Those who need additional training to reach their goals may petition for up to 2 700 additional hours. All training must be completed within 5 years.

Work-based education

A common concern across countries is that adults who are most in need of improving skills are the least likely to participate in formal learning programmes. The workplace may be an ideal place to reach this population, and may bring significant benefits to both employers and employees.

Each of the case study sites includes programmes to help those who want to improve their job prospects. A few of the programmes visited were located directly in workplaces, others included outreach to work-based education, and some tailored programmes to meet the needs of particular companies, although these particular programmes/classrooms were not featured in our study. In this section we highlight only those programmes held at a worksite or employment agency.

Three of the sites visited for this study were based primarily at worksites. They include:

- *The Mobile Trailer in Southern Jutland, Denmark.* A unique trailer mobile teaching unit brings LLN provision directly to enterprises in the region. Two trailers, which were initially supported by the European Social Fund and now by the County of Southern Jutland, are equipped as classrooms and include high quality ICT facilities. The trailers move to different enterprises every few weeks. Classes take place during working hours (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *Haven Products, Ltd., Inverness, Scotland.* The Haven Company, which aims to provide meaningful employment for individuals with a range of disabilities such as autism, arthritis and epilepsy, participates in a programme known as "Big Plus for Business" promoted by Learning Connections Scotland, and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). The WEA supports tuition for three weekly courses, including a communication class and two ICT classes incorporating literacy and numeracy training. The WEA has also provided networked laptops and other materials for learning. Fifteen out of the 24 employees participate in these programmes. Classes take place during working time (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

- *Just-in-Time training for job seekers and employees in Leuven, Belgium.* The Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB) collaborates with the adult basic centre (CBE), or "Open School" in Leuven, Belgium to develop short training courses for adults who are having problems finding and/or keeping a job. The courses focus on basic employability competencies and attitudes (literacy, ICT, communication and other skills). The focus is primarily on

mathematics due to the nature of the vocational training, which includes construction, electricity and welding. The project was initiated in 2004 as a European Social Funds (ESF) project (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

A prison-based programme

Low language, literacy and numeracy skills are prevalent in prison-based populations, as noted in Chapter 2. The OECD case study included one visit to a prison-based programme.

- *The Saint-Quentin-Fallavier Penitentiary, Lyon, France.* A national network of providers brings LLN training to prisons throughout France. It is important for preparing learners for re-entry into society. It is also important for quality of life in the prison milieu, where literacy skills are needed in order to maintain contact with the family and the outside world, to request visits with social workers, use of facilities, and so on. Instructors working in the milieu receive specialised training and support materials from the National Education Service. Provision is individualised (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Concluding remarks

The exemplary cases featured in this OECD study, which were selected according to the criteria outlined at the beginning of this chapter, represent a range of provision in this sector. The programmes target the needs of very diverse learners, including immigrants, younger learners who have dropped out of secondary schooling, learners with disabilities, learners wanting specific work-based skills, those who are working toward certification, and those who are learning in order to reach personal goals.

Our focus on formative assessment as an integrated feature of teaching and learning has provided a common thread to the case studies. The programmes featured throughout Section II all place an emphasis not only on identifying learning needs and tailoring teaching to meet those needs, but also on ensuring that learners are partners in the process, are deepening their own skills for peer and self-assessment and for learning-to-learn, and are progressing to more sophisticated levels of understanding and greater autonomy. There is also a strong emphasis on learner self-determination.

The case study programmes also share a common commitment to innovation and ongoing programme improvement. While they are not necessarily representative of common practice, they demonstrate what is possible, and provide directions for policy development.

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Chapter 6
First Steps: Diagnosing Learning Needs and Setting Goals

This chapter introduces the first of the five steps in the OECD staircase. It explores different approaches to welcoming new learners, and to diagnosing their needs, capabilities and goals. Individual learning plans or learning contracts are common in many of the case study programmes. They may be used to identify learner motivations for starting and staying in a programme, and as a tool to track learner progress toward goals.

When adult LLN learners first enter a new programme, they very typically have an initial interview with programme administrators and/or instructors to discuss their goals and motivations for learning. This first meeting may also include a diagnostic assessment to identify the learner's strengths and any potential barriers to learning (such as a disability), and to place learners at the appropriate level.

As a follow-up to this initial interview – usually within the first few days – instructors and new learners set out their goals for learning in a written document, such as an individual learning plan (ILP) or contract. Instructors will use the document to better link learning objectives set out in core curricula with the learner's specific interests. The ILP or contract also serves as a way for learners and instructors to track progress toward goals.

These are the first steps in the learning journey. The general principles shaping these first steps are fairly common in the adult LLN sector. And while staff and instructors in the exemplary programmes featured take different approaches to these first steps, they share concerns with ensuring that learners feel welcome, are engaged in the learning process from the outset, and that the learning plan reflects the individual learner's goals and motivations.

Diagnosing learning needs

Diagnostic assessments are intended to help identify learner capacities and needs, including the nature, depth and extent of any barriers to learning, and resources that may be necessary to address learning barriers. Adult learners bring a wide range of experiences and abilities to the learning setting, and have different motivations for pursuing and persisting in learning. They may also have a range of physical, social, emotional and economic barriers (see for example Barton *et al.*, 2006).

There are different views as to how formal or informal the diagnostic assessment should be. On the one hand, several of the exemplary programmes featured in this study use informal initial interviews in order to avoid stirring learners' anxiety. Other programmes follow more formalised intake and assessment procedures as required by governments.

A handful of research projects have focused on learners' feelings regarding initial interviews and assessments. New learners may experience fear when entering a new programme (Egloff, 1997, p. 166 and 177; see also Genuneit, 2004; and Füssenich, 2004). Schladebach (2006) describes many learners' reactions to intake forms as being like a "red rag to a bull". Brigitte, an adult foundation skill learner contributing to the German-language journal Alfa Forum, reports on her own panic, frustration and fear during the first talk, even though it did not involve any kind of test (Brigitte, 2004, p. 20).[1] These studies support the view that screening or assessment embedded in conversation is more likely to yield information regarding new learners' needs.

Indeed, adults with foundation skill needs report shame and fears of discrimination, and "stigma management" as a part of daily life. Many have developed skills to conceal low literacy or numeracy skills from their families or in everyday situations. The German researcher Birte Egloff describes how adults with low foundation skill have developed a range of coping strategies – in part, to avoid discovery (Egloff, 1997, p. 118). These coping strategies are also vital for functioning in a world developed for the literate (see also Blais, 1995; Daniau and Bélanger, Annex 3 on the Internet).

Taking such factors into account, the network of Ateliers de Formation de Base (AFB, or, Workshops for Foundation Skill Learners) in Haute

[1] Brigitte is an author in the ALPHA Forum journal. The journal invites adults with foundation skill needs as well as researchers and practitioners to write. Brigitte published a report about her feelings and experiences before and during the entry talk. It was her choice not to publish her last name.

Normandie, France have eliminated the initial set of diagnostic tests altogether. Programme leaders and instructors there felt that formal diagnostic tests were off-putting for individuals who have had negative experiences in school. Instructors in the AFB network believe that the welcoming interview should be the first step in an ongoing assessment process; there need not be a lot of pressure on building a complete profile of learners in this initial encounter. Instructors say that they are able to make fairly accurate diagnoses through more informal dialogue and observation (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Others have found that very informal questions are effective for establishing a collaborative tone between learners and assessors and providing helpful initial information during the welcoming interview. Guidelines used at the Centre for Adult Education (Centro de Educación de Personas Adultas, or CREA) in Ávila in Central Spain suggest that initial questions might include: "What do you expect from this course?" "What do you fear?" "How do you feel at this time?" "What earlier experiences of school have you had?" "What cultural handicaps do you feel you have?" (Sanz, Annex 3 on the Internet). Scholz (2004) makes straightforward recommendations for initial interviews – for example, to avoid desktop barriers between the assessor and the new learner, or the use of simple techniques and instruments (schemes of the alphabet, headlines of newspapers, filling in gaps in texts, and so on). Scholz suggests that assessors with good knowledge of diagnostics can learn a great deal from such simple approaches.

Learners may also be asked to give their own assessment of their skill levels. At the Jewel and Esk Valley College in Edinburgh, learners are asked to describe how they feel about their reading, writing, speaking, numeracy, IT and/or study skills. They rate their skills on a scale of 1 to 10 (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Some programmes are required to use more formalised intake and assessment procedures. In the case study featuring the Mobile Trailer Teaching Unit in Southern Jutland, Denmark, for example, instructors use the diagnostic, or "entry level test" developed by the Ministry of Education. The test is linked to the aims and standards for the curriculum and for certification. It is intended to identify learning gaps between the learner's level upon entry into the programme, and official course objectives. Instructors at this site use the results of this test to develop individualised learning programmes. Learning objectives as well as methods are specific to each learner (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

But there is also a need to evaluate the validity and reliability of the actual diagnostic instruments, whether implemented as a more formal

battery of tests or embedded in an interview. Indeed, we may know more about the administration of the most popular diagnostic tests than we do about their validity.

Identification of learning or other disabilities

Diagnostic assessment may also be important for identifying learning disabilities or difficulties (possibly previously undiagnosed). The World Dyslexia Association estimates that 4% of any population has severe dyslexia and a further 6% have dyslexic characteristics[2] (see *www.wdnf.info*). It is reasonable to suggest that the percentage of individuals with learning disabilities in adult LLN programmes may be much higher than in the general population. Poor diagnoses or the mishandling of learning and other disabilities in schooling may have hurt learner progress.

While diagnostic tests used for programme intake are not always appropriate for making an official diagnosis of dyslexia or other disabilities, they may lead to further testing. Clinical tests to diagnose learning disabilities are expensive, but the cost of not addressing the learner's barriers is likely to be even more expensive.

Box 6.1. The reading and writing circle
Verdal, Norway

The following illustrates the toll low literacy (and efforts to cover it up) can take on individuals over time:

> *... a local advocate for the Nord-Trøndelag Dyslexia Association notes that he has recruited some of those who are now active in the local Dyslexia Association and the Reading and Writing Circle through the intervention of the local hospital. The nurses there have called the local Dyslexia Association to meet with patients who appear to have reading and writing difficulties. Often, this advocate says, adults who have masked their problems with literacy throughout their lives have very high levels of stress, and related health problems. They may have reached a point of crisis in their lives by the time he meets them.*

Source: Looney, Husby and Røynestad (Annex 2 on the Internet).

These diagnoses are important not only for better understanding of specific barriers to learning, but also because learners with a specific

[2] As defined by the World Dyslexia Network Foundation, dyslexia is: "… a specific learning difficulty in the acquisition of reading, writing and spelling, and is neurological in origin…".

disability may have a legal right to accommodation in the education setting (in some countries, such as the United States, individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities such as dyslexia, also have a legal right to accommodation in work settings). Accommodation may include access to computers (particularly important for individuals with dysgraphia, or difficulties with writing), the opportunity to take tests orally, extended time on exams and other guidance. However, it is important to emphasise that learners cannot claim rights if they do not have an official diagnosis.

The diagnosis of a disability and appropriate response may make all the difference for the learner. An instructor at the Haven programme in Inverness, Scotland recounted that they had "…had people that have had one specific barrier that kept them from learning… Once [a learner has] defined and overcome that there is nothing to stop them". This instructor cited the case of one learner who had been diagnosed with epilepsy as a pupil and was told not to use computers because a flickering computer screen might trigger an epileptic fit. He had always thought that he would never be able to work with computers until the programme coordinator at Haven made him aware that the newer LCD monitors would not have the same problems with flickering (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

A closer look at diagnostic tests and recognition of prior learning

The German review of literature developed for this report (Grotlüschen and Bonna, Annex 3 on the Internet) describes qualitative and quantitative diagnostic tests developed for younger learners in vocational education, but which may also be used in adult LLN education. DIA-TRAN, for example, measures existing competencies, potential, attitudes and behaviours. In a (non-representative) sample of 183 participants, DIA-TRAN received positive reviews: 81.6% answered that they learned more about themselves and their skills; 71.1% answered that they were more optimistic about the future; 47.4% answered that they had a better idea of what they would do in their vocational future. On the other hand, 13.2% answered that the aims of DIA-TRAN were not clear.

The e-based KODE and KODEX systems evaluate basic competencies related to personal, activity-based, technical and methodical, and social and communicative competencies (assessors refer to a grid with questions) (Heyse, Erpenbeck and Max, 2004). These systems are widely used in enterprises and in employment agencies across the German-speaking countries. Trainers and counsellors using this system need a license. The developers say that KODE and KODEX are not psychometric tests, but tools to help users, with the assistance of a counsellor, to reflect on their

competencies and learning needs. As with many such systems, there is a need for closer evaluation to understand the full impact.

In the German-speaking countries, portfolios for validation of acquired competencies are among the most prevalent diagnostic activities. For example, Germany has more than 50 "further education passports". Participants usually work with a counsellor to define and validate prior formal and informal learning activities and to identify areas for further development to meet goals. Three of the most widely-used portfolios are: the ProfilPASS (Germany), CH-Q Kompetenz-Management-Modell (Switzerland), and the Kompetenzbilanz and KOMPAZ (Austria).

ProfilPASS, used in Germany, is the newest of these portfolios. Piloted in 2004-05 and officially released in 2006, the developers describe the aim of the ProfilPASS as being "…to bring unconscious competencies into the consciousness of the user" (DIE/DIPF/IES, 2006, p. 88). The aim is to strengthen self-esteem and motivation for further learning. A pilot phase evaluation of 1 178 users showed that the portfolio had been well-received. Twenty-seven per cent of the users reported that they had identified "unconscious" competencies in the process of working with a counsellor to complete the portfolio. Another 41% of users reported that while they were aware of their competencies, they had not thought of their competencies as "something special". The pilot phase evaluation indicates that 35% of the participants pursued further education, but does not indicate any that the portfolios had had impact on the learning process itself.

CH-Q Kompetenz-Management-Modell was developed and implemented in Switzerland in 1995 and is now used in five European countries. It is valid for legal accreditation of learning. Nevertheless, the quality of design and implementation of CH-Q have not been evaluated (Käpplinger, 2002).

The Kompetenzbilanz and KOMPAZ (Austria) are based on the CH-Q. They are used to help individuals to identify their strengths and skills and define future objectives. It usually takes four to five weeks to complete the six steps of the portfolio. A 2005 evaluation of the Kompetenzbilanz found that six months after the completion of the Kompetenzbilanz, participants reported that most of the methods had been helpful. Nearly 86% of the participants were positive about the requirement to work with a coach to complete the portfolio. Nearly 31% of respondents "mostly" agreed that they had achieved their primary aim. The 2005 evaluation concludes that the approach has been helpful in making people aware of their informally acquired competencies and skills, and in developing goals for their vocational future.

Engaging with learners' culture and background

Learners in adult LLN classes bring their own cultural backgrounds and experiences to the learning setting. Reder (1994), in a review of educational and anthropological research on this subject, suggests that adult learners have already developed a range of literacy practices appropriate to their family and social environment. Instruction should therefore move away from "deficit models" which focus on learners' lack of mainstream literacy skills. A better approach is to build on the learner's existing literacy practices, and the social meanings shaping literacy development (see also Shields, Bishop and Mazawi, 2004, for an exploration of "the impact of deficit thinking" in Navajo, Maori and Bedouin schools).

Developing the individual learning plan (ILP) or contract

"Individual learning plans" (ILPs) or learning contracts are common across the exemplary programmes visited for this study. An ILP typically sets out the learner's specific goals and how he/she will go about achieving those goals. It may include information on the learner's needs and motivations, priorities for a particular class or personal interests that may help the instructor to customise learning and ensure that it is both relevant and interesting. The process of developing the ILP also provides an opportunity for learners to identify their strengths – ensuring that the focus is not only on their learning gaps but also on their capacities. Instructors may also use this information to anchor future learning in existing knowledge.

Learners and instructors collaborate on the development of the ILP, which is usually completed in the first days or weeks of a programme. The negotiation between learners and instructors regarding goals and teaching and learning methods, if not unique to adult LLN sector, nevertheless receives much greater emphasis. Learner goals set out in the ILP must be balanced against official programme or curriculum requirements, or the needs of the workplace.

Instructors need to be able to call upon a wide range of skills and knowledge in order to tailor learning to individual needs and preferences while also working toward specific curriculum goals. However, finding the balance between learner goals and official curriculum may well be one of the most challenging aspects for instructors in the adult LLN sector. As programme staff in one of the US case study sites commented, it often seems that learners' individual goals merely co-exist with curriculum, but at times, instructors are able to effectively incorporate individual's specific goals into teaching units (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

The ILP also serves a touchstone for providing both formal and informal feedback to learners on progress made. As instructors in the Mary Ward Centre, London note, with a well-designed ILP, the usual "good job, you are making progress" becomes "good job, you are close to completing a specific goal" (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet). Learners and instructors also use the ILP formatively, to assess their own progress over time and to identify remaining gaps (see Chapter 10).

Box 6.2. Continuing Education and Training Services (CETS) Croydon, England

When new learners first come to the Continuing Education and Training Services centre in Croydon, they meet with a staff member who explains the programme and answers the learner's questions. An Assessment Interview Form is completed for each new learner, recording information about the learner, the reasons he/she is trying to improve his/her basic skills, and the support services he/she might need. New learners are also assessed with written tests, which helps determine the level at which they should be placed….

Once the initial assessment is complete, new learners are helped to prepare an individual learning plan (ILP). The ILP contains the learner's long-term goals, goals for the class, preferred learning styles, and interests that might help the tutor contextualize learning. The form also has sections for learners and tutors to review progress, identify enrichment programmes that might support learning, and record attendance, punctuality, contribution in class and completion of homework.

Once this initial process is complete, learners receive an Induction Programme List so that they can check off that they have completed all the preparation steps but also have had their questions answered, such as, when the class starts and ends, and the expectations for homework, attendance, and punctuality.

Each learner's ILP is reviewed using a review checklist that asks learners to describe what they can now do that they could not do at the beginning of the term, examples of how they have used these skills outside of class, the impact of those new skills, and what they feel they need to learn next. This review includes a discussion of a Record of Programme progress ... that records accomplishments, both by self assessment and tutor assessment, during the term. If learners drop out during the term, they are contacted and asked to provide a reason for their dropout.

Tutors fill out a lesson plan for each session. At the end of the term, the tutor also fills out a feedback summary that records the learners' evaluation of the course and the Centre and its facilities, and summarises any comments made by learners. The form also asks tutors to reflect on their teaching, specifically their strengths, areas of development to be taken and when, and any other centre related issues.

Source: Comings and Vorhaus (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Learning contracts, which are used to help learners to develop problem-solving skills in the German apprenticeship system as well as in some university classes, are a variation on the ILP, but also have features in common with the "management-by-objectives" approach (Ott, 1999). A learning contract may set out an agreement for completion of a small project, with an outline of objectives, competencies to be built, and time. Upon completion of the project, the results are presented for summative assessment (Grotlüschen and Bonna, Annex 3 on the Internet).

An evaluation on use of the contracts in a university setting found that the learners had mixed reactions. Some learners reported that the contracts helped them to reflect on and better articulate study aims, and to structure group processes. Others reported that they liked the overall approach of the learning contracts, but found that the design was too complex, and required too much administrative work. A third group reported negative reactions to the economic terminology. As one respondent commented, "This reminds me of my time as a hospital nurse, where I already hated agreements on objectives" (Graeßner 2002, p. 11).

Box 6.3. Saint-Quentin-Fallavier Penitentiary
Lyon, France

All the case study programmes in France use "learning contracts". The contracts developed within the French penitentiary system illustrate how the contracts are adapted to their particular situation….

Because inmates may not stay in a particular facility for a long period of time (the inmate may be transferred or released) learning contracts define very specific objectives which may be attained in a relatively short period of time (for example, around 40 hours). [As one instructor noted] "we don't have 600 hours at our disposal [to accomplish everything we would like to], so we identify a specific need with the learner, and fix our objectives. Then we measure demonstrated qualitative gains".

Source: Michel and Maroun (Annex 2 on the Internet).

The ILP helps learners to express their personal motivations for learning (*intrinsic* motivation) to define achievable goals, and provides information for instructors as to how they might make learning more relevant. Motivation is crucial for successful learning, and reflects the energy and focus learners are prepared to commit to achieving goals (see OECD, 2000; OECD, 2007). Several studies also highlight the centrality of learner motivation to learner persistence (see for example, Beder, 1991; Wikelund, Reder and Hart-Landsberg, 1992; Tracy-Mumford, 1994; Quigley, 1997).

Certainly the process of developing the ILP will push learners to clarify their short- and long-term goals, but they will also need support and encouragement along the way. Learning is more effective when learners are involved at all stages of the process, including planning learning, and tracking achievement of goals (Clarke, 1991; Greenwood and Wilson, 2004).

Key issues and conclusions

This study has a strong focus on the process of learning – how learners progress toward higher level skills and greater autonomy. In the exemplary programmes featured in the study, this process begins as soon as learners enter a programme. The first steps typically include an initial interview and diagnostic assessment setting out the new learner's needs as well as goals, setting the tone and direction for learning.

The exemplary programmes visited for this study took very different approaches to these first steps. In some countries and regions, adult LLN programmes are required to use an officially approved diagnostic test and interview process. This is to ensure equity of treatment across programmes. There are also guidelines for gathering information in a more informal manner for new learners. Other countries do not have official guidelines related to the initial interview and diagnosis. In one of the programmes visited, the instructors had deliberately eliminated the initial, more formal diagnosis they had been using. These instructors felt that it was more important for the first encounter be welcoming than to gather as much information as possible; there are many opportunities to diagnose learner needs once learners have started the programme.

The debate as to just how formal or informal the welcoming interview and diagnostic assessment should be may set up a false dichotomy, however. An assessment that creates great levels of stress is not likely to yield a useful result. This is particularly important given some learners' scepticism, and even panic, fear and frustration when they enter a new programme, as described in this chapter.

Validated instruments (and training of the assessor) are needed to ensure that the right questions are asked, and are asked in a way that will yield the needed information. High quality diagnostic assessments help instructors to identify barriers to learning, such as a disability (possibly previously undiagnosed or unaddressed), and to avoid compounding negative experiences. Diagnostic assessments for speakers of other languages may also need to include diagnostics for learning and other disabilities.

Tools to identify competencies may also be useful for helping adults take a more positive view of their existing skills. The integration of validated instruments for recognition of prior learning into adult LLN programmes may provide better information on learners' existing strengths and capacities. Instructors may also use this information to better anchor teaching. The range of instruments used to identify and validate learners' acquired competencies in German-speaking countries, as reviewed for this study, show some promise, although further development is needed. Individual learning plans and contracts are quite common across exemplary programmes visited. These plans help to identify the learner's motivations for starting and staying in a programme. (A learner's ability to articulate specific goals is an important factor in persistence, as well.) Instructors are also better able to understand the contexts within which learners will use skills. The plans or contracts often serve as tools for formative assessment – that is, a way to gauge how learners are progressing toward goals, remaining gaps, and plans to address those gaps. (See Chapter 10 for more on the use of ILPs and contracts as tools for tracking progress.)

Balancing individual goals with official curriculum is not only one of the most challenging tasks for instructors, but also one of the most important. Learners should also be involved in this process, and plans should be simple, straightforward and accessible. In this way, learners develop their own skills for learning-to-learn, and stay focused on meeting their goals.

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Chapter 7
Relationships within the Classroom: Dialogue and Peer Assessment

This chapter introduces the second of the five steps in the OECD staircase. It highlights the importance of high quality classroom relationships, fuelled by dialogue, in the teaching, learning and assessment process. Instructors create environments where learners are able to reveal what they do and do not understand, and are fully engaged in the learning process. Peer assessment also helps to build solidarity within a group, and provides opportunities to catalyse learning.

The second step of the OECD staircase highlights the centrality of relationships within the classroom, as built through dialogue and peer assessment. The subject of classroom relationships is a central theme in much of the literature on adult learning – much more so than in literature for school-age learners. This reflects, in part, the historical absence of a well-defined curriculum or standardised goals for adult learners, as well as the need to balance learners' varied goals, motivations, and diversity of their backgrounds (Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet).

Dialogue and peer assessment also provide rich opportunities to uncover and build on learners' prior experiences and knowledge, and to develop and improve strategies and skills. Indeed, brain research reinforces the importance of high-quality social interaction for catalysing learning and development (OECD, 2007).

Dialogue

The focus on dialogue is one of the important ways in which adult learning is distinguished from compulsory school teaching and learning, where the image is usually of the teacher lecturing from the front of the room while learners take notes. Dialogue recognises the learner's status as an equal, and enables instructors and learners to discover and draw upon the

range of experience of participants (Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet). Dialogue is also a way to explore the process of learning, and the learner's feelings about and motivation for learning (see Boud, 2000; Eldred *et al.*, 2005; McGivney, 1996).

The following five elements emerge from the OECD case studies and reviews of the international literature as important for effective dialogue in adult LLN settings:

1. Building rapport and creating a "safe" environment.
2. Using dialogue to promote participatory and democratic learning.
3. Negotiating learning goals and methods.
4. Structuring dialogue to meet specific learning goals.
5. Using dialogue to establish what learners do and do not know and to adjust teaching to meet identified learning needs.

Taken separately, any of these five elements may be seen either as too diffuse or as serving only narrow learning objectives. For example, several commentators point out that building a safe environment is essential, but learners also need to be challenged to move beyond their comfort zone. Other commentators see the focus on dialogue as a method for uncovering the learner's understanding, in particular, as serving an instrumentalist approach to meeting externally defined learning outcomes, while paying little heed to whether learners have internalised the ideas and concepts. But taken together, the five elements help to ensure that dialogue enriches the learning process.

Building rapport and creating a "safe" environment

There is wide agreement among researchers and practitioners that a "safe" environment is a pre-condition for effective classroom dialogue. This has been referred to as "…the need for an appropriate 'atmosphere', 'classroom culture', or 'organisational environment', meaning a relaxed interpersonal climate in which learners are comfortable to interact, listen to others, even to disagree with or challenge others, including the teacher" (Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet).

Several of the OECD case study researchers remarked that the classrooms visited for this study were relaxed and positive places, and that learners and instructors were very supportive of one another. Instructors, particularly those who have been used to teaching in a "frontal", or "transmission" mode, find that they have to re-think their own roles and the dynamics within the classroom. It is important to "lose the teacher mask", as

one instructor at the Reading and Writing Circle in Verdal, Norway, commented. Instructors may also invite learners to critique their own performance. This same instructor commented, "a very good sign of progress is when the learners catch the instructor making a mistake". Instructors in this programme say that empathy is absolutely essential. Empathy, of course, refers to the ability of the instructor to put him/herself in the learners' place and to understand feelings – as well as to understand their specific learning challenges and needs (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet; see also Marshall and Wiliam, 2006).

The instructors interviewed at the Verdal Reading and Writing Circle also emphasised that no subject should be off limits for discussion during class time. As one instructor commented, "…learners need to be able to bring concerns from their everyday lives into the classroom and to know that they can discuss them with instructors or peers". Learners in the programme are invited to express their needs for teaching and learning. Coffee/tea breaks are also noted as an important opportunity to socialise, where all may talk about their lives and the class with each other. Joking is common – including self-deprecating humour.

Several commentators confirm the importance of such approaches, noting that instructors must be willing to engage with other aspects of learners' lives as well as their emotions, attitudes and beliefs about learning (Barton and Papen, 2005; Ginsburg and Gal, 1996; Nonesuch, 2006; Swan, 2006). In a synthesis of findings from research conducted between 2002 and 2005, the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) in the United Kingdom, found that the instructor's empathy and patience, as well as capacity to understand the learners' needs and trajectories are as important as technical competence. The NRDC synthesis report further notes that "[a]ddressing adults' needs and life experience (often including negative experiences of education) is far more influential in guiding learning programmes than environment, funding or accreditation-related targets" (NRDC, 2005).

Some instructors and programmes have also created more formal ways for learners to address their fears or to express their feelings about the learning process. For example, the second-chance TKO (*Tweedenkan Onderwijs*) programme in Hoboken, Belgium, has developed a course entitled "Fear of Failure". Some learners say that this course has helped them to feel more confident and provided guidance on how to meet their goals (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet). At the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger, Norway, one of the instructors has "class time" once a month with coffee and ice cream to discuss the atmosphere and organisation of the class. During this session, she asks the learners if there is anything difficult, bad, or positive that they want to talk about. Another

instructor in this programme asks learners to use their log book to talk about their own feelings, or to voice complaints about something in the class if they want to do so. If there is an issue she finds to be of particular importance to the entire group, she may ask the learner if she may read the log to the class (keeping the author anonymous) so that everyone can talk about it. If the learners write about an individual problem, she may have an individual meeting with them. This instructor says that learners tend to be very honest and open. She does not correct grammar in the log book (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

This emphasis on creation of a safe space is intended to help learners feel more free to express themselves, and to expose what they do and do not know. But it is also about building learner self-efficacy regarding their ability to succeed at learning (Absolum, 2006). As instructors at the Buddies for Learning programme in Renfrewshire, Scotland noted, many of the learners in the programme "…were taught in school in a way that undermined their confidence in themselves and in their learning". They may have felt that it was their own fault if they did not understand something at school. According to the Buddies for Learning instructors, "…if learners do not understand, the philosophy is that it is the tutors' problem not the learner's". In other words, tutors/instructors are responsible for helping learners address any learning misconceptions or misunderstandings.

Box 7.1. Adult Basic Education
Winterstein Adult School , California, United States

During an Adult Basic Education course observed for this study, the instructor asked for examples of how to use the word "reverse" in a sentence. To demonstrate the word's meaning, one student said, "If there was one thing I wish that I could do in my life, it would be to reverse some of the decisions that my parents made [referring to their divorce] when I was young". This sentence prompted a number of reactions of empathy from the other students and the teacher thanking her for her contribution as well as confirming the correct use of the word. The next student (a young woman who appeared to be a somewhat reluctant participant in the class up to this point) then offered her sentence (with some emotion), "there is nothing in my life that I would want to reverse, because it's all made me the strong person that I am". A nearby student patted her on her shoulder, saying, "right on, that's cool". The two contributions generated a warm buzz of affirmation between the students who clearly felt that it was 'safe' to self-disclose, as well as completing the 'technical' task set by the teacher. This class had a very high rate of attendance, which the centre's principal attributed in large part to the supportive environment that the teacher had created.

Source: Benseman and Comings (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Research on learner persistence by Comings, Parrella and Soricon (1999) points to the importance of positive relationships with the instructor and fellow students. However, learners rate the relationship with the instructor as being much more significant. (Of all respondents, 50.7% found that classroom relationships were important. Of this group, 81% indicated the relationship with the specific instructor as being most important, 9% indicated the importance of their relationships with fellow learners as most important, and 10% referred to a combination of the two.) In a separate study, learners in a mathematics course credited better individual relationships with the instructor and group work with helping to build their confidence. These were in sharp contrast to the kinds of relationships they had experienced in school and sometimes in other adult learning settings (Baxter *et al.*, 2006). Beder (2005) found that learners are more engaged when they interact more frequently with the instructor.

Instructors point out that creating this "safe space", or culture of trust, may be challenging, particularly among learners who are sceptical about educational institutions. Instructors at the Adult Education Youth Class in Århus, Denmark, observe that helping learners to develop motivation and positive self-efficacy is "…as necessary for these youngsters as are the studies themselves". (Learners in the classes observed were between 17 and 30 years of age.) Instructors in this programme make themselves available for personal meetings with learners. They also collaborate closely with their colleagues. These instructors have been trained in conflict resolution and mediation; learners have also learned strategies for coping with conflict. Instructors at the programme have initiated regular Monday morning "joint evaluations" where learners may participate in collective project work, or even card games. The joint evaluations are a way to build social competencies, and to move away from more stressful experiences (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

An instructor at the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger, Norway observed that building a culture of trust also requires that learners see the assessment process as positive. As this instructor noted, "nothing aggravates people so much as how they are assessed by others". She wants learners to understand that the assessment process is directly related to helping them learn and to improve over time (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

A safe environment, however, does not imply that instructors and/or other learners cannot challenge each others' beliefs and assumptions. Alexander (2004), for example, argues that "…true dialogue entails challenge and disagreement as well as consensus". Brookfield (1990) points out that teaching is about making judgements – although some approaches to assessment are more effective (constructive, specific, task-oriented,

timely, etc.). Swan (2006) argues that effective learning is often the result of "cognitive conflicts". Reporting on findings from different classrooms, Swan found that learner results improved when instructors focused on and discussed specific conceptual obstacles rather than merely transmitting information.

Disagreement, debate, and judgement, however, are only effective when instructors and learners have developed interactive and positive relationships (Absolum, 2006; Ecclestone, 2004). James (1997) makes the point that "direct questioning of deeply-ingrained beliefs may often arouse defensiveness and resentment". Discussions of politics and culture may be highly charged if not handled appropriately.[1]

The francophone commentator Jorro (2000) identifies the ways in which instructors risk being either too critical, or not critical enough. Jorro warns instructors against:

- *Fault-finding*: Placing too much emphasis correcting mistakes.
- *Collusion*: Validation of work that should be corrected.
- *Deconstruction*: Re-working a learner's approach to problem-solving without acknowledging the positive aspects of what he or she has done.
- *Apology*: Seeing only the positive aspects without helping the learner to reconsider his or her approach to doing things.
- *Truisms*: Referring to existing work without advancing it in anyway.
- *Proselytism*: Excessive generalisation without consideration of context.
- *Prophesy*: Ignoring the details or logic behind a concept.
- *Betrayal*: Lack of respect for confidentiality.
- *Improvisation*: Having too much confidence that a lesson will go well in spite of a lack of structure or preparation.

Thus, instructors need to establish a supportive climate, while also providing opportunities for learners to express frustration or resistance to aspects

[1] Instructors may also need to consider whether and how to raise issues that may be sensitive in some cultures, or which may not be considered as appropriate for group discussion. For example, some subjects may not be appropriate for discussion in mixed-gender groups (as highlighted in the health literacy literature, subjects such as AIDS, rape, drugs, trauma, and other subjects may be particularly sensitive).

of the learning experience (Nonesuch, 2006), or to disagree or challenge others in regard to strategies for solving problems (Swan, 2006). Knowles (1983) further suggests that a supportive climate is necessary if learners are to look objectively at their own learning gaps and needs. Helsing, Drago-Severson and Kegan (2004), in their exploration of theories of adult development, note that the ability to question assumptions and to be receptive to others' ideas is important to the development of critical thinking skills.

Using dialogue to promote participatory and democratic learning

Dialogue to promote participatory and democratic learning centres not only on *what* instructors and learners discuss (for example, rights, community and social change, and so on), but also on *how* these principles are put into practice in the learning setting.

Democratic principles and participatory learning have had special currency in Spain, where the the publication *Libro Blanco de Educación de Adultos* (Fernández, 1986) helped to promote a new model of participatory and collective assessment. Under this model, assessment was no longer considered the sole prerogative of instructors. The introduction of the *Libro Blanco* coincided with the restoration of democracy in Spain and the new demands of the workplace.

The Centro de Investigación Social y Educativa (CREA) of the Universidad de Barcelona promotes dialogue as "the foundation to democratic learning". CREA outlines seven key principles:

1. *Equality of dialogue*: everyone may speak and all are equal.
2. *Transformation of the learner's self concept*: learners come to understand that there "… are no pre-established limits to the capacity for improvement".
3. *The creation of shared meani*ng: learners learn that they can act positively in their families, communities, workplaces and personal lives by sharing their thoughts, feelings and dreams.
4. *The use of tools*: learning to use the technology is an important goal for learners in the programme.
5. *Equality of differences*: learners learn to value their own cultures and modes of expression (for example an oral literary tradition) while also learning how to express themselves in the dominant culture, so as not to be excluded.

6. *Cultural intelligence*: no one has deficits, and all are able to learn. Learners bring a range of literacy practices from their own experiences, cultural background and social environments.

7. *Solidarity*: cooperation and collaboration are encouraged among learners. Learners may also advise instructors on how they can best help them to achieve their goals.

The seven principles are particularly important for learners in marginalised communities, such as learning groups in prisons or in Roma communities (see also Flecha García, 1997), or in other informal or non-institutionalised collective learning situations (Sanz, Annex 3 on the Internet).

These ideas also resonate among many experts and practitioners in other countries. At the Saint-Quentin-Fallavier penitentiary in Lyon, France, inmates say that the classroom is the only place within the facility where they can come together no matter who they are or what their background. They say they feel respected within the classroom ("here, the instructor refers to me as 'Mr.'"). The instructor in this programme notes that the courses are, symbolically, *l'école républicaine*, where individual rights are respected and the person is protected. "That's something very strong for us," the instructor notes. "It's a true antidote to the tensions elsewhere in the facility" (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Similar attitudes were found in the exemplary case studies across the participating countries, where instructors placed emphasis on modelling democratic interactions within the classroom (whether they articulate the ideas in these terms or not). Participants in classrooms listened to others, posed questions, critiqued ideas, argued points of view. These skills are also the core skills of citizenship (see also Alexander, 2004). So, while the content in many of the LLN classes observed for this study was usually very focused on helping learners to gain specific skills, such as a new grammar structure or a new mathematical concept, the interactions reflected the principles of democratic interaction (in line with those formulated by CREA). Learners interviewed for the OECD case studies also express their appreciation that instructors treat them as equals. Several of the OECD case study researchers describe interactions between and among instructors and learners as positive adult experiences, reflecting a relationship of equals.

Research on the workplace may provide a window on how dialogue-based teaching and learning can most effectively promote democratic participation. Belfiore and Folinsbee (2004) highlight the importance of workplace "management style". They provide examples of how employees demonstrate their critical thinking capacities in making suggestions for improvements in work processes. They suggest that training and quality

improvement processes should allow full participation of learners/workers, rather than being top-down instructor or manager-led.

Negotiating learning goals and methods

Learners in adult LLN classrooms may engage in ongoing negotiations with instructors regarding their goals and preferred learning approaches. The Buddies for Learning programme in Renfrewshire, Scotland, follows a "dialogical method" – where all learning is negotiated between individual learners and instructors. The programme uses information on what the learner already knows and is interested in (gathered in diagnostic assessment and the individual learning plan, as well as through ongoing classroom conversations with the learner). Instructors and learners may establish mutual criteria for monitoring success. Teaching is then based on assessment of learner progress, and responds to individual learning needs. Such negotiations may also serve to build learners' skills for "learning to learn" (Condelli, 2002; Roberts *et al.*, 2004, Sanz, 2007).

Box 7.2. Learning Buddies
Renfrewshire, Scotland

The Buddies philosophy is very much about letting people learn at their own pace. Three principal aims guide the tutor's support for learners. First, working with what the individual learner already knows and is interested in; second, creating an environment where the norm is for the individual learner to have power over his or her own learning by using the individual learning plan to set learning goals and assess achievement thus ensuring that each individual decides both what they want to learn and how he or she wants to go about that learning; and third, focussing on the learner's understanding and responding to learners' individual learning styles. Through the group setting learners observe what other people are doing in class and that creates ambitions to pursue the same track. Given the negative school experiences of most Buddies learners, one of its primary goals is to build trust and confidence in learning within a safe space allowing for experiencing success in achieving their own goals. Learners are not just getting one chance but two or three, because Buddies aims at turning around learner preconceptions that they cannot learn or that it is the learner's fault if he or she does not understand.

Source: Sliwka and Tett (Annex 2 on the Internet).

An instructor in one of the programmes visited in California engages learners by sharing what she has learned in her professional development sessions. For example, she had told her students that the four main components of successful literacy were phonemic awareness and phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. She was delighted when recently talking about building vocabulary in a session, one of the students called out,

"yeah, because that's one of the four things we need to read better" (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Inevitably, as the commentator Hautecoeur (1996) points out, different stakeholders have very different views on the aims of adult foundation learning. For example, French researchers focused on work-based skills emphasise the importance of foundations skills for reading and writing, calculation, problem-resolution, and orientation. Researchers in other francophone countries, however, also emphasise the importance of teamwork, and the use of ICT for independent learning (including for personal development and community participation) (Michel, 2006; Bastyns and Stercq, 2002; Charest and Roy, 2001). These tensions may also play out in the process of negotiating learning goals and methods.

Structuring dialogue to meet specific learning goals

Classroom dialogue, in the words of the well-known commentator on adult education, Paulo Freire (1972), should be "….an organised, systematised and developed representation of things people want to know more about". It should also be open-ended, allowing participants to explore issues and problems rather than merely engage in routine exchanges. Dialogue may be structured around a specific learning objective, such as building a specific grammar skill (and this will be more important with beginning learners), but it should also provide a chance for learners to critique the material, their feelings about it, or about the process of learning itself (see also Marr, 2000; Ivanic, 1996; Ivanic and Simpson, 1988).

Box 7.3. Napa Valley Adult School
California, United States

A number of the ESL classes had made considerable efforts to base their lesson plans in civics on surveys of their students' expressed needs. At Napa Valley Adult School for example, a survey had shown 'accessing and using free or low-cost medical and dental services' and 'keeping your family safe and responding to emergencies' as the two top needs for their students, although the priorities also varied across the different ESL levels. These topics had therefore been the focus of the first sessions of these classes. Students in this class were also encouraged to work in small groups on their civics programme, which the teachers felt helped to make the programme more learner-driven. A California official confirmed that teaching based on these sorts of learner surveys "has dramatically changed ESL teaching in a lot of centres" because of its contextualising of curriculum, rather than being predominantly workbook-driven.

Source: Benseman and Comings (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Instructors develop activities and provide materials to guide conversation, and to relate to the specific interests of the learners. They may use a combination of direct instruction or structured activities for the whole class, as well as individual or small group tutoring. In a class observed in the Skills for Life programme in Croydon, Borough of London, the instructor noted that all the learners in the class want to improve their skills either to become employed or to improve their income. In the class observed, the instructor focused on goals of the core curriculum, but also drew upon his knowledge of the learners' specific employment goals, interests in sports, movies, and the novel one of the learners was reading.

At the Ateliers de Formation de Base (AFB) in Haute-Normandie, France, a group of instructors has engaged in an action research project in partnership with researchers at the University of Rouen (Jean-Pierre Astolfi) and the University of Provence (Anne Jorro). The action researchers focused on making the assessment process transparent, as well as adjusting teaching to meet learner needs while working toward goals. The instructors have developed tools to structure observation of learners, and to better understand the logic behind each learner's way of thinking. Classes are structured and planned, but instructors are also prepared to re-orient teaching when necessary – that is, until the learner shows evidence of having understood the goal for the lesson. Assessment is thus integrated into the learning situation, where the learner is an active participant in his/her own learning (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Researchers and practitioners involved in the project at Haute-Normandie suggest that assessment should not be about pointing out what learners lack (even if the aim is to fill learning gaps), but about building on what learners already know and can do. Thus instructors need to be accepting of learners as well as demanding. These action researchers also point out the importance of modelling assessment skills for learner peer- and self-assessment (Forum des pratiques, 2005).

Using dialogue to establish what learners do and do not know and to adjust teaching to meet identified learning needs

Identifying learning gaps (that is, the gap between what learners know and what they are trying to achieve) and adjusting teaching to meet identified needs is central to the concept of formative assessment. Gérard (2004) suggests that formative assessment should be used throughout the learning process to identify and analyse the kinds of errors a learner is making in order to select an appropriate remediation. Learners also need opportunities to reinforce new knowledge, by applying it in a variety of situations (see for example, Vygotsky, 1986).

But some commentators suggest that learning is significantly narrowed when dialogue is seen primarily as a way to determine whether learners are meeting standardised criteria and learning goals. McNair (1996), for example, argues that "…while the development of explicit outcomes has been helpful in some ways", it "…is not enough to develop autonomy – the key question is not 'does my performance satisfy the criteria?' but 'do we agree that this is right?'". Learners gain "authentic autonomy" when they have developed their own capacity for judgement, and are not reliant on standardised criteria or procedures (see also Brookfield, 1990).

Learners may also need alternative ways to raise issues they want to explore in more depth. Several instructors say they have organised their time so that they can provide more one-to-one support for learners. Instructors in the adult returnees' course at the Jewel and Esk Valley College in Edinburgh set aside as much as 30 minutes for each of the nine learners prior to or following a course (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet). One instructor at the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger, Norway sets aside time for frequent mini-conferences with learners during the 2-hour lesson. She uses this time to give feedback and to help learners to reflect on strategies that help them to learn best. Other instructors at the Learning Centre take advantage of "guidance hours" (an official class time for learners to do their homework and confer with instructors) to get to know individual learners better. In this context, it is easier for instructors to spend time with learners and to see if they are solving tasks mechanically, or if they understand the underlying concepts. But the instructors also tell learners that it is their responsibility to ask instructors for help if they don't understand something.

Log books may also be a useful way to monitor learner understanding and to provide an additional way for learners to raise questions or concerns. For example, the mathematics instructor at the Johannes Learning Centre marks a plus (+) or minus (-) sign in the learner's log book to highlight whether he/she has completed the problem correctly, or needs to re-do it. The instructor likes this system because it is simple and concise. Nor is there any excuse, he says, for colleagues who are also working with the same learners to say they don't understand the system.

He finds that the log books also provide a way for learners to give him feedback about how they feel about their learning, to raise questions, and to note any issues they may be having with the class. He finds that many learners do not like to ask questions in class because they see this as showing that they are stupid. They are much more open in their log books.

The language instructors at the Johannes Learning Centre also use log books. The learners use them to ask the instructor to focus on a particular

issue or problem in class – and the instructors often prepare lessons in response to these requests. The intention is to get the learners to diagnose their own learning needs, and for the instructor to act as a guide in helping them reach their learning goals. The log books also encourage learners to reveal what they don't understand, and to address learning gaps directly (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Classroom dialogue also presents multiple opportunities for spontaneous teaching and learning. Case study researchers in the United States observed several instances where instructors turned simple and fairly straightforward questions into mini-lessons on learning-to-learn. For example, in one of the lessons observed, a learner identified Ottawa as the capital of Canada. The instructor then asked, "so who knows how to spell it?", prompting a five minute mini-lesson incorporating a discussion on how to check spelling using a computer, and how to use Google as a learning resource. In another example, a learner's question on accessing health services led to a discussion on recent experiences other learners had had in accessing those services.

Dialogue to establish what learners do and do not know inevitably means that learners must reveal misunderstandings or allow themselves to make mistakes in front of the instructor and their peers. Instructors need to first establish an environment of trust and support (the "safe" space discussed above), and the understanding that mistakes provide an opportunity to learn. As an instructor in one adult basic education classroom in the United States told her students, "it's OK if it's not right, because we can all fix it" (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Peer assessment and peer mentoring

Classes are usually composed of learners from very different backgrounds, with different learning needs and goals (although in urban areas with larger numbers of learners, it is easier to group learners according to level). Even in classes where learners are grouped according to level (or in the case of language classes, according to Western or non-Western language background, or educational background), learners are likely to have very different needs. A learner may have high speaking skills, but low writing skills. A class might include some learners who make slow progress, while others make normal or rapid progress. Or learners may have similar learning challenges, but with different causes. Learners may range in age from their early twenties to late seventies, and come from different countries and continents. Such diversity may make the instructor's task of tailoring learning to meet learner needs extremely challenging, but also all the more necessary.

Some point out that diversity is reflective of social groups beyond the classroom (family, friends, work and leisure), and may provide significant opportunities for learners to learn from each other through dialogue (Forum des pratiques, 2005). Learning may be deepened when learners with very different experiences and approaches work together to learn new things (see also the discussion on the "positive use of heterogeneity" in the French case study developed for this report, Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

The Spanish literature refers to peer assessment as "the paradigm of participatory (cooperative and active) correction". Peer assessment takes place during the learning process, rather than at the end of it, as with summative assessment. This approach allows learners to improve their performance. Small, interactive groups build solidarity among learners, promote dialogue, and provide opportunities for each learner to share his/her knowledge and skills (Sanz, Annex 3 on the Internet). Learners with very different backgrounds and experiences have the opportunity to engage in high quality dialogue, exploring different ideas and ways of understanding. Collaboration among peers also provides opportunities for learners to explore "what makes for a quality performance" and to catalyse learning (see Absolum, 2006; Alexander, 2004; Baxter *et al*., 2006; Breen, 2001; Ivanic and Tseng, 2005; Marr, 2000; Marshall and Wiliam, 2006; Morton, McGuire and Baynham, 2006; OECD, 2007; Tout and Schmidtt, 2002).

As is the case with instructor feedback, however, learners need to be able to provide specific suggestions as to how their peers may improve their performance (McNickle, 1994). They may also need to get used to working in groups. At the Jewel and Esk Valley College in Edinburgh, instructors note that "getting to know other people in the course is part of the structure of group work". Learners first work in pairs, and then gradually in groups of four, and then in two teams. Learners in the programme may also undertake group work on subjects of shared general interest, conducting research in the library and on the Internet, and then giving a group presentation (past group topics have included World War II, homelessness, and eating disorders) (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Peer mentoring is at the core of the Reading and Writing Circle, in Verdal, Norway, as mentioned earlier in this report. The head of the programme and the local president of the Dyslexia Assocation piloted what is known as the "Equal Man" project. As applied at the Reading and Writing circle, the Equal Man is a person with learning disabilities or difficulties who has previously completed the course, and who can mentor newer learners. The Equal Man explains concepts, encourages learners to keep going, serves as a role model, and at the same time reinforces his or her own learning.

Instructors and Equal Men participate in a one-and-a-half day training with the National Dyslexia Association in order to better understand their roles and what they can contribute to the learning setting. They see themselves as part of a collaborative team. The instructors and Equal Men take on different tasks related to pedagogical and social-psychological challenges. The effectiveness of the team depends on making sure that roles are clearly defined, that all know what their responsibilities are, and importantly, what they do not include.

One of the special challenges for the Equal Man is in deciding when he or she is a learner (as the Equal Men are also reinforcing their own learning during the course), and when he or she is an Equal Man supporting newer learners. All agree that good communication is very important to the success of the Equal Man approach. The first year of the programme, the instructors and Equal Men say, involved a lot of hard work in sorting out roles. They note that they need to re-adjust with each new course.

The Dyslexia Association supports outside activities for learners in the programme, such as social events and occasional out-of-town travel (many adults with dyslexia, the president of the local Dyslexia Association says, have never left their home towns or stayed in a hotel). They note that social networks and peer support are an essential part of learner empowerment (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Several instructors across the exemplary learning programmes visited for the OECD study commented that more active involvement of learners in the classroom also means that they have needed to change their own roles. An instructor at the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger notes that she probably speaks 50% less than in the past – allowing learners themselves to do more of the talking. At the same time, the instructor is relieved of some of the burden of assessment as learners take on self- and peer-assessment (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

While peer assessment and/or group projects were prominent in all the OECD case studies visited, there are few studies on the impact of such approaches on the learning process and outcomes. Two small scale studies indicate that there are indeed benefits. Roberts *et al.* (2004) developed case studies of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) groups in five different settings to identify distinctive features of learners and provision. Most relevant to the question of peer assessment was the finding that group interaction was the most significant mode of learning for the ESOL learner support. Interestingly, and calling for further investigation, the study found

that individualised teaching and learning may *not* support the needs of adult ESOL learners.[2]

Taylor, Evans and Abasi (2006) studied how adult learners collaborated with peers in both formal and informal programmes. The researchers found that collaborative learning was "the cement that bonds" in both small and large programmes. The instructor's "philosophy and leadership style" were central to effective collaborations, according to the case study authors.

Box 7.4. Jewel and Esk Valley College
Edinburgh, Scotland

The Adult Returnees' course is designed to prepare students for further study, training or employment. Formative assessment is seen as the most effective way of enabling learners to improve their work and therefore underpins all the work done in the course. In addition to providing learners with individually targeted feedback and support, instructors also identify common difficulties, which learners discuss in pairs or larger groups. This builds on the strengths of each learner in the group and enables them to share and learn from each other.

A number of the learners have mental health difficulties so their particular needs are taken into account in developing group work. For example, one student said she suffered from depression and did not like mixing with other people. It took about three weeks before she felt comfortable with working in a group, even though she had to work on various tasks with a partner from the very first day. Eventually she became good friends with four people in the course and now feels much more confident with other people.

Getting to know the other people in the course is part of the structure of group work. For example, at the start of the course people work in pairs and then gradually in larger groups of four and then two teams as they grow used to working together. The students work in teams to undertake research on a topic that interests them, using the library or the Internet, and then give a presentation. This year the topics chosen by the students were World War II, homelessness and eating disorders based on their own existing interests. These topics are also used to develop IT skills both through the Internet searches and through the use of PowerPoint, planning, working with others as well as communications. People are prepared for working in groups through discussions and input on the issues involved. This is a formative task as a preparation for the individual presentation that is part of the summative assessment for the communications module.

Source: Sliwka and Tett (Annex 2 on the Internet).

[2] By contrast, research by Hannah, Diaz, Ginsburg and Hollister (2004) found that learners using independent computer-assisted instruction to supplement classroom based made more progress in development of English oral skills. The learners in this experiment had intermediate level English.

Group work may also help to reduce learners' dependency on the instructor. The learners can draw upon the skills and knowledge of a wider range of people. Peers may also be better able to help each other link new skills to real life contexts, a key element for adult learners (Barton *et al.*, 2004, 2005, and 2006; Ivanic *et al.*, 2005, 2006; Roberts *et al.*, 2004, 2005).

Box 7.5. An overview of peer learning
Courses observed in California, Maryland and Massachusetts, United States

There was considerable use of students as resources for learning in most of the classes observed for the US case study. Typically, teachers would simply ask students to help their fellow students with tasks – 'Adele, why don't you help her out there, you know how to do that don't you?" Adele would then move over and sit down with the student needing help to work on the problem. Several students would be helping in this way at any time, meaning that there was considerable movement around the classroom. Although a few students appeared to be called on to help more frequently than others, there was also a reasonable degree of reciprocity between the students.

This form of peer teaching was particularly common in mathematics and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. For example, in several of the ESL classes, students were working with other students with the same language, unprompted by the teacher and this informal teaching was seen as part and parcel of the usual teaching process for that classroom.

Along similar lines, there was a lot of time during the observations involving students working in pairs. A typical episode would involve the teacher teaching a point of grammar for example and then asking students to pair up and practise the point that had been taught.

Another element of using students as resources could be seen in several teachers who wrote learners' responses to written questions given for homework on the whiteboard – and then rather than simply correcting the responses herself, the teacher would pose the question back to the learners, "so what do you think of this answer? ["it's not right"], "all right, what would a better answer be?" Students' incorrect or incomplete responses were sometimes used as prompts for micro-teaching to clarify or correct the learners' responses. The students appeared to be more engaged with this process than in instances where the teacher simply corrected and/or supplied the correct answer.

In addition to the use of peer teaching, one teacher gave an interesting reply to a student's request, "can I tell her?" [the answer]; she replied, "no, but you can help her understand it" – whereupon the two students then discussed the mathematics problem and the first student subsequently provided the correct answer.

Source: Benseman and Comings (Annex 2 on the Internet).

The workplace may also provide some clues for peer work within classrooms. However, as Fuller and Unwin (2002) point out, management's approach to training and development affects the way in which interactions among colleagues benefit learning. The review of francophone literature

developed for this study indicates that there has been little attention to peer work as a pedagogical method for foundation learning in the workplace (Daniau and Bélanger, Annex 3 on the Internet).

Tools and peer-assessment

Many instructors use tools, such as rubrics with criteria for assessment of fellow learners, in order to keep discussion focused. For example, in a language class observed at the Johannes Learning Centre, learners worked in small groups to develop a story and to then assess the quality of their efforts. The instructor first introduced the exercise by talking about the elements of story (person, place and a problem), and listed some examples on the blackboard. As the groups developed the stories, they discussed verb tenses, spelling and the meaning of words among each other. The instructor guided learners when needed. Each group presented the story they had developed, while peers used a rubric outlining criteria for a quality presentation to assess their work (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Learners and instructors may also develop criteria for assessment of a particular project as a group effort – providing more opportunities for learners to develop ownership and to internalise the criteria. In addition to these kinds of group presentations, McNickle (1994) suggests that videos of student performance may also provide opportunities for self- or peer-assessment.

Key issues and conclusions

Relationships, fuelled by dialogue, are at the heart of the teaching, learning and assessment process. As emphasised in this chapter, effective classroom dialogue fulfils several functions.

- Dialogue helps to build rapport within the classroom; learners feel safe to express their feelings and to reveal what they do and do not understand.
- Dialogue promotes participatory and democratic learning. Learners and instructors are equals within the classroom.
- Through negotiation, learners help set the terms of the learning process.
- Learners explore issues and problems related to specific learning objectives, but also offer their own critiques of the material or their feelings about it.
- Instructors identify specific learner needs, and adjust teaching.

The skill of the instructor in guiding dialogue is crucial. This includes the instructor's empathy as well as subject and pedagogical knowledge. Instructors also need to support learners while challenging them to deepen their skills and to think more independently.

We have argued that instructors need to draw upon each of these elements as they guide classroom dialogue. For example, dialogue that is focused primarily on building rapport may miss opportunities to explore learner understanding of concepts. At the same time, dialogue focused on meeting narrow learning objectives may mean that learners do not develop their critical capacities, or express their own ideas and opinions.

Adult LLN classrooms inevitably include learners with different learning needs and backgrounds. Instructors in the OECD case study classrooms take advantage of this diversity, drawing upon different experiences and talents of learners in the classroom. The focus on peer learning also helps to build solidarity within a group, and provides opportunities to catalyse learning. Peer assessment, which is fairly common across the programmes visited, may help learners to develop their own skills for self-assessment and learning-to-learn.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the subject of classroom relationships is a central theme in much of the literature on adult learning, reflecting an absence of well-defined curriculum or standardised goals for learning. There are concerns, however, that the introduction of new curricula and standardised learning objectives encourage a much narrower focus for teaching and learning.

Instructors in exemplary classrooms managed to balance teaching focused on meeting specific curriculum objectives with objectives to develop learners' deeper skills. These instructors had worked hard to achieve this balance. But if policy makers are to encourage this kind of exemplary teaching on a broader basis, they will need to closely examine whether learning objectives and curricula are aligned with overall goals for learner progression and autonomy. They will also need to consider strengthening qualifications requirements and professional development for instructors to build these essential skills.

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Chapter 8
Techniques: Feedback, Questioning, and Scaffolding

This chapter introduces the third of the five steps in the OECD staircase. The focus is on specific techniques of formative assessment: feedback, questioning and scaffolding. There is a strong research base pointing to significant learning gains associated with these techniques for school-age and university learners. While there is no significant research on impact in the adult language, literacy and numeracy sector, there is, a rich literature based on practitioner wisdom. Instructors at the OECD case study sites had integrated several of these techniques into their practice. The chapter identifies areas where further research may reveal importance nuances for practice with the adult LLN population.

The third step of the OECD staircase highlights the formative assessment techniques of feedback, questioning and scaffolding. These techniques are intended to uncover learner understanding, to help instructors pitch learning to the right level, and to provide learners with specific advice on how they can improve their performance. Research drawing on controlled studies at the compulsory (Black and Wiliam, 1998) and university levels (Brookhart, 2001; Crooks, 1988; Gibbs and Simpson, 2003) points to the significant learning gains associated with these techniques. This research has been extremely important for promoting formative assessment at the level of both policy and practice.

There is a rich literature on these techniques in the adult LLN sector, but it is usually based on practitioner wisdom, or findings from very small-scale empirical studies. The lack of significant research featuring controlled studies in the adult LLN sector has meant that little is known about the real impact of these formative techniques on outcomes for this population. Nor has it been possible to develop a more finely-tuned understanding of how these techniques should be adjusted for adult LLN learners. This chapter explores the state of the art in the adult LLN context, including literature based on practitioner wisdom, evaluations of ICT programmes, and in

classrooms observed for this study. It identifies areas where further research may reveal important nuances for practice with this population.

Feedback

Feedback is central to effective formative assessment. The OECD case study researchers observed instructors giving learners a lot of positive feedback. In an English-language class at the Mary Ward Centre in London, for example, instructors used words such as "…good, great, and fantastic" when giving feedback. Instructors were also sure to point out when learners were able to do something they had not been able to do earlier. When providing feedback on where a learner needed to put more effort, it was never negative – usually the vagaries of the language were blamed, and not the learner. At the same time, instructors gently challenged learners to re-think incorrect answers, and to understand the nature of their mistakes – avoiding the charge of "collusion" with learners (that is, validation of incorrect work).

At the Ateliers de Formation de Base (AFB) in Haute-Normandie, the action researchers developed an individual tracking tool to record learner progress over the course of an activity. Case study researchers observed that, when using the tool, the instructors proposed initial tasks, but then stepped back in order to observe and record essential points. They did not intervene during the course of the activity. Typically, the instructors involved in this project make a point of refraining from pointing out learner gaps. They feel that learners are already well aware of what they are not able to do; reinforcing the negative only serves to de-motivate and devalue the learners (Forum des pratiques, 2005).

Their approach is supported by a study by Turner and Watters (2001), which found that feedback viewed as "enriching rather than judging" is highly effective. The authors report that learners in the study "….were surprised at becoming 'hooked' into learning', and that they were more interested in how they were learning than how successfully they were performing".

Several learners at the three English case study sites agreed that regular feedback and reviews of progress were important to them – not only for the specific suggestions the instructor may provide, but also because they found it motivating. They found feedback to be particularly helpful when they were beginning to struggle (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet). At the TKO second chance school in Hoboken, Belgium, learners agreed that while formative assessment is more work, it is helpful for

subjects that require building up of knowledge over time (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Not all feedback is effective – and indeed, feedback cannot be considered to have been formative until it has been used to improve performance. Several commentators note that assessment may only be considered as formative when feedback is used to close the learning gap (Boud, 2000; Sadler, 1989; Black and Wiliam, 1998). Interactive engagement in feedback and learner efforts to close the learning gap also enable the instructor to assess the effectiveness of the approach with a particular learner in a specific situation.

Importantly, the effectiveness of different approaches to feedback is also "…critically affected…by what each learner understands about the nature and purposes of the assessment process itself…". Boud (2002) describes "the damaging nature" of the "final language of assessment" – even including terms such as "good", "right", and so on. In a small-scale quantitative study of a group of access learners, Young (2000) found that individual learners had very different perceptions of the messages being given through feedback on their work. Their opinions as to whether it was important to receive positive comments varied. Young also reports that "for some students, feedback was 'only work'; others felt their whole sense of self was at stake".

A number of commentators give advice on effective feedback based on observation and experience. In line with Black and Wiliam's (1998) findings on the effectiveness of feedback for younger learners, a number of commentators recommend that feedback for adult learners be focussed on the task at hand, and not on the ego of the learner.[1] In their summary of this literature, Derrick and Ecclestone (Annex 3 on the Internet) also suggest that if instructors are not aware of the various nuances involved in giving feedback, or cannot adjust teaching appropriately, then the "formative benefits of feedback may not be realised", and "...learners' motivation may even be affected negatively".

[1] Meyer, Mittag and Engler (1986) showed that learner reactions to praise and blame are based on their self-concept of ability. In their study, students who were praised inferred lower task-specific competence than students who received neutral feedback. The level of cognitive development seems to be a moderator of such paradoxical effects: Barker and Graham (1987) found that the learners of different ages infer different meanings from praise and criticism. Younger learners always infer that praise indicates high ability, whereas older learners may take praise as indicating lower ability (a paradoxical effect). It is not clear that these findings will hold for adult LLN learners, however. This population needs to be studied separately.

Krapp and Ryan (2002) emphasise that feedback needs to provide information about the learning content, as opposed to marks, which don't inform the positive aspects of the work, or point out where improvement is needed. Rogers (2001) recommends that feedback be timely, encouraging, provide clear reasons for success or failure, and guidance on how to improve. Feedback should also help learners to develop their own understanding of quality work. Hillier (2002) makes similar suggestions, adding that instructors should not use excessive amounts of red ink, provide feedback that is too lengthy and detailed, or finish with a negative comment.

In the cases observed in the United States, feedback was very often tied to progress learners were making in preparing for standardised tests (the tests are discussed in more detail in the section on summative assessment in Chapter 10). Case study researchers noted that for those learners who are preparing for the General Educational Development (GED) test, there are frequent "practice tests" to provide feedback as to how well the learners are doing in relation to the GED standards. GED workbooks also provide explanations for answers in appendices so learners may refer to these to figure out where they might have misunderstood a problem. Several instructors in the US case study sites noted that they feel it is important not to overtest (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Programme leaders at the Savoirs pour Réussir (SPR) programme in Marseilles, France share the view that assessments based on targeted or formal objectives do not take into account learners' personal barriers or struggles. Often, LLN learners who feel devalued have difficulty in developing plans or figuring out the steps they need to take to reach their objectives. The first objective at SPR, therefore, is to provide positive feedback, helping learners to recognise their own capacities (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

ICT-based feedback

Perhaps one of the most promising features of ICT in adult learning is its potential to provide learners with immediate and constructive feedback. ICT-based feedback may involve online interaction between learners, instructors and peers, as well as automated feedback. However, the effectiveness of these approaches depends very much on the quality of the feedback – whether from the on-line instructor or the programme.

Research on the impact of e-learning on learner performance in German-speaking countries may also provide some clues on effective feedback in the ICT context. Grotlüschen (2003) conducted a series of interviews with adult learners using e-learning in companies and in training situations in Germany, including the use of multiple choice tests, open questions and an

application portfolio. While the study is of a very small scale and findings are not generalisable to other groups, it nevertheless raises interesting questions.

The study found that the online multiple-choice tests appear to have motivated the learners to continue working, although they apparently (and very importantly) did not retain any of the content of the lessons. When asked about what they liked best about the lesson, learners responded that they would need to look at the chapters online again, because they couldn't "…tell by heart what the chapters were about". The web-based software also included tests with open questions, but the learners did not receive any personalised feedback on their answers. Learners found this lack of personalised feedback discouraging and so did not use the tests.

In some cases, learners did receive personalised feedback. For example, with one e-learning programme, learners were able to make an online presentation of project results to their peers and the tutor. The instructor in this particular study preferred to "give hints for further improvement", but left it up to the learner to decide how to use the hints. The "lighter" approach to feedback allowed learners to retain ownership of the work, and appears to have contributed to their continued participation in the process (Grotlüschen, 2003).

While this approach may come closer to simulating a classroom setting, there are still some drawbacks. For instance, unless the instructor and learner are on-line at the same time, the learner will not receive immediate feedback, while questions and concerns are still fresh. In addition, the learner and instructor do not have the same opportunities to develop relationships, and the learner may therefore be less accepting of the instructor's technical competence and quality of advice.

In Spain, the e-gramm initiative (developed by Lawley and Beltrán at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia and first launched in 2001) provides detailed and explicit feedback to learners at a low level of proficiency on their written compositions for English as a Foreign Language courses. E-gramm provides two complementary filters to identify incorrect sequences and problem words. In developing the programme, the project team analysed common mistakes in hundreds of learner compositions, encoded them, and wrote feedback to enable learners to modify their own writing. Currently e-gramm is able to detect 60 to 70% of mistakes made by Spanish mother tongue learners, and it could be expanded further. Because e-gramm requires that learners make their own corrections, the developers believe that learners benefit (Sanz, Annex 3 on the Internet).

The e-gramm initiative has not yet been evaluated, although Sanz (Annex 3 on the Internet) proposes that it holds much more potential than

other technologies used in language laboratories, which are "…little more than thinly disguised tests; multiple choice questions and questions on reading comprehension with fixed answers". According to Sanz, e-gramm is the first language programme in Spain to provide feedback on freeform written production. Similar ICT programmes, which use artificial intelligence to monitor and model learners' problem-solving approaches and to provide customised advice, have been shown to have a positive impact (Fletcher, 1996; Murphy *et al.*, 2002).

Questioning

Effective questioning can help to draw learners into active dialogue and debate, joint enquiry, and/or reveal whether learners have understood a new concept. Questioning may help to establish common understandings within heterogeneous groups, where learners have different backgrounds, as well as different ways of thinking and approaches to problem-solving. It may also help to establish whether learners have indeed made progress in closing learning gaps.

Several commentators recommend that teachers develop a repertoire of questioning techniques. Questions that push learners to reflect and/or explain are more useful (for example, "”how?", "why?", "are you sure?", "are you happy with that?", "show me", and other questions which cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no"). Questions to avoid include: double questions, leading questions, rhetorical questions and closed questions (those looking for a unique correct answer). These kinds of questions discourage learners from reflecting on the problem, or revealing that they do not understand (Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet; Rogers, 2001).

Box 8.1. Johannes Learning Centre
Stavanger, Norway

In a primary school level Norwegian language class observed, the content of the lesson was designed to meet requests several learners had made in their learning logs to spend a bit more time on prepositions, vocabulary and synonyms. In this class, learners worked in pairs and groups on a variety of tasks centred on the content. Throughout the class, the instructor was careful to ask open-ended questions. She did not give the answers right away, but delved into the questions further until learners were able to grasp the idea, and to also understand it from different angles. Questions were developed in a very systematic way. The instructor drew upon the knowledge of all learners in the class, and followed up responses to questions with new questions.

Box 8.1. Johannes Learning Centre
Stavanger, Norway *(continued)*

At one point in the lesson, the instructor asked learners to read parts of a text they had been working with aloud. Other learners in the class were asked to mark difficult words and wrong pronunciations (although not interrupting the reader while doing this). At the end of the passage, the instructor asked learners to repeat sections where there had been some difficulties – for example, she asked, "When Ahmed read, did you notice anything about his pronunciation?" She also gave feedback on specific challenges for the reader.

In another language class, learners worked in small groups to develop a story and to then assess the quality of their efforts. The instructor first introduced the exercise by talking about the elements of story (person, places and a problem), and giving some examples on the blackboard. As the groups developed the stories, they discussed verb tenses, spelling and the meaning of words. The instructor guided learners when needed.

Before the groups presented their stories to the full class, they received a rubric to assess their fellow learners. The instructor explained the rubric, and discussed criteria for a good performance. The first group came to the front of the class, and one of the members read the story aloud. All learners – in the group presenting, in the audience, and the reader himself – completed the assessment sheet.

In a mathematics class, the instructor introduced the lesson by focusing on principles of basic statistics. He also gave several examples to clarify difficult matters. He described, compared, repeated, discussed and explained Norwegian concepts as well as concepts in mathematics (as learners must understand the language before they are able to apply it to a new subject). As with the two other instructors, he didn't give the answers right away, but asked other learners to respond first. The instructor's questions were open-ended, so learners were made to think twice as they solved the problems.

When the learners were working with a task sheet, some of them preferred to work in pairs, others individually. They were encouraged to rely on their own knowledge and experience in mathematics.

The learners also helped each other. Peers were allowed to explain difficult concepts in their mother tongue when working with someone from their own country. The instructor gave guidance to those who needed it, without giving away the answers. He also paid special attention to weaker learners.

Each of the instructors say that active involvement of the learners in the classroom also means that they need to change their own roles. One instructor notes that she probably speaks 50% less of the time than in the past. Another notes that it has been important to ask more open-ended questions so that learners can reason through the ideas, with light direction from the instructor.

Source: Looney, Husby and Røynestad (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Box 8.2. York College
York, England

Instruction in the Skills for Life courses at York college usually takes place in weekly 2-hour classes, though some are longer and more intensive. The average class size is around 9 and attendance is around 85%. Tutors use a combination of large and small group teaching and one-to-one tutorials….

The numeracy class observed (Level 1 and 2) takes place in a room which looks like a long meeting room in an office. Several small tables have been put together to form one large table. This day, five learners are in attendance. They are all people born in the United Kingdom, and between the ages of twenty and forty. They act like a group that has been working together for a while and seem to know a lot about each other. The tutor is a substitute today, though she is also a numeracy and literacy tutor in the programme.

The tutor begins the class by tacking up problem sheets on the corkboard walls around the room. Next to each problem sheet, the tutor has tacked an envelope. She gives each learner a pile of small cards with the four mathematical process signs on them. She asks learners to go around the room and read the problems and make a decision on which card to drop into the envelopes.

When everyone is finished, the tutor looks in each envelope to see if there are any mistaken cards in them. When she finds one, she asks whose it is. The learner is then asked why he or she chose that function. This serves as an opportunity to teach the whole class how to make this decision when reading a problem. After this exercise is completed, the tutor passes out copies of the problem sheets and asks each person to solve the problems. The tutor goes from learner to learner helping them with anything they find difficult and asking them to explain the decisions they are making as they solve the problems. The tutor gives positive feedback as part of most interactions.

After about an hour, the class takes a break and goes downstairs to the small kitchen to make coffee and tea for each other. They sit around the small room and talk about their lives and the class with each other and the tutor. An outsider might find it difficult to identify the tutor.

The class returns to its classroom and begins again to work on problems with the tutor going around the room to help each of them individually. When a learner reports on his or her answer, the tutor asks for an explanation of how the answer was derived. After the explanation, the tutor explains that there are several ways to arrive at an answer and describes other options. At the end of the class, the tutor makes sure everyone fills out their class form.

Source: Comings and Vorhaus (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Box 8.3. Various sites observed in the United States

OECD case study researchers observed a range of questioning techniques in sites visited in the United States. For example, the instructors who were observed used questioning techniques to challenge learners and ensure their engagement by:

- *Creating safe environments to ask questions: several instances demonstrated that instructors were genuinely interested in hearing learners' questions – asking if anyone wanted anything explained further at the end of a session.*
- *Ensuring that questions are pitched at the right level: instructors asked questions at levels that were attainable, but also challenging.*
- *Leaving reasonable wait-time for learners to respond to questions so that they clearly understood that a response was expected from them and would not be answered by the teacher.*
- *Ensuring that the learners answered the questions and not the teacher – "so is that sentence OK? – anything that you would like to see changed with it?" (addressed to the whole class).*
- *Providing learners with realistic feedback on their answers along with suggestions for reviewing why the answer may have been incorrect or incomplete – or additional questions to elicit another response.*
- *"Tuning" of questions based on learners' responses: teachers often opened with a general, open question ("so what do you all think about this?"), but then gradually focussed their questioning both in relation to more specific topics ("what do you think the writer is trying to do in this chapter?") and also "fine-tuning" their questions based on the learners' responses ("you think that it's all about control in this case or something else?").*
- *Providing opportunities for high levels of learner: learner interaction – in part due to the number of questions that students asked each other, but also to avoid instructor-dominated questioning.*
- *Promotion of critical thinking, for example by prompting students to make fine distinctions between similar words (fixable and feasible).*
- *Allowing for diversity of answers so that students received a message that there are a number of ways to answer correctly.*

Source: Benseman and Comings (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Swain, Griffiths and Stone (2006) report on a project to improve six instructors' questioning techniques. Over the course of the project, instructors developed their ability not only to ask more sophisticated questions, but also to give learners more time to respond, and to act on learner responses in order to advance learning. They also learned to encourage learners to raise their own questions and ideas. While the instructors were the primary focus of the study, the researchers also found a direct link between the kinds of questioning instructors used to check learning and learner motivation.

Box 8.4. Ateliers de Formation de Base
Haute Normandie, France

At the Ateliers de Formation de Base in Haute Normandie, OECD case study researchers observed an instructor's use of questions to help learners break down and analyse a text.

This instructor drew upon the different competencies of the learners in the group. The questions were focused on the process of how learners had come to their conclusions [related to a text they were reading, about pre-historic man, which included a timeline for years B.C.]. When learners noted that they had had a problem in reading or analysis [related to the chronology of events], she asked them to explain how they had resolved the problem "...What is a chronology? From older to more recent....But you didn't read the instructions. .... You started with one way of thinking about dates, but isn't it another way of thinking?" The instructor allowed the groups to structure their thoughts, while she took up her position as an active observer.... At the end of the time allotted, the two groups had not finished the worksheets [the instructor had provided]. The instructor told them that they could complete them later. There followed a collective assessment of the activity in which they had been engaged, during which the instructor first let the groups express their feelings about the process, and how they had addressed the difficulties encountered. She questioned the learners on the steps they had taken. Some learners freely identified a number of elements. For example, "we blocked at the beginning, didn't read the instructions well; we confused the relationship of the dates, and didn't know how to place them. The most difficult thing was to understand the overall story. It's good to work together and to put all our ideas together. I understood a little, she understood a little, and together that's a lot".

Source: Michel and Maroun (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Swan (2005), in a study on questioning in mathematics teaching, found that instructors tended to ask low level questions, for example, testing learners' recall of facts and procedures. The study found that allowing learners more time to respond to questions helped to significantly improve learner achievement.

Swain (2005) suggests that instructors need to spend more time developing questions that are worth asking, and which are critical to the learners' understanding of the subject-matter. These should be followed up with appropriate activities. Hodgen and Wiliam (2006) suggest that instructors have more time to construct thoughtful interventions when they spend less time talking.

Scaffolding

"Scaffolding" is a key concept in formative assessment, building on Vygotsky's concept of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD – that is, the zone between what learners already know, and what they have yet to learn) (Vygotsky, 1986). Essentially, scaffolding means that instructors pitch the level of lessons and learning material so that learners get as much or as little challenge as they can handle at any given point.

At the Buddies for Learning programme in Inverness, Scotland, instructors comment that "there have been learners who even left their coats and hats on during the first sessions". This lack of confidence makes it necessary to provide learners with quick wins, such as enabling them to write their own name and address within two sessions (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet). Instructors at the Reading and Writing Circle in Verdal, Norway cite similar experiences. These positive learning experiences help to facilitate further success (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

The Comings, Parrella and Soricon (1999) study on learner persistence, referred to in earlier chapters, found that learners were more successful if they built their sense of self-efficacy through mastery, including quick early wins, social persuasion and opportunities to address emotional states (among other significant factors). These elements highlight the importance of dialogue and discussion in the learning setting.

In some cases, programmes may get involved in addressing wider issues affecting the learner's ability to engage in classroom work. Learners may be in precarious economic, social and linguistic situations, with few of the skills necessary to help them cope (reading, writing, and numeracy, but also problem-solving abilities and resilience). At the Savoirs pour Réussir (SPR) programme in Marseilles, the programme leaders find it important to address the learner's social (housing, health, identity papers) and personal difficulties (identity). The volunteer tutors help learners identify the personal tools and resources they already have for problem-solving, and then provide the extra help needed to become increasingly independent. It is a process of

transformation for the young learner, which the programme leaders argue, is the goal of education.

The language and literacy instructors at SPR believe that before getting into the technical aspects of language, they need to help learners to engage with the language itself. They want learners to realise that they have many of their own ideas to express, and that language is a tool to help them do that. Therefore, in the early stages, the SPR workshops do not focus on spelling, conjugation, or syntax. Learners interviewed for the case study expressed their appreciation that they not only learn how to express themselves in different ways, but what they learn has immediate relevance for their lives – for example, looking for a place to live, for a job, or developing their CV. Some of the learners said that they became more aware of their skill needs. As one learner said, "We completed school, but found that in real life we were lacking things [we needed]. Here, we can learn those things" (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Instructors may also prepare several different types of tasks for a single session – focusing on an overall goal for the class, but then deciding how to best help each learner. For example, the mathematics instructor at the Johannes Learner Centre in Stavanger, Norway, says that some learners are not yet ready to cope with all the mathematical theory behind a specific learning goal, or with more difficult problems. He may give less confident learners problems which are below their level so that they can build an initial feeling of competency. Or, he may give practical exercises to learners who are not yet grasping mathematical theories. He cites the case of an Iraqi carpenter in one of his classes who clearly had no fear of geometry and had strong spatial abilities, but was not ready to work with mathematical theory (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In some cases, instructors provide opportunities to improve their work over time (similar to a "mastery" approach to learning – where learners have the opportunity to revise work until standards have been met). In an English as a Second Language programme in Adelaide, Australia, learners learning to write critical essays provide first, second and final drafts. They receive instructor feedback at each stage. Learners receive summative assessment only after this process (Misko, 2008). In writing classes at the Croydon Skills for Life programme in England and at the TKO programme in Hoboken, Flanders, instructors emphasise the importance of the different steps in the writing process. The instructor observed in the Croydon programme guides learners through the steps of planning, drafting, revising and completing a piece of writing. The instructor at the TKO programme discusses the criteria by which learners' writing will be assessed (sometimes setting the criteria with the learners). Learners have the opportunity to re-work their writing and to hand in improved drafts as often as they wish, until

they have met all the criteria. Instructors say that learners improve their ability to assess their own writing as well as that of their peers in this process. They are also developing skills that will serve them later, as this process is consistent with the kind of writing done within work contexts, and where co-workers often set their own criteria (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Instructors at the Reading and Writing Circle in Verdal and at the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger, Norway separately commented that, with experience, they have learned to focus on helping learners do a few things well. They may also cover the same topics repeatedly during a course in order to reinforce learning. The mathematics instructor at the Johannes Learning Centre commented that his learners are coping better, building their confidence with mathematics, and addressing their emotional blocks to learning. Learners also say that they appreciate that they are allowed to progress at their own pace (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

The Spanish research community emphasises the "spiral construction of learning", which may also be described as a "process of progressive enrichment". This approach is relevant to scaffolding of learning. It involves a three-step process: "observing reality; evaluating reality, and, acting on reality. The process then starts again…" (Sanz, Annex 3 on the Internet). Bruner (1996), in his own description of the spiral construction of learning, notes that knowledge can be represented at varying levels of abstractness and complexity.

Vergnaud (1990) points out that learning is much less linear and progressive than it is often presumed to be. This explains why instructors are sometimes surprised when learners do not transfer learning from one situation to another, even when the problems appear to be closely related. Nevertheless, instructors and learners need to keep in mind that they always have some expertise or knowledge on which they can draw to address a new situation. The challenge is to identify this anchor and build on it. Instructors thus identify the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1986) through observation of the learner in action. They try to understand the learner's logic in approaching problems. Such an approach takes a more global view of the learner and his or her capabilities than assessment focused on one particular learning objective (see also the discussion in Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Instructors need strong subject knowledge when deciding where to focus their attention. For example, when emphasising quality over quantity, instructors need to know which core principles are the most important for learners in a given subject. Which basics does a learner need to know before

moving on to the next step? What are the signs that a learner may have a disability? What kind of changes to the learning environment may be most helpful? What teaching approaches work best for different kinds of learners? Access to a repertoire of materials and approaches for helping a range of learners is vital. Instructors at the Reading and Writing Circle in Norway, which serves learners with dyslexia and reading and writing difficulties, develop materials and approaches for learners in cooperation with the FFO. (The FFO, or *Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon*, is the umbrella organisation for the associations serving, among others, the blind, deaf or other physical or learning disabilities in Norway.) (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

At the "Just-in-Time" learning lab at the Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB – *Vlaamse Dienst voor Arbeids Bemiddeling*) in Leuven, learners are focused on mathematics skills needed for employment. When the instructor first meets new learners she asks a lot of questions about their motivation and the level of mathematics they think they can handle. "What do you want to learn here in the lab?" "Have you seen this [module, computer instruction programme, etc.] before?" "Does it look like something you can do?" "Does this look like what you need to learn" to meet the requirements of specific job? Responses to these questions can be used to tailor learning activities to the needs of individual learners. Adapting to the needs of individual learners is challenging because the instructor doesn't always know in advance who will be in the open lab for a given session, and she may have only one or two learners one day, and up to 15 on another (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Box 8.5. "Learn and Workplace", Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB) Leuven, Belgium

The "Learn and Workplace" project, initiated as a European Social Funds project in 2004, supported development of training courses for adults experiencing difficulties in finding and/or keeping a job.

The focus in the learn-workplace featured in this case study is mainly on mathematics (because there was a bigger remediation need for mathematics due to the nature of the vocational training – construction, electricity and welding – and because it was very hard to convince learners from vocational courses to follow a Dutch [language] course). The instructor in this centre has developed mathematics material focusing on the needs of each particular job and thus contextualised or embedded mathematics tasks and assignments. All this material is now organised in binders by profession. The instructor tries to incorporate project-based learning whenever possible. This way the mathematics skills are grounded in situations that the learners find vocationally relevant.

Box 8.5. "Learn and Workplace", Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB) Leuven, Belgium *(continued)*

When there are only a few learners this way of working is not difficult. However, when there are more learners, the instructor must move quickly through the lab, and back and forth between the two rooms to stay in touch with how each learner is doing and assign new work – a model sometimes referred to as "teaching on roller skates". It requires a high degree of expertise in mathematics, teaching strategies, and the ability to mentally keep track of how each learner is doing.

Immediately after each session the instructor takes careful notes on what each learner has accomplished and what the learner needs to do next time. She will discuss her notes with the learner at the beginning of the next open lab session. She also sends a copy of the progress notes, immediately after the session, to the VDAB (the Flemish Public Employment Service) *instructor who gives the vocational course the learner attends, and to the learner's counsellor at the VDAB. This communication accomplishes several things. First, it keeps the VDAB instructor and counsellor informed of the learner's progress. Second, it builds and maintains good relationships between the job skills training, VDAB counselling and foundation skills staff.*

The instructor also sometimes suggests ways in which the numeracy skills could be reinforced in the vocational classes. Collaboration with the professional VDAB training instructors is also practiced as new assessments are developed. The "Learn and Workplace" instructor works one-on-one with the vocational instructor to assess the numeracy skills and knowledge needed for training and for the job. In some cases this includes understanding math theory, for example, understanding the binary system is important for certain kinds of electrical work. Heidi also works with the VDAB vocational instructors to tailor the curriculum to the needs of the vocational training, and the needs of the learners. For example, often a curriculum needs to have more levels added to address a wider range of learner needs.

Source: Rosen and De Meyer (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Learners in larger programmes may also fill specific learning gaps with extra courses. For example, the Mary Ward Centre in London offers courses to help adults who have been out of school for a long time or who have poor study skills. Immigrant learners whose literacy skills are in a non-Latin script may take courses to prepare them for entry into a regular English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class. There is also a study workshop for learners who need ongoing support. The Skills for Life programme in Croydon, the Continuing Education and Training Services (CETS) centre, offers support for learners with dyslexia, as well as e-based workshops for learners who enter late in the term and want to catch up. York College offers courses for learning through information technology, spelling, memory, budgeting and financial literacy in addition to the literacy and numeracy courses offered in the Skills for Life courses (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet).

ICT and scaffolding

The internet-based “ich will schreiben lernen” (I want to learn to write) is one of the most well-known approaches to e-learning in Germany. Like the AFRA (Aachener Rectschreib-Fehler-Analyse, Aachen analysis of orthographical mistakes) system, the “ich will schreiben lernen” site tailors exercises according to an automatic diagnosis of learner needs. The learner starts with a self-assessment (for example, by choosing one of three statements: “I know several letters but I am not able to write words”), followed by diagnostic items. For example, the learner may be asked to underline vowels or write several words. Upon completion of each package, the learner receives a pictogram (such as a smiley face) with his/her results. The learning results are assessed automatically, and the programme selects the next set of learning packages, based on these results. If a learner makes mistakes which he or she had solved successfully before, the system provides review exercises, but does not downgrade the learner. The system also helps learners to identify patterns of mistakes.[2]

The popularity of the “ich will schreiben lernen” platform is encouraging. In June 2006, the programme claimed 9 623 anonymous learners, and 1 907 register learners and 400 instructors in the Volkshochshulen. It has also received several awards and funding for further development. There is a need for further research to determine the impact of this and similar programmes on learning (Grotlüschen and Bonna, Annex 3 on the Internet).

Kozma and Wagner (in OECD, 2006) suggest that one of the advantages of computer-assisted instruction is its ability to break subject matter into small segments or chunks (that is, to scaffold learning). Each chunk of subsequent information is then determined by earlier performance. Learners may proceed to more challenging work if they are successful, or may get extra support and opportunities to respond if they have not been successful. Moreover, subsequent instruction may be specifically tailored to the types of errors or misunderstandings identified in their responses. In this way, learners may proceed at their own pace. Applications such as these are increasingly sophisticated.

[2] The site is to be relaunched as ich-will.de and will include English, numeracy and other subjects.

Box 8.6. Various sites observed in the United States

The use of computers also provided a useful mechanism for providing accurate and immediate feedback for learners. In a family literacy programme, for example, one of the parents (watched by her daughter) worked studiously on her basic mathematics facts using a programme, Fast Math, which is also used in the school where the programme is based. The programme incorporated a useful balance of consolidating what she already knew with practice in the operations that she had not yet mastered. The student was extremely engaged in the programme and enjoyed seeing how much she had progressed since the last session and the reward of a game on successful completion of a work unit. The teacher reported that all of the students enjoyed the programme and it had encouraged playful competition that had been generated between the parents and their children. At [the Napa, California programme visited for this study], another teacher assigned some Internet-based language tasks that included periodic quizzes that the students also enjoyed, while in an advanced mathematics class in Baltimore, the teacher stopped the main class activity in order to do some basic numeracy facts practice (accessed off the Internet via a Smart Cart), "because you're still making too many mistakes with them".

The effectiveness of the computer programmes for the learners in these cases appeared to be primarily about the immediacy of the feedback, the ready adjusting of the content to the results being achieved and the independent, self-paced nature of the teaching process. For the teachers involved, the value of the computer in these cases appeared to be the convenience of readily accessing appropriate teaching material as well as the independent nature of the task, freeing them up to work individually with other students.

Source: Benseman and Comings (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Key issues and conclusions

As we have asserted in earlier chapters of this report, teaching and learning are ultimately about the quality of relationships within classrooms. But instructors may also draw upon a repertoire of specific formative assessment techniques – such as feedback, questioning and scaffolding – to uncover learner progress and adjust teaching and learning to better meet needs.

Instructors in the exemplary programmes featured in this report had devoted a lot time and energy to thinking about how best to integrate these techniques in their regular practice. The case study researchers observed instructors giving learners a lot of positive and specific feedback, and using questions to encourage reflection and debate. They also described ways in which instructors scaffold learning – encouraging learners to pursue problems independently, and to assess the quality of their own work. Instructors only stepped in when absolutely necessary to help learners get to the next step.

There is also a rich literature on the different formative assessment techniques, which draws on practitioner wisdom. Various commentators set out advice on guidelines on how to approach different formative assessment techniques. There are also a few small scale empirical studies offering observations on approaches that yield better results.

But the adult LLN literature has not traditionally included controlled studies measuring the impact of different techniques on learning. This kind of research has been extremely important at the compulsory and university levels. Black and Wiliam's 1998 review of English-language research on such techniques brought together a range of controlled studies measuring the impact of different formative approaches. Based on the cumulative research findings, they concluded that the achievement gains associated with formative assessment are among "the largest reported for educational interventions" (Black and Wiliam, 1998). These findings have been extremely important for promoting formative assessment at the compulsory level – among policy makers as well as practitioners.

The adult LLN sector would also benefit from controlled studies measuring the impact of different approaches for different learners. What kind of feedback is most effective for learners with very low self-efficacy? How can instructors take advantage of adult learners' prior knowledge and experience in scaffolding new learning? How do adult learners integrate these kinds of techniques into their own repertoire of skills for learning-to-learn? Research on the effectiveness of ICT-based feedback, questioning and scaffolding may also provide vital evidence. Such research would go a long way toward strengthening the evidence base in this sector.

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Chapter 9
Developing Learner Autonomy

This chapter introduces the fourth of the five steps in the OECD staircase. The focus is on how adults build greater autonomy through strategies such as negotiating and setting their own goals for learning, and through peer and self-assessment. There is also an important emphasis on ensuring that skills will be useful for learners in real-life settings.

Two of the earliest and most influential writers on adult learning, Freire (1972) and Knowles (1983), see adult education as a process through which learners aim to gain independence from the instructor. Similarly, the francophone commentator Goffinet (1989) asserts that learner autonomy is the only real long-term measure of the effectiveness of teaching and learning. For Abrecht (1991), the instructor's job is to provide the necessary support and tools until learners are able to do things more independently.

The more recent OECD Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) (OECD, 2005) places autonomy at the centre of its framework of key competencies. DeSeCo defines autonomy as "the ability of individuals to think for themselves as an expression of moral and intellectual maturity, and to take responsibility for their learning and for their actions". More concretely, individual autonomy includes the ability to develop and see through personal projects and life plans. Learner autonomy is an essential part of the learner progression, and is the fourth step of the OECD staircase.

Building autonomy and skills for learning-to-learn through learner self-assessment

Instructors build learners' autonomy through the development of skills and strategies for peer- and self-assessment, and for learning-to-learn. Several commentators consider the development of these skills as vital for "authentic learning" (Fordham, Holland and Millican, 1995; Lindsay and Gawn, 2005; and McGivney; 1996).

Goffinet (1989) observes that when learners first participate in assessment of their own or their peer's work, they often try to guess at what the instructor's opinion would be, and then base their own assessment upon that. Lehouiller (1995) comments that most learners, at least in the early stages, see assessment as the role of the instructor, and do not feel competent to play a role in their own assessment.[1] Very often, the language of assessment is overly technical and inaccessible to learners. Learners may need to develop and discuss their own assessment criteria and materials as they learn the official language of assessment (Derrick and Ecclestone, Annex 3 on the Internet).

Learners may also need to overcome a negative view of assessment. The action researchers involved in the Ateliers de Formation de Base (AFB) in Haute Normandie assert that learners often see assessment as an instrument for "control", and not as a tool for learning. The instructor's role, therefore, is to help the learner to recognise and acknowledge progress, and to re-appropriate the assessment process, as well as their own identity (Forum des pratiques, 2005). Other commentators observe that the development of independent learning skills helps to build the learner's "resilience, reflectivity and responsibility" (Claxton,1995; Klenowski, 1995). It is vital, Ecclestone (2002) argues, that learning and assessment centre on the development of cognitive and critical capacities, and not just procedural progress toward pre-defined targets and criteria, which does little to build real learner autonomy.

In one promising study, learners wanting to return to secondary level vocational education, used learning diaries to reflect on how they approached difficult theoretical work. Based on a review of the approach, the diaries helped to stabilise learner's self-awareness, to identify and address their own barriers to learning (Haug, 2003).

[1] These observations are very much in line with the research on learner progression. As Helsing *et al.* describe, learners at Level 1 "…expect their instructors to communicate knowledge clearly, giving them the rules to follow to get the right answers. Good instructors make sure that the students understand the subject matter" (Helsing, Drago-Severson and Kegan, 2004, citing Drago-Severson, 2001; Drago-Severson and Berger, 2001; Helsing, Broderick and Hammerman, 2001; Kegan *et al.*, 2001a, 2001b; Portnow, Diamond and Rimer, 2001). See also the discussion on learner progression in Chapter 10.

Box 9.1. What counts as success?

Learners and instructors measure success in direct and very personal ways. For example, Tett *et al.* (2006) share examples of how some learners assessed what they had achieved in their family, work, community and private lives. Statements included:

- "I am now able to help my children with their homework and that means we are happier together as a family as I'm not so worried about not understanding how they learn to read".
- "I have got a job as a gardener now that I can read and write better and this has always been my goal".
- "I am now the Trade Union representative at work and doing this course has helped me to give advice to other staff about, for example, filling in Health and Safety forms".
- "Learning makes you feel better about yourself you know. Now that I know I can learn I want to go on and do more and so I have now enrolled for a computing course at my local college" (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In a second example, an external evaluation of the Trailer Mobile Teaching Unit at the Danfoss Company in Southern Jutland, Denmark, noted the satisfaction of both learners and the enterprise with the programme. Evaluators observed that the working climate had improved, and that individuals who had participated in the courses were more flexible and were able to take on new functions in jobs that demanded reading skills (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In a third example, instructors at the Adult Learning Centre in Arendal, Norway shared ways in which both they and learners had benefited with the integration of portfolio methods into teaching and learning. The instructors said that:

- They are more goal-oriented in their teaching and assessment practices.
- They are paying more attention to which teaching and learning approaches are most effective with different learners.
- Learners now participate in and take more responsibility for planning the learning process – that is, what and how they will learn (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In a fourth example, instructors at the second chance school – the Tweedekansonderwijs (TKO) – in Hoboken, Belgium observed that learners were more motivated and were achieving more and learning better. Since the emphasis is more on attitudes and broader skills such as learning how to learn and problem solving – and not merely on passing a test – the instructors consider the learning now to be more connected to learners' lives (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In another study, Klenowski (1995), observing a small group of learners found that they were more likely to develop autonomy and self-direction when self-assessment was "…fully integrated into the learning process rather than treated as a 'bolt-on' element". She found that the use of explicit criteria, interactive dialogue between instructors and learners, and learner self-assessment had a significant impact on pedagogy, and that learners took increased responsibility for decision-making.

Box 9.2. The second chance education (Tweedekansonderwijs or TKO) centre Hoboken, Belgium

The TKO, or second chance school in Hoboken, Belgium has a class devoted solely to the topic of "learning-to-learn". In the class observed for the case study, learners were introduced to the neuroscience of short and long-term memory, and learned how to create their own mind maps to improve brainstorming, memorisation, note taking, communicating in teams, and so on. The learning-to-learn course has also covered other specific learning strategies and tools such as writing effective narrative summaries, developing a "table of contents" as an outline to organise knowledge, asking for help from an instructor or other learners, developing a "study pal" relationship [that is, developing a relationship with a peer with whom they can study on a regular basis], and "making stories" out of complex information.

The TKO has focused on formative assessment as a "whole school strategy", so learners also develop learning-to-learn skills in other classes at the TKO programme. For example, a writing instructor describes how learners develop their own sense of what constitutes good writing by judging their own writing against criteria (and sometimes they are involved in setting the criteria themselves), and re-writing and editing their work until it meets the criteria. Learners and instructors use tools such as checklists and portfolios to track progress over time. The writing instructor says that learners not only improve as writers, but also improve in their ability to evaluate their own and others' writing. Instructors in other subject areas at the TKO school confirm that, with regular formative assessment across the programme, learners begin to internalise the effective steps in the learning process (not only through the learning-to-learn course). They are better able to locate good source materials, and also have more confidence in their own "authority and objectivity".

Source: Rosen and De Meyer (Annex 2 on the Internet).

The Adult Learning Centre in Arendal and the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger, Norway have each created guidance hours, or study workshops, for learners. Instructors in the two programmes say that the guidance hours have provided time and space for them to work more closely with learners. Learners are free to choose what they will work on during this time, and to decide how they will focus their attention. Instructors are thus able to observe learners' approaches to problem-solving.

Several of the case studies provide examples of how instructors help learners to build strategies to organise their time and approaches to studying, to reinforce their own learning in real-life settings, and to assess their own level of competence. For learners with little prior schooling, for example, this may involve such skills as learning how to keep their work organised (by writing dates on their papers, ensuring that their notes are legible, and so on). Learners may also need help in figuring out how to keep from getting blocked by a specific difficulty. For example, learners at the Reading and Writing Circle in Verdal, Norway have learned that they can understand the gist of something they are reading without understanding every word. This is an important skill for "automaticity" in reading (that is, the ability to decipher words rapidly). They have also learned to note key words and highlight important points. These are important breakthroughs for learners.

The "I Can" portfolio in use at Adult Learning Centre in Arendal helps learners to see how they are becoming more independent over time. Each lesson in the portfolio asks learners to identify what they "can do" and what they "can do with some help", what they want to learn more about and what they ought to work on. In a class observed for the case study, the instructor discussed with learners how they might assess their level of reading comprehension using the worksheet. "How can you test yourself to see if you understand? How can you work later [outside of the class setting]? How can you check if you understand new words?" The instructor solicits ideas from the learners. Learners suggest that they can cooperate with other learners, develop their own questions, and so on (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

This positive approach to identifying competencies and how one learns is also important to building learners' confidence. As a learner at the Learning Buddies programme in Renfrewshire, Scotland said, "Now that I've begun to understand how I can learn, I want to learn more and more" (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Two American commentators find that many adult LLN learners are already actively engaged in independent learning activities. Reder (2006) analysed data from the US-based longitudinal study of adult learning (LSAL), which provided a sample size of 940 learners. He found that learner "self-study" is widespread, both among adults who are in literacy programmes and those who are not. Self-study may include the use of workbooks, ICT-based programmes, and other materials. Reder argues that learners "…operate at higher levels of autonomy in relation to education, even at the lowest levels, than is often assumed". Although the study cannot draw any conclusions related to the quality of learning in the self-study environment, there is evidence that it is an important factor in long-term persistence. Comings, Parrella and Soricon (1999) found that the learners

who had undertaken self-study were also the most likely to subsequently persist in formal learning programmes.

Learners may also need to develop skills for self-advocacy beyond the classroom. For example, individuals with learning disabilities may need access to accommodations, ranging from basic to more sophisticated technologies; immigrant learners may need the skills to explain different points of view and customs from their country. The ability to assert rights and communicate needs to employers and others is vital to autonomy (also see OECD, 2005).

Box 9.3. General Adult Education, Adult Education Centre Frederikssund, Denmark

At the end of learners' oral presentations in an English class observed, the learners were asked to assess their own work, based on an "assessment form" prepared by the teacher and which is regularly used by the students in the classroom to assess themselves and the other students during the various exercises.

Assessment tool used by teacher and student on their learning style

- *How is it to be a student (rank from 1 to 6)?*
- *How do you feel about and experience the teacher?*
- *How do you evaluate your work as a student?*
- *What about absences?*
- *Overview of how the student learns*
- *Use of the study plan*
- *What about the learning environment in the VUC (Adult Education Centre)?*
- *What about the learning environment in the group?*
- *What can I do as a teacher to help you (the student)?*
- *What does the student do to take responsibility for his/her own learning process?*

Source: Colardyn and Baltzer (Annex 2 on the Internet).

Box 9.4. Jewel and Esk Valley College
Edinburgh, Scotland

The following illustrates how one learner gained greater autonomy in her personal life using skills she had developed in the programme:

Tammy started off the course gradually and initially did not have very high expectations but she recognises that there are many things in all aspects of her life that she can do now that she couldn't do before. She is working with her 17-year-old son on his spelling, is working voluntarily with an older woman and now feels able to talk to people whereas before she would have avoided doing so as she was worried about her vocabulary. She has found that the emphasis on listening and talking in the course and the reading she has been doing has made it possible for her to use words she did not know before. Her self-confidence has increased enormously. At the beginning, she stayed in the course because she didn't want to let the tutor and the other people in the course down but later she stayed because she enjoyed it and felt that she was learning a lot. She was able to use her learning on the course in her home life, now being able to write a letter to the dentist and to fill in application forms for the college. She has developed better listening and talking skills and has found that telling other people about something she has read gives her a better understanding of what it says. Tammy learnt to do mind maps and now uses them to plan her shopping.

Source: Sliwka and Tett (Annex 2 on the Internet).

ICT and independent learning

E-learning is an increasingly common approach to independent study, although access to the necessary technology is uneven, and entry level learners often need extra assistance. There are mixed views on the effectiveness of ICT-based programmes for motivating learners and improving outcomes, as well.

A series of studies have shown that there are no significant differences in outcomes between learners using ICT-based learning and those in more traditional settings (the studies cover a range of learners, from adults with mild learning disabilities to post-graduate learners – see for example Schwartz and Duvall, 2000; Anderson and Nicol, 2000; Maki *et al.*, 2000; Tolmie and Boyle, 2000 cited in Selwyn, 2006). At the same time, other studies have suggested that "….more interactive forms of learning with ICT can lead to a more reflective, 'deeper' learning and more empowered and democratic discussion among adult learners (Doubler *et al.*, 2003; Jeris, 2002 cited in Selwyn, 2006). Some researchers have found that ICT-based learning is an attractive and motivating mode of learning for adults with basic skills (Lewis and Delcourt 1998, cited in Selwyn, 2006) According to research by Hannah *et al.* (2004), English as a Second Language learners

who use computer-assisted instruction as a supplement to regular classroom learning do better than those who only attend class.

Grotlüschen and Bonna (Annex 3 on the Internet) report on qualitative research which found that formative, computer generated self-assessments increased learner motivation. The research also shows that, for complex tasks, learners are more responsive to feedback provided by knowledgeable individuals. This feedback should be given in the form of advice and not as correction of mistakes.

Grotlüschen and Brauchle (2004) observed a number of learners using computer-assisted instruction in three courses and subsequently conducted interviews. They found that low achievers preferred the instructor's guidance, particularly in regard to the choice of topics and the evaluation of results. The learners believed that e-based feedback did not reflect their own images of how learning should happen. The authors conclude that "… reflection about the learning process is not automatic. Results show that learners don't even realise that they are stuck in the middle of a learning process, unable to decide what went wrong. Even minimal problems, like clicking on a lesson somebody already knows, lead to boredom, resistant and reluctant attitudes and frustration". Connolly, Saunders and Hodson (2001) report that while independent ICT learning may motivate some adult learners, others find the experience difficult, particularly when they do not have direction from tutors (in Selwyn, 2006).

Grotlüschen and Brauchle question whether e-learning is the best way to reach adults with language, literacy and numeracy needs. At the same time, they note that recent research projects have shown that "didactically intelligent systems" can be effective. Learners need more intensive guidance in the first phases (Grotlüschen and Brauchle, 2004).

One problem is that such "didactically intelligent" systems are expensive to produce. Mayes (2000) argues that "….for reasons of cost alone the interactive pedagogical opportunities offered by information and communications technology are often overlooked by adult learning providers, leaving ICT-based pedagogy rooted in more old-fashioned linear and restricted models…" (cited in Selwyn, 2006).

Key issues and conclusions

Building learner autonomy is one of the primary goals of adult LLN provision. The international Definition and Selection of Competencies (OECD, 2005) defines autonomy as an individual's ability to think for him or herself, and to take responsibility for learning and actions. Learners become more autonomous as they integrate new skills into their daily lives,

and develop their confidence, ability to plan, take initiative and make independent judgments.

In several of the exemplary programmes featured in this report, efforts to build autonomy begin with the learner's involvement in negotiating what and how they will learn when they first enter a programme or start a new course. They are active partners at each step of the learning process. Learners gradually develop the confidence to use their own judgment regarding the quality of their work, and for identifying gaps in their learning.

As this chapter has shown, instructors in the OECD exemplary case studies have found a number of different ways to help learners develop their skills for autonomy and learning-to-learn. Programmes have created special guidance hours and courses focused on learning-to-learn. They have also integrated the teaching of these skills into regular course work – helping learners to better organise their time, develop effective study techniques, draw upon and develop their reasoning skills, assess the quality of their own work, and decide upon next steps.

Learner autonomy is also important because many LLN learners are already engaged in independent learning. It is a vital way for learners to maintain their interest and focus if they are unable to participate in formal training for a period of time. While there is a need to look more closely at the kinds of materials that are most effective for independent learning, there is evidence that learners who participate in both organised and independent learning opportunities tend to make greater progress.

Learners often measure their own success in terms of what they have achieved in their family, work, community and private lives. As they become more independent, they are also more confident about what they are able to contribute in these different areas of their lives.

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Chapter 10
Recognising Learner Progress

This chapter introduces the fifth and final of the steps in the OECD staircase. In the spirit of lifelong learning, this step does not represent the end of the learning journey, but an opportunity to take stock of progress made and to identify next steps and goals. The chapter explores theories of learner progression – that is, how learners move toward higher level skills and autonomy. Programmes have developed a range of formative assessment tools to track learner progression and adjust teaching and learning strategies to meet needs. Learners also participate in summative assessments at the end of a programme. Programmes may give formal examinations, or may use alternative approaches to assessing learner achievements. Not all learners are working toward certification.

Recognition of learner progress is the final of the five steps that make up the OECD staircase – although of course it is not the final step in the learning journey. Rather, it is an opportunity to identify next steps and goals. The emphasis is on "measuring the distance travelled" toward individual learner goals, and on creating lifelong learners.

This chapter explores how programmes recognise learner progress – toward personal goals as well as for certification. It starts with an exploration of theories of adult learner progression – how learners move toward higher-level skills for critical analysis and autonomy. The chapter continues with an exploration of the range of approaches to assessment of learner progress – including formative and summative assessment. An important sub-theme in the chapter, as throughout this report, is the fundamental tension between the teaching and learning focused on attainment of learning objectives as defined in official curricula and other documents, and more complex skills, which cannot be reduced to simple objectives.

Theories of adult learner progression

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) sets skill Level 3 as the suitable minimum for managing the demands of the knowledge and information technology. As discussed in Chapter 2, IALS and ALL data indicate that individuals at Levels 1 and 2 are more likely to be unemployed and to earn less over their lifetimes. Wage inequalities driven by new approaches to work organisation and ICT are likely to exacerbate these disadvantages. Individuals performing at Levels 1 and 2 are also likely to have poorer mental and physical health, and to participate less in community life. A central goal for adult LLN provision, therefore, is to help learners develop the critical thinking skills needed to function at higher levels (OECD and Statistics Canada, 1997, 2005). (See Annex 1 for descriptions of IALS and ALL competence levels.)

The ALL survey also serves as a useful way to understand the increasing levels of sophistication required for performance at higher levels of literacy, numeracy and problem-solving. For example, in the problem-solving domain, ALL respondents performing at Level 1 are asked to make simple inferences from limited information grounded in a familiar context. At Level 2, respondents are asked to evaluate alternatives based on well-defined, transparent and explicitly stated criteria. While successful problem-solving may require the respondent to bring together information from different sources, the reasoning process is fairly linear. At Level 3, respondents may be asked to organise information based on given criteria or to construct a solution to a problem by taking non-transparent or multiple, interdependent constraints into account. Goals may be ill-defined and the reasoning process non-linear. Respondents must be able to draw upon a variety of problem-solving skills.

In the numeracy domain of ALL, respondents performing at Level 1 or 2 are able to perform simple, one or two-step tasks such as counting, understanding simple percentages and performing simple arithmetic operations, while respondents performing at Level 3 and higher demonstrate understanding of a range of mathematical concepts, and the ability to undertake a range of processes to solve problems, draw inferences and provide mathematical justification for responses.

The international Definition and Selection of Competencies (OECD, 2005) describes higher level competencies as involving the need to think and act reflectively. Individuals develop capacity for reflection as they master a specific area of knowledge or a specific skill, assimilate it, and then adapt it. With increasing sophistication, they are able to draw upon their creative abilities and to take a critical stance.

In a synthesis of theories on adult learning progression, Helsing, Drago-Severson and Kegan (2004) point out that the learner's evolution from simpler to more complex ways of knowing depends on the nature of supports, encouragement and challenges. Their analysis is based on a synthesis of models developed by: Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky *et al*., 1986; Kegan, 2001; King and Kitchener, 1994; and Perry, 1970. These models of adult learner progression set out broadly similar descriptions of the nature and direction of growth.

Helsing *et al.'s* synthesis describes four levels of adult development in learning. Learners at Level 1 are described as having an "absolutist stance toward knowing" (Perry, 1970). Learners at this level "…believe that good students study hard, follow clear instructions and rules, find the right answers, get good grades, and possess the correct facts and skills (p. 169)". At Level 2, learners recognise that some knowledge is only "partially certain" (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Learners are interested not only in acquiring knowledge, but also in understanding how they can apply it in other parts of their lives. They also develop a greater awareness of themselves as learners, and their own attitudes toward learning and the subject they are learning.

Adult learners at Level 3 are developing critical thinking capacities and draw upon standards and criteria to assess information and to make their own judgements. At Level 4, learners are able to create and explain their own complex ideas, to construct their own standards for self-assessment, and take responsibility for their own learning. As with younger learners, individual adult learners vary in the pace of development, how they take in, organise, understand and analyse new information. Prior knowledge and experiences also shape learners' approaches to learning.

Using tools to track learner progress

The formative assessment framework provides support for progression with its emphasis on scaffolding learning so that learners are able to define and meet goals and build self-efficacy for further challenges, and for self- and peer assessment. In this way, instructors are also able to help learners to develop the increasingly sophisticated knowledge and skills necessary to address complex and sometimes ambiguous information, and to apply these skills in their daily lives. The central involvement of the learner in goal setting, assessment and adjustment of teaching ensures deep engagement in the learning process.

The danger for learners at foundation levels is that teaching focused solely on narrow learning objectives may not help them to move beyond the

most basic levels. If learners are to advance to levels where they are able to draw upon skills for critical thinking and problem-solving, then they will need to be supported, encouraged and challenged. As put forward by ALL, IALS and other country-based research, these are precisely the skills which countries need to encourage if learners are to move from foundation to higher level skills.

ILPs and learning contracts to track progress

As noted at the beginning of Section II, several of the programmes participating in this study use individual learning plans (ILPs) or learning contracts setting out learner goals. The ILP also provides a framework for the instructor and learner to review progress, and to discuss ways in which instruction or other services may be adapted to help the learner to succeed. In many of the OECD case study sites, the ILP or contract is the main approach to embedding formative assessment in the teaching and learning process. Although there is a similar focus on tracking progress – that is, measuring the distance the learner has travelled – the way in which these documents are used varies across the exemplary programmes featured in this study.

The ILP itself may include checklists to help learners track their progress and any adjustments made to teaching. Some forms include a place for assessment of how newly acquired knowledge and skills are being used outside of the class (for example, in family, community, and work settings).

Instructors and learners may refer to the ILP on a daily basis, whenever a learner completes a specific task, and at regular intervals. Most programmes schedule regular reviews of learning portfolios between instructors and individual learners – ranging from every six weeks to 24 sessions. Dialogues between instructors and learners may focus on progress toward the goals, the learner's feelings about the pace of progress and class participation, how new knowledge and skills are being used outside of class and where learners may want to invest further effort. The specificity of goals outlined in ILPs or other tracking tools means that these dialogues are very focused.

Learners in the three Skills for Life case study sites in England take similar approaches to review of the ILP. They meet with the instructor when they have completed the equivalent of one term, to fill out a second Tutorial Record. They are asked what they have learned, how they have used these skills outside of class, the impact of new skills, and next goals for learning. This Tutorial Record also includes the instructor's assessment of learner progress. The instructor and learner also have the chance to discuss any changes to instruction that may help the learner to make greater progress, or

to maintain their motivation. At the end of the year, the learner and instructor complete a Final Tutorial Record.

It is important that the learner take ownership of the ILP. The Mary Ward Centre in England has developed two important innovations. First, they have started working with interpreters for those immigrant learners whose English is too poor to discuss the ILP with the instructor. Second, they have reduced the ILP forms from the full A4 size to a much smaller size which makes it more convenient for learners to carry around in a small ring binder. This, in turn, also helps learners develop a sense of ownership. (Some forms are also kept in files at the programme so instructors can refer to them, or outside evaluators may look at them to see that formative assessment is taking place) (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Box 10.1. The Scottish Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme

Guidance on progression is also part of this process of regular review [with learners] and includes checking if the barriers that learners have identified to their progress are being overcome and if the support needs they have identified are still relevant. At these reviews progress is recognised in the four areas of life: family, community, work and lifelong learning. Achievements can be hard to measure quantitatively other than in terms that progress is good, significant, slow, etc., but are recorded qualitatively through the learners' comments on their own progress. In some cases learners build a portfolio of their work, for example, a learner who wanted to help her daughter with her reading, kept a copy of a tape of bed time stories she had told her daughter as well as the titles of books that she had practiced reading in class so she could read them to her daughter when she felt more confident about all the words. The skill and confidence of the tutor is crucial in this process and can be supplemented by participation of the local co-ordinator who is responsible for tutor-support.

Source: Sliwka and Tett (Annex 2 on the Internet).

In the general adult education programme in Frederikssund, Denmark the first six-week review of progress also covers elements that can affect the learner's progress (*e.g.*, family problems, friends, etc.). Instructors have guidelines that help them to address these topics. Learners may also raise questions about the teaching and learning process. Instructors note that learners may want to clarify their and the instructor's responsibilities, to discuss the social climate of the class, whether they are enjoying the learning or are bored, what to expect next in the programme, and so on. Learners may record their feelings about their own progress (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In the adult returnees' course at the Jewel and Esk Valley College in Edinburgh, learners develop the ILP after their first week in the programme. The learners work in pairs and discuss the kind of resources available to support their learning. At the end of the course, there is a whole group discussion on what progress means to the learners themselves. Individuals then complete a form describing how they feel about their accomplishments and what they have achieved in different areas of their lives. Learners can draw upon the knowledge and experiences they have identified through this process (Rogers, 2001; Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Portfolios

Portfolios of learners' work samples are popular across several of the exemplary programmes featured in this report. Portfolios provide a way for instructors and learners to track progress over time, and in some cases, are also used to document achievement for official reporting purposes. Both instructors and learners in the OECD case study sites using portfolio methods perceived benefits of this approach (see also Klenowski, 1996).

At the Johannes Learning Centre in Stavanger, Norway, two instructors have been using portfolios as a tool for learning for over a decade. As with ILPs, the focus is on helping learners to clarify their learning goals, what they need to do to reach those goals, and to track improvement over time. The instructors also try to be very clear about their expectations. In Norwegian and English language classes, the instructors remarked that many learners will throw away any papers they feel are less than perfect, so learners are asked to keep and take care of every draft of their writing.

Together, the instructors and learners review the full portfolio in December, and again in March and at the end of the academic year, in June. Dates are written on texts so that learners can see their progress over time. Learners will see, for example, whether they are more organised, writing longer texts, writing in paragraphs, making fewer mistakes, and using more sophisticated grammar. In this way, learners find it easy to see their own development.

When learners deliver their first portfolio to teachers for assessment and review, they are asked to self-assess their work as being "very good, good, or not so good". If there is a discrepancy between the assessments of instructors and the self assessments of learners it is usually due to the lower ratings provided by learners. The portfolio review process is also about learners finding out how they are learning. "You have to work with it step-by-step", comments one instructor. Instructors are also strategic in deciding how to structure their assessments. They might highlight things that need to be corrected, but leave the learner first to figure out why he or she is making

mistakes, and then to correct them. Alternatively, the instructor may only highlight a particular kind of problem rather than every mistake that has been made. Instructors generally also schedule one-to-one meetings with learners to provide them with direct feedback.

The Adult Learning Centre in Arendal, Norway has piloted a language portfolio, known as the "I Can" portfolio, as part of a European Grundtvig grant.[1] The portfolio includes checklists of language competencies needed for everyday life, such as finding an apartment, helping children with their schoolwork, or for pursuing further education or employment goals. Checklists in the portfolios provide learners with a clear idea as to the gains they have made and what they need to focus on in their language learning in order to meet new goals. Language competencies are described in very specific and detailed ways. For example, "I can understand short and simple instructions" (usually related to a specific situation, such as making an appointment with the doctor). The levels are based on those developed for the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Instructors at Adult Learning Centre in Arendal report that learners using the portfolio seem to be more aware of the different levels and types of language skills than they have been in the past. However, all learners need time before they are able to take responsibility for their own learning. Eventually they are able to use the portfolio as a tool for prioritising study tasks (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Instructors in one of the general adult education (AVU) courses observed in Frederikssund, Denmark, encourage learners to develop computerised portfolios. Learners receive training on use of the portfolio computer programme, and how to store their best products and test results. Instructors' notes on learners' progress are also stored electronically, and are accessible to participants (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

[1] The Grundtvig programme is one out of four programmes in the EU's Socrates programmes for education. The Norwegian project builds on the European Language Portfolio, which was developed and piloted by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe between 1998 and 2000 as a tool to support the development of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The Norwegian model also draws upon Dutch and Irish models which provide checklists for the progressive development of competencies necessary for English-language fluency.

Checklists and log books

The Danish Ministry requires instructors to document learner progress using a checklist for each participant. The checklist indicates the minimum standards set by the Ministry of Education. Instructors may adapt the checklist to local or regional needs (or in the case of work-based learning, to the needs of the enterprise). Instructors at the Trailer Mobile Teaching Unit in Southern Jutland also use the checklists as an informal tool to track learner progress. They augment the checklists with portfolios and computer notes on learner progress (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

At the Saint-Quentin-Fallavier penitentiary in Lyon, learners have an individual record of their learning activities. It includes a weekly record of courses taken, and competencies gained. Learners may use the record to review their progress at more or less regular intervals. At the institutional level, the record also helps assure that the learner will have some continuity in his/her learning programme in case of transfer between facilities, or if he/she wants to pursue learning elsewhere at the end of his/her sentence.

At the Savoirs pour Réussir (SPR) programme in Marseilles, the instructors use a grid with indicators and criteria of performance. Learners can see that they have mastered specific competencies, and focus their attention on those they are currently working to acquire. The grid also allows learners and instructors to adapt the programme, taking into account possible barriers. The key elements in the grid are: procedures used to arrive at a result, strong and weak points, and interest in learning (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In several of the sites observed for the US case study, instructors had created charts tracking learner progress toward different components of the General Educational Development (GED) tests, based on trial test results. Instructors worked with individual learners to analyse any incorrect responses and to suggest activities to help address problems in the test. Instructors also typically develop work-plans for reaching next goals, which they list on the charts. In one of the sites observed, the instructor had written the chart up on a whiteboard. This chart served as a constant reminder to learners of the progress they had made, and the areas in which they needed to do more work. The instructor in this classroom says that the learners appreciate the clarity of goals on the chart, and the visual indication of their progress (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Instructors at the Ateliers de Formation de Base (AFB) in Haute Normandie have recently introduced worksheets to track the progress of individual learners. The instructors feel that the worksheets have had a significant impact on learner engagement. Learners, who fill in the worksheet with the help of instructors, have a better understanding of what

they need to do to close remaining learning gaps, and place greater value on what they have already learned. The instructors believe that the fact of writing down progress made, and what still needs to be done, also has a strong symbolic value for the learner (more so, they find, than is the case with oral feedback and discussion of progress) (Michel and Maroun, Annex 2 on the Internet).

However, the checklists and logbooks are not universally popular with learners. As instructors in the General Adult Education programme in Frederikssund, Denmark mentioned, log books initially encountered a lot of learner resistance ("I don't want to participate"). Many learners prefer approaches that are closer to what they experienced at school, perhaps because they feel they have a better understanding of the rules and expectations (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

"Remedial diagnostics"

Some programmes, such as the Reading and Writing Circle in Verdal, Norway, "re-give" diagnostic tests at different points to show learners how far they have advanced, and to identify areas where they need more work. It is important to note, however, that the diagnostic tests have not always been validated (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Summative assessment and certification

In many cases, although not all, learners are working toward some kind of certification. Certification, of course, involves some kind of summative assessment. Summative assessments often have a strong impact on the practice of formative assessment. There is a great deal of concern, for example, that the focus on testing to earn certification or as a measure of programme performance may result in "teaching to the test", and/or generate a great deal of anxiety on the part of adult LLN learners who may have not performed well in testing environments in the past.

To be sure, the culture of high-stakes testing is not nearly as pronounced as in the compulsory sector. In several countries, the pitched political discourse on school-level accountability as measured by test performance often leads to an almost singular focus on preparing students for those tests. Lower-profile adult LLN programmes do not face the same level of pressure, but must nevertheless provide evidence of learner progress. Those that rely upon standardised tests to provide this evidence are much more likely to focus on helping learners to pass those tests than they are on the development of learner autonomy or skills for learning-to-learn.

Another important concern in adult LLN is that summative assessment will have a negative impact on learners. Many experts assert that formative assessment is particularly appropriate for adult LLN learners who may have had negative experiences in prior schooling, and who may fear tests (Egloff, 1997; Genuneit, 2004; Füssenich, 2004). Merton (2001) found that "most people fear tests and would prefer continuous assessment". He reports that learners value daily feedback and advice on how to improve (which they may not have received in their previous education). Merton also notes that the instructor's choice of words and tone of voice influence how learners perform under pressure.

Examinations

As discussed in Chapter 3, several countries set out formal or standardised tests for certification. Preparing learners for these official tests may become an important focus. For example, the OECD case study visit to Denmark took place at the end of April, and the official qualification examinations were scheduled in May and June, so the case study researchers found a very explicit focus on preparing learners (and in particular young adult learners) for these examinations in two of the programmes. For example, in the AVU Youth programme in Århus which serves learners between 17 and 30 years of age, both the Danish language and mathematics instructors had prepared practice tests. The instructors tried to use these practice tests as opportunities for formative assessment – with time for instructor and peer feedback. The mathematics instructor also discussed strategies the learners could use to improve their performance. The instructor and learners had earlier prepared a collection of "pearls" – that is, solutions to different kinds of mathematics problems. Learners could refer to the "pearls" as a guide for solving similar problems encountered during the 3-hour examination (Colardyn and Baltzer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In the United States, OECD case study researchers report that the GED test or state high school diploma equivalent was the clear focus in many of the classrooms observed for the study.[2] Teaching and learning centred on curriculum content, but also the "culture" of the examinations the learners expected to take. Several of the instructors in the US case study sites said that they made conscious efforts to avoid "teaching from the workbook" in order to prepare learners for examinations. Instead, they tailored learning to ensure that the content was relevant to the learners' needs (Benseman and Comings, Annex 2 on the Internet).

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[2] Publicly funded programmes require pre- and post-tests of learner accomplishments, using standardised tests.

In England, ambitious national targets for numbers of learners to earn certification in England place pressure on instructors. Instructors interviewed for the OECD case study in England said that with the introduction of targets, they had feared they would be restricted in what or how they were able to teach as a result of the increased focus on testing and certification. These instructors have found, in fact, that many of the learners are motivated to take the tests for certification. They do need to help learners to build their self-confidence and to develop effective strategies for test-taking, however (Comings and Vorhaus, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Alternative approaches to summative assessment and certification

As described in Chapter 3, several programmes take an alternative approach to the traditional final examination for certification. At the Haven programme, in Inverness, Scotland, learners keep their written projects in a portfolio as a record of what they have learned, and evidence of their employability. The portfolio includes both formative and summative assessments of their progress (Sliwka and Tett, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Box 10.2. The Haven Company
Inverness, Scotland

Haven is a company that tries to provide meaningful employment for individuals with a range of different disabilities. Haven offers a range of services, including photocopying, packaging, laminating and assembling small parts such as in hazard switches for cars.

The individual learning goals that each student sets for him/her self are recorded in the ILP. Andrew, for example, who works in packaging for the local hospital has been using spreadsheets in his work and now wants to learn how to generate spreadsheets himself on the computer. The tutor spends an extra hour per week on one to one coaching with Andrew. She identified his skill needs initially by interviewing him and by shadowing his performance at work. She then identified the ICT requirements for the hospital work by talking to the current operator and obtained an overview of the company's requirement from the line manager. The core aim of the one-to-one coaching was to further develop and to broaden his skills in ICT so that they would be transferable to other job roles. She agreed the ILP with Andrew, the line manager at the hospital and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) to make sure that the learning goals would satisfy all three partners in the process.

Source: Sliwka and Tett (Annex 2 on the Internet).

In 1999 the Flemish government moved from a system where learners in "second chance" education were required to take tests to earn their secondary school degrees, to a system where learners have the option of

taking the test, or of completing requirements in classes with no tests. The policy created space for innovation at the programme level.

Approximately four years ago, the programme leader at the Hoboken second chance school in Flanders decided to use the 1999 policy as a way to introduce formative assessment across the school. She saw this as a chance to create opportunities for real learning, not just test preparation. Instructors at the school agree that learning is now more connected to learners' lives, and that learners who engage with the new system know and remember more. Instructors believe that the formative assessment also better prepares learners for the workplace. They comment, however, that some of their learners actually prefer the option of taking the examination – it is less time-consuming, and, the learners believe, the rules and expectations are clear (Rosen and De Meyer, Annex 2 on the Internet).

Programmes are also experimenting with the use of learner portfolios to complement traditional forms of certification. The "I Can" portfolio piloted at the Arendal Adult Learning Centre featured in the study includes a detailed language biography describing the owner's experiences in each language, language learning strategies to which learners can refer, a checklist for competencies, and a dossier in which examples of personal work and official documents can be kept to illustrate learners' language competencies[3] (Looney, Husby and Røynestad, Annex 2 on the Internet).

In some of the non-accredited programmes, learners may receive certificates upon course completion, although there are no requirements to pass a test to receive the certificate. Many learners, having built their confidence, set new goals for further education – for primary, upper secondary school completion, and sometimes higher education.

As is the case in compulsory school settings, there is a great deal of concern regarding the validity and reliability of summative assessments. Many summative assessments measure only a narrow set of skills, and do not necessarily show whether or how learners are able to apply skills outside of a testing situation. Fagan (1992) suggests that summative and formative assessments that uncover learners' problem solving skills (analysis, meaning association, ability to predict, infer, synthesize and track information) will reveal more about the learners' ability to transfer new skills to daily life (cited in Derrick, Ecclestone and Merrifield, 2007).

[3] The portfolio is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) on language. It is intended to serve as a complement to regular educational certificates.

Learners not working toward certification

Countries are legitimately concerned with increasing numbers of learners earning certification. Certification is important for job advancement as well as entry into higher levels of education. Nevertheless, many learners have goals other than for certification. For example, Schladebach (2006) reports that 88.4% of learners surveyed in the Volkshochschule system (the primary institution offering literacy and numeracy courses for adults in Austria and Germany) were participating in order "to do something for themselves".

A study by Turner and Watters (2001) found that adult learners in non-accredited learning were more interested in why they were learning than how successful they were being. The learners used self-assessment, instructor-assessment and peer-assessment to track how well they were doing. Learners viewed learning outcomes as a useful framework for understanding their progress rather than as a goal in and of itself.

Turner and Watters' findings are consistent with arguments made by a series of observers that learners relate their progress to their ability to perform in real life contexts, rather than with the acquisition of qualifications (See Barton *et al.*, 2004, 2005, 2006; Belfiore and Folinsbee, 2004; Condelli, 2002; Freire, 1972; Lindsay and Gawn, 2005; Swain *et al.*, 2005; Ward and Edwards, 2002). In a study by Whitty (1993), 80% of respondents cited independence and confidence in communication skills as more important than certification, although many thought that the certification also contributed to confidence. Such intrinsic motivation is vital for effective learning. An OECD study, *Motivating Students for Lifelong Learning* (2000), notes that:

> *At least two dozen studies have shown that people expecting to receive a reward for completing a task – or for doing it successfully – do not perform as well as those who expect nothing. This appears to be true for children and adults, for males and females, for rewards of all kinds….*

Key issues and conclusions

Recognition of learner progress represents the final of the five steps of the OECD staircase – although of course not the final step in the learning journey. As learners gain confidence in their capacities, they may set new goals. They become lifelong learners.

The chapter began with an overview of theories of adult learner progression. These theories provide important insights into what we know about how adult

learners evolve from "simple to more complex ways of knowing". The levels of progression from foundation to higher-level competencies are consistent with those identified in international surveys (IALS, ALL) as well as the OECD *Definition and Selection of Competencies*. The theories also support the idea that learners draw upon their existing skills as they take in new knowledge, but also need to be challenged to develop more sophisticated skills and capacities. Much like younger learners, adults vary in the pace of learning, and how they take in, understand, and analyse new knowledge.

The adult LLN programmes featured in the study place the focus on "measuring the distance travelled". Several of the programmes establish individual learning plans (ILPs) or contracts with learners when they first enter programmes. Learners and instructors use the ILPs to track progress toward specific goals. They recognise gains and identify areas where they need to put further effort. Of course there is the danger that the ILPs will merely co-exist with official curricula and learning objectives. But at its best, the process of tracking and recognising progress helps to build learners' skills for self-assessment and learning-to-learn. Learners are also better able to relate skill-gains to their daily lives.

The different OECD case study programmes take a range of approaches to summative assessment. Some are required to use official or standardised examinations. Other programmes allow learners to demonstrate achievements in relation to a specific goal they have set for themselves. Such alternative approaches are often more labour intensive than standardised examinations, but are also more likely to reveal whether learners have developed knowledge and skills they can use in their daily lives. They are also very clearly aligned with the goals established in the individual learning plan, and agreed upon with the learner.

Certainly certificates serve as a signal to employers and further education institutions that an individual has attained foundation-level competencies. But as pointed out in this chapter, a high percentage of learners are not necessarily working toward certification when they start a new programme. Systems that hold programmes accountable for numbers of learners to earn certification discourage learners who are intrinsically motivated to "learn something for themselves", while also encouraging real tensions between summative assessment (assessment *of l*earning) and formative assessment (assessment *for* learning). Systems that are focused on engaging learners in the learning process and that are focused on real progression will be better aligned with diverse learner goals, and with overall goals for this sector. And some learners later decide to pursue certification as they gain confidence in their ability to learn.

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Section III
Conclusions

Chapter 11
Supporting Effective Practice
Implications for Policy and Directions for Research

This chapter proposes a framework of seven interrelated principles for strengthening policy and practice, and for building the evidence base. It calls for broad debate on the nature of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as a range of practical strategies. The chapter also sets out a research agenda for this field, calling for greater attention to the impact of different approaches, and active engagement of researchers with policy makers and practitioners.

Over the last decade, the International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD and Statistics Canada, 1994, 1995 and 1998), the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005), and other national surveys have revealed the persistence and prevalence of low foundation skills in populations. Other research has pointed to the impact of low foundation skills on the economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities.

Across countries, policy makers have responded to these data with significant new investments and new programmes. New policies have been important for increasing the transparency, coherence as well as the status of the adult LLN sector. At the same time, investments are still insufficient to meet needs, and it is not clear that even current levels of funding will be sustained over time. These concerns are compounded by a lack of information on how effectively these new systems are promoting adult LLN learning. Data on outcomes other than certification are rare, and as we have mentioned previously, there is little attention to how data can be used to improve programmes and better meet learner needs.

To address these gaps, our study has examined exemplary teaching, learning and assessment processes that lead to high quality outcomes. It has considered how policy can better promote and support effective practice across the sector. The study's initial focus on formative assessment has also

been useful for considering how individuals as well as systems learn – from what works, as well as from what doesn't work.

In this final chapter, we examine the implications of findings from the international research and practice explored in Section II for addressing challenges in the adult LLN sector. We identify seven interrelated areas where policy can do more to help strengthen and develop effective practice and improve outcomes:

1. Promote active debate on the nature of teaching, learning and assessment.
2. Strengthen professionalism.
3. Balance structure and flexibility: formative assessment as a framework.
4. Strengthen learner-centred approaches.
5. Diversify and deepen approaches to programme evaluation for accountability.
6. Devote the necessary resources: people, time and money.
7. Strengthen the knowledge-base.

These seven principles serve as a broad framework for strengthening policy and practice and for building the evidence base.

1) Promote active debate on the nature of teaching, learning and assessment

Countries have developed several innovative approaches to adult LLN provision – including diagnostic assessment of learner needs, individual learning plans, and tracking tools to measure progress toward goals. Instructors in the exemplary programmes featured in the OECD study have built on these elements to transform practice. The process of transformation within programmes has involved debates and reflections on the nature of teaching, learning and assessment itself.

Policy makers can promote wider debate on such fundamental concepts across the sector. Active debate invites exchange among stakeholders, critical analysis of evidence and ideas, and innovation. It moves beyond simple dissemination of tools or sharing of best practices, and places a stronger focus on transformation of teaching and cultures of learning. This process is essential if ideas are to gain any real traction in the sector.

The debate agenda includes questions such as:

- What are the underlying principles that should drive provision in the adult LLN system, and how should these be reflected in and aligned across policy and practice? Do these principles reflect the importance of the process of learning, as well as outcomes?
- What counts as success, and for whom? How can systems develop more meaningful measures of learner success (autonomy, social and economic integration, individual and family health)? Are approaches to learner assessment and programme evaluation consistent with goals and values for adult LLN?
- How do systems recognise complexity and address ambiguities? For example, measures of learning and programme accountability may be highly contested. The understanding of what it means to be a literate person shifts over time to reflect changes in society. The evidence base as to what works and for whom is underdeveloped. How are systems able to accommodate these uncertainties?
- Are learner assessment and programme evaluation used as tools for learning, and not merely to judge outcomes?

Debate focused on these and other key questions will help stakeholders to reflect on goals and values for provision, and strategies to support innovative and effective practice.

2) Strengthen professionalism

Effective teaching, learning and assessment centre on the quality of interactions between and among instructors and learners. High quality interactions involve a complex mix of skills in assessment, subject-matter and pedagogical expertise, and softer skills such as humour, patience, flexibility and empathy.

How can systems better support instructors in developing this sophisticated set of skills? Instructors will need opportunities for effective training and professional development, as well as the ongoing support of programme leaders and peer networks. As instructors develop their skills, they develop the capacity to think and act reflectively – diagnosing needs and developing appropriate responses.

A strong focus on building learners' higher level skills is also vital if teaching and learning are to move beyond mechanistic approaches, where instructors focus on the technical aspects of assessment. Instructors need to challenge learners, and to ensure that they are genuinely involved in the

process of learning and assessment. Instructors also need to identify their own values and goals for teaching and learning, to take "ownership" of new approaches, and to pay attention to the impact they are having on learning.

With these challenges in mind, countries will need to continue in current direction of strengthening practice through more rigorous qualification and professional development requirements. In many countries, there are efforts to "catch-up" with the compulsory sector.

Most training targeted to adult LLN instructors currently occurs through professional development, rather than in initial training. This is important and should be continued. However, given the ad hoc and short-term nature of professional development, it is not enough. There should be a range of professional development approaches. In addition, pathways – mirroring systems developed for LLN learners – would allow instructors to deepen their skills in progressively advanced courses.

Instructors also need opportunities for peer support. The fact that many instructors in this sector work on a part-time basis makes it difficult to schedule time to meet and exchange ideas. Networks (both virtual and physical) provide opportunities for programme leaders and instructors to share experiences and insights and to raise questions with a large number of peers. But these networks should augment, rather than replace programme-based exchange and support.

3) Balance structure and flexibility: formative assessment as a framework

Well-designed tools and guidelines provide much-needed structure and enable instructors to be more systematic in their practice. At the same time, instructors need plenty of flexibility in order to adapt to the teaching context as well as the needs of diverse learners.

Ideally, formative assessment frameworks will provide the right balance of structure and flexibility. Instructors use the tools and techniques of formative assessment to uncover learner understanding and progress toward goals. They then adapt teaching to meet identified needs, drawing upon a repertoire of learning tasks and challenges to help learners address gaps. This interactive approach to assessment and adaptation of the teaching and learning process calls upon the instructor's pedagogical and subject-knowledge, but also calls for a great deal of creativity and flexibility.

Nevertheless, poorly designed (or poorly implemented) guidelines and tools for formative assessment will provide more structure than flexibility, and will do little to advance learner autonomy or skills for learning-to-learn.

Assessments may be seen as a way to track learners toward meeting summative targets (an iterative process), rather than engaging with learners to build skills, knowledge and understanding (an interactive process).

Policies to help structure classroom practice might include: broadly defined learning objectives, tools that can be adapted to context (for example, community-based or work-based programmes), and guidelines that provide insight into the process as well as the principles of formative assessment. In addition, training and professional development for formative assessment will help instructors to develop effective skills for guiding classroom interactions.

The introduction of formative assessment as a framework for teaching and learning also enters into the debate on the nature of teaching and learning itself. As emphasised at the beginning of this study, formative assessment represents a fundamental change in how we think not only about assessment, but also about the whole approach to teaching and learning, and how instructors and learners work toward successful outcomes. Policies will need to align principles and strategies to effectively support this change in classroom cultures.

4) Strengthen learner-centred approaches

The countries and programmes participating in this study promote "learner-centred" approaches to adult LLN provision. While the approaches vary across countries and programmes, the consistent principles are: to ensure that learners' needs are diagnosed and addressed, individual motivations, interests and goals are incorporated into teaching, and that learners may choose whether or not to pursue qualifications. There is a strong emphasis across countries on tailoring of content to meet individual needs.

Yet many aspects of adult LLN provision are still more oriented to the needs of systems than they are to those of learners. Some approaches that could help to strengthen the focus on learner needs include:

- *Instruction that fits learners' patterns of participation*. Programmes may help learners develop learning plans that include several modes of instruction (including classes, distance education, and peer learning). When learners cannot learn in classroom settings, they may continue through self-study. When they are ready to return to classroom learning, instructors can take into account the progress made through self-study. Policy makers can identify persistence

supports as an essential feature of programme design (see also Chapter 3).

- *Smoother pathways for progression.* Countries have made a great deal of progress in creating more coherent pathways for progression. But some countries have also pointed to an ongoing lack of co-operation between agencies responsible for adult LLN provision. Learners thus face barriers in moving between programmes (for example, between foundation skill learning and vocational training, or from foundation to programmes offering higher level education and training). Further efforts are needed to improve inter-agency co-operation, and to ensure that the focus remains on the needs of individual learners.

- *Portable portfolios as well as improved national databases to register learners' progress toward goals over time and across programmes* (whether through formal, informal or non-formal learning). The Adult Learning Inspectorate in England suggests the development of a Lifelong Learning Portfolio which would track a learner's progress throughout his or her learning career. It could track learning progress toward a range of goals for personal, family, community and working life. Portable portfolios would also help to track learners' participation in a range of settings (community-based, work-based).

- *A stronger focus on ensuring that formative and summative assessments are grounded in real-life contexts related to the learner's goals.* This may imply a thorough review of how well individual learning plans (ILPs) and learning contracts are integrated into teaching and learning (or whether they merely co-exist with the official curriculum), as well as a review of the quality and relevance of the range of summative assessments. Summative and formative assessments that uncover learners' problem solving skills (analysis, meaning association, ability to predict, infer, synthesise and track information) will reveal more about the learners' ability to transfer new skills to daily life. Assessments may also consider direct evidence of how learners have integrated new skills into their daily and work lives (see also Chapter 10)

In addition, learners should be regularly consulted on their own views as to how well programmes are serving their needs.

5) Diversify and deepen approaches to programme evaluation for accountability

Increased attention to the adult LLN sector has also meant increased accountability for programme performance. Performance measurements are vital for understanding the quality of programme delivery, and ensuring that investment of public money is yielding results. Information gathered on programme performance can also be used to make improvements in delivery and teaching.

But there are a number of challenges for assessment and evaluation systems in the adult LLN sector. At the system level, key stakeholders, including learners, community advocates, instructors, programme leaders, policy officials from different agencies, and employers may have very different views of what counts as success and how to measure it. For example, countries have a legitimate concern in increasing numbers of learners earning certification. Yet learners are often more likely to relate their progress to their ability to perform in real life contexts, or gains in confidence and autonomy, rather than the acquisition of qualifications.

There are also practical data needs. Do the data gathered provide the kind of information that is needed to know whether adult LLN systems are meeting goals? At the programme level, do the data include the necessary context and details to identify programme strengths, effective practice, and areas for improvement? Do accountability systems provide room for programmes to learn from what works as well as what doesn't work?

Current approaches to accountability provide little insight as to whether programmes are really helping to prepare learners for employment, community integration, or individual and family well-being. Nor do many of these systems provide any indication of whether learners have gained skills for self-assessment, the ability to transfer knowledge and skills across domains, or whether they are integrating new skills in their daily and work lives.

Given the range of stakeholder interests, no single approach can satisfy all needs. Systems that use diverse, well-aligned measures of learning processes, as well as outcomes will be better able to manage competing goals and interests – and to capture useful data.

The mix of approaches to measurement might draw upon current approaches, including:

- *A focus on outcomes*. While we have warned that narrowly defined outcomes also narrow teaching and learning – a focus on outcomes is nonetheless essential. Clearly defined outcomes ensure that

standards are consistent across programmes, create transparency, and facilitate progression through systems. Employers and other stakeholders know that learners who have earned certificates have met well-defined standards. Outcomes are also valuable for learners who are not working toward certification, but who want a framework by which they can judge their own progress. Outcome measures that are relatively open, as are those designed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, may allow learners to demonstrate attainment drawing upon their own interests, an area of study, or work-related tasks.

- *Targets*. The idea of setting targets for numbers of learners to earn certification is problematic in systems that allow learners the choice to *not* work toward certification (and many learners choose not to). But targets that set realistic goals based on recent trends, focus on participation, and which recognise that learners may make different choices, can help to keep the focus on outreach and programme accessibility. Local communities and individual institutions may also set specific targets to improve services.

- *National reporting systems.* National databases provide guidelines for assessment, set out standards, and provide a nationally consistent means for tracking and reporting on learner outcomes. Instructors also have access to guidelines and tools for summative assessments. Potentially, these systems may also include details useful for identifying effective practices.

- *Inspections and programme self-evaluations.* Systems may also observe and evaluate practices and processes within programmes and classrooms. Inspections and self-evaluations can look more closely at how well programmes are integrating formative assessment to diagnose needs and shape teaching and learning. For example, the Flemish and English Inspectorates have also had some influence on promoting the practice of formative assessment at the programme and classroom level. The Scottish framework for programme self-evaluation includes criteria related to formative assessment practices, such as whether teaching and learning have been responsive to learners' identified needs and goals, whether learners have met curriculum standards, evidence of the quality of teaching and learning from the learners' ILP. The programme self-evaluation data are evaluated by the Scottish Executive, and areas for improvement are identified.

Systems may include surveys of learner satisfaction in accountability schemes. These may also provide a way to measure less tangible learning

gains, such as increases in the learner's self-efficacy and confidence, increased involvement in social and community activities, improved ability to help children with homework, and so on. These outcomes are much harder to quantify than certification or course completion rates, but are nevertheless vital measures of programme effectiveness.

**Box 11.1. Gauging the quality of assessment and evaluation systems
A short checklist**

Learner assessment

- Are learners fully involved in formative assessment processes – for example, in setting goals for learning, assessing their progress toward goals, and discussing adjustments to teaching and learning with instructors?
- Do summative tests measure skills that are important to the development of learner autonomy? For example, do they measure learners' skills of analysis, or capacity to transfer skills to daily life?

Programme evaluation

- Are targets realistic (neither too high nor too low in their ambitions for programme provision)? Are they based on research on adult learner progression, or data on past trends?
- Do targets encourage programmes to serve only those learners who are most likely to succeed, or to serve all learners, including those with the greatest need?
- Do measures of programme performance and accountability provide information on the process of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as on outcomes?
- Do evaluation data help inform programme improvements? How? What additional data might be needed, and what data are unnecessary?
- Are programmes given the space to learn from what doesn't work and to make improvements?
- Are there mechanisms for learning at the systemic level – to deepen the knowledge base and to disseminate knowledge on what works, to examine the effectiveness of policies across the different agencies responsible for adult LLN provision, and to adjust them when needed?

6) Devote the necessary resources – people, time and money

This study has not included any detailed discussion on funding within the adult LLN sector. However, it has been concerned with providing insight on effective practice in the hopes that this may guide more effective investment of existing resources – including people, time and money – and suggest where additional resources might help to further professionalise the field and improve outcomes.

People

Several countries and programme leaders have reported the problem of high turnover of instructional staff (although in Denmark, it is common for instructors to have taught in the same programme for at least ten years). In addition, several countries report that a large group of instructors are over the age of 50, and therefore nearing retirement age. Two major challenges, therefore, are to attract new instructors to the sector, and to improve conditions of employment in order to increase instructor retention.

The timing is opportune in terms of being able to reach a new generation of incoming instructors who will be entering this sector. However, it will take time for new qualification requirements to filter through in the sector. In addition, the kind of initial training and professional development referred to in earlier chapters (see particularly Chapter 4) is expensive.

Conditions of employment will also need to be commensurate with instructors' status as professionals. The adult LLN sector is still far from having conditions equivalent to those in the compulsory sector, although professionals in the two sectors are undertaking similar work. Countries need to closely examine pay and benefit conditions, as well as career structures for advancement (and development of skills as "master" instructors).

The current over-reliance on voluntary or part-time instructors presents a serious barrier to development of effective practice. That said, a core volunteer/paraprofessional workforce should be supported and sustained with appropriate training and conditions of service. Having volunteers/paraprofessionals is a particularly good strategy in classrooms focused on tailoring provision for different learners. Volunteers can give more time and attention to individual learners, and also bring different points of view and knowledge in explaining new concepts and ideas.

Time

Many instructors note that formative assessment approaches such as tracking tools, individual sessions with learners and so on, are much more time intensive. Given the amount of paperwork instructors are often required to complete, formative assessment and related strategies may appear as an additional burden. Pragmatic solutions such as ICT-based learning programmes with effective feedback (a few programmes have been found to be particularly effective), effective deployment of volunteer tutors, peer learning and other approaches may help to relieve some of this burden. A close look at how to cut back on official paperwork may also help.

Curricula may also reinforce the importance of helping learners to focus on developing a few core skills, and for developing skills for self-assessment and learning-to-learn. As learners progress, they can take on more responsibility for their own learning and self-assesment. In addition, research pointing to the impact of different formative assessment approaches and techniques may also help to convince instructors of the benefits resulting from the extra time invested.

Money

While, as noted above, we have not made a detailed review of funding structures for adult LLN provision, the country background reports prepared for this study have noted that there is significantly more funding in this sector than there has been in the past – and that it is still not enough to meet needs. In the United States, for example, demand is significantly greater than supply in many states. In some New York programmes new learners are selected by lottery, rather than keeping waiting lists.

Absent a significant new infusion of funding, countries will need to choose between serving as many learners as possible, or raising quality for a smaller number of learners. Likely, the latter strategy will be more effective for demonstrating the worth of programmes, and attracting further investment. But, at best, this trade-off is only a short-term solution to the problem of insufficient funding. Indeed, it is increasingly apparent that countries cannot afford to underfund this sector. The social and economic costs of not addressing the needs of adults with low foundation skills are simply too high.

7) Strengthen the knowledge-base

Our list of research needs in the adult LLN field is wide-ranging. It includes very specific recommendations related to promising teaching and

assessment practices, as well as more general recommendations related to policy and implementation. The list is built on the assumption that researchers in this field will need to broaden the range of methodologies used, and in particular to pay much greater attention to impact. Researchers may also engage more actively with policy makers and practitioners.

We have identified the following as priority areas:

1. *Research on classroom relationships – which are at the very heart of teaching, learning and assessment*. This research can provide insights on effective practice that are not often captured in controlled studies of instructional techniques. This "softer" approach to research has been a strength of the adult LLN sector, and should continue to occupy a prominent place in the field.

2. *Research on specific formative assessment techniques – including feedback, questioning and scaffolding*. Controlled studies on these techniques with adult LLN learners would provide valuable information on the impact of different approaches – that is, what works, for whom, and under what circumstances. Research might address such questions as:

   - What are the most effective approaches to providing positive feedback while also challenging learners to do more? What type of feedback is most effective for adults with very low self-efficacy?

   - What questioning methods are most appropriate for adult learners (likely to be different than for younger learners)?

   - How can scaffolding take into account the adult learner's prior experiences/uneven levels of capacities?

3. *Validated assessment instruments (and training for assessors).* Assessment instruments are needed to ensure that the right questions are asked, and are asked in a way that will yield the needed information on learners' existing capabilities and potential barriers to learning.

4. *More research on how adult foundation skill learners progress from basic to more complex levels of knowledge and autonomy*. This may include research on how learners with different learning histories and barriers take in new knowledge, develop skills and gain independence. Research on progression in different subject areas will be particularly valuable.

5. *Evaluation of how well specific learning objectives are aligned with overall goals for learner progression, and autonomy.* This should

include attention to whether and how learners are using new skills in daily and work life.

6. *More research on learner persistence*. This research should take into consideration different modes and models for sustaining learner engagement, continuity and progression. There is also a need to deepen understanding of the factors that support different types of learners in their efforts to meet goals over time.
7. *More extensive evaluations of promising e-based programmes as a complement to traditional learning*. There is also a need to better understand the conditions under which adult LLN learners can effectively engage in distance learning.
8. *Broader surveys of current teaching, learning and assessment practices.* Such surveys would help to identify practices which merit further investigation, as well as widespread but ineffective practices. The surveys should take in the range of provision – including community-based, work-based, prison-based programmes, and so on.
9. *Research on how instructors take on and adapt new practices to meet needs of learners*. This research should explore the ways in which policies or programmes may promote or create barriers to change (including staffing, professional development, guidelines and tools), as well as how instructors' values and goals impact approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Again, such studies should explore the range of provision
10. *Further investigation on the adequacy of funding and effectiveness of investment for improving practice and social and economic outcomes.* In turn – more funding needs to be devoted to research.
11. *Further international research*. International research provides opportunities for mutual learning on what works across different contexts, as well as a range of possibilities for organising and supporting improved programmes.
12. *Use of data gathered for accountability purposes to learn more about what works and why.* Accountability systems also need to be reviewed to be sure that the data gathered can be used to evaluate the quality of provision at an appropriate level of detail.

Concluding remarks

Our review of teaching, learning and assessment for adult LLN learners has revealed a rich array of policies and practices within and across

countries. Countries have taken very different approaches to balancing competing needs and goals of stakeholders, and can learn a great deal from each other. Indeed, while policy approaches and cultures vary, many of the goals are the same.

Policy support for the complex work of teaching, learning and assessment has been important for ensuring higher quality within this sector. But there is still work to do, both at the conceptual and empirical levels.

The fact is that knowledge on the impact of the different approaches to teaching and assessment is limited in the adult LLN sector. Without better knowledge of what works (and what doesn't work), it will be difficult to attract much-needed funding, or to develop effective practices across the sector. The good news is that the existing research base (including research on the generic methods of formative assessment, as well as practitioner wisdom) provides clear direction for future research and development. The stakes of not taking on this challenge will be high for communities as well as learners.

Annex 1
International Surveys on LLN Learners

The following tables bring together descriptions of adult skill levels as measured in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) (1994-1998), and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) (2005) conducted by OECD and Statistics Canada.

International Adult Literacy Survey

The following descriptions of adult skill levels in prose, document and quantitative domains were gathered directly from Annex A of the report *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey* (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000, pp. 93-102).

	Prose	**Document**	**Quantitative**
Level 1 (0-225)	Most of the tasks at this level require the reader to locate one piece of information in the text that is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the directive. If a plausible incorrect answer is present in the text, it tends not to be near the correct information.	Most of the tasks at this level require the reader to locate a single piece of information based on a literal match. Distracting information, if present, is typically located away from the correct answer. Some tasks may direct the reader to enter personal information onto a form.	Although no quantitative tasks used in the assessment fall below the score value of 225, experience suggests that such tasks would require the reader to perform a single, relatively simple operation (usually addition) for which either the numbers are clearly noted in the given document and the operation is stipulated, or the numbers are provided and the operation does not require the reader to find the numbers.
Level 2 (226-275)	Tasks at this level generally require the reader to locate one or more pieces of information in the text, but several "distractors" may be present, or low-level inferences may be required. Tasks at this level also begin to ask readers to integrate two or more pieces of information, or to compare and contrast information.	Document tasks at this level are a bit more varied. While some still require the reader to match a single feature, more distracting information may be present or the match may require a low-level inference. Some tasks at this level may require the reader to enter information onto a form or to cycle through information in a document.	Tasks at this level typically require readers to perform a single arithmetic operation (frequently addition or subtraction), using numbers that are easily located in the text or document. The operation to be performed may be easily inferred from the wording of the question or the format of the material (for example, a bank deposit or order form).

	Prose	Document	Quantitative
Level 3 (276-325)	Tasks at this level generally direct readers to locate information that requires low-level inferences or that meets specified conditions. Sometimes the reader is required to identify several pieces of information that are located in different sentences or paragraphs rather than in a single sentence. Readers may also be asked to integrate or to compare and contrast information across paragraphs or sections of text.	Tasks at this level are varied. Some require the reader to make literal or synonymous matches, but usually the reader must take conditional information into account or match on the basis of multiple features of information. Some require the reader to integrate information from one or more displays of information. Others ask the reader to cycle through a document to provide multiple responses.	Tasks at this level typically require the reader to perform a single operation. However, the operations become more varied – some multiplication and division tasks are included. Sometimes the reader needs to identify two or more numbers from various places in the document, and the numbers are frequently embedded in complex displays. While semantic relation terms such as "how many" or "calculate the difference" are often used, some of the tasks require the reader to make higher-order inferences to determine the appropriate operation.
Level 4 (326-375)	These tasks require readers to perform multiple-feature matching or to provide several responses where the requested information must be identified through text-based inferences. Tasks at this level may also require the reader to integrate or contrast pieces of information, sometimes presented in relatively lengthy texts. Typically, these texts contain more distracting information, and the information requested is more abstract.	Tasks at this level, like those at the previous levels, ask the reader to match on the basis of multiple features of information, to cycle through documents, and to integrate information; frequently, however, these tasks require the reader to make higher-order inferences to arrive at the correct answer. Sometimes the document contains conditional information that must be taken into account by the reader.	With one exception, the tasks at this level require the reader to perform a single arithmetic operation where typically either the quantities or the operation are not easily determined. That is, for most of the tasks at this level, the question or directive does not provide a semantic relation term such as "how many" or "calculate the difference" to help the reader.
Level 5 (376-500)	Tasks at this level typically require the reader to search for information in dense text that contains a number of plausible distractors. Some require readers to make high level inferences or to use specialised knowledge.	Tasks at this level require the reader to search through complex displays of information that contain multiple distractors, to make high-level inferences, process conditional information, or use specialised knowledge.	These tasks require readers to perform multiple operations sequentially, and they must locate features of the problem embedded in the material or rely on background knowledge to determine the quantities or operations needed.

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey

Definitions of skill (extract from ALL Survey)

Like IALS the ALL defines skills along a continuum of proficiency. There is no arbitrary standard distinguishing adults who have or do not have skills. For example, many previous studies have distinguished between adults who are either "literate" or "illiterate". Instead, the ALL study conceptualizes proficiency along a continuum and this is used to denote how well adults use information to function in society and the economy.

Four skill domains are conceptualized in ALL. Two of them, namely prose and document literacy are defined and measured in the same manner as in IALS. Numeracy and problem solving are new domains. The conceptualization and definitions of the four skill domains as well as examples of test items used for the assessment are described in detail in Annex A and in *The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey: New Frameworks for Assessment* (Statistics Canada). The operational definition for each skill domain is summarized here in Box A.

Box A
Four Skill Assessment Domains in ALL

- *Prose literacy* – the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures and instruction manuals.

- *Document literacy* – the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts.

- *Numeracy* – the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage the mathematical demands of diverse situations.

- *Problem solving* – Problem solving involves goal-directed thinking and action in situations for which no routine solution procedure is available. The problem solver has a more or less well defined goal, but does not immediately know how to reach it. The incongruence of goals and admissible operators constitutes a problem. The understanding of the problem situation and its step-by-step transformation, based on planning and reasoning, constitute the process of problem solving.

Source: OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 16.

Measurement of skills (extract from ALL Survey)

The ALL employed the same methodology as in IALS to measure skill proficiency. For each domain, proficiency is denoted on a scale ranging from 0 to 500 points. Each score denotes a point at which a person has an 80 per cent chance of successfully completing tasks that are associated with a similar level of difficulty. For the prose and document literacy domains as well as the numeracy domain, experts have defined five broad levels of difficulty, each corresponding to a range of scores. For the problem solving domain, experts have defined four broad levels of difficulty. See Tables I.1 and I.2 for a description of the levels. Also see Annex A [of the full ALL report] for a more in depth presentation of each domain.

Table I.1. Five Levels of difficulty for the prose, document and numeracy domains

	Prose	**Document**	**Numeracy**
Level 1 (0-225)	Most of the tasks in this level require the respondent to read relatively short text to locate a single piece of information which is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive. If plausible but incorrect information is present in the text, it tends not to be located near the correct information.	Tasks in this level tend to require the respondent either to locate a piece of information based on a literal match or to enter information from personal knowledge onto a document. Little, if any, distracting information is present.	Tasks in this level require the respondent to show an understanding of basic numerical ideas by completing simple tasks in concrete, familiar contexts where the mathematical content is explicit with little text. Tasks consist of simple, one-step operations such as counting, sorting dates, performing simple arithmetic operations or understanding common and simple percents such as 50%.
Level 2 (226-275)	Some tasks in this level require respondents to locate a single piece of information in the text; however, several distractors or plausible but incorrect pieces of information may be present, or low-level inferences may be required. Other tasks require the respondent to integrate two or more pieces of information or to compare and contrast easily identifiable information based on a criterion provided in the question or directive.	Tasks in this level are more varied than those in Level 1. Some require the respondents to match a single piece of information; however, several distractors may be present, or the match may require low-level inferences. Tasks in this level may also ask the respondent to cycle through information in a document or to integrate information from various parts of a document.	Tasks in this level are fairly simple and relate to identifying and understanding basic mathematical concepts embedded in a range of familiar contexts where the mathematical content is quite explicit and visual with few distractors. Tasks tend to include one-step or two-step processes and estimations involving whole numbers, benchmark percents and fractions, interpreting simple graphical or spatial representations, and performing simple measurements.

	Prose	Document	Numeracy
Level 3 (276-325)	Tasks in this level tend to require respondents to make literal or synonymous matches between the text and information given in the task, or to make matches that require low-level inferences. Other tasks ask respondents to integrate information from dense or lengthy text that contains no organizational aids such as headings. Respondents may also be asked to generate a response based on information that can be easily identified in the text. Distracting information is present, but is not located near the correct information.	Some tasks in this level require the respondent to integrate multiple pieces of information from one or more documents. Others ask respondents to cycle through rather complex tables or graphs which contain information that is irrelevant or inappropriate to the task.	Tasks in this level require the respondent to demonstrate understanding of mathematical information represented in a range of different forms, such as in numbers, symbols, maps, graphs, texts, and drawings. Skills required involve number and spatial sense, knowledge of mathematical patterns and relationships and the ability to interpret proportions, data and statistics embedded in relatively simple texts where there may be distractors. Tasks commonly involve undertaking a number of processes to solve problems.
Level 4 (326-375)	These tasks require respondents to perform multiple-feature matches and to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy passages. More complex inferences are needed to perform successfully. Conditional information is frequently present in tasks at this level and must be taken into consideration by the respondent.	Tasks in this level, like those at the previous levels, ask respondents to perform multiple-feature matches, cycle through documents, and integrate information; however, they require a greater degree of inferencing. Many of these tasks require respondents to provide numerous responses but do not designate how many responses are needed. Conditional information is also present in the document tasks at this level and must be taken into account by the respondent.	Tasks at this level require respondents to understand a broad range of mathematical information of a more abstract nature represented in diverse ways, including in texts of increasing complexity or in unfamiliar contexts. These tasks involve undertaking multiple steps to find solutions to problems and require more complex reasoning and interpretation skills, including comprehending and working with proportions and formulas or offering explanations for answers.

	Prose	**Document**	**Numeracy**
Level 5 (376-500)	Some tasks in this level require the respondent to search for information in dense text which contains a number of plausible distractors. Others ask respondents to make high-level inferences or use specialized background knowledge. Some tasks ask respondents to contrast complex information.	Tasks in this level require the respondent to search through complex displays that contain multiple distractors, to make high-level text-based inferences, and to use specialized knowledge.	Tasks in this level require respondents to understand complex representations and abstract and formal mathematical and statistical ideas, possibly embedded in complex texts. Respondents may have to integrate multiple types of mathematical information, draw inferences, or generate mathematical justification for answers.

Source: OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005, pp. 17-18.

Table I.2. Four levels of difficulty for the problem solving domain

Problem Solving	
Level 1 (0-250)	Tasks in this level typically require the respondent to make simple inferences, based on limited information stemming from a familiar context. Tasks in this level are rather concrete with a limited scope of reasoning. They require the respondent to make simple connections, without having to check systematically any constraints. The respondent has to draw direct consequences, based on the information given and on his/her previous knowledge about a familiar context.
Level 2 (251-300)	Tasks in this level often require the respondent to evaluate certain alternatives with regard to well defined, transparent, explicitly stated criteria. The reasoning however may be done step by step, in a linear process, without loops or backtracking. Successful problem solving may require to combine information from different sources, as e.g. from the question section and the information section of the test booklet.
Level 3 (301-350)	Some tasks in this level require the respondent to order several objects according to given criteria. Other tasks require him/her to determine a sequence of actions/events or to construct a solution by taking non-transparent or multiple interdependent constraints into account. The reasoning process goes back and forth in a non-linear manner, requiring a good deal of self-regulation. At this level respondents often have to cope with multi-dimensional or ill-defined goals.
Level 4 (351-500)	Items in this level require the respondent to judge the completeness, consistency and/or dependency among multiple criteria. In many cases, he/she has to explain how the solution was reached and why it is correct. The respondent has to reason from a meta-perspective, taking into account an entire system of problem solving states and possible solutions. Often the criteria and the goals have to be inferred from the given information before actually starting the solution process.

Source: OECD and Statistics Canada, 2005, pp. 17-18.

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Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Adults

IMPROVING FOUNDATION SKILLS

Adults with low skills in language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) are numerous in many OECD countries. They can include early school leavers, older learners who have not used their skills over time, immigrant and refugee learners, or individuals with disabilities. The consequences of these low foundation skills span the economic, health and social well-being of individuals, families and communities. Investment in this sector of adult education is therefore crucial. But what is known about whether and how programmes are meeting the needs of diverse learners?

This study looks specifically inside the programmes for adult LLN learners, with a focus on formative assessment – referring to the frequent assessment of learner understanding and progress to identify needs and shape teaching and learning. Drawing upon evidence gathered in country reports, exemplary case studies and international literature reviews, it examines the impact and implementation of different teaching, learning and assessment practices for adult LLN learners; the way innovative programmes address the very diverse needs and goals of this population; and the policies that support or hinder effective practice.

This book provides a strong foundation for understanding the fundamental issues at stake in the adult LLN education, and can guide future policy, practice and research. It will be of particular interest to policy makers, teachers and instructors, researchers, and students.

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